

Rubber price petition bounces

A group of 30 Democrat MPs left Government House disheartened yesterday after Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra did not show up to receive their petition complaining about falling rubber prices. The Democrats, from provinces where rubber is grown, were blocked from entering the Thai Khu Fa Building to hand in the petition. They were greeted by Prasit Chaiwirattana, the prime minister's deputy secretary-general who came to pick up the petition on Ms Yingluck's behalf. They left without submitting the petition. In the open letter, the Democrats called on the government to buy rubber at a minimum 120 baht per kilogramme as pledged and to look into irregularities in its price support scheme. They also asked Ms Yingluck to attend yesterday's House meeting which was scheduled to discuss falling rubber prices.

Mr Prasit yesterday criticised the Democrats' move as politically motivated, saying they did not inform the prime minister's staff prior to the visit. "Who would come down [to meet them]? It looks like they are politicising the issue and aren't serious about getting the problem solved," he said. Nakhon Si Thammarat MP Chinnaworn Boonyakiart said yesterday they were there to urge the government to speed up efforts in dealing with falling prices. Mr Chinnaworn said they did not wish to see rubber farmers gather to protest at Government House as the price has dropped to 76 baht per kilogramme. The government's decision to spend 15 billion baht to intervene in the rubber market had not lifted prices, he said. Meanwhile, the Democrat Party will today hold a press conference on the Pheu Thai government's performance after one year in office, Democrat spokesman Chavanond Intarakomalyasut said. He said Democrat leader Abhisit Vejjajiva will join the shadow cabinet in detailing the government's mismanagement and policy flaws. Mr Chavanond also lashed out at the government's plan to hold an event this weekend to promote the administration's schemes. He said the event was intended for the prime minister to make a public appearance at the taxpayers' expense. He was responding to Pheu Thai spokesman Prompong Nopparit's criticism that the Democrats lacked political etiquette in holding a press conference ahead of the government's forum. Ms Yingluck said yesterday the government has generally achieved its targets during its first year in office. However, she said it was not her job to say if she was satisfied with the government performance. "It is for the people to evaluate." Ms Yingluck also said the planned event tomorrow and Sunday at Rajamangala Stadium was to showcase the government's 11 schemes aimed at improving people's quality of life.