

Thailand: Student activists fined for hanging chili and garlic on the fence of Govt. house

Monday 11 January 2021, by [BOONBANDIT Tappanai](#) (Date first published: 21 August 2020).

BANGKOK — Can garlands of chili and garlic cost you 2,000 baht? It did Wednesday for two activists.

Two student activists, Parit “Penguin” Chiwarak and Tanawat “Ball” Wongchai, were fined for hanging garlic and chili garlands on the Government House fence Feb. 2 as a symbolic gesture calling for then-junta leader Gen. Prayuth Chan-o-cha to step down.

The court on Wednesday ordered Penguin and Ball to be fined 2,000 baht each for violating the Public Assembly Act, saying that they failed to notify the authorities 24 hours ahead of their gathering.

Speaking after the court verdict, Parit said he does not believe that he has broken the law as he was exercising his rights mandated by the Constitution.

“I respect the ruling, but I disagree with this law, which has been proposed by the NCPO-backed legislators,” Parit said. “I may be arrested for talking with my friends, as it does not specify what is a public assembly.”

The pro-democracy activists went to Government House on Feb. 2 to read a statement demanding Prayuth to resign ahead of the election, which they then hung garlic and chili garlands on the fence before being taken away by the police.

Burning chili and salt in Thai culture is a ritual used to utter a curse upon adversaries, while garlic garland is believed in Western culture to ward off vampires.

Parit said after his arrest that the garlands were not meant to curse anyone, but to “ward off evil spirits that are sucking taxpayers’ money.”

They were indicted with charges relating to unauthorized protest, which the pair denied before being released by the police on the same day.

Their political stunt came after Prayuth challenged his detractors to banish him during a speech on government’s performance on Feb. 1.

“Every leader of the world, whether democratic or socialist, don’t have to resign during elections. Look at Obama or Xi Jinping, do they have to step down?,” Prayuth said. “Go on, come and chase me out!”

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