

Khon Kaen Activists Remain Divided, But Peaceful

KHON KAEN—Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and the Election Commission are expected to reach a decision this afternoon on whether or not the February 2 elections will be postponed, but Khon Kaen residents, like Thais across the country, remain divided on their hopes for the outcome. Yet while chaos, and at times violence, has dominated the streets of Bangkok in recent weeks, both sides of the divide in Khon Kaen plan to respond to today's announcement – regardless of the outcome – calmly and peacefully.

In Khon Kaen, the minority anti-government activists are hoping the elections will be postponed until after the government has undergone significant reform, while Khon Kaen's strong Red Shirt constituency, which supports the Yingluck government and wants to take the country's disagreements to the polls, is hoping the February 2 date will remain in place.

The Khon Kaen chapter of the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) has been holding anti-government rallies at the city shrine every night since January 3 and sending daily buses of anti-government supporters to participate in the Bangkok protests. But the chairman of the group, 58-year-old Khon Kaen resident Kamol Kitkasitwat, said that even if the government decides to go forward with Sunday's election, the group does not plan to stage any special demonstrations or protests.

"We don't want to provoke any violence," said Mr. Kamol. He added that so far, the group's nightly rallies have not elicited any hostility from Red Shirt supporters.

Mr. Kamol said that if the polls are open on February 2, PDRC activists may demonstrate at voting stations in Khon Kaen to

express their position against the election, but they will not attempt to block voters from casting ballots, as was the case in [Bangkok on Sunday](#).

Many members of Khon Kaen's strong Red Shirt constituency are hoping for an opposite outcome from Yingluck's 2 p.m. meeting with the Election Commission, but they also do not plan to respond aggressively if the decision does not go their way.

Forty-year-old Khon Kaen radio DJ Sanya Simma said he is afraid that if the election is postponed today, it might be a long time before the Thai people get another chance to vote. Yet he and another Khon Kaen radio DJ, 45-year-old Bhutdhipong Khanhaengpon, said a decision to delay the election would not be enough to turn them against the government.

"We are ready to listen to the reason that the government gives us," said Bhutdhipong. "If the reason is good enough, or even not good enough, we will listen and think."

Pheu Thai party list candidate Thanik Masripitak said he is worried that a postponement of the election will disillusion Pheu Thai voters, but that he will continue to campaign for the party regardless.

"We will have to campaign harder to explain to our supporters why we have to postpone," said Mr. Thanik. "We hope that our supporters will keep understanding."

The stark contrast between how the conflict is playing out in Bangkok versus Khon Kaen was illustrated when advance voting on January 26 was either blocked entirely or disrupted at 49 out of 50 polling stations in Bangkok, but completely [unimpeded in Khon Kaen and other areas in the northeast](#).

For the time being, political activity in Khon Kaen, and across much of the Northeast, appears far less confrontational than in Bangkok.

“There will be no violence in this province because most of us know we have different political ideologies and beliefs,” anti-government leader Mr. Komol said. “We can say to one another, ‘I understand that you have a different idea, but we can still live together.’”
