

**Bangkok Issues New Passport For Thaksin
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BANGKOK, Dec 16 (Bernama) -- Bangkok has issued a new passport to former Thai premier Thaksin Shinawatra, thus lifting the revocation of his passport imposed by the previous government.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Thani Thongpakdi said today the passport was issued in Bangkok on Oct 26 and had been sent back to the Thai embassy in Abu Dhabi.

"Thaksin submitted his passport application in Abu Dhabi on Oct 25 and the embassy forwarded it to Bangkok for further action on the same day," he said, here.

Thani said Thaksin was issued with an ordinary passport, adding that "He has the right to come back to Thailand anytime."

Thaksin's passport was revoked by former Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya on April 12, 2009 when the former fled the country in 2008 after being charged with corruption and was later found guilty in absentia and sentenced to two years in prison.

Foreign Minister Dr Surapong Tovichakchaikul today confirmed that he had lifted the revocation order.

Prior to this, Dr Surapong had said that the right to issue or revoke passports lay with the Foreign Minister and that he planned to re-issue the passport for Thaksin as a "New Year gift".

Yesterday, the opposition Democrat's spokesman Chavanond Intarakomalyasut claimed that the Foreign Ministry issued the passport to Thaksin on Oct 31 and demanded an explanation from the government for issuing a passport to a convicted fugitive.

Kasit said those involved in the re-issuing of Thaksin's passport must be held responsible for acting against the law and regulations.

Thaksin was ousted in a bloodless coup in Sept 19, 2006 and has been living in self-imposed exile since 2008.

He was reported to have travelled using a Montenegro passport ever since the revocation of his Thai passport.

Under normal circumstance, a former Thai prime minister is entitled to a diplomatic passport.

Asked whether the re-issuance of Thaksin's passport was tantamount to guarantee his innocence, Thani said: "These are two different issues."

Thani was also not sure whether Thaksin had used his new Thai passport thus far.

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