

---

THE  NEW

# INDIAN EXPRESS

---

5 JULY 2016

## Growers, industry lock horns over rubber quality



### Taking stock

Natural rubber production dropped by 13 per cent to 5.63 lakh tonne in 2015-16, while imports grew by 2.7 per cent

India imports rubber from Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia

Kerala accounts for 85 per cent of the production of rubber in India followed by Tamil Nadu and Karnataka

PRAMOD THOMAS @Kochi

RUBBER planters and the tyre industry seem locked in a battle of words regarding the quality of Indian raw rubber with the former asserting that rubber produced here is of superior quality. The industry, however, is not buying the argument. The acrimony takes significance when considering that domestic tyre demand is expected to grow at 6-7 per cent over the next three years.

Growers, for their part, allege that industry associations are behind the propaganda of Indian rubber being low quality because they want to increase cheaper imports, which growers say will affect over 1.5 million domestic growers. The industry, on the other hand, feels that because of low prices, domestic growers are not giving proper care to rubber trees. Planters' associations are

mulling taking up the issue with the government.

"There is propaganda which says that Indian rubber is of low quality. The dubious intention of this campaign is industry players want more imports at lower prices," alleged C Vinayaraghavan, Chairman, Association of Planters of Kerala.

The country's natural rubber production dropped by 13 per cent to 5.63 lakh tonne in 2015-16, while imports surged up to 4.54 lakh tonne, from 4.42 lakh tonne in 2014-2015.

"Rubber Board studies have established the technical superiority of RSS4 (which is produced in the country) over block rubber. Indian sheet rubber is produced from pure latex. The only reason for large import of block rubber is the cheaper cost," N Dharmaraj, President, United Planters' Association of Southern India

(UPASI) asserted.

Automotive Tyre Manufacturers Association Director General Rajiv Budhraj, however, said that in recent years, natural rubber quality has suffered.

"Due to prevailing low prices, best practices are not being followed to minimise costs of operations. If proper agri practices are not being followed, it is natural that the output will suffer," he said. Mohinder Gupta, Chairman, All India Rubber Industries Association pointed out that over 70 per cent of total rubber production and 90 per cent of traded rubber is of 'block' or 'technically specified rubber' globally.

"But India is the only country where over 70 per cent production is that of sheet rubber. Block rubber, being a factory product, and subject to tests at all stages, ensures a quality and consistency," he concluded.