

Thailand: Nationwide protesters face obstruction by state authorities

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Despite attempts at intervention at all levels by state agents, student-led protests against dictatorship have continued nationwide for a second consecutive week

Following the Free Youth protest on Saturday 18 July, young people in over 46 provinces across the nation organized protests in their hometowns with similar goals. The Free Youth demands were that the government dissolve parliament, put an end to state harassment of dissidents and draft a more democratic constitution.

Between 19 July-26 July, there were at least 30 anti-government events across the nation.

Besides large numbers of police officers at protests taking photos and playing audio recordings of laws protesters might violate, state agents at all levels — including university presidents, teachers, police officers and local political leaders — have also reportedly attempted to stop youths and youth leaders from attending protests.

University presidents banned the use of campuses

The presidents of Mahasarakham University in Maha Sarakham and Prince of Songkla University in Pattani issued letters banning protests on their campuses as the organizers planned. Both presidents cited Covid-19 concerns.

Despite the disapproval from the administrators, students and members of the public went ahead with their protests with the additional goal of protesting against their presidents for not standing with the taxpayers who pay their salaries.

Matichon reported that over 2,000 people attended the event in Maha Sarakham on Wednesday (22 July) evening, although the university kept the lights for the protest turned off.

Matichon also reported that a student at Maejo University in Chiang Mai was called in and interrogated by police officers and the university administration on his motivations and objectives for the event.

High schoolers face pressure from their schools

Student organizers at Satriwitthaya 2 School were called to a meeting with the school director regarding their planned anti-government event on 23-24 July. The Twitter accounts of those students were also suspended.

The event at the school did not happen as police officers and teachers were standing by at many locations in the school.

Triam Udom Suksa students held their protest on 24 July despite unfriendly weather and hostile authorities. According to iLaw, the school was ordered to close its gates by Pathumwan police. It was also reported that police officers and public health authorities talked to school administrators while looking at school CCTV footage.

Over 500 people attended a protest in Phrae on 22 July after high school students were told by their teachers that the school would not let them graduate if they attended the protest, according to iLaw.

There is also a leaked audio recording of a PA system announcement at a school in Phrae threatening staff and students that if they attended the protest, they would be violating the Emergency Decree and might be sent to a youth detention centre.

Authorities at a school in Nakhon Sawan talked to a student, called the student's parents and threatened to fire the student after the student held a sign in public showing support for the 18 July student-led protest. Students at Kanlayanee Si Thammarat School in Nakhon Si Thammarat faced similar threats.

A 16-year-old Phetchabun student was summoned and interrogated by her school's deputy director after she shared a promotional poster of an event planned in the province, according to the Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR).

Another 16-year-old Lamphun student was also hunted down by a teacher, TLHR reported. A teacher showed a photo from her Facebook account to students around the school in an attempt to find her. She said she had to hide in a bathroom and go home immediately after school with help from her friends.

However, students still appeared at protests, most of them with tape on their shirts to cover their schools' names.

Harassment at home

Lom Sak police took one of the Phetchabun organizers into custody, without identifying themselves and without any warrant, to talk about the planned event. The police told him that they were prepared to press charges if the event went ahead, TLHR reported. He decided to cancel the event.

Police officers reportedly harassed youth leaders of Phrae, Lamphun, Samut Prakan and Phetchabun in their homes. Their actions included asking for the information about the protests, attempting to take photos of their ID cards without their permission, taking photos of their property, asking condo security guards for CCTV footage of an activist and threatening parents and relatives.

A 16-year-old in Lamphun was told that her name was on the "blacklist." Another Lamphun student posted on her Facebook page that she would not attend the event planned on 24 July because she was concerned about her security after she was visited at her home by plainclothes police.

A Hat Yai youth was also visited by local government politicians at his house.

Related businesses also harassed

TLHR reported that a Phetchabun business that agreed to provide electroacoustics for an event was threatened by the police with having its license taken away.

On the day of the protest on 23 July, Khon Kaen police were reported to have talked to drivers of songthaew buses that provided transportation for students to the protest in an attempt to get private

information about them. According to iLaw, they asked which politicians are behind all these protests.

Police officers came to warn protestors at Kasetsart University on 24 July to not violate the Emergency Decree

Taking photos

Police attempted to take photos of protestors' ID cards and their homes when they visited them. They also appeared at every event taking photos and videos using their phones, cameras and drones.

At the trash picking event in Chonburi, Tanawat Wongchai posted a video of police officers taking photos of participants' car license plates. Over 1,000 people were at the event.

A protester in Pathum Thani was asked by an officer for their ID card. The officer attempted to take a photo of the card but failed because he was booed by all the protesters. Municipal officers in Pathum Thani also set up CCTV cameras on a nearby pedestrian flyover facing the protesters. Other events scheduled at the same locations

Another reason Satriwitthaya 2 students had to cancel their event on 23 and 24 July was because the school scheduled mosquito spraying on both days without any notice.

Phayao youths organized a protest on 27 July, but after the event was announced, the Phayao Mueang District Chief Officer scheduled a volunteer event for local royal volunteers at the same time and location as the protest. However, the organizers decided to change the location. Anti-government rallies continue for a second consecutive week

Despite all the attempts at obstruction, most protests happened as planned. Many anti-dictatorship protests are planned for next week. The Free Youth leaders said that if their three initial demands are not met within two weeks after 18 July, they will hold another protest on an even bigger scale.`

Saturday 1 August will mark a full two weeks.

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P.S.

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