

# 'Rubber Board Is Exploring Avenues For Increasing Consumption Of Rubber'

*What would you list as the achievements of Rubber Board under your tenure?*

My immediate task during the first few months was to have an in-depth analysis of the factors leading to the present low price situation. Naturally, my immediate concern was to see that the declining trend of price is arrested. I realised that the board will have to re-orient its priorities. A number of new programmes have been drawn up with a shift in focus from production orientation to market orientation, keeping in view of the liberalised economic policies and the fluctuations in rubber prices. These are long-term proposals and the results will be visible over a period of time.

*As the unsteady market condition still prevails, what are the measures taken by the board to revive the rubber industry?*

Hitherto, the board was giving more empha-



The Rubber Board was formed with an objective of undertaking and encouraging scientific technological and economic research, supply of technical advice to rubber growers, training them and so on.

**S M Desalphine, IAS, chairman, Rubber Board, in an interview with *Express Hotelier & Caterer* speaks about the market conditions and various other aspects associated with the rubber industry. Excerpts**

sis to rubber production. Now I think we should concentrate more on improving the productivity, processing, marketing and export of natural rubber (NR) with a thrust on the quality of rubber and rubber products. The board is exploring various avenues for increasing the consumption of rubber viz by promoting diversified uses of rubber and research on non-conventional applications such as seismic bearings, bridge bear-

ings, rail pads, canal linings etc has been intensified.

The board has also taken up measures for quality improvement of NR through group processing centres and to meet the export requirements and the demand of the domestic industry.

*What kind of assistance is provided by the board to rubber growers?*

The board assists rubber growers in the

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following manner:

a) Free technical assistance at all stages of rubber planting, harvesting and processing of latex

b) Financial incentives in the form of planting grant at Rs 12,000 per ha for new planting/replanting of rubber by the small farmers owning upto two hectares in traditional area (Kerala and Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu). In the non-traditional rubber growing areas the rate of assistance is Rs 16,000/- per ha upto five ha and Rs 2,000 per ha between five and 20 ha. This assistance is paid in six annual installments after ensuring that the growers maintain the plantation scientifically

c) Board also undertakes tribal settlement projects by planting rubber in the land owned by tribals, under special schemes with around 50 per cent financial support from the tribal welfare department of the concerned state governments

d) Incentives for using advanced planting materials is given to all category of growers irrespective of the size of their holdings

e) Good quality planting materials of approved varieties produced in board's nurseries are distributed among small farmers on no profit no loss basis

f) Irrigation subsidy and assistance for boundary protection - applicable in non-traditional regions only

g) Roller subsidy at Rs 1,000/- per set of rubber sheeting rollers purchased by small farmers. There is a separate scheme for free supply of rollers to NGOs involved in group planting of rubber in non-traditional region

h) Smokehouse subsidy at Rs 3,000 per smokehouse constructed by small growers

i) Subsidy for purchase of plant protection equipment

j) Bio-gas plant subsidy is paid to small farmers for the treatment of effluent produced while processing of latex into sheet rubber, as a pollution control measure

k) Assistance for bee-keeping in rubber plantations

l) Support to co-operative/rubber producer's societies to set up community processing centres, offices cum collection centre, besides providing them with various equipment. The board also, in addition, provides financial support.

*What are the measures being taken to meet the shortage of skilled tappers? What are the facilities available for training these tappers?*

The board runs 23 rubber tappers' training schools spread over the entire rubber growing tract, where regular training programmes of 30 days duration involving practical as well as theory classes, are conducted. The trainees are paid a stipend of Rs 25/- per day. They are also provided with free dormitory accommodation during the training period. On an average 1,850 tappers are trained in these schools every year.

**We should concentrate more on improving the productivity, processing, marketing and export of natural rubber (NR) with a thrust on the quality of rubber and rubber products**

Besides, short-duration tappers training programmes for eight days are also conducted by the board in selected rubber growing pockets where the need for improving the skill of tappers is felt. These trainees are also paid Rs 25 as stipend. Average number of tappers trained under this programme annually is 4,000.

Board's rubber tapping demonstrators visit small holdings on a regular basis and impart on farm training to the tappers in the small holding sector. On need basis, small training programmes of one or two days duration are conducted under the auspices of Rubber Board in order to educate the farmers regarding the modern techniques in rubber tapping, rain guarding, yield stimulation, processing of latex into good quality sheets etc.

There are thirty-five model rubber producers' societies supported by the board for development of infrastructure, also functioning as technology dissemination/training centres in areas of tapping and post harvest processing of latex. And last but not the least, demonstration plots on modern rubber tapping techniques, set up by the board in farmers' fields in the small

holding sector also function as training centres for tappers in the local area.

*Treated rubber wood is yet to become popular. What are the measures taken to promote this sector?*

Rubber Board is creating an awareness among the general public, architects, interior designers and decorators about the properties of rubber wood and its applications by distributing catalogues, technical information participation in exhibitions and by demonstrating its use in offices, schools and in buildings. The board is also giving technical assistance to processors for improving quality which will improve the acceptability of the wood and also by providing testing facilities.

*Will the import of synthetic rubber pose threat to the Indian economy?*

No. In India synthetic rubber is not at all a threat to natural rubber. The two types of elastomers are complementary to each other.

*Tell us about the board's rubber wood testing lab?*

The rubber wood testing lab was set up by the Rubber Board in Kottayam to carry out identification of species of wood, measure physical and mechanical properties, and effectiveness of preservation treatment through qualitative and quantitative tests. The lab is also equipped to conduct tests on furnished products from rubber wood.

*Any future plans to promote the rubber sector in the state?*

The board has drawn up plans to achieve global competitiveness with respect to quality and cost and market development for the domestically produced rubber. It is also proposed to promote natural rubber as a green commodity, vis-a-vis, its synthetic counterpart. In the field of processing and marketing, thrust will be given for quality improvement, reduction in cost of processing, value addition through modification and to promote environmentally sound processing methods while providing market information on rubber and rubber wood. The board also plans to promote rubber wood as an eco-friendly timber and improve the economic viability of rubber plantations besides encouraging manufactures of export oriented products to deal in the same. ♦