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FILM, FUN, PEACE AND LAUGHTER

>> XP, 8B

Call to impose heavy penalties on drivers blocking ambulances

KHANITTHA THEPPHAJORN
THE NATION

MOTORISTS FAILING to make way for ambulances may face harsher punishments in addition to social ostracism for “endangering others” as netizens join with the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) and the police to get tough on offenders.

The fine for blocking an ambulance could be raised from the current Bt500 to Bt10,000 or as high as Bt20,000 if the NLA passes legislation being called for by two Facebook-based campaigners for changes to the Land Transport Act.

NLA First Vice President Surachai Liangboonlertchai yesterday collected the petition demanding an open passage for ambulances and emergency vehicles from “Street Hero Project” administrator Weerakij Akarachotewit and “Mor Lab Panda” administrator and medical technologist Phakphum Dejhasdin.

Surachai said he would forward the petition to the Royal Thai Police, along with recommendations by the NLA committee on integrating and coordinating emergency rescue services, which he chairs.

Surachai said the committee had discussed how to hold accountable and punish drivers who intentionally failed to make way for emergency vehicles causing an on-board patient to later die. The panel decided that the authorities should ask a doctor to determine whether delay had contributed to the death. The accused person's intention and behaviour could also be factors for determining a punishment beyond the normal fine, he said.

The move followed several incidents in the past month where cars blocked ambulances from passing.

On April 24, a social media user named “Weera Boonjit” posted a video clip of an ambulance with a patient on board being blocked by a pickup truck that refused to move out of the right lane in Phetchabun's Nong Phai district. The post, which received 644,000

views and was shared by 1,700 others, attracted a lot of criticism of the truck driver. Weera said that because an ambulance usually drove at high speed to save lives, it requires the right lane and so others should move to the left and let it pass.

Another caught-on-camera incident took place on April 6. Social media user “Kenzaa Standby” posted the video clip of a Suzuki Swift sedan sticking to the right lane despite the trailing ambulance's lights and blaring siren. Prasit Raemkhonburi, 61, who was being transported by ambulance from Lat Krabang Hospital to Nakhon Ratchasima's Khon Buri Hospital, was pronounced dead later that day. His daughter, Saijai said Prasit suffered oxygen-deprivation to his brain, and was being sent to be treated at his hometown hospital nearer to relatives as there was a chance he would be in coma after surgery. She said the family forgave the sedan driver and didn't wish to press charges because they wished Prasit's spirit to be at peace.

The sedan belonged to Panuwat Sricharoen, an official at the National Institute for Emergency Medicine (NIEM), who allowed his girlfriend, Jiraporn Juaisa-ngiam to drive while he slept in the car, according to NIEM chief Dr Atchariya Paengma.

Atchariya said that Panuwat claimed that his girlfriend was shocked to see an ambulance tailing behind and she was not a good driver. The agency gave him a warning and a probe is to be launched. Panuwat apologised to all sides and offered his condolences to Prasit's family in a video posted on the “Street Hero Project” page on April 10.

National police deputy chief Pol General Weerachai Songmetta, said Jiraporn was summoned by police on April 10 to hear the charge of failure to make way for an ambulance, which is punishable by a Bt500 fine.

This incident prompted national police chief Pol General Chakthip Chaijinda to order that police help accommodate emergency vehicles at intersections.



Defence Ministry's assistant spokesman Colonel Wanchana Sawatdee, displays a redesigned mascot, Nong Kiew Koi, as he distributes leaflets for national reconciliation in Siam Square yesterday. The mascot was redesigned after public mockery of the previous version.

NATION/TANACHAI PRASARNPANCHI

Military pledges firm backing for PM Prayut

SUPREME COMMANDER HINTS AT OTHER MILITARY LEADERS ALSO JOINING PRO-JUNTA PARTIES

JITRAPORN SENAWONG,
KAS CHANWANPEN
THE NATION

AMID apparent efforts by the junta and its backers to ensure the return of Prayut Chan-o-cha as prime minister after the election, the military yesterday pledged its full support to the ruling junta and its leaders.

Supreme Commander Thanchaiyan Srisuwan yesterday admitted that the military remained a tool of the government even though Prayut had shown signs of political ambition. He said to support the government was the military's central role.

The military support came after a series of political moves from junta chief Prayut to consolidate power in preparation for the election, which is planned for next February.

The junta leader last week appointed an influential politician as his political adviser.

He is also travelling upcountry to attend a mobile Cabinet session but there has been speculation that he will meet other popular politicians,

wooing them for support. Regardless of Prayut's political machinations, the supreme commander reiterated that the military stood by the government and its leader.

Under the military-sponsored charter, Prayut can return to the top government job after the election if 376 out of 750 parliamentarians vote for him even if he does not lead any political party. Prayut has in his pocket 250 senators handpicked by the junta's committee. The general needs 126 votes from the House of Representatives, where elected politicians sit.

Thanchaiyan did not rule out the possibility of military leaders also joining the pro-junta party that could be set up to back Prayut.

However, personally, the general said he might not be involved. His role remains only within the National Legislative Assembly of which he is a member.

In response to a question about the military being politically non-partisan, Thanchaiyan said the Armed Forces support the government's policies. Normally, the framework was

laid out long before and the Army followed it, he added.

Asked if the military would become a tool in Prayut's political campaign, the supreme commander said the military did what it did regardless of people's perceptions.

Wanwichit Boonprong, a military and security affairs expert from Rangsit University, said the military's support for the military-led government was not unexpected.

The relationship between the military and the junta government, even after the next election, was well secured not only by the fraternal ties among military personnel but also by mutual interest, he said.

‘Strong comradeship’

“The military network now has close ties with key junta leaders like Prayut and his deputy Prawit Wongsuwan,” he said. “They would continue to help secure the junta, overseeing dissent. On the other hand, the junta will also reward them with a liberal budget and smooth and continuous implementation of policies.”

That is one of the reasons why the military prefers a military-led government to a civilian one, Wanwichit explained.

They trust generals-turned-

politicians better than they do ordinary politicians when it comes to shuffling positions, he said. This was due to their strong comradeship, he added.

After the next election, although the junta leaders may lose their absolute power provided by Article 44 and may seem distant from the Army, the expert said he believed Prayut and Prawit would continue to be powerful and have the potential to retain power. They would have the support of both the military and politicians, he said.

“They will be protected by the senators they appoint and they have politicians they are wooing now,” he said. “And these figures also have to yield to the Army's power. Politicians don't want to have problems with the military. They prefer to stay on the same side. And all this makes Prayut powerful,” the expert said.

This scenario was unlike the previous coup led by Sonthi Boonyaratglin in 2006, he said.

Sonthi toppled the elected civilian government of Thaksin Shinawatra, formed a party when he stepped down more than a year later to enter the electoral fray, which portrayed a power-hungry image, he said. In Prayut's case, he has politicians and technocrats as a cushion, he said.

MAKING WAY



The National Institute for Emergency Medicine has provided universal guidelines on how to make way for emergency vehicles/ambulances

- 1 Be alert when you see warning lights and hear a siren.
- 2 Try to determine the distance of an oncoming ambulance in your rearview mirror.
- 3 Based on the number of vehicles on your left and right, if it is deemed safe, lower your speed and pull to the left to make way for the ambulance.
- 4 If you are unable to pull to the left due to traffic congestion or risk of an accident, slow down and let the ambulance find its way ahead.
- 5 When the ambulance passes you, do not follow immediately behind it.
- 6 When you are in a traffic jam and an ambulance is behind you, decide whether you should pull to the left or the right and turn on your indicator so the ambulance driver can decide how to overtake you.



Source: The Nation

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