

# Suthep denies meddling in Dems rift

## Governor's support takes hit in new poll

SUPOJ WANCHAROEN

Former Democrat heavyweight Suthep Thaugsuban yesterday distanced himself from a deepening rift between the Democrat Party and Bangkok governor Sukhumbhand Paribatra, saying he was not involved in the party's affairs.

"That's no longer my business. If [you're] interested in what the Muan Maha Prachachon Foundation will do, [you] can ask me," he said, referring to the foundation which he now heads, after stepping aside from politics.

"I can still talk about the country's situation but not the internal issues of any particular political party," said Mr Suthep. He said it would be unfair for him to make comments about the party as he was no longer involved in it.

"I should comment about the party only if I share the same responsibility those party members have," said Mr Suthep.

He also dismissed rumours about a secret deal between him and MR Sukhumbhand to form a new political party, saying he would not return to the Democrat Party, nor would he set up a new party to compete with the party.

MR Sukhumbhand and Mr Suthep

were spotted chatting at the "Samui Festival 2016" in Surat Thani's Koh Samui over the weekend.

The meeting sparked speculation that they were holding talks over the Democrat Party's decision to sever ties with the governor last week.

Mr Suthep also denied speculation he was serving as a go-between, mediating the rift between the Bangkok governor and the Democrat Party. He said he was seen socialising with MR Sukhumbhand because it was only good manners to welcome guests.

MR Sukhumbhand, meanwhile, insisted he would not terminate his membership of the Democrat Party, when asked if he would resign from the party and form a new one.

He denied discussing the rift between him and the party when he met Mr Suthep in Surat Thani.

The governor said he talked to Mr Suthep about his plan to set up a college which he was interested in supporting.

No part of the weekend talks dealt with politics or the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), said MR Sukhumbhand, who appeared cheerful during yesterday's interviews.

Meanwhile, Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva said the problem regarding MR Sukhumbhand would not affect the party's plans to field a candidate for the next Bangkok governor election.

He also denied the latest poll which

showed a drop in MR Sukhumbhand's popularity would affect the party's popularity.

He was referring to a new public opinion survey conducted by Bangkok University's Research Centre which showed dwindling support for MR Sukhumbhand's re-election.

About 30.3% of the 1,185 respondents, polled from Jan 22-25, said they would not support MR Sukhumbhand in the next Bangkok governor election. That's a 15.1% increase from the previous survey. About 27.2% of respondents said they would support him, a 15.8% decrease.

The poll comes after a series of scandals involving City Hall, including criticism of an extravagant light show it staged outside its offices.