

## **India: Export plans of rubber nurseries caught in red tape**

KOCHI: It's not just rubber, rubber saplings from the state are also in great demand in the international market, especially from African nations where large-scale plantations are being set up at a rapid pace. But cumbersome export certification procedures have stopped over 2,000 rubber nurseries, inundated by enquiries from countries such as Tanzania, Liberia and Ghana, in the state from exploring these markets where even India-based plantation companies have leased land for growing rubber. "Many new plantations are coming up in African countries. But they lack rubber nurseries and planters in those countries are looking to import saplings. While even exporting samples is profitable, getting approval for exports is very difficult as procedures are stringent," said Jomon Augustin, director of Kuttiyankal Rubber Nursery, Pala, who has exported 10,000 saplings to Mexico in 2010. Getting phytosanitary certification of plants or plant products from Union government's department of agriculture, which ensures that they are free of pests, is not easy, forcing nurseries to drop their plans of exploring new markets. There are about 2,000 nurseries in the state with a majority of them in the small-scale sector. "Earlier, we faced difficulties in exporting rubber saplings as chances of them getting damaged were high. But now with the root trainer method used in raising saplings in polypropylene cups instead of the polythene bags traditionally used, it is easy to export saplings if other certification hurdles are cleared," said Jose Cheerakuzhy of Cheerakuzhi Young Bud Rubber Nursery in Palakkad, which sells around 10 lakh saplings annually. The nursery has so far received 10 enquiries from different countries and despite approaching the Union government for quarantine certification the deal was stuck in later proceedings. "It is true that some private rubber nurseries in the state have been receiving enquiries from abroad. But if they want to export saplings, they have to get the clearance from the union government since live materials belong to a country under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreement," said J Thomas, rubber production commissioner with the Rubber Board, adding that the demand for saplings had grown in African countries due to the absence of nurseries. "However, the Rubber Board has not received any official enquiries for large-scale exchange of rubber saplings," said Thomas. Rubber nurseries said that many India-based plantation companies, who have leased large tracts of land in African countries, have also made plans to plant rubber and enquired about availability of saplings.