

to its proximity, favourable climate and un-tapped potential." Echoing similar views, South-based rubber producers said that there is limited scope to expand rubber plantation in states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and North East. "So, foreign location is a viable option," they suggested.

The proposal emerged during the recent consultative workshop on the rubber sector organised by the commerce ministry for taking views of the domestic rubber industry for designing a rubber policy for the 12th Five Year Plan.

Besides IRDF, All India Rubber Industry Association and Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA) were among others present in the workshop.

The industry bodies said the domestic rubber availability is a matter of concern as the demand-supply gap is widening. "In the medium to long-term, prospects of availability of natural rubber is a concern and it is about time that the government should look for options abroad," an ATMA official said, adding that the gap is expected to rise this fiscal in view of rising demand from the automobile sector.

According to official data, the demand supply-gap in the 2010-11 fiscal was 87,255 tonne, as compared to 99,165 tonne in the previous year. *PTI*