

The controversial Internal Security Bill was overwhelmingly endorsed by the National Legislative Assembly on December 20 with no lawmaker opposing it during two hours of deliberation.

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

Chotechaung Chutinartorn, one of the 200 or so protesters outside the parliament while the NLA was in session, said Thailand now had its own "Gestapo" that could curb people's rights, such as freedom of movement and the right to use electronic devices and access the Internet.

The protesters have vowed to gather 10,000 signatures to start a constitutional motion to repeal the law.

At its heart is Article 17, which grants the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) 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, headed by the prime minister with the Army chief as his deputy, will have regional and provincial branches. Its upper echelons are filled mostly by generals and senior bureaucrats.

Wildlife corridors planned. The government plans to expand wildlife forest areas for the animals in them by using corridors to connect 19 protected forests.

Samart Sumanochitraporn, director of the National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department's Wildlife Conservation Office, said the intention is to boost the size of wildlife habitats by joining adjacent forests with a safe way for the wild animals to come and go between the areas by building tunnels for them, so they can go under the roads rather than across them.

Officials are now surveying animals' movements in order to place the tunnels in appropriate locations, he said.

Director-General Chalerm-sak Wattanasombot told a press

Loss of freedom feared as security bill sails through



A NEAR MISS

RICE DELIVERY: Fortunately, no deaths or injuries were reported when a trailer filled with 29 tons of unprocessed rice decoupled from the truck that was transporting it and crashed into this downtown home in Nakhon Ratchasima.

Truck-driver Boontham Semarum, 34, was transporting the rice from Buri Ram to a mill in Nakhon Ratchasima when the trailer parted from the truck and careered into the building.

conference on December 19 that the department also plans to raise wild animals for profit by building tree-houses, from which tourists will be able to pay to observe animals in the wild.

Clean cafes. In a bid to curtail alcohol sales and other vices at Internet cafes, authorities are encouraging entrepreneurs to join their "safe and constructive Internet cafes" project.

The project requires participating Internet cafes to strictly ban access to pornographic or illegal websites, ban smoking and the drinking of alcohol, and not allow anyone younger than 18 years old to stay after 10 pm.

Social Development and Human Security Minister Paiboon Wattanasiritham said that cafes

joining the project would receive benefits that include low-cost software.

The project was launched by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Culture Ministry, Interior Ministry, Education Ministry and Royal Thai Police.

The government already prohibits youths aged under 18 years old from staying in Internet cafes after 10 pm, but many have flouted this law, K. Paiboon said.

Some cafes sell alcohol and cigarettes to minors, he added.

Stoned cars. Following a report that a car waiting at an intersection in the capital had stones thrown at it on December 19, Bangkok Metropolitan Police Chief Pol Lt Gen Assawin

Kwanmuang instructed 88 police stations across the city to be vigilant in the search for stone throwers and said such criminals should be dealt with strictly.

Several rock-throwing incidents have been reported recently in central Thailand, most of which have resulted in deaths.

A truck driver is under the care of HM The Queen after he was blinded in a stone-throwing attack in Ayudhya in October while driving his six-wheeled truck.

Earlier this month, a cafe singer was killed by a 1.5-kilo-

gram rock thrown at her by two young men on a motorbike after an abusive exchange in Kamphaeng Phet.

In October 2004, Thai comedian "Jo Mokjok" was killed in a stone attack on the Asia Highway in Ayudhya's Bang Pa-in district by a group of youngsters during an attempted robbery.

Two visas in one. Thailand and Cambodia will sign a single visa agreement that will enable visitors to use only one visa for both countries, the Foreign Ministry has announced.

Foreign Minister Nitya Pibulsonggram was expected to sign the agreement with his Cambodian counterpart Hor Namthong during an official visit to Phnom Penh recently.

The pact is a pilot project under the Ayeayawady-Chao Phya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS).

Set up since 2003, ACMECS is a joint development scheme that includes Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

Under the slogan of "four countries, one destination", the Single Visa pact is aimed at facilitating tourism in the region.

Foreign ministers of the four countries in August 2005 agreed to allow Thailand and Cambodia to implement the scheme first, the remaining members joining later if the scheme proves successful.

Around the Nation news round-up is sourced from the pages of The Nation and Kom Chad Luek newspapers.

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