

Rubber industry demands duty-free imports

Special Correspondent

CHENNAI: With natural rubber production expected to fall short of the domestic consumption for the second year consecutively, the rubber industry wants the Centre to permit duty-free imports, at least to the extent of the deficit.

Stating this, leaders of All-India Rubber Industries Association (AIRIA), led by its President Vinod T. Simon, said such a measure was imperative since the shortfall this year would be 75,000 tonnes. It was 65,000 tonnes last year. They were address-

ing presspersons on the sidelines of a two-day national rubber conference that got under way here on Friday.

Against this backdrop, the government's decision to bring branded natural rubber exports under the Market-Linked Focus Product Scheme has shocked the industry. The scheme is to encourage products and sectors that have high export-intensity or large employment potential.

"We are alarmed [at the decision]... along with tyre manufacturers association would represent to the government," Mr. Simon said, add-

ing that the rubber industry was hit on account of high duty on imports of inputs and low duty on finished products.

Noting that raw material prices and skilled manpower availability and cost remain key concerns for the Rs.50,000-crore industry, he said there were differences in consumption figures of the industry body and the Rubber Board. While the Board agrees that there is a shortfall in production, of about 4 per cent, the industry estimate of growth in consumption, of 7.5-8 per cent, was over four percentage points more than

that of the Board's.

The inadequate availability of natural rubber, Mr. Simon and AIRIA (Southern Region) Vice-Chairman K. Srikanth said, had hit the MSME units most with many of them cutting production and some even shutdown. The association, its leaders, including AIRIA (SR) Chairman K. Vaidyalingham, had been asked by the government to submit data substantiating its appeal for an anti-dumping duty on imports of finished rubber products.

Towards addressing the skilled manpower requirement of the industry, the gov-

ernment, in collaboration with the association, had formed the Rubber Skill Development Centre.

BULLION RATES

June 22 rates in rupees with previous rates in brackets

| Chennai | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Bar Silver (1 kg) | 53,440 (54,485) |
| Retail (1 g) | 57.20 (58.30) |
| 24 ct gold (10 g) | 30,225 (30,280) |
| 22 ct gold (1 g) | 2,826 (2,831) |
| Mumbai | |
| Silver | 53,720 (55,090) |
| Standard gold | 29,940 (30,065) |
| Delhi | |
| Silver | 53,900 (54,800) |
| Standard gold | 30,400 (30,590) |
| Sovereign | 24,400 (24,500) |