

## Thailand's Red Shirts to rally after Thaksin ruling

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Bangkok, PAB-Online

Anti-government protesters in Thailand vowed on Friday to proceed with their planned rallies in Bangkok after its top court stripped former premier Thaksin Shinawatra of more than half his 2.3-billion-dollar fortune.

The verdict was an apparent compromise aimed at avoiding violence by the tycoon's supporters, but it left many of them in tears and a pro-Thaksin protest movement said it would push ahead with mass rallies in March.

After reading out a seven-hour verdict, judges said the Supreme Court would seize 46 billion baht (1.4 billion dollars) of the assets from the sale of Thaksin's telecoms firm, which were frozen after the 2006 coup that ousted him.

But they said the twice-elected former leader could hold on to the wealth he had already accumulated before taking office in 2001.

"The majority of the judges rule that the wealth of Thaksin to be confiscated, from share dividends and part of the share sales... is altogether 46.37 billion baht," the judges said in their verdict.

Thaksin, who lives abroad to avoid a two-year jail term for corruption at home, said in a video speech from exile in Dubai that he was the "political martyr" of a conspiracy to remove him from politics.

"This case is very political... The ruling will be a joke for the world," said Thaksin, who is widely known outside Thailand for being the former owner of Manchester City football club.

Thousands of troops and police had been deployed across the country for what the local media had dubbed "Judgement Day" but there were no outbreaks of violence by his backers, known as the "Red Shirts", after the ruling.

Dozens of supporters gathered at the headquarters of Thailand's main opposition party where some wept and others shouted slogans. Hundreds of others gathered at a central Bangkok park burned an effigy of the courtroom.

Jatuporn Prompan, a core Red Shirt leader, vowed to go ahead with their planned rallies beginning March 12 in Bangkok and rejected the ruling as "totally unfair" to Thaksin.

"Our fight for democracy will continue. We choose to rally in order that people may digest the ruling and see whether it is fair to Thaksin," he said.

Red Shirt riots at an Asian summit and in Bangkok in April 2009 left two people dead and scores injured.

The government had applied for the seizure of the proceeds from the sale of shares owned by Thaksin and his family to Singapore-based Temasek Holdings in January 2006.

The judges said in the ruling read out on national television and radio that Thaksin had "used his power in favour of Shin Corp" and that the profit from the sale "is wealth acquired through inappropriate means," they said.

The court ruled that Thaksin illegally hid his ownership of shares in Shin Corp during his two terms as prime minister, despite saying that he had transferred them to his family.

Thaksin had also issued a Cabinet resolution in favour of the mobile telephone arm of his empire, set satellite policies that benefited Shin Corp, and gave a loan to Myanmar in exchange for it doing deals with his firm.

The case goes to the heart of the rifts that have opened up in Thai society since the coup.

The Red Shirts, largely from his stronghold in Thailand's impoverished north and northeast, loved his populist policies and accuse the current government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva of being an unelected elite.

The tycoon's opponents in the Bangkok-based circles around the palace, military and bureaucracy accuse Thaksin of being corrupt, dictatorial and of threatening Thailand's widely revered monarchy.

Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a political analyst at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University, said the ruling could help to find a solution to Thailand's intractable political divide but was not enough by itself.

"Certainly it's a political verdict, it has been all along. And not taking everything (from Thaksin) is a step in the direction towards a way out of this mess," Thitinan said.

"Taking everything would have been seen as unfair by many involved," he added. (AFp/IP)