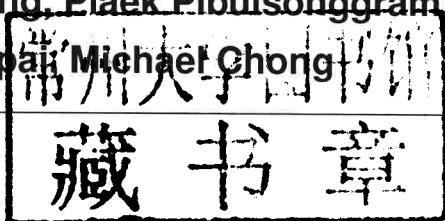


**Overseas Chinese
Politicians: Lee Kuan Yew,
Raymond Chan, Douglas
Jung, Thaksin Shinawatra,
Abhisit Vejjajiva, Samak
Sundaravej**

Books Group

OVERSEAS CHINESE POLITICIANS

Lee Kuan Yew, Raymond Chan, Douglas Jung,
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Srimuang, Lee Hsien Loong, Pridi Banomyong,
Howe Yoon Chong, Plaek Pibulsonggram, John
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ABHISIT VEJAJIVA

Abhisit Vejjajiva (English pronunciation (help·info); Thai: (Thai pronunciation), RTGS: Aphisit Wetchachiwa, IPA: [à.pí.sít wēt.t.t.wá], born 3 August 1964) is the 27th and current Prime Minister of Thailand. He has been the leader of the Democrat Party since February 2005. Abhisit successfully ran for MP in Bangkok under the Democrat Party following the 1991 NPKC military coup. Abhisit quickly rose through party ranks but failed in a bid to become party leader in 2001. He was accused of covering up illegal donations by the failed petrochemical firm TPI Polene to the Party during the run-up to the 2005 elections (as of 2010, the scandal is still under investigation). Abhisit became party leader after the Party's overwhelming defeat in the 2005 elections. During the 2005-2006 Thai political crisis, Abhisit called for King Bhumibol Adulyadej to appoint a replacement to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. In a rare public speech, Bhumibol responded, "Asking for a Royally-appointed prime minister is undemocratic. It is, pardon me, a mess. It is irrational".^[5] Under Abhisit's leadership, senior Democrat Party members accused Thaksin of what they called the Finland Plot, a supposed plan to overthrow the monarchy and establish a republic. Abhisit boycotted the 2006 elections.^[6] Abhisit voiced displeasure at the 2006 coup that overthrew Thaksin,

but otherwise did not protest it or the military junta that ruled Thailand for over a year. An Attorney-General's Office fact-finding panel found that the Democrat Party bribed other parties to boycott the 2006 elections to force a constitutional crisis, and recommended dissolving the Democrats. The new Constitutional Court acquitted Abhisit and the Democrats of the vote bribery charges, while banning Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party for the same charges. Abhisit supported the junta's 2007 Constitution, calling it an improvement on the 1997 Constitution.^[7] The Democrat Party lost the junta-administered 2007 election to the People's Power Party.

In the crisis that followed, some Democrat Party members became leaders of the People's Alliance for Democracy, which seized Government House, and Don Muang Airport and Suvarnabhumi Airports, while violently clashing with the police and anti-PAD protesters. Abhisit voiced displeasure at sieges, but did not stop his deputies from their leadership of the PAD.^[8] The sieges ended after the Constitutional Court banned the People's Power Party. Several PPP MPs, including those from the Friends of Newin Group, formed new parties and supported the Democrat Party leader Abhisit to be elected Prime Minister.^{[9][10]}

Abhisit became Premier during a global economic crisis and faced escalating domestic political tension. During Songkran of 2009, National United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) protesters disrupted the Fourth East Asia Summit.^[11] The protests shifted to Bangkok. Abhisit declared a state of emergency. Protests against the government escalated during March and April 2010, with the UDD demanding immediate elections. Abhisit declared the protests unconstitutional. Televised negotiations between Abhisit and UDD leaders failed to set an election date. Abhisit declared a state of emergency on 8 April, one day after a group of protesters stormed into the parliament while in session. TV and community radio stations that supported the protesters were subsequently shut down. 24 people including troops and innocent protesters were killed and over 800 injured in an unsuccessful attempt to crack down on protesters on 10 April. On 16 April, Abhisit formally relinquished command over protest control to the chief of the Army.^[12] A UDD proposal to hold elections in 3 months was rejected outright by Abhisit on TV. On 3 May, Abhisit announced a reconciliatory roadmap which included elections on 14 November. The roadmap was tentatively accepted by the protesters with additional demands of withdrawal of troops and prosecution of the head of security commander in relation to the April 10 incident. Abhisit insisted his offer for the Roadmap and the 14 November elections were not for negotiation and confirmed that the rally must end before May 15. Tensions escalated as the UDD stood firm. A large-scale military pressure on protesters occurred from 13 to 19 May, leaving over 85 deaths, and over 1250 injuries by 8.30 pm on 18 May, mostly from clashes outside the main protest encampments. Reporters Without Borders found it "deplorable that the authorities are using the state of emergency to censor neutral or opposition news outlets," while the Thai Journalists Association criticized the "one-sided information" presented by TV stations, which

