

POLITICS

Opposition to omit Thaksin's name

CHAIRITH YONPIAM

The no-confidence debate against Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra is expected to be held on March 24 as scheduled after the opposition People's Party (PP) agreed not to name former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra during the debate.

The decision to host the debate was reached during yesterday's meeting of government and opposition whips. Parliament president Wan Muhamad Noor Matha and opposition leader Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut were also present.

After the meeting, Mr Natthaphong said the debate will take place as planned, while the censure motion will be revised to omit Thaksin's name.

Mr Natthaphong said that the opposition would use other words to refer to Thaksin indirectly during the debate.

"I believe Thaksin is still a public figure. If he wants to explain himself, the media is ready to give him attention. There is no need for him to explain in parliament," he added.

Mr Natthaphong also said that the opposition requested 30 hours to grill Ms Paetongtarn in exchange for not mentioning Thaksin by name in the debate, which was opposed by government whips.

Government and opposition whips will meet again on Wednesday to finalise the timing for the debate, he noted.

According to sources, the government wants to limit the debate to no more than two days, with one additional day to hold a confidence vote. During the two-day period, the prime minister also needs time to respond to the opposition, the sources said.

Mr Wan previously warned the opposition not to name an outsider if it wants the censure debate to be scheduled.

Mr Wan has informed Mr

Natthaphong that any reference to Ms Paetongtarn's father must be removed from the motion.

He argued that directly referencing Thaksin, an outsider in the debate, would violate parliamentary meeting regulation No.176.

He also warned that an unrevised motion could expose lawmakers to defamation lawsuits from outsiders.

The House speaker also said he could be sued for defamation if Thaksin was referenced in the debate. As such, he told the opposition to remove all mention of the former prime minister from the motion, or the debate wouldn't proceed.

However, the opposition has already submitted an official objection to this request for it to omit Thaksin's name from the debate, according to Arpath Sukhanunth, secretary-general of the House of Representatives.

The House's working team found that no previous censure motions had ever directly named any external individuals; however, other terms such as "family members" or "former members" have been used, Mr Arpath said.

Speaking at Government House yesterday, Ms Paetongtarn said she heard that the opposition may use the words "that man" as an indirect reference to her father during the debate.

The no-confidence motion, which was submitted to the parliament president on Feb 27, singles out the PM and accuses her of lacking leadership and allowing her father, Thaksin, to pull strings in the government.

In response, she said she was ready to answer all questions in a censure debate and would let ministers answer any questions that might concern them.

Ms Paetongtarn expressed confidence that the coalition government would survive the censure motion because the bloc is united and strong,