

Thailand: Lèse Majeste Convict Somyot released from prison

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BANGKOK — After years embodying the excesses of the lese majeste law, Somyot Prueksakasemsuk was released from prison shortly after dawn Monday from the Bangkok Remand Prison.

Emerging at 6am in a light blue polo shirt, Somyot smiled and appeared to be in good spirits as a small group of supporters, his two children and associates welcomed him.

Minutes after being freed, he told the press that the 2014 coup, which took place while he was serving what had initially been a 10-year sentence, had led society and the economy “backward.”

Asked what he would do now that he was a free man, Somyot said he has written an account of the hardships faced by many prisoners, such as improper sleep quarters and basic rights.

He added that he met political prisoners from both sides of the political divide while in prison, and the task is how the two sides can work together for a better society.

“Elections are a form of democracy ... I support them,” he said. “... I hope the government will not delay elections further because it would not be good for the economy.”

Somyot, 56, was arrested in 2011 and sentenced two years later under the lese majeste law, which carries a maximum imprisonment term of 15 years per offense, for two articles published in a political magazine called Voice of Taksin, which he edited.

He was sentenced to 10 years for the two articles - five years each - set in a fictitious kingdom construed by the court to contain references to the late King Rama IX, plus one year for defamation. By then he had already been jailed two years.

The Supreme Court reduced his sentence in 2017.

During his trial, he testified that the two articles were written by former politician Jakrapob Penkair under a pen name but was held responsible nonetheless. Jakrapob, who is in exile, has never confirmed nor denied being the author.

For years, international rights groups have declared Somyot a prisoner of conscience and campaigned for his unconditional release. Shortly after being freed, Somyot thanked Amnesty and the International Labour Organization.

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P.S.

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<http://www.khaosodenglish.com/featured/2018/04/30/lese-majeste-convict-somyot-freed/>