



- [Local news](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Regional](#)
- [Security](#)
- [Crimes](#)
- [Transport](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Asia](#)
- [World](#)
- [Investigative report](#)

[News](#) > Local News

KLONG DAN

Activists urge PCD sincerity in legal battle

- Published: [18 Dec 2013](#) at 00.00
- Newspaper section: [News](#)

Local activists have expressed concerns over the Pollution Control Department's fight in the Supreme Court over the Klong Dan wastewater treatment plant.

Dawan Chantarassadi, an activist who opposes the Klong Dan wastewater treatment plant in Samut Prakan province, yesterday said the department needs to show sincerity while fighting the case. She was afraid the department might compromise with the defendants.

"Drawing on our experience, we can advise the department on the statement submitted as part of its fight in the Supreme Court," Ms Dawan said.

On Nov 19, the Appeal Court acquitted all 18 defendants involved in the case.

Among the acquitted were ex-politician Vatana Asavahame, the elder brother of ex-Thai Rak Thai executive Suwat Liptapanlop, and the wife of former commerce minister Subin Pinkayan, plus 16 other members of the NVPSKG _ the joint venture under which the wastewater treatment project was managed.

In 2009, the Dusit District Court sentenced Vatana and the other defendants to three years in jail after it found they had illegally acquired a 1,900-rai land plot from residents in Samut Prakan province.

Other plots acquired by the group were mangrove forests, where title deeds could not be issued.

The group sold the land to the state to construct the wastewater treatment project at an inflated price.

The defendants appealed against the verdict and the appeal court reversed the lower court's decision. It ruled the land acquisition process had been legal. The court also found the defendants not guilty of inflating the land prices before selling them to the state.

The department's lawyers submitted an appeal statement to the Supreme Court on Dec 4 and are waiting for a decision on whether the court will hear the case.

Penchome Sae-tang, director of Ecological Alert and Recovery Thailand (Earth), said she had found an irregularity in the case as the Appeal Court read its verdict in July, but the department only released the verdict last month.

She urged the department to fight with vigour to protect the country's interests, since there was clear evidence of corruption within the Klong Dan wastewater project.

While waiting for a decision on whether the Supreme Court will agree to hear the case, some legal advisers from the department have raised the idea of negotiating with defendants. They added that the department was willing to drop the case at the Supreme Court in exchange for the consortium's agreement to end an ongoing arbitration proceeding.

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