are all government-owned.^{[13][14][15][16][17]} Abhisit made it his government's top priority to censor media and prosecute people questioning the role of the Privy Council and the King in politics. However, he was criticized by Privy Councilor Kamthorn Sindhavananda for being slow to respond to alleged insults.^[18] In its 2010 report, Human Rights Watch praised Abhisit's rhetoric but dismissed his record, noting, "The government continually undermined respect for human rights and due process of law in Thailand."^[19] Numerous cases of government corruption occurred under Abhisit's leadership. Abhisit's Social Development and Human Security Minister Vitoon Nambutr resigned after procuring rotten canned fish for flood stricken refugees, and Public Health Minister Vittaya Kaewparadai resigned after gross overpayment of items under the massive Thai Khem Khaeng (Strong Thailand) stimulus program.^{[20][21]} Abhisit also oversaw rising tension with Cambodia over several issues, including the appointment of controversial PAD leader Kasit Piromya as Foreign Minister, violent border clashes over Preah Vihear, and the appointment of Thaksin Shinawatra as economic advisor to the Cambodian government.

Family

Mr. Abhisit was born in Newcastle, England and educated at Eton.^[22] He then went on to gain a bachelor degree in philosophy, politics and economics (PPE), first class honors, and a master degree in economics, both from Oxford University.^[23] Apart from his native language, he speaks fluent Thai.

Abhisit's father, Athasit Vejjajiva, was a physician, the President of Mahidol University, and was appointed Deputy Public Health Minister by the National Peace Keeping Council military junta. Athasit's grandfather, Phra Bamrad Naradura (Long Vejjajiva), had previously served as public health minister some 50 years prior.^[24] Athasit was also President of the Royal Institute of Thailand, and during Abhisit's Premiership, Director of Charoen Pokphand Foods, Thailand's largest agribusiness firm, and part of the Charoen Pokphand Group, a large family-owned agribusiness, retail, and telecommunications conglomerate.^{[25][26]}

The Vejjajivas are members of a prominent family of Thai Chinese that are of Hakka origin that maintained good relationships with the Thai ruling elite from as early as the late 18th century.^{[27][28][29]} The family's Chinese surname is Yuan (Chinese: 袁; pinyin: Yuán).^{[30][31]} In the reign of Rama VI, the surname "Vejjajiva" was bestowed upon Yuan-clan Lopburi provincial physician Sub-Lieutenant Dr. Long (Thai: เสงี่ยม), his father, and grandfather.^[32]

Abhisit is married to dr Pimpen Sakuntabhai, a former dentist and now a lecturer at the Department of Mathematics at Chulalongkorn University. They have two children: Prang Vejjajiva (daughter) and Pannasit Vejjajiva (son). Abhisit has two sisters: child psychiatrist Alisa Wacharasindhu and author Ngarmpun Vejjajiva.^[33]

Entry into politics

The National Peace Keeping Council seized power in a military coup in 1991 and appointed Abhisit's father Deputy Minister of Public Health.^{[34][35]} Abhisit began his political career in the 1992 general elections that followed the coup, becoming a Bangkok MP for the Democrat Party. He was re-elected to the same seat in the 1995 and 1996 general elections. In the elections of 2001 and 2005, he returned to parliament as a Party List MP for the Democrat Party. He has served as Democrat Party spokesman, Government spokesman, Deputy-Secretary to the Prime Minister for Political Affairs, Chairman of the House Education Affairs Committee, and Minister to the Prime Minister's Office.

Abhisit has occasionally been criticized for relying on his good looks to support his career. Morgan Stanley economist Daniel Lian, in a letter to then PM Thaksin, reportedly asked, "Other than his pretty young face, what else can he offer to the Thai people?"^[36] However, *The Nation*, a local English-language newspaper more sympathetic to the Democrats, responded that "Abhisit's ammunition is pure decency [and] unrivalled talent."^[37]

Democrat Party leader

In 2001, Abhisit made a bid for party leadership, taking on a seasoned politician Banyat Bantadtan. Abhisit lost. However, Banyat led the Democrats to an overwhelming defeat by Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party in the 2005 legislative elections. Banyat resigned and Abhisit was chosen to replace him.

The Thaksin crisis

When Prime Minister Thaksin called a snap election on 25 February 2006, Abhisit said he was "prepared to become a prime minister who adheres to the principles of good governance and ethics, not authoritarianism." The very next day, however, he announced that the Democrat Party, along with other opposition parties, would boycott the elections. Abhisit joined the Thai Nation Party's Banharn Silpa-Archa and Mahachon Party's Sanan Kachornprasart in claiming that the elections "lacked legitimacy" and were an attempt by Thaksin to "divert public attention" from his tax free sales of the Shin Corporation to Temasek Holdings. Abhisit also said what was likely from the short time allowed "was an election that would yield the outcome Mr Thaksin was expecting."

Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party won an overwhelming majority in the virtually uncontested April 2006 election as suspected by Abhisit. In a number of Democrat-stronghold constituencies, fewer than 20% of eligible voters voted, thus not meeting the minimum required by the constitution. The Election Commission planned for by-elections to fill the vacant seats, and decided to allow parties that had previously boycotted the election to contest the by-elections. The Democrat Party

sued the Election Commission, claiming that it had no right to allow new parties to contest the by-elections. A constitutional crisis loomed, as the constitution obligated the formation of a new government within 30 days of the election, but a new government could not be formed due to the vacant seats.

2006 election fraud charges

Thai Rak Thai later charged the Democrat Party with bribing other small political parties into boycotting the April 2006 elections. The Democrats denied this allegation and were acquitted of the charges by the Constitutional Tribunal on 30 May 2007.

On 28 June 2006 an 11-member fact-finding panel headed by Deputy Attorney-General Chaikasem Nitisiri voted unanimously to dissolve the Democrat party (as well as the Thai Rak Thai party and 3 other parties) based on evidence that the party bribed other small opposition parties into boycotting the election of 2 April 2006.^{[38][39]}

In February 2007, candidates from the Progressive Democratic Party testified before the Constitution Tribunal that they were duped into registering for candidacy in the April elections.^[40] Three witnesses also testified that Democrat leaders Thaworn Senniam, Wirat Kalayasiri, and Jua Ratchasi encouraged protesters to disrupt the registration of candidates during the by-elections after the April 2006 election. Prosecutors contended that the party tried to disqualify the election results and force continuous rounds of by-elections.^[41] The defense claimed that the witnesses were hired by the Thai Rak Thai party to discredit the Democrats. Eventually, the Constitutional Tribunal acquitted the Democrat Party of all charges, while finding the Thai Rak Thai Party guilty of the same charges.^{[42][43]}

Policy platform as Opposition

Online image: Abhisit in Yala. On 29 April Abhisit announced his candidacy for Prime Minister at the Democrat Party annual convention. He promised an "agenda for people", with education as the main focus. He used the campaign slogan "Putting People First". He also vowed not to privatise basic utilities such as the electricity and water supply and to nationalize state enterprises that Thaksin had already privatized.^[44] Regarding core elements of the so-called "Thaksinomics", Abhisit promised "the benefits from certain populist policies, such as the 30-Baht healthcare scheme, the Village Fund and the SML (Small Medium Large) scheme, will not be revoked but instead improved." He later urged that Thaksin's popular 30-Baht healthcare scheme should be replaced with a system where access to medical services is totally free.^[45] Abhisit stated that all future Democrat MPs would have to declare their assets and any involvement in private companies. (By law, only members of the cabinet need to declare their assets.)^[46]

Abhisit raised over Bt200 million at the Democrat Party's 60th Anniversary dinner. He outlined several energy policies, including increasing dividend payments from state-owned oil company PTT and using the funds to repay Oil Fund debts and having state-owned electric utility EGAT absorb part of the rising fuel prices.^[47] Abhisit later outlined plans to reduce retail petrol prices by eliminating the 2.50 baht/litre tax used to maintain the government's Oil Fund.^[48]

On 13 July 2006, Abhisit promised to deal with escalating violence in the South by making the problems in the Southern provinces a public agenda.^[38]

Abhisit also promised many populist policies including providing free education, textbooks, milk, and supplemental foods for nursery school students and increasing the minimum wage.^[49]

2006 military coup

On 19 September 2006, only weeks before the scheduled elections, the military seized power in the 2006 Thailand coup. Abhisit voiced his disapproval of the coup just hours before all political activities were banned:

We cannot and do not support any kind of extra-constitutional change, but it is done. The country has to move forward and the best way forward is for the coup leaders to quickly return power to the people and carry out the reforms they promised. They have to prove themselves. I urge them to lift all restrictions as soon as possible. There is no need to write a brand new constitution. They could make changes to the 1997 constitution and if that's the case, there is no reason to take a year. Six months is a good time.^[50]

Abhisit promised the junta-appointed Premier, Surayud Chulanont, his full support.^[51] Abhisit also supported the military junta's 2007 draft constitution on the grounds that it was the "lesser of two evils". Abhisit said the Democrat Party considered the new constitution similar to the 1997 Constitution, but with improvements as well as faults. "If we wanted to please the Council for National Security we would reject the draft so it could pick a charter of its own choosing. If we reject the draft, it will be like handing out power to the Council. We have come up with this stand because we care about national interest and want democracy to be restored soon," he said.^[7] Acknowledging the flaws of the new Constitution, Abhisit has also proposed, along with asking for cooperation from other political parties, to amend the Constitution once he is in power.^[52]

December 2007 election

The Democrat Party was left in the opposition after the December 2007 parliamentary election, as Samak Sundaravej of the People's Power Party was able to form a six-party coalition. In a parliamentary vote on 28 January 2008, Abhisit

was defeated by Samak for the post of Prime Minister, receiving 163 votes against 310 votes for Samak.^[53]

Rise to Premiership

See also: 2008 Thai political crisis Following the Constitutional Court of Thailand's removal of prime minister Samak Sundaravej in 2008 for vested interests by taking a salary from a cooking show while in the seat of PM, Abhisit lost the National Assembly vote for Prime Minister by 163 votes to 298 for Somchai Wongsawat, ex-PM Thaksin Shinawatra's brother in law.^[54] On 2 December 2008, the Constitutional Court banned the three government parties for election fraud, including the PPP, thus dissolved the governing coalition and paving the way for a Democrat-led government. The Court also banned Somchai from politics for five years for his involvement in the scandal as one of PPP's executive board member and removed him from office; he was succeeded by a deputy.

After Somchai was removed and the PPP dissolved, many MPs defected to the Democrat side thus forging a new alliance. Defectors included MPs from the For Thais Party (Puea Thai, the successor of the PPP), the former Chart Thai Party under Sanan Krachonprasat, the Thais United National Development Party, and the Neutral Democratic Party, and the "Friends of Newin" faction of the former Peoples Power Party.^[55] The enlarged Democrat-led coalition was able to endorse Abhisit as Prime Minister.^{[56][57][58]} Abhisit became Prime Minister after winning a special vote in parliament on 15 December 2008.^[59]

Prime Minister of Thailand

Abhisit was formally endorsed by King Bhumibol Adulyadej as Prime Minister on 17 December 2008. Abhisit ascended to power amid a global economic crisis, continued divisions between his PAD/palace/military/urban supporters and UDD/rural critics.

Key appointments in Abhisit's government included PAD leader Kasit Piromya as Foreign Minister, construction tycoon Chaovarat Chanweerakul as Interior Minister, and investment banker and former Abhisit classmate Korn Chatikavanij as Finance Minister.^[60] Abhisit, who was widely criticized for appointing Kasit as Foreign Minister, defended his selection, saying that "Khun Kasit [Piromya] has been picked for his experience. He has been ambassador to a number of key countries, he's a very knowledgeable person on the economy. He may have addressed or joined some of the rallies but if he has done anything illegal he will be prosecuted."^[61] Massage parlor tycoon Pornthiva Nakasai was appointed Deputy Commerce Minister. Abhisit denied that there was any bargaining or deal-making behind the appointment of his Cabinet.^[62]

Abhisit's first act as Prime Minister was to send SMS texts to tens of millions of Thai mobile phone users. The message, signed "Your PM", asked people to help him solve the country's crisis. Interested phone users were asked to send back their postal codes, at a cost of three baht. Abhisit was criticized for violating privacy regulations in the mass SMS. The National Telecommunication Commission says that mobile phone service providers may not exploit client information, including phone numbers, without their consent. However, it did not seek actions against Abhisit.^{[63][64]}

TPI illegal donation scandal

In early 2009, the Democrat Party was accused by the Opposition of receiving 258 million baht in illegal donations from businessman-turned-politician Prachai Leophairatana. Prachai was the founder of failed petrochemical firm TPI Polene (which was under rehabilitation under the Financial Institutions Development Fund) as well as advertising shell companies Messiah Business and Creation. In the lead-up to the 2005 general election, while Abhisit was Deputy Party Leader, TPI Polene allegedly transferred the funds to Messiah Business and Creation, which then transferred the funds to senior Democrat Party leaders and their relatives in batches of less than 2 million baht each to over 70 separate bank accounts (2 million baht is the maximum that banks can transfer without reporting to the Anti-Money Laundering Office).^[65] The opposition claimed that the Democrats never reported the donation, which was far in excess to legal limits, to the Election Commission.^[66] Abhisit denied the allegations, claiming that his party's accounts had been checked by auditors. Other Democrat Party leaders claimed that "the alleged donation never took place" and that the "party never obtained it."^[67] Receiving and using an unlawful donation could result in the dissolution of the Democrat Party and the banning of its executives from political office for violating the Political Party Act.

The Opposition raised the issue in a debate of no-confidence, and accused Abhisit of approving false account reports for 2004 and 2005 to the EC and filing false information.^[68] The government won the vote, despite the *Bangkok Post* calling the evidence against the Democrats "overwhelming" and even the pro-Democrat *Nation* called the Opposition's presentation "clear-cut."^{[69][70]} However, the scandal was subsequently investigated by the Department of Special Investigation. The DSI prepared a 7,000 page report which it submitted to the Election Commission in early 2010. The EC claimed that the DSI report contained many holes.

Rohingya scandal

In January 2009, CNN investigations revealed that up to 1,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar had been captured by the Thai Navy, beaten, then towed out to sea without engines or navigational aids and with little food and water. Abhisit's initial response was to claim that the media reports were "exaggerated" and that the refugees would "sail on boats without engines or sink their ships so that authorities

help them to get onshore." Army Commander Anupong Paojinda denied the reports of abuse.^[71]

On 20 January, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) requested that the Thai government provide them access to the 126 surviving boat people in their custody.^[72] Abhisit said he was "glad to work with international organisations" but that such organizations would have to work on a cooperative basis with proper Thai government procedures. The military said it had "no clear information" about refugees in its custody.^[73]

Further media investigations revealed that refugees had very recently been cleared from a detention center but were nowhere to be found. A Thai Navy officer was interviewed, saying that "We have to take the engines off the boats or they will come back. The wind will carry them to India or somewhere."^[74] Abhisit then promised a thorough military-led investigation, but simultaneously issued a blanket denial of abuse on behalf of the military. The investigation was led by the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), the same unit in charge of refugee arrivals.^[75]

The ISOC investigation cleared all the government officials involved. Consequently, ISOC continued to be in charge of refugee arrivals.^[76]

Abhisit's deputy, Suthep Thaugsuban, suggested the entire situation was cooked up to besmirch Thailand's image.^[77] Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya claimed that the CNN reports were incorrect and called for people not to "believe what the world says about Rohingya."^{[78][79]}

UNHCR goodwill ambassador Angelina Jolie criticised Thai government of ignoring the plight of Rohingyas and suggested that Thai government should take better care of the Burmese ethnics. The Foreign Ministry reprimanded the UNHCR, noting that the UNHCR had "no mandate" and saying that the matter should not be mentioned by it and its "guests."^{[80][81]} Abhisit was criticized by both Thai and international commentators for defending the military at the expense of protecting the human rights of the refugees. "We are not going to see the Abhisit government going after the military because it was instrumental in his assumption of office," said political scientist Thitinan Pongsudhirak.^{[82][83]}

Corruption

The Abhisit government was charged in numerous cases of corruption, particularly relating to spending under the Thai Khem Khaeng economic stimulus program. After much public pressure, Abhisit appointed Banlu Siripanich head of an investigative committee to investigate allegations within the Ministry of Public Health. Banlu's committee found that: