

Thailand: Nakhon Si Thammarat rubber growers block highway again

NAKHON SI THAMMARAT, July 15- Rubber growers in this southern province blockaded Asian Highway Route 41 Sunday afternoon, demanding Deputy Agriculture and Cooperatives Minister Nattawut Saikuar meet them to discuss falling rubber prices. The rubber growers have been blocking Asian Highway Route 41, both inbound and outbound, in Nakhon Si Thammarat's Na Bon district. Somyos Raksawong, president of the Nakhon Si Thammarat rubber growers association, said that the group decided to step up their protest calling on Mr Nattawut to visit and meet them there to acknowledge the rubber price problem, as well as listen to their solutions to tackle weaknesses of a Bt15 billion project to intervene in the rubber market. Their goal is for small rubber growers to be supported and benefit from this project. The roadblock has reportedly caused heavy traffic congestion and local police have been forced to facilitate affected drivers advising them to detour on nearby roads instead. Earlier, Songpon Savastham, Nakhon Si Thammarat vice governor, visited the protest site at 4pm to negotiate with Mr Somyos to open the highway to traffic. However, the negotiation failed. Meanwhile, the protest and roadblock appears to have prolonged. The move came after the group of local rubber growers unanimously decided not to meet Mr Nattawut in the capital tomorrow, as he earlier proposed and scheduled, to talk about the falling rubber price. The group wanted to meet with Mr Nattawut, but demanded that the deputy minister, who is a native of Nakhon Si Thammarat, meet them there to discuss the problem rather than meeting him at Deputy Agriculture and Cooperatives Ministry in Bangkok on Monday afternoon. The rubber farmers on Saturday night blocked inbound Asian Highway Route 41 and had dispersed at 9pm after the initial negotiations between Mr Somyos and Nakhon Si Thammarat deputy governor Decha Kangsan.