

# RICE PRICE CUT HITS GOVT HARD

**Polls** point to sharp decline in support, with the Abhisit administration seen as better

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**T**he latest public opinion polls reveal growing discontent against the government, especially after it reduced the rice pledging price.

The results of three opinion surveys released yesterday showed that the public was not happy with the government's decision to lower the rice pledging price from Bt15,000 to Bt12,000 per tonne and limit the money paid to each farmer at up to Bt500,000, with effect from June 30.

Meanwhile, a separate survey by Assumption University's Abac Poll found that more respondents said the previous Democrat-led government had performed better than the current Pheu Thai-led one.

Regarding the cost of living, 58.9 per cent of respondents said they were satisfied with the Abhisit Vejjajiva government, compared to 41.1 per cent for the Yingluck Shinawatra government. For tackling the economic problems,

the Abhisit government scored 60.4 per cent against 39.6 per cent by the current administration. The previous government was also way ahead in quality of life, with 61.8 per cent against 38.2 per cent. It also got higher scores over the current administration in the areas of solving traffic problems, access to people, national unity, and democracy.

The current administration fared better in the areas of fighting crime and drugs (58.4 per cent against 41.6) and quality of education (54.8 against 45.2).

The Abac Poll survey was conducted among 2,017 people in 17 provinces across all regions between June 11 and yesterday.

The National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) yesterday released results from a poll of 1,248 people nationwide from Wednesday to Friday about the government decision to slash the pledging price. More than half (59.62 per cent) disagreed because they sym-

pathised with the farmers whose income would shrink while rice production costs (fertiliser, fuel and labour wage) were on the rise and this could cause them to be in debt, the poll said. They urged the government to tackle corruption in the rice-pledging scheme.

Most respondents (54.17 per cent) said the price cut would hit Pheu Thai Party's popularity among farmers.

Suan Dusit Poll echoed similar views in its poll of 1,310 people nationwide from Wednesday to yesterday. About 59 per cent disagreed with such a price reduction, while 25.19 per cent said otherwise claiming the Bt15,000 price was too high and a burden on the government while 15.65 per cent were uncertain and urged the government to consider factors including farmers' invested costs and the world economic condition. As for the limit imposed on each farmer, 42.75 per cent agreed as it would help the government better rein in spending whilst 35.11 per cent said the problem came from the government's mismanagement hence it should not affect farmers.

The respondents also rated the possible solutions as follows: punishing corrupt people in the rice-pledging procedure 29.96 per cent, finding measures to aid affected farmers 23.82 per cent; the government visiting the farms and explaining reasons to the farmers in detail 20.94 per cent; controlling production cost and providing water supplies 17.68 per cent; and finding markets to sell the rice in the stockpile because rice grains could get damaged 7.60 per cent.

Bangkok Poll's recent survey of 1,234 people found that Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's popularity had gone down from 51.2 per cent last November to be 40.4 per cent, while her ruling party's popularity was also lower by 7.8 per cent to 41 per cent after the government's rice-pledging project suffered a big loss. While 55.4 per cent expected Yingluck to complete her term in office, some 45 per cent suggested that Yingluck shuffle her Cabinet.

Meanwhile, the prime minister said her Cabinet had cut the rice pledging price in order to maintain financial and monetary discipline but insisted that the price could be adjusted if the world price of rice increases.

Farmers have threatened to storm Government House next week after the Yingluck Cabinet resolved to cut the rice pledging price from Bt15,000 per tonne to Bt12,000 per tonne.