

(BN) Thai Street Protests May Spur Senators to Kill Amnesty Bill

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(Adds stocks and Senate speaker from second paragraph.)

By Suttinee Yuvejwattana and Anuchit Nguyen

Nov. 5 (Bloomberg) -- Thailand's Senate plans to reject a proposed amnesty law for political offenses when it meets from Nov. 11, after thousands of people joined protests across the country yesterday to oppose the legislation.

The government, which has said the law would help heal social divisions, will accept the Senate's decision, Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra said today in a televised address.

Two members of the 150-seat upper house said more than 50 percent of senators would vote to reject the bill next week. The SET Index of Thai stocks jumped 2 percent at the close, the most in six weeks, while the baht erased an early decline.

"Many senators are in a panic because they're afraid of the public's reaction," Senator Prasarn Marukpitak today told the Blue Sky television network, which is affiliated with the opposition Democrat party. "Some say the public trend is so strong, they can't go against it. So they can either reject the draft law or abstain."

Democrat lawmakers led marches through Bangkok's streets yesterday, paralyzing traffic in the Silom business district and near the Grand Palace, one of Thailand's top tourist attractions. The legislative push has weighed on Thai stocks and the baht amid concern it will reignite political clashes in a country that has been wracked by street violence since a 2006 coup that ousted Thaksin Shinawatra as leader.

Senate Vote

“I don’t want to see the amnesty law used as a political tool to create disputes,” Yingluck, Thaksin’s sister, said in the speech. “This government will work for the country’s benefit and will not use its majority to go against the people’s wishes.”

The Senate will block passage of the amnesty bill when it meets on Nov. 11, Speaker Nikom Wairatpanij said at a press briefing in Bangkok today.

In its initial draft, the law would have freed members of the public charged over political clashes since the 2006 coup. A parliamentary committee amended the draft to include soldiers and politicians who oversaw deadly crackdowns on protesters, and people charged on the basis of investigations by state agencies established after the coup.

“I have more confidence than a week ago that most senators will reject this law,” Boonchai Chokwatana, an appointed senator and chairman of Saha Pathanapibul Pcl, said today in an interview with Blue Sky. “Large demonstrations against the bill in every part of the country prompted many elected senators to listen to the voice of their voters.” Paiboon Nititawan, an appointed senator, said at a media briefing today that about 104 senators will reject the draft.

Corruption Cases

At least 32,000 people joined protests in Bangkok and 17 other provinces yesterday, police spokesman Piya Uthayo said.

Students and lecturers from Chulalongkorn University are staging a separate protest in central Bangkok today, he said.

Yingluck said the bill wouldn’t apply to corruption cases, and denied that it would let Thaksin recover 46.4 billion baht

(\$1.48 billion) seized by the courts in 2010. Thaksin fled abuse of power charges that stemmed from a military-appointed panel for helping his wife buy land from the government.

“Distorted information led people to believe this is a financial law,” Yingluck said. “If this is a financial law, the prime minister would have to sign it, and I haven’t signed anything. This law is to grant amnesty to those affected by political movements and the coup.”

Parties linked to Thaksin have won the past five elections on support from rural areas, including the 2011 vote that brought his sister to power.

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