

Northeast stamps its rubber mark

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KOCHI: The comparatively long gestation period for investments and social and political instability have not prevented non-traditional areas identified for natural rubber (NR) cultivation from making their mark on India's efforts to increase its production.

Increasing awareness and interventions by the respective State governments ensure that thousands of hectares are added yearly to rubber acreage. In Tripura, where rubber cultivation began in early 1960s, about 4,000 hectares are added to cultivation every year.

In Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, rubber cultivation is spreading rapidly even with constraints that were seen as insurmountable nearly a decade ago, said an official of the Rubber Board. In each of these States, average productivity hovers around 1,200 kg

a hectare, the national average being around 1,800 kg. A total of 4.5 lakh hectares have been identified as suitable for rubber cultivation in the Northeast.

While NR cultivation makes impressive gains in non-traditional areas, Kerala is expected to lead NR production over a long time. It is home to 80 per cent of the total cultivated area and 90 per cent of the NR production in India. In 2000-01, Kerala had an even higher share of NR cultivation and production at 84 per cent and 92 per cent respectively. India produced 8.31 lakh tonnes of NR from 6.86 lakh hectares during 2010-11.

Over a million hectares have been identified in non-traditional areas, including in States such as Orissa, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, as suitable for NR cultivation but less than two lakh hectares have been brought under cultivation, say Rubber Board figures.

Rubber Production Com-

missioner J. Thomas said that the relatively long gestation period for investments makes farmers shy away from rubber cultivation in some areas. The Board estimates that an investment of Rs. 1.85 lakh is needed for developing a hectare of rubber plantation in Tripura. It takes up to seven years for the rubber plants to be tapped.

With subsidy being offered only Rs.19,500 a hectare, no other agricultural crop has such a long gestation period for investments.

BULLION RATES

January 17 rates in rupees with previous rates in brackets

Chennai		
Bar Silver (1 kg)	53,315	(51,870)
Retail (1 g)	57.10	(55.50)
24 ct gold (10 g)	27,910	(27,730)
22 ct gold (1 g)	2,610	(2,593)
Mumbai		
Silver	53,500	(52,190)
Standard gold	27,695	(27,470)
Delhi		
Silver	52,725	(52,150)
Standard gold	27,925	(27,890)
Sovereign	23,300	(23,300)