

Thailand: Vendor arrested for selling slippers with PM's picture

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A woman was arrested at a red-shirt activity in Ayutthaya for selling slippers with Abhisit's face on them.

On 3 Oct, at about 5 pm, police arrested Amornwan Charoenkij, 42, for an offence under Section 9(3) of the Emergency Decree which prohibits 'press releases and distribution or dissemination of letters, publications or any means of communication containing texts which may instigate fear amongst the people or is intended to distort information which leads to a misunderstanding of the emergency situation to the extent of affecting the security of the state or public order or the good morals of the people either in the area or locality where an emergency situation has been declared or the entire Kingdom.'

At about 11 pm, Surachet Chaikosol, a Phue Thai MP for the province, bailed her out using his political position as a guarantee.

Amornwan said that at first she intended not to request bail, because she was very angry with the charge. She had sold the slippers at red-shirt gatherings at Ratchaprasong, Imperial shopping mall [red-shirt headquarters in Lad Phrao, Bangkok] and in Chiang Mai, apart from selling rice with omelets.

'I was ready to stay in jail, but the MP came and told me that I'd better get bailed and go home, and then come back to fight in court. I wanted to be jailed. What a damn life! I don't want to stay [in the world] outside [prison] any more! It's not livable. It's hard to make ends meet. What's so wrong with just selling slippers? I have to live with it. If you're a red shirt, anything you do will be wrong,' she said, adding that she had joined rallies since 3-4 years ago at Sanam Luang because she could not tolerate what is wrong, despite the fact that she was born in Trang and always voted for the Democrat Party.

She expected that the remaining 40 pairs of slippers, out of 60 she had brought to sell, would be confiscated by the police. The slippers were printed with a message, 'People died at Ratchaprasong,' and photos of Abhisit and Suthep Thaugsuban.

'When asked by the police, I answered frankly that people did die there. What else could I say? I had no problems selling these elsewhere. This is too much. These are not weapons.'

She said that, in fact, local policemen had bought several pairs from her, and they probably showed them to others, resulting in her arrest.

After her release on bail, she planned to spend the night at Ayutthaya train station and catch the next train back to Bangkok in the morning, along with a group of friends who had stayed with her.

Sombat Boon-ngam-anong, a red-shirt activist, said that the arrest was not right, and was peculiar as

Ayutthaya was not under the Emergency Decree. The slippers were merchandise for a political campaign. Any defamation charge should be lodged by the injured person himself.

P.S.

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