

# Red Shirts and the New Cabinet

Sunday 14 August 2011, by [UNGPAKORN Giles Ji](#) (Date first published: 11 August 2011).

Most politicians in the Peua Thai party no doubt believe that having Red Shirts in the cabinet would create a “bad image”. This is true if you believe that a “good image” is one of doing absolutely nothing to solve the crisis of democracy and social justice in Thailand.

The new cabinet contains people like Chalerm Yubamrung, a thuggish politician who sums up the term “legal double standards” from when his son was charged with murdering a policeman in a pub brawl. He is also suspected by some of having profited from drug dealing. This is a “good image” for the new government.

I don’t know General Yuttasak Sasiprapa, the new Defence Minister. Some say he had a hand in gunning down student protesters in 1973. I don’t know the truth about this. He might be a democratic soldier. But the big question is why any democratically elected Thai government needs to put a military man in charge of Defence. Surely the time has come to kick the military out of politics and ban all military and police ranks from parliament. The military just expects to have the “right” to intervene in politics for its own benefit. Then it claims to defend the King, to justify its actions, and uses *lèse majesté* to shut up its opponents.

Another “image” associated with this cabinet is the image of the elected speaker of the House grovelling on the floor before the unelected King. In Britain the Queen must read out the policies of a newly elected government in parliament

Another, supposedly, “good image” of the new cabinet, as they all posed for their collective photo outside Government House, was their black arm bands, a sign of mourning for some minor Royal who just died. When will the cabinet wear mourning for the nearly 90 unarmed red shirts gunned down by the military last year?

If these are all part of the “good image” of the new cabinet then thank heavens there are no red shirts in the government!!! It would immediately sully their reputations.

But there are more important reasons why red shirt leaders should not hold cabinet posts. In the past, Filipino and British governments have brought in leftists to head Labour Ministries, in order to create an image, shut them up and then make them fall-guys. It would have been a disaster if a red shirt had been appointed as Minister of Justice, only to be made impotent and then blamed for not achieving justice for those killed by the army last year.

The fact that there are no red shirts in the cabinet is a golden opportunity for the red shirt movement to prove that it is independent from the Peua Thai government. They can then organise mass protests to demand justice, the freeing of political prisoners, the punishing of those responsible for the 2010 massacre, the end to censorship and *lèse majesté* and the reform of the army and the judiciary.

The question is: are the red shirt leaders up to this? If they are not, will new groups of leaders emerge who can take the movement forward?

Some say we must be patient. But on this I agree with Arisman Pongreuangrong, another red shirt activist, who says that we cannot wait. Now, just after the election victory, is exactly the time to

strike out for democracy and justice. A time table should be set for the freeing of prisoners and the bringing to justice of those who committed state crimes against the people. "If not now, then when?" (paraphrasing Tracey Chapman). Wait until the elites regroup and crush us again?

The recent election had only one important meaning and that was to prove that the military and the Democrat Party were illegitimate. Having a newly elected Peua Thai Party government is totally meaningless if nothing changes. It is time to take the gloves off and stop worrying about the feelings of the government. If they wish to betray the people who sacrificed their lives for democracy, or those who are currently in jail, then they are not on our side. Red Shirts will have to fight this government in order to gain democracy and social justice.

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