

# Bangkok Post



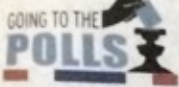
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## Charter 'No' vote poses risks to NCPO

**ANALYSIS:** Critics warn government against writing another constitution if public gives thumbs down on Sunday, writes Nattaya Chetchotiros



**O**ponents of the draft constitution are playing down the risk that a new charter could be even more undemocratic if the draft is voted down in Sunday's referendum.

They believe the engine will turn to the extent of those who vote "No" and come up with a better draft charter if the version prepared by the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) led by Manich Chulalongkorn falls at the post.

The vote "No" camp is made up not only of anti-government groups such as the red-shirt United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UFD) and the Thai Thair Party, but extends to cover the Democrat Party leader as well as many noted public figures.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and his deputies, Pravit Wongsoontorn and Wisutwan Kira again, have repeatedly given assurances that the government will stick to the roadmap to hold the elections next year, no matter what the outcome of the referendum.

This indicates the engine is conditioned it can deal with the situation after the vote and that Gen Prayut must have a back-up plan to ensure the time frame to resume democracy is not affected.

Democracy leader Abhisit Vejjajiva said the Bangkok Post survey people have decided they will vote to support the draft because they fear if they reject the draft they may get something even worse. Others reasoned they were reluctant to vote in the same way as the red-shirts who boycotted the draft vote before it was written, he said.

Mr Abhisit said he had spent a lot of time contemplating the issue before he attended his master address the draft.

The former prime minister advised the draft should not be used as a carrot to bring the regime to power in any way.

The fact that the draft charter drawn up by the previous CDC led by Bhasarakorn Deawong was rejected by the defunct National Reform Council (NRC) and if this draft charter is voted down in the referendum, the regime could not allow to apply the old approach to have a third draft constitution drawn up, Mr Abhisit said.

"Both Gen Prayut and Mr Wisutwan said they will not use the old approach," Mr Abhisit said.

"All the power rests with the prime minister. Gen Prayut must listen to the voices of people who do not accept the draft if the draft is voted down."

"If the draft fails, the prime minister must assess why."

In the event the draft is shot down, Mr Abhisit said he believed the National Council of the Peace and Order (NCPO) will not defy the public and create unrest by producing a new constitution that is much worse than the previous two draft charters.

"I believe the NCPO must think of the future and come up with good solutions," he said.

Former Democrat Party leader and former prime minister Chuan Leekpai supported Mr Abhisit's stance against the draft charter.

Though it is not the party's resolution, Mr Abhisit's stance is in line with the principle of democracy, for the country changed to democracy 84 years ago, so we cannot afford to step backwards, but we must move forwards," Mr



People from all walks of life join the Election Commission's 'Big Day' activity aimed at drumming up public attention and getting people out to write in Sunday's referendum on the draft constitution at the Royal Plaza. AP/WIDE WORLD

“Gen Prayut must listen to the voices of people ... if the draft fails, the prime minister must assess why.”



“What is for sure is that this draft is very bad. A coalition government will be too weak to implement any reforms.”



Chuan said in a speech at a party to mark Mr Abhisit's 52nd birthday on Wednesday. Sombhat Chonlathorn, a media guru and former minister, has also announced he will not accept the draft charter. He told the Bangkok Post the draft charter is "stipulating bad democratic."

"I believe if the draft passes the referendum, both conflict will stay in the near future. I will not accept the draft which was drawn up at the behest of the military because the military is intent on [denial of] democracy," Mr Sombhat said.

“I believe if the draft passes the referendum, fresh conflict will erupt in the near future.”



“It is wrong to urge people to accept the draft ... this is because it is impossible to amend this constitution.”



Development Administration, said that it is unclear whether something worse will occur if the draft is voted down.

"What is for sure is that this draft is very bad. A coalition government will be too weak to implement any reforms," Mr Sombhat said, referring to an electoral system under the draft charter that will create a semi coalition government and increase political instability.

"If the majority of voters reject the draft, the NCPO must find the weaknesses and make improvements.

"They should not draw up a new constitution that could be much worse. If and when a new constitution drawn up by the NCPO is entered and it turns out to be much worse, there is still definitely face assistance," Mr Sombhat said.

