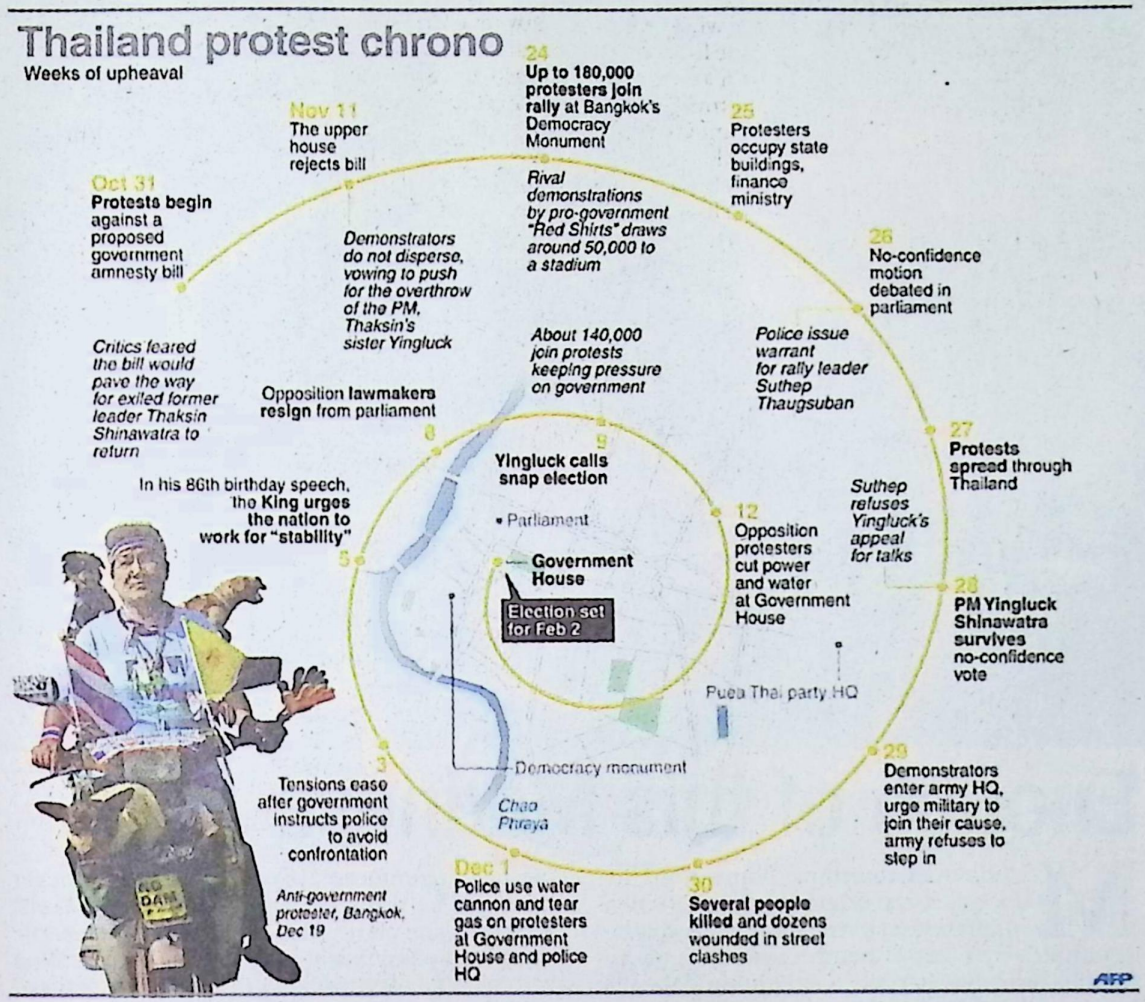


2007, the area has recorded higher growth than any other region, which is likely to cement loyalty to Puea Thai.

Yet, the ruling party stands on shaky ground elsewhere. Given the Democrat Party's boycott, candidates who win in pro-Democrat areas may still end up with fewer votes than the "no vote" tally, leaving them as lame ducks.

According to Thai election laws, a candidate who wins unopposed must get a minimum number of votes to be declared a winner. If the candidate cannot hit the minimum, by-elections will be held.

A successful election will go down well with the international community, and a win for Puea Thai will give the party the renewed mandate it seeks.

But millions of mostly Bangkok-based Thais have shown that they reject the electoral system in recent weeks.

Protesters who have been marching in Bangkok see Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra as a front for her older brother Thaksin Shinawatra, whom they regard as corrupt and bent on eroding the influence of the monarchy.

Army chief Prayuth Chanocha had warned last week: "We must not look at the situation in Bangkok alone, but see what is happening in the provinces as well."

The political division runs through all tambons, or sub-districts, and "the situation could trigger a civil war", he added.

A Bangkok Post editorial on Monday said General Prayuth's remarks were "distressing... but it is unfortunately true that even when it seems things can't get worse, they can". Pitch sees the February 2 election as only a tap on the brakes as Thailand continues to slide deeper into uncharted waters.

"Everybody is pushing the situation towards extremes."

— NIRMAL GHOSH
ANN/The Straits Times