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PM extends olive branch over Thepha power plant

PRAYUT SAYS NO DECISION YET AS ACTIVISTS PLEDGE TO CONTINUE CAMPAIGN AFTER ARRESTS

PRATCH RUJIVANAROM
THE NATION 1A

THE GOVERNMENT has not made a decision about the Thepha coal-fired power plant project, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha stated yesterday, while an opposition group pledged to carry on its campaign against the project regardless of the government's crackdown.

Prayut announced on the official Facebook of the Government Spokesman Bureau yesterday that the government still had not made any judgements on the construction of the controversial 2,200-megawatt, coal-fired power plant in Songkhla's Thepha district, as the National Energy Policy Council was considering the project.

The proposed power plant, which would be operated by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (Egat), has faced strong opposition from local people who claim its Environmental and Health Impact Assessment (EHIA) was poorly done, contained incorrect and incomplete

information, and excluded participation from people who disagreed with the project.

Prayut said that the government had good intentions to develop the country but because of the discontent regarding its projects, authorities were ready to listen to opinions from every side.

He added that if anyone had comments about government policies, they could submit their opinions via official channels such as at the Damrongdharma centres and to local authorities.

However, Direk Hemnakhon, a prominent leader of group opposed to the power plant, said he did not trust that the government would properly consider the project, as the opposition group had not been allowed to present its perspective.

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"WE CANNOT RELY ON LOCAL OFFICIAL AGENCIES TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE COAL-FIRED POWER PLANT ANYMORE, BECAUSE THE PROJECT IS NOW BEING RUN BY THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT."
Activist Direk Hemnakhon

ernment. This is why we have to speak directly to the prime minister," Direk said.

"We would like to ask the prime minister and government not to see us [the opposition group] as the enemy. We just want the government to comprehensively consider such a gigantic project, as more than Bt100 billion from the national budget would have to be spent on this new coal-fired power plant."

He also said the opposition group would carry on campaigning against the plant's construction despite the recent crackdown on a peaceful demonstration and criminal charges filed against protesters. He also urged the government to revoke the project's EHIA.

"We are fighting not for ourselves, but for the next generation and the future, so we cannot give up on our efforts no matter what," he said.

According to the Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning Office (ONEP), the EHIA was approved by a committee of experts on August 17 and the ONEP was waiting for Egat to submit the full report so it could be passed on to the National Environment Committee and the Cabinet.

ONEP secretary-general Raweewon Bhuridej also said the agency's committee of experts had already suggested to the Energy Ministry and Egat that they provide more information and build a better understanding with local people to resolve the conflict.