

# Rising Political Movement in the Northeast Defies Military Rule

KHON KAEN – Today, about 80 activists, academics, and villagers from the Northeast and Bangkok pushed the boundaries of the military government’s restrictions on political gatherings by attending a political seminar in Khon Kaen City, despite efforts by the authorities to block the event.



Activists, lawyers, and academics gathered together with Northeastern villagers at a political seminar under the name “Unsettling Isaan’s Lands – The People’s Fate after the Coup” in Khon Kaen City.

On Thursday morning, student activists from Khon Kaen University’s Dao Din group opened the doors to their meeting house to host an ad hoc seminar under the title “Unsettling Isaan’s Lands – The People’s Fate after the Coup,” organized

by the “Neo E-Saan Movement,” or the New Isaan Movement.

Initially, the seminar was to be held at the city’s Kosa Hotel, where organizers had booked a meeting room. However, yesterday the booking was cancelled after the hotel management received an order from military officials, according to the seminar’s organizers.

The “Neo E-Saan Movement” an emergent umbrella group of Isaan activists, was founded in March at a seminar at Thammasat University with a fiery declaration to oppose military rule and defend Northeasterners’ interests against the central government’s perceived dominance over the region.

The crowd of about 80 people included villagers and activists from all across the Northeast dressed in black hoodies with the word “Commoner” in white letters. They were joined by Bangkok academics and members of the student group of the New Democracy Movement, including well-known student activist Sirawith Seritiwat, who was recently briefly arrested on a trip to the controversial Rajabhakti Park.

On stage, Kornchanok Saenprasert, a former Dao Din member and Director of the Center for Human Rights Law for Society, criticized the heavy restrictions on freedom of expression and the right to peaceful protest under the current regime.

“The military junta has no legitimacy whatsoever to govern this country,” he said, “and they have to stop bullying people who are simply asking for their rights to be respected.”

Sanan Chusakul, a well-known Isaan writer and social activist, said that the suppression that society is currently experiencing will ultimately cause people to rise up and protest.

“The history of suffering in Isaan has moved people beyond fear,” he said, “and they have the will to rise up to oppose the powerful forces in Bangkok.”

However, he believes that the people's movement must have patience and keep mobilizing on small scale until the conditions are favourable for a large-scale uprising.



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Chan Makan, a 18-year-old high school student from Udon Thani City who attended the event, learned about it on Facebook. "I am curious to find out what direction our country's politics is heading," he said, adding that he learned much from the discussions the event facilitated between villagers from across the region.

Kanika Laophim, a 36-year-old market vendor from Kalasin Province whose village is affected by an oil and gas exploration site, travelled to Khon Kaen to educate herself about her community's rights.

“I am glad I came here to exchange views with many people from communities who face very similar problems to my village,” she said.

At 1:00 p.m., the event was briefly interrupted when Lieutenant Colonel Pitakphon Choosri from the 23rd Military Circle Command and six police officers approached the organizers and requested the activists to refrain from protesting outside of the vicinity of the house.



In the afternoon, about 40 activists from Dao Din and the New Democracy Movement group staged a protest at the Democracy Monument in downtown Khon Kaen. They held up signs

and attempted to place a military leather boot on top of the monument, but security officials prevented them from doing so and seized the boot.

After the activists read a declaration calling for a return to democracy, a constitution drafting process that includes the voices of the common people, and more self-government for the Northeast, the protest dispersed peacefully.