Mr Sombhat said that even though the NCPO has sweeping powers at its disposal, it still cannot push through reform, particularly public reform.

In light of this, he said he has no hope that a weak coalition government after the election will succeed in police reform.

Former Thai key figure Khunying Sudarat Keuraphan has opposed the draft charter, saying one of its bases is the draft is designed in a way that makes it hard to amend.

She also criticised a campaign by some state agencies to urge the public to accept the draft first and any provisions deemed as flawed could be amended later.

"It is wrong to urge people to accept the draft and say the charter can be amended later," Khunying Sudarat said on Facebook.

"This is because it is impossible to amend this constitution."

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### Court gives Surapong 1-year term

**POST REPORTERS**

The Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Political Office Holders has handed former Revenue minister Surapong Saechueng a suspended one-year prison sentence over a 2004 malfeasance case.

Surapong was found guilty of violating Section 117 of the Criminal Code by approving three unqualified people as members of a selection committee and as special members of the Bank of Thailand (BoT) board in 2004, said the ruling read on Tuesday.

When serving as finance minister in the now-dissolved Thaksin Prasert Pattana government of the late prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Surapong rejected candidates recommended by the Fiscal Policy Office and instead favoured with appointments by making his own choices, said the ruling.

Surapong appointed Witsa Ungtong, Chaitan Wuthasarn and Sarin Limprapong to the committee ordering the BoT board and an operations member of the board, even though all three served on the board of another financial institution, said the ruling.

He found members of another financial institution, the three were deemed not qualified to sit on the BoT board to prevent conflicts of interest, said another transparency as required under the Bank of Thailand Act, said the ruling.

The judges decided to sentence Surapong to one year in jail and the fine 200,000 Baht.

However, since the defendant had six prior convictions the sentence was suspended.

The court is due to hand down a ruling in another Surapong malfeasance case on Aug 25.

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Bangkok Screening Room.

## The new kids on the block

Stand-alone cinemas in Bangkok nowadays are largely known as places where porn is screened. Scala Theatre or House RCA aren't exactly thriving; the future of the former is still unclear while the latter trudges on. So it seems a reckless idea that a 50-seat alternative cinema, Bangkok Screening Room (BKKSR), is opening later this month right in the middle of the city.

But the plan isn't an act of impulse. The trio of founders — Sarinya Manamuti, Nicholas Hudson-Ellis and Wongsarond Suthikulpanich — have been mulling over the plan for over two years. Back in 2014, they organised a pop-up open-air film screening programme at Hof Art Space which was met with great response from the public. They did a similar programme at Wonderfruit Festival last year.

"Every time we come back to Thailand, the choice of films to watch is so

limited," said Sarinya.

She and Hudson-Ellis were previously based in Australia, working at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image. "There's no space for alternative films, and most of the stand-alone cinemas are gone. With the chain cinemas we have in department stores, it's not balanced at all. You have only a few films that are repeatedly screened in all cinemas."

Situated in Saladaeng 1 off Rama IV, in the same building as Whitespace Gallery, the aim of BKKSR is to support emerging Thai filmmakers and provide an opportunity for local audiences to see films not usually screened in mainstream theatres.

Even though the ticket price, set at 300 baht, may seem high, it's understandable considering the location and the selection of films to be screened. Opening late August, the programme is already set: the Contemporary Film Seasons

category includes the 2012 joint British-Belgian-North Korean romantic comedy *Comrade Kim Goes Flying*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Palme d'Or-winning film *Loong Boonmee raleuk chat* (*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*). The Classic Film Seasons include Ishiro Honda's 1954 classic *Godzilla* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.

The venue plans to screen two films on week nights, and four on Saturdays and Sundays.

To support emerging Thai filmmakers, the ticket revenue will be split 50/50 between the cinema and the filmmaker (it's 55/45, or less generous, for filmmaker at cinema chains). Bangkok Screening Room also invites Thai independent directors to submit short films to be screened instead of commercials before every film.

**Bangkok Screening Room is on Saladaeng 1. Visit [www.bkksr.com](http://www.bkksr.com).**

PHOTO COURTESY OF BANGKOK SCREENING ROOM