

Rubber fund staff oppose merger plan

The Office of the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund (ORRAF) chief has come under fire, with his staff strongly opposed to a plan to transform the state enterprise into a public organisation.

Under the plan called for in the new rubber bill before parliament, the country's three core rubber organisations _ the ORRAF, the Rubber Estate Organisation and the Rubber Research Institute of Thailand _ will be combined into one group.

Wit Pratuckchai, director-general of the ORRAF, proposed making the new body a public organisation, said ORRAF labour union head Jittin Wisetsombat.

The move will not be accepted by ORRAF staff, Mr Jittin said.

He said that on Aug 29 the union filed a formal request asking Deputy Agriculture and Cooperatives Minister Nattawut Saikuar to remove Mr Wit from his post.

An ORRAF source said the bill will also give more than 10 billion baht per year in export fees to rubber manufacturers instead of rubber farmers, the current beneficiaries of the funds.

"The ORRAF is facing more than 10 probes by the Office of the Auditor General of Thailand and the National Anti-Corruption Commission," the source said.

"This is putting huge pressure on the ORRAF."

Meanwhile, rubber prices show no signs of rising.

Sanya Srisomphong, a rubber planter in Phatthalung's Tamot district, said current fresh latex prices are between 70 baht and 75 baht a

kilogramme.

He said his daily income has dropped from about 4,000 baht to 800 baht as the prices being paid for latex have dropped.

“The government must shore up the latex price to 100 baht/kg and must ensure this money really does go into farmers’ hands,” Mr Sanya said.