

**Government Vows Not To Allow Rubber Protesters Close Surathani Airport**  
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BANGKOK, Sept 4 (Bernama) -- As rubber farmers in the south begin to gather near the Surathani Airport after their demand for a price guarantee was not met, the Thailand government has vowed to keep the airport open.

The government was ready to take serious action if the protesters escalated their action by closing the airport, Deputy Prime Minister in charge of National Security Pol Gen Pracha Promnok said.

Speaking to reporters today, he said the protesters would not be allowed to close the airport as that would affect the country's image.

He said the governor of every province can authorise issuance of disaster prevention and mitigation measures to deal with any incidents.

The protesters threatened to close the Surathani Airport after the cabinet yesterday rejected their demand for a price guarantee similar to the one given to rice farmers.

Instead, the government announced yesterday subsidies to rubber farmers in the form of assistance based on their rubber holdings and also to the industry to increase rubber consumption domestically.

Latest reports say the protesters started moving towards the airport yesterday. The airport is now guarded by riot police while the protesters have converged at a location not far away from the airport.

Asked whether the Internal Security Act (ISA) would be used against the protestors, Pracha said the authorities were assessing the situation based on day-to-day developments.

As to when the protest would end, he said it depended on the negotiations between the government and the protesters.

Expressing concern on the protesters' safety, Pracha said the court had already issued a warrant of arrest for a 34-year-old suspect involved in the killing of a security guard at the demonstration site a few days ago.

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