

Pair charged with stealing rice worth Bt100m from warehouse

THE NATION

TWO MEN were arrested yesterday and charged with theft after 98,000 sacks of rice worth about Bt100 million were found missing from a warehouse in Pathum Thani. The rice belonged to the Marketing Organisation for Farmers under the rice-pledging scheme.

Suspects Kittipong "Lek" Saenwarangkul, 37, and Theeraksa "Uan" Saenwarangkul, 42, were nabbed at a hotel on Rattana Thibet Road.

Deputy National Police chief Pol General Aek Angsanant said the theft was part of the corruption in the rice-pledging scheme, and that police were on the hunt for other suspects.

Meanwhile, results released by Bangkok Poll yesterday showed that more than half of the economists surveyed preferred the rice policies issued by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) over those offered by the Yingluck Shinawatra and Abhisit Vejjajiva governments.

About 63 per cent of the economists surveyed also said they believed the move to reduce production costs was better than the rice-pledging scheme offered by Yingluck's government and the income-guarantee policy offered by the Abhisit government. The respondents also suggested that the NCPO focus on marketing and expanding rice markets and ensure that market mechanisms are in place to prevent traders from taking advantage of farmers.

They also called on the NCPO to help farmers boost productivity by adopting an agricultural zoning scheme as well as improving the quality of rice, irrigation and soil.

They also encouraged the NCPO to help give farmers lessons on self-

sufficiency and teach them how to transform agricultural products to meet demands.

The permanent secretary of the Prime Minister's Office, ML Panadda Diskul, yesterday posted a message on Facebook saying his team's task of checking rice stocks was nearly complete and that it was now drawing up conclusions and analyses for the Rice Policy and Management Committee.

Panadda also said that he would no longer provide updates on Facebook as he and his team had to focus on providing a final report to the panel, adding that his team had done what it could to help bring Thai rice back to its top world ranking.

"When I visited my father, who served as a Thai ambassador in Europe, I saw menus of famous restaurants saying 'all dinners served with hot Thai rice'. This always made me proud," he said.

Meanwhile, 202 farmers' move to seek an out-of-court settlement with the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives for compensation on the delay in rice payments has failed, Phra Buddha Issara - who led a protest against the elected Yingluck government - said yesterday.

The farmers had filed a Bt100-million lawsuit against the last government and the bank for failing to pay them for the rice pledged under the scheme.

Payap Haopramong, a lawyer representing the farmers, said they were forced to seek loans at 20-to-30-per-cent interest to meet their daily expenses after their payments were delayed.

The lawyer said the bank would consider his proposal that it absorb the high interest shouldered by the farmers. The next hearing on the case is scheduled for September 18.