

MOVE WILL BE 'A BLOT ON POLITICS'

EC's Somchai slams NLA 'reset' bill

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» Election commissioner Somchai Srisutthiyakorn yesterday slammed the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) decision to endorse a bill to "reset" the EC.

The bill will become "a dark side of efforts to reform the election process", Mr Somchai wrote on his Facebook page.

There will be no problems if the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) maintains neutrality at the next general election.

But if the regime pursues a political aim and becomes a stakeholder in the next poll, the NLA's decision to reset the EC will become a blot on politics, Mr Somchai said.

This would be no different from the controversial blanket amnesty bill which the Pheu Thai-led government tried to use its numbers in parliament to push through, Mr Somchai said.

The amnesty bill sparked anti-government protests in late 2013, that culminated in the May 22, 2014 coup that toppled the Pheu Thai-led government.

Mr Somchai said that while supporters of the bill on the EC hope that new election commissioners who will be chosen under the new tougher qualification requirement will maintain independence and impartiality and ensure the outcome of the next poll is acceptable to all sides, the process to select EC members will still be appointed

by the NLA.

This is different from the old selection process where EC members were chosen by an elected Senate.

Under the bill approved by the NLA, the NLA will have a final say on EC candidates nominated by a selection panel.

"The NLA may reject the candidates and the selection process will go on until the NLA gets the EC members it desires," Mr Somchai said.

Previously, critics voiced concerns that the reset proposal would pave the way for the military regime to take control of the new EC after the reset.

The assembly on Friday passed the bill in its third reading by a vote of 177 to 1.

Section 70 of the bill — dubbed the "reset" proposal which calls for the removal of five incumbent election commissioners — was also passed with a vote of 161 to 15.

This will effectively lead to all five incumbent election commissioners appointed under the 2007 constitution being removed when the new law comes into effect. Seven new commissioners will be recruited within four months of the law being enacted.

The NLA will send the bill back to the EC for consideration. The EC will now have 10 days to consider if it has any objections.

If so, a joint committee made up of five NLA members, five CDC members and one from the EC will be set up to consider the bill in 15 days before resubmitting it

the NLA.

EC chairman Supachai Somcharoen appeared to come to terms with the fate of the current EC members.

He said there will be no use in raising any objections because the bill now has the backing of the NLA.

When the new law comes into effect, the EC members will have to comply, he said.

Responding to Mr Somchai's criticism, NLA vice-president Peerasak Porjit said the voting on the bill was open with both critics and supporters allowed to debate the legislation.

Pheu Thai Party key figure Chaturon Chaisaeng yesterday said that the resetting of the EC should also be applied to other independent agencies such as the Constitutional Court.

In a Bangkok Poll survey conducted by the Bangkok University, 37.3% of respondents believed that the EC's move to review a complaint lodged by Pheu Thai Party lawyer Ruangkrai Leekitwattana, who accused nine ministers of holding shares in private companies that are awarded state contracts, was intended to bargain with the NLA over the reset proposal.