

Thailand's prime minister survives no-confidence motion

Robert Champion
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Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra survived a no-confidence vote last week after two days of a censure debate in the National Assembly. Called by the parliamentary opposition bloc, this was part of the ongoing infighting within the Thai ruling class, which is certain to continue and generate further political instability.

The censure motion was led by the so-called “progressive” People's Party (PP) in alliance with the military-backed Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP). The ruling bloc in parliament, which includes Paetongtarn's Pheu Thai Party (PT) and its allies including the right-wing Bhumjaithai Party (BJT) and the United Thai Nation Party, which is also backed by military factions, defeated the motion 319 to 162.

Afterwards, Paetongtarn stated that the debate went “smoothly” and thanked all members of parliament for motivating her to “continue to work hard for our people.” Paetongtarn became prime minister last August after Srettha Thavisin, the first Pheu Thai prime minister, was removed from office by the Constitutional Court on trumped-up ethics charges.

Paetongtarn was probed on a number of issues including corruption over landholdings, tax evasion and even poor economic knowledge. She was also accused of taking political orders from her father, former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the founder of Pheu Thai who was removed from office in the 2006 military coup. He remains de facto party leader and a political target of the military and the royalist political establishment.

As has repeatedly been the case in Thai politics, the corruption charges are simply the means by which rival factions of the political establishment battle for power and influence. Tensions in ruling circles have markedly sharpened amid a worsening economic crisis and

growing fears of an eruption of opposition by workers, peasants and youth.

According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Thailand's GDP growth in 2024 was just 2.6 percent, with contractions in both manufacturing and agriculture. The growth rate was considerably lower than the region as a whole, which sees countries in the order of 5 to 6 percent.

In backing the no-confidence motion, the “progressive” People's Party, as the lead opposition party in the National Assembly, has aligned itself more closely with the PPRP, which was the party of the military junta that seized power in the 2014 coup.

People's Party MP Pakamon Noon-anan criticised remarks Paetongtarn made last September, in which the latter stated a strong baht was good for Thailand's exporters. “People worldwide know that a strong baht benefits imports because they cost less to bring in. It harms exports because our products are more expensive... Lack of understanding of a simple issue affects people's confidence in the nation's leader,” Pakamon declared during the debate.

It is not the “people's confidence” but the interests of big business that is the real concern. Thailand is in the firing line in the Trump administration's trade war measures, having a trade surplus with the US of \$35.42 billion in 2024. The US is Thailand's top export market, supplying food stuffs, electrical appliances, automotive parts, industrial products and some minerals.

According to estimates from the Joint Standing Committee on Commerce, Industry and Banking, operating costs for Thai exporters could spike by 6 to 8 percent if US tariffs are directed against Thailand.

In the first part of this year, Thailand's exports have actually grown, partly in anticipation of US tariffs.

However, this growth is not sustainable. The Economic Intelligence Center (EIC) of Siam Commercial Bank this month lowered its export growth forecast from its November prediction of 2 percent to 1.6 percent, while the government is targeting 3 to 3.5 percent growth.

The EIC's prediction is based in part on factors like US tariffs, which includes 25 percent tariffs on all vehicle and auto part imports into the US that came into force today. Thailand has the tenth largest auto industry in the world, and in 2024 exported approximately \$US4 billion worth of auto parts to the US.

The Thai economy has taken another huge hit today after Trump announced his list of so-called reciprocal tariffs on countries worldwide—friend and foe alike. Now Thai exports to the US across the board will be subjected to a huge 36 percent tariff.

Sections of Thai big business are deeply concerned that Paetongtarn lacks the ability to deal with Trump's trade war, protect corporate interests and deal with the inevitable social unrests as new burdens are imposed on working people. As a result, the future of the Paetongtarn government is still very much in doubt, despite its defeat of the no-confidence motion.

PPRP Secretary-General Paiboon Nititawan remarked prior to the parliamentary debate: "After the censure debate, many issues will follow and involve legal ones which can be expanded. They may turn out to be petitions to the National Anti-Corruption Commission and the Constitutional Court."

He warned that a petition to the Constitutional Court on the prime minister "may lead to political change" and would be "fun." Four prime ministers have been removed by the Constitutional Court in the last 16 years, including Pheu Thai's Srettha Thavisin last year.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) and other bodies like the Constitutional Court (CC) have been heavily influenced by the military since the 2014 coup. The coup leaders wrote and rammed through the 2017 constitution that paved the way for elections and included substantial powers for the military.

Significantly while the People's Party criticised Thaksin's "undue influence" on the Paetongtarn government during the censure debate, the influence of the military and the monarchy went unchallenged. Its past criticisms of the military and monarchy have now been shelved as it has aligned itself with the PPRP.

The PP's predecessor, the Move Forward Party, rose to prominence following huge protests of mainly young people in 2020 against the 2014 coup leader, the 2017 constitution and the monarchy. After winning the 2023 election, the military blocked it from forming government and undoubtedly played a role in its dissolution last August.

That the People's Party is working with the PPRP to target the Paetongtarn government, not only exposes the fraudulent character of its progressive posturing, but demonstrates the organic inability of any faction of the bourgeoisie to defend basic democratic rights.



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