

India tyre industry unable to use domestic natural rubber for making radial tyres

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KOCHI, INDIA: Indian tyre companies are resorting to more import of natural rubber to meet rising demand for radial tyres as domestically produced ungraded rubber fails to meet the quality specifications.

Tyre companