

Khon Kaen Reds Out on Bail

KHON KAEN – Three Red Shirt prisoners were released on bail from Khon Kaen Central Prison yesterday evening, a little over one week since four newly-elected Pheu Thai government representatives offered their parliamentary status as surety for their release. All three suspects had been [detained on charges](#) related to last year's May 19 arson and violence in Khon Kaen city.

Mr. Jiratrakul Sumaha, Mr. Adisay Wibulsek, and Mr. Udom Khammul were met at the prison's front gates by several hundred Red Shirt supporters, relatives and three Members of Parliament – all of them there to celebrate the release.



From left to right: Udom Khammul, Adisay Wibulsek, and Jiratrakul Sumaha.

A fourth prisoner, Mr. Sutas Singuakhaw was denied bail, though his lawyers assured the assembled crowd that Mr. Sutas would most certainly be bailed out in September.

The prisoners' release came on the same day that a Mahasarakham judge denied the bail requests of nine detained Red Shirt prisoners and just one day after an Ubon Ratchathani court [sentenced four Red Shirt protesters](#) to 34 years in prison for their part in the destruction of Ubon's provincial hall.

When asked how the Ubon court's decision bodes for those released today in Khon Kaen, Party List MP and Isaan Red Shirt leader Dr. Cherdchai Tantirin said, "We never know what's going to happen. Whatever is happening behind the scenes can change."

Khon Kaen's Red Shirt prisoners are just four of around 100 Red Shirt suspects still awaiting trial for charges related to last year's bloody protests in Bangkok and the provinces. But after nine Pheu Thai representatives [secured bail](#) for 22 Red Shirt prisoners in Udon Thani on August 16, their success ignited a nationwide initiative to release untried Red Shirts still detained on charges from last summer's violent Red Shirt protests.

"It's just not fair for them to be in there for too long, it's too much," said Pheu Thai representative Pongsakorn Amnopporn as he came to bolster his fellow MPs' bail request last Thursday. "The representatives are supposed to help their people."



Pheu Thai MPs Mukda Phonsombat (far left), Cherdchai Tantirin (center), and Thanik Masripitak (far right) field questions from the press.

According to Dr. Cherdchai, before the July 3 election secured a Pheu Thai majority in Parliament and voted Ms. Yingluck Shinawatra in as Prime Minister, Red Shirts had little opportunity for mobility. "Now, the time has come when the government lets the representatives be free and do what they want to do – to do their jobs," he said.

Dr. Cherdchai's job, however, has involved a bit more work than was at first expected. Over the course of the last eight days, there have been three separate meetings at Khon Kaen's provincial court in which the required number of MPs to assure the prisoners' release fluctuated from four to six and then back again to four. In the end, Pheu Thai Party List MPs Dr. Cherdchai, Dr. Yaowanit Piengket, Thanik Masripitak and Khon

Kaen Constituency MP Mukda Phonsombat offered their positions as surety. Additionally, 500,000 baht was provided by local business woman (and niece of Ms. Mukda) Pu Warada for each of the prisoner's release.

Dr. Cherdchai said that Ms. Pu would be reimbursed by the Pheu Thai party by this coming Tuesday.

As dusk fell across the city, an impromptu Red Shirt caravan made its way from the provincial prison to the municipality's Spirit House so that the recently released prisoners could perform a merit making ritual.

"I am extremely happy – the most happy I have ever been in my life," Mr. Jiratakul said upon emerging from the temple. "I am so impressed with the Red Shirt brothers and sisters that have always been by my side."

The suspects' trials are expected to begin in early 2012.

[Train in the Distance: Nong Waeng and the Future of Railside Slums](#)

<https://vimeo.com/27991255>

[YouTube Version](#)

KHON KAEN – On January 5, 2011, Mr. Rangsan Khachen was reading his morning newspaper when he spotted his community's name. Nong Waeng, his home of ten years, he read, could soon be transformed into a train station on a high-speed railway from northeastern Nong Khai, on the border of Laos, down to

southern Padang Besar which borders Malaysia.

Though a new government has been elected since high-speed [rail talks began](#) last autumn, the construction of a countrywide high-speed rail system remains on the table. The \$320 billion joint enterprise between Thailand and China will increase tourism and trade, especially for Northeastern rice farmers, [claimed](#) former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. But as plans for construction of the line from Nong Khai to Bangkok move forward, little has been done to safeguard the rights of hundreds of railside slums in Thailand that may soon be evicted to make way for new rails.

Since the rapid urbanization that swept Thailand in the 1950s, 246 communities of rural migrants have settled in slums within 40 meters of the railway on land owned by the State Railway of Thailand (SRT). In the past 50 years, only 46 have procured legal land leases. Nong Waeng is one railside community that has fought for a land lease and won, just in time to steer clear of eviction.

Nong Waeng was founded over twenty-five years ago by rural migrants looking for work in the growing city of Khon Kaen. As buildings sprung up, opportunities for labor abounded. Though the rural laborers who flocked to the city could find plenty of work, few could find affordable housing options. As a result, many chose to settle along the railway. Today, Nong Waeng is one of 22 railside slum communities in Khon Kaen city alone.

Over the past twenty years, Nong Waeng has shown dedication to procuring rights for running water, electricity, and most recently a land lease. In March of this year, after years of preparation, their [proposal for a land lease](#) was finally accepted.

For the remaining 200 railside communities in Thailand without a lease, however, news of the high-speed rail comes as a rude

awakening. Construction on the rails from Nong Khai to Bangkok are likely to [begin in 2012](#), leaving Northeastern communities with only a few months to prepare. While some may try to petition for a lease of their own, their time is limited and their future still uncertain.

To learn more about the story of Nong Waeng, watch the video above.

[Voter Turnout in the Northeast Below National Average](#)

KHON KAEN – One month after the July 3 general election saw the opposition Pheu Thai party win a decisive victory with 265 of 500 parliamentary seats, the election season is wrapping up. Provincial Election Commissions have all finally released their election results, revealing that the Isaan voter turnout continues to lag behind the national average.

This year, the Isaan voter turnout in the constituency race reached 71.77%, more than 3% below the national average, and nearly identical to the turnout in the 2007 general election. Voter participation in the Northeast rose slightly after the 2005 elections when the Isaan voter turnout reached only 67.66%, nearly 5% below the national average. But notwithstanding the increasingly contentious political climate in recent years, Northeastern voter participation between 2007 and 2011 hardly changed.

Pheu Thai's decisive July 3 victory did not come as a surprise to many. The new party led by Yingluck Shinawatra is an

offshoot of her older brother Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai party that brought record numbers of voters to the polls in 2005, eight years after the introduction of Thailand's compulsory voting law.

The populist policies that Mr. Thaksin had implemented in his first term as Prime Minister inspired the historically neglected rural electorate to take to the polls in 2005 to re-elect the Thai Rak Thai party in a landslide victory. Mr. Thaksin's universal health care program, micro-finance investments in villages, and other welfare policies had attracted a support base from the rural Northeast like none before. However, while the rural populace has recently shown far greater participation in general elections, they have yet to match the national average.

Since the 2006 military coup that overthrew Mr. Thaksin, political unrest and the fear of a faltering democracy have gripped the country. In the media, in classrooms, and on rally stages across the country, Thais have begun to speak more openly about the need for democratic reform and many had hoped that this election would see yet another spike in national voter turnout. On July 3, 2011, even Election Commissioner Sodsri Sattayatham [anticipated a voter turnout](#) of around 80%. She cited Thai voters' marked desire to see concrete political changes as the reason for the expected increase. Ultimately, voter turnout barely budged from its 2007 peak.



Source: Election Commission of Thailand



Source: Election Commission of Thailand

Detailed results [here](#).

