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FRIDAY, December 21, 2007

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**Security
bill sails
through
unopposed**

Pravir Rojananaphruk
The Nation

THE CONTROVERSIAL Internal Security Bill was overwhelmingly endorsed by the National Legislative Assembly yesterday with no lawmaker opposing it during two hours of deliberation.

The assembly voted 105-8 in favor, with two abstentions.

More than 20 other bills were passed by overwhelming - sometimes even unanimous - approval, including those on public debt, non-formal education, the Bank of Thailand and the establishment of associations and foundations.

Protesters abandoned any hope of preventing the assembly, which they regard as illegitimate, from passing the security bill and left just minutes before its second reading at 6pm.

They vowed to gather 10,000 signatures to start a constitutional motion to repeal the law.

"Please carry out the [security] work with utmost care.

Please always remember that there are people who are apprehensive that the law will be abused," urged NLA member Viriya Namsripong seconds after the bill was passed.

Chotechaung Chaitanorn, one of the 200 or so protesters, said Thailand now had its



DEMONSTRATORS DEMANDING the National Legislative Assembly stop considering laws face off with police officers in front of the Parliament for the final time yesterday.

own notorious "Gestapo" that could curb people's rights such as freedom of movement and the right to use electronic devices like the Internet.

He handed out bundles of flyers attacking the bill, but to no avail.

"It's like giving a blank

cheque to officials," he said.

Protesters vowed to continue to oppose the bill.

At its heart is Article 17, which grants the Internal Security Operations Command (Isoc) - headed by the prime minister as director with the Army chief as deputy

head - the authority to order curfews, restrict citizens' freedom of movement and access to and use of any electronic equipment, place anyone under house arrest, stop vehicles and close down roads or transportation routes, and order any government official

to carry out or stop carrying out any duty.

Isoc will have regional and provincial branches and its upper echelons are filled mostly by generals and senior bureaucrats.

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