

## Consumer groups here 'ill-equipped'

CONSUMER protection groups in Thailand are in their infancy and are ill-equipped to deal effectively with consumer problems, a group member has said.

Ms Jiraporn Limpananont, a Drug Study Group official, said that both governmental and private consumer protec-

tion groups were too inexperienced and lacked the necessary funds to provide consumer protection like that in Malaysia, South Korea or Bangladesh.

She said that some foreign consumer protection groups owned laboratories to test potentially hazardous products.

In some countries, there are special courts for consumer protection cases, she added.

Many members of the public here are unaware of their rights as consumers and the dangers posed by certain products because it took time for findings to appear, she said.

Because of public indifference, Ms Jiraporn said that many sub-standard or potentially dangerous products were freely available in Thailand.

Criticising the supply of uncertified drugs because of a lack of up-to-date information, she said that when the group first investigated set prescriptions — an assortment of pills to be taken together for an illness — the Ministry of Public Health claimed it knew nothing about them, despite their widespread use.

Criticising government policy, she said that it was impractical for the ministry drug committee to ban combination pharmaceutical preparations because of the risk of poisoning, when the separate ingredients could all freely be bought locally.

## Anyone for brown rice?

THAIS should eat more brown rice, a leading Thai nutritionist said yesterday.

Speaking at the 11th Congress of the International Consumers Unions at the Hyatt Central Plaza Hotel, Dr Chotichaung Chutinthorn of the Siam Consumers Union said that a large number of Thai children died from malnutrition each year due to poor diets.

He told a panel discussion that white rice is less nutritious than brown rice which is also cheaper. He said that the most nutritious part of rice which contain vitamins and minerals was destroyed in the milling process, leaving behind only starch in the form of white rice.

Dr Chotichaung urged that legal measures be imposed on rice millers to ensure that the nutrients in rice are not wasted.