

Thais draw step closer to same-sex marriage

Senate approval likely this year

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The House of Representatives yesterday passed a marriage equality bill at its final reading, a landmark decision that brings the country one step closer to legalising same-sex unions.

The bill requires approval from the Senate and royal endorsement before it becomes law — a move which is expected later this year. It had the support of all major parties and was passed by 400 of the 415 lawmakers present, with 10 voting against it.

"We did this for all Thais, to reduce the disparities in society and create equality," said Danuphorn Punnakanta, a Pheu Thai list-MP and chairman of the parliamentary committee on the bill. "I want to invite you all to make history," he told fellow lawmakers before the vote.

Mr Danuphorn said the bill would give same-sex couples the same legal rights and benefits as those of husbands and wives.

Those would include government-supported medical treatment and other benefits, tax deductions, the rights to approve the medical treatment of spouses, the rights to manage and inherit the assets of spouses, and



EQUAL UNIONS

Key points in the Marriage Equality Bill

- References related to gender "man", "woman" "husband" and "wife" are changed to gender-neutral terms.
- A couple can be married when they reach the age of 18 or if the marriage is allowed by a court due to certain circumstances.
- Marriage is prohibited if one party has a mental disorder or is deemed incapable or is closely related. Bigamy is prohibited.
- Divorce is completed upon registration. Reasons for divorce include adultery, neglect for more than a year and physical and mental abuse.
- One party can seek compensation and file for divorce if the other has a relationship with another individual. A 310-day wait period is required for a woman to remarry another male partner to prevent a dispute about the paternity of a baby.
- Married couples, regardless of the gender of the partners, are eligible for the same legal benefits and rights as heterosexual couples, including inheritance, adoption and access to welfare benefits.

Source: Parliament

BANGKOK POST GRAPHICS

the rights to adopt children and organise the funerals of spouses.

The Senate is expected to deliberate the bill on April 1, 2 and 9, the final day of the current parliamentary session, said Kamnoon Sidhisamarn, the Senate chief whip.

A Senate committee would then scrutinise the bill during the parliamentary break and return it to the Senate for a final vote before the installation of new senators.

The term of the existing 250 appointed senators will end on May 11 but they will continue performing their duties until a new 200-member Senate — which will be indirectly elected — takes office.

The passing of the bill marks a significant step towards cementing Thailand's position as one of Asia's most liberal societies on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, where openness and free-wheeling attitudes coexist with traditional, conservative Buddhist values.

Thailand has long been a draw for same-sex couples as it has a vibrant LGBT social scene for locals and expatriates, as well as targeted campaigns that attract LGBT travellers.

The bill could take effect within 120 days of royal approval. Thailand would then follow Taiwan and Nepal in becoming the first places in Asia to legalise same-sex unions. The legislation has been more than a decade in the making, with delays occurring due to political upheaval and disagreement on what approaches to take and what should be included in the bill.

The Constitutional Court ruled in 2020 that the current marriage law, which only recognises heterosexual couples, was constitutional, but recommend the legislation be expanded to ensure the rights of other genders.

Parliament in December approved four different bills on same-sex marriage in the first reading and asked a committee to consolidate those into a single bill. The bills aim to amend 68 provisions under the Civil and Commercial Code to redefine terms to ensure gender equality and diversity.
REUTERS