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Senators want to screen FTA deals

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A group of senators yesterday called for the government to seek parliamentary approval before signing any more free-trade agreements (FTAs).

Niran Phitakwachara, chairman of the Senate committee on social development and human security, said FTAs could affect Thai sovereignty and many sectors of society. They could also compel the government to amend laws.

Many senators have strongly criticised the rush to sign trade pacts and its non-transparent handling of negotiations, saying deals made by armchair officials have already cost the nation's small-scale farmers dearly.

According to Article 214 of the Constitution, any activities that would affect sovereignty need to be endorsed by Parliament, he said, adding that the United States has a mechanism that Congress must be notified before the administration begins any FTA talks.

The Senate committee on foreign affairs, chaired by Kraisak Chon-havan, yesterday invited FTA negotiating team chiefs to clarify the progress of trade-pact talks.

Kraisak said he strongly disagreed with the reduction of tariffs on agricultural products, saying the influx of Chinese produce into the country as a result of the Sino-Thai FTA had hurt northern farmers.

Tariffs on more than 5,000 fruits and vegetables imported from China were waived in October as part of the first phase of a larger trade accord between the nations.

The government has set up a committee headed by Narongchai Akrasanee to find ways to mitigate the impacts of FTAs, especially on small farmers, said Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara, the vice commerce minister.

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