

BANGLADESH: Rubber board on cards

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The government will set up a 'rubber board' in a month or two to better manage the sector, said the state minister for environment and forests yesterday (7 Nov. 2010).

"The cabinet has approved the plan and we have progressed a lot," said Hasan Mahmud. He was speaking at the launch of a three-day rubber fair, the first of its kind in the country, at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in Dhaka.

Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation (BFIDC), the state-run agency responsible for managing government rubber gardens, organised the event to mark its 50 years of operations. BFIDC Chairman Md Farhad Uddin presided over the event.

The state minister said the rubber sector has huge potential, as the use of the key industrial material is increasing both locally and globally.

BFIDC and the private garden owners grow rubber on around 92,985 acres, producing about 12,000 tonnes of the raw material a year, according to BFIDC.

BFIDC accounts for over half of the total national output.

Mahmud said Bangladesh would have to go for the high-yield variety to grow more rubber on the same amount of land, as the country cannot afford to allocate any more land for cultivating the natural product because of a high population density.

Mahmud also said rubber cultivation would be included in the government's social forestation scheme for its vast potential.

The environment minister said as the rubber trees extract more carbon than other trees, rubber cultivation would allow garden-owners an opportunity to take advantage of the billion-dollar global carbon credit market.

A typical rubber garden absorbs nearly 32 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year and the price of each tonne of carbon is \$22, he said.

"The ministry will extend assistance to help the garden-owners make use of the global carbon credit market," he said.

Mahmud said current rubber production meets internal demand in the country. "But we have to increase production, as demand for rubber is gradually increasing to keep up with the growing economy."

Environment and Forests Secretary Mihir Kanti Majumder said the government would take back land from the people who leased out state land to cultivate rubber, but are not doing so.

About two-dozen stalls have been set up at the fair, which is showcasing different products made of rubber.

Bangladesh Rubber Garden Owners Association President Syed Moazzem Hossain and Bangladesh Rubber Industries Owners Association President Shafiqul Islam Mintu also spoke.

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