

# Abhisit opposes member re-registration

## DEMOCRAT CHIEF QUESTIONS REFORM RATIONALE PROPOSED BY NRSA

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DEMOCRAT Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva yesterday questioned the rationale behind a political reform idea to overhaul political affiliation by “resetting” current party memberships and requiring all members to re-register.

He said the proposed move to “start all over” would unnecessarily cause confusion and trouble.

Abhisit, who is a former prime minister, was commenting in response to a proposal by Seri Suwanpanont, chairman of National Reform Steering Assembly (NRSA)’s political reform committee, which will submit a series of proposals regarding election-related organic laws to the Constitutional Drafting Commission (CDC).

The Democrat leader said if the plan was to eliminate fraudulent party members, it sounded unreasonable and not in line with the current situation. The Election Commission (EC)

had a party-member database in hand and it could check current members right away. Abhisit questioned the need for a resetting.

Previously, political analysts claimed that a large number of parties’ members were fraudulent with certain members falsely claimed to be members – which had seen some parties claim to have over 10 million members.

The “reset party members” proposal was also rejected by political reform panel member Nikorn Jamnong, who said the claim about fraudulent party members was untrue.

Nikorn said around eight years ago, the EC and the Interior Ministry had cleared parties’ member lists and used Information Technology system to help manage the database. Therefore, he said, names of parties’ members could not be duplicated.

Nikorn, who is chief adviser to Chart Thai Pattana Party, said at the present, current members of all parties accounted for only 4.8 million peo-

ple, 2.8 million for the Democrats, and just 150,000 for Pheu Thai. So, if it needs to check party members, the authorities should verify new members rather than existing party members, which would also need a budget to be done, he said.

Abhisit also suggested that the EC have officers from various ministries, qualified representatives from academia and the business sector to help organise elections, rather than only officials from Interior Ministry to support the election administration, like the political reform committee proposed.

In regard to another NRSA proposal that would require party members to pay a membership fee not more than Bt200 a year, Abhisit said parties’ members were normally responsible for the fee payment. He said there should be a regulation stipulating that if members do not pay, their membership will be terminated.

Abhisit also addressed the EC’s proposals on the four election-related

organic laws on such issues as elections, the Senate, political parties, and the election agency.

He agreed with the EC idea that it should require parties to submit policies to the EC before the election. However, he did not believe the EC is in a position to confirm whether policies are practical or not.

Abhisit stressed that all political parties have legitimacy to decide whether or not they field candidates to contest an election. And if a party obstructs the running of an election, that is basically unlawful, referring to the EC proposal to revoke a party's status if it boycotts a poll.

"If such a proposal is imposed and a party fields only a candidate to contest an election, I am not sure whether that party would be considered wrong or not," the former PM said.

Meanwhile, a majority of people – 77.6 per cent, agreed with the plan to overhaul political affiliation, saying they want "new-blood" politicians and to eliminate corrupt representatives, according to a survey by Super Poll with 1259 participants nationwide, which was released yesterday.

In contrast, 22.4 per cent rejected the "reset" proposal, saying the proposal did not allow people to participate in reforming politics.

Most people – 69 per cent – do not favour any particular party's proposals to drive the country forward, compared to 14.6 per cent who prefer the Democrats, 11.5 per cent voting for Pheu Thai Party, and 4.8 per cent for other parties.

In regard to the next election, most people – 68 per cent – approve of the Interior Ministry helping the EC organise the next election scheduled for late next year, in order to reduce poll frauds, according to a Bangkok University poll with 1,156 people, also released yesterday.

In contrast, 25 per cent rejected the ministry having a role in organising the poll, saying the EC can manage the election alone, while 6.7 per cent said they were not sure. Asked to what extent people feel confident in the EC being able to combat poll fraud, 53 per cent said they felt "less to least" confident, 37 per cent said "much to most", and 9.8 per cent said they were "not sure".