

MOBILE CABINET BACK AFTER 2-YEAR GAP

PM to hold direct talks with citizens

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» The government has said it is now time to learn about problems directly from people in various areas via mobile cabinet meetings after having spent the last three years successfully laying a solid foundation for the country.

But the latest survey showed that opinions of the government's performance have dropped in all areas.

The government will hold a mobile cabinet meeting in Nakhon Ratchasima tomorrow and Tuesday, the first held outside Bangkok in more than two years. The last mobile cabinet meeting was held in Chiang Mai in June 2015 and the first one was held in Hua Hin of Prachuap Khiri Khan in March 2015.

During the event Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, who was born in Nakhon Ratchasima, will visit his old house in Suranaree army base where his father, Col Prapat, had served.

According to the prime minister, the people's well-being is now the main target of his government, which aims to boost annual per capita income to 450,000 baht in the next 20 years from the current 212,000 baht.

Government spokesman Sansern Kaewkamnerd said yesterday that the Northeast is an important region for moving the country's economy forward as it is the largest region and the gateway to Indochina.

Gen Prayut has set a policy to develop the northeastern region into a hub of the Greater Mekong Subregion.

The prime minister stressed that the conditions and environment of each region in the country are different and field visits

are necessary to understand the real problems by speaking directly to residents, said the spokesman.

"It is time that the cabinet and I visit various regions, provinces and communities in order to directly examine the contextual problems and connect them together in order to reduce disparities," Gen Prayut said in his weekly televised programme on Friday night.

The cabinet will take what they learn from visiting various regions to create projects and allocate budgets accordingly, which will accelerate the national administration as it represents the country as a whole, not only Bangkok, he said.

"The government and I have continued to listen to the public. But this time we will go see for ourselves and meet with the people. We will share with the public the progress we have made in the past three years as well as our plans for the next two years."

He said his government had spent the last three years laying the foundation so that for the next two years it can implement policies that reduce disparities and boost income. More than 10 million people make less than 100,000 baht per year, which is definitely insufficient, he said.

"We must help them increase their income to at least 300,000 baht per year," he said.

The PM said notable goals in the 20-year National Strategy include raising per capita income to 450,000 baht, achieving 5% economic growth per year, and ranking no less than 10th in the Global Competitiveness Index by 2036, in addition to increasing the country's forestland to 40% — a key indicator of sustainable development and environmental friendliness.

Gen Prayut also said in the past three years his administration has resolved the country's long-standing issues and has laid the foundation for future development.

The primary indicators of the overall health of the economy from 2014 to the first quarter of this year have improved, he noted.

For example, agricultural productivity increased from -5.3% to 20.1%, investment increased from -2.2% to 1.7%, while exports had risen to 2.7%, making GDP in the first quarter of this year grow by 3.3%.

But in the latest opinion survey, the military government's perceived performance has dropped in all areas.

The Bangkok Poll, conducted on 1,216 people on the third anniversary of the Prayut Chan-o-cha government, found that respondents gave the administration an average overall score of 5.27 out of 10, compared to 5.83 after 18 months in power and 6.19 after two years.

Although declines were seen across the board, a breakdown showed the areas it ranked the highest were national security (6.38), administration and law enforcement (5.75), society and quality of life (5.30) and foreign affairs (5.09).

Notably, the economy remained its weak spot, with the "failed" score of 3.85.

The areas with the biggest declines in perceived performance compared to the previous survey done 18 months ago were the economy (-0.78 percentage points), society and quality of life (-0.59), administration and law enforcement (-0.58), security (-0.52) and foreign affairs (-0.32).