

LEGISLATION

PP backs groups opposing fund law changes

Asks if BJT is trying to silence critics

AEKARACH SATTABURUTH

Opposition People's Party (PP) leader Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut said he shared the concerns of civil society groups opposing amendments to four laws that would change the funding arrangements for public bodies.

Mr Natthaphong yesterday met Teerapat Kahawong, secretary of the People's Health Movement, and other civil society representatives, who handed him a petition opposing amendments proposed by the Bhumjaithai Party (BJT). The petition warned the changes could undermine the independence of the organisations concerned.

The four bills concern the funding of the Thai Health Promotion Foundation

(ThaiHealth), Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS), the Elderly Fund and the National Sports Development Fund.

The proposed amendments would end earmarked contributions from alcohol and tobacco taxes and replace them with allocations from the annual government budget, raising concerns about funding continuity and institutional independence.

The People's Health Movement said debate on the bills should prioritise public input, particularly regarding their potential impact on health promotion, welfare rights and the independence of public bodies.

Mr Natthaphong said the discussions highlighted shared concerns about health promotion, transparency and continuity in public spending.

He argued the BJT should not justify the amendments on grounds of fiscal discipline, suggesting they could also weaken political opponents and civil society networks working with

the organisations.

"The amendment was not proposed by either the government or the cabinet, but by the BJT. Does this suggest an intent to undermine political opponents?" he said.

Regarding Thai PBS, he urged the need to preserve the independence of public broadcasting, saying the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) would be a more appropriate source of funding.

As for ThaiHealth, he said internal management problems could be addressed through clearer operating rules and greater transparency without necessarily amending the law.

Mr Natthaphong said the most practical option at this stage would be to establish an ad hoc parliamentary committee to study the issues and examine the management of each fund.

After reaching clear conclusions, the committee could suggest a course of action, including whether some aspects could remain unchanged.