

Talking protest with Attapon Buapat: Inside the “Khon Kaen’s Had Enough” group

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In the wake of the growing protests in the Northeast and across the country, *The Isaan Record* sat down with Attapon Buapat, one of the prominent faces of the rallies and an organizer with the “Khon Kaen’s Had Enough” group. The 30-year-old talks about the birth of the movement, funding of the protests, the growing harassment by the authorities, and his hopes for change.

The Isaan Record (IR): How did the Khon Kaen’s Had Enough group come about?

Attapon Buapat (AB): Khon Kaen’s Had Enough didn’t start from only one group but from many groups of students. It started with Khon Kaen University students who were angry and upset about the dissolution of the Future Forward Party. To be clear, the majority of the young generation supported the party at that time, and when it was dissolved, they became upset.

And then there were several groups of students who were interested in politics, both those who were active online and those who organized [on campus]. Despite coming from different groups, they knew each other and started talking and then decided to mobilize together.

I became involved after the students started discussing ways to organize, and I talked about politics with them. One day, I got a call from one of them inviting me to speak on stage. So I sort of became involved by chance.

After the protests at Sithan Lake [on the Khon Kaen University campus in February], we decided to change the name of the group from “Khon Kaen University’s Had Enough” to “Khon Kaen’s Had Enough.” It was to broaden the appeal to include not only students but also the general public, so

that both could play major roles in the movement.

IR: What are your goals, what are you fighting for?

AB: We want to achieve change, and not only a change of government but a change in society's ideological foundation. We want to change the way by which society and the country operate so that people can see all that is wrong. This is not only about politics but also about culture and rights. The political issues just work to draw people with different interests together.

Politics only functions as the glue that binds everyone together. And you can see that the search for good political solutions brings about debate. It must all start with debate and open discussion about political issues, and what we're interested in will then follow naturally.

IR: What are some of the other issues that you have been focusing on apart from the big political questions?

AB: It all came about after the three protests in Khon Kaen province. When people saw that we had power and had enough backup, they asked us to help with their problems. For example, some street vendors in front of a nursery school in Khon Kaen who were facing some issues came to seek our support. So now we're focusing on other issues as well.

Students don't want to separate themselves from the general public. We often discuss within our group, saying that we don't want to be seen as a student mob or a student group, because students are only a subset of the whole population.



Attapon Buapat speaks to crowds of student protesters at Sithan Lake on Khon Kaen University's campus on February 26, 2020. Photo by Adithep Chanthet.

IR: You are not only active in Khon Kaen but also with protest groups in other provinces.

How did that happen?

AB: It was not on a personal basis but on behalf of Khon Kaen's Had Enough. After organizing several political activities, we set up a Facebook page called "[Khon Kaen's Had Enough](#)," which gave us more exposure. We helped organize events and share our experiences in many provinces where students were interested but didn't have enough manpower.

We would also help other provinces that already had [protest] experience but lacked in other areas, such as a low number of speakers. Most of the time we would share our experience about what they should or shouldn't do, about the problems that might occur, and how to prepare for confrontation, for instance.

IR: How do you fund your activities?

AB: We started from zero baht. Don't ask if we are supported by any political party because the answer is no. We survive on donations. We go to markets, we bring along a donation box, and each time we get several thousands of baht, and sometimes up to 10,000. We also advertise our bank account for donations on Facebook.

Donations are also accepted during protests, with money going towards transportation and sound systems. The activities we currently organize are funded with leftover money from our protests. When we travel to other provinces, we raise funds for transportation costs and food.

When it comes to political activities, we don't pay out of pocket. We have support from older people. One lovely image that we see is during events, people often donate snacks, water, and food. Sometimes someone would place 100, 200 baht in our hands and say, "Use that to fill the tank" or "Use that to buy food."

If you ask who's supporting the students, I wouldn't say the answer is the students themselves, but I would say it's the people.

IR: Is any political party involved?

AB: Not financially or in any other way. We need to be frank and not be blindly optimistic. Protests don't have to be that pure. Students come out because they want to see a new country, a new society, and political parties that provide policies in line with their ideas.

They are hot-headed and so are we. It's like there's a group of people or a political party that gave us hope that they'd bring the country towards the right path but then they [the party] were dissolved.

There are political parties with the same ideology and which think in the same way as us, but we won't allow them to play a role in what we're doing. But, if we are moving towards the same goal, we might seek advice from them. But we won't ask for money.

IR: Has anyone in your group been harassed or followed by the authorities?

AB: The students staying in their dorms haven't yet faced anything like this because the dorms are scattered around campus. But those who stay at home often find police cars roaming out in front of their houses during protests or political events.

Personally, I've never seen the police patrolling the alley where I live. But now suddenly police cars have started to appear when there are political events. I always try to check if the police appear at

the same time when I leave the house because if they do, it could mean they are up to something.

IR: The students have been demanding for the government to stop harassing people. Has there been any more harassment lately?

AB: We have clear evidence of an incident that has not been made public yet. A student in our group whose parents are a government official and military officer spoke on stage in one particular province. We found out that an officer took a photo of that student's identification card and met with the parents. That means they are now intruding in on such families.

As for me, I was told by friends in the police force that my name has been included on a blacklist. If you ask me whether or not I'm afraid, I must admit that I am. I often ask myself what I'm fighting for, why I'm doing this and what I will get from it. But when it comes to the time, I feel like I don't want to back away. I get so frustrated that the fear goes away. that the fear goes away. It's all so frustrating and there just has to be change now.

It probably won't mean a change in the way the country is governed, but a change in the society and [people's] way of thinking. People in society need more opportunities to have their rights and voices heard. They should have better lives, a better future, a better welfare state, and a better education.



Attapon Buapat: "You need to start giving importance to the demands of students and people."

IR: What's your vision for change?

AB: We still have another 50, 60 years to live in this world. We want those years to be full of quality, happiness, and to have a good welfare state. Our country gives too few opportunities to people. I would like to see opportunities for everyone, not only for middle-class families or state officials.

I want to see the children of farmers and villagers become founders of startups and have the opportunity to follow their dreams without worrying that their families might not be able to support them.

IR: Do you have any hope that you will see your vision become reality?

AB: I'm 30 years old. Before I never thought about and have not been familiar with the concept of a welfare state because in the past, people didn't really talk about it. But now we're seeing more people talking about the concept, which means there is hope. I have a hope for it to be reality in the future.

IR: Are there plans for the protest groups in Isaan to join the rallies in Bangkok?

AB: It's difficult to say whether or not we will join the protests in Bangkok because that would require resources and time. But a large-scale gathering of students and people in Isaan can happen. One day we might send a joint signal.

But for other regions, we will have to see how strong they are. As for how big Isaan can grow, what I can say is that Isaan people have a sense of belonging and fun, so we always try to incorporate entertainment aspects into our protests.

IR: How much pressure have you and the current movement been able to put on the government now? And do you think your public support will grow?

AB: If you ask whether the government has been shaken, I don't think that's the case just yet. But there's a warning sign that they can't do anything they want. You need to listen to people's demands. You need to listen to the protests that are happening in almost every province. You need to stop committing insincere and fraudulent acts. You must start giving importance to the demands of students and the people.

As for us, we will continue to gain strength and support. We don't have any core leaders. If I stop, Khon Kaen's Had Enough won't. If you want Khon Kaen's Had Enough to stop, you need to stop about 100 people. But then the groups in Maha Sarakham and Nong Khai provinces will still be there.

You can't stop the whole region. We're currently trying to expand the group, to get to know each other more and bring in more outsiders. We hope that the more strength we gather, the more negotiating power we'll have.

Right now I still wonder why the government is not getting the message despite the large amount of strength we have. If they still don't get the message, we will make it bigger.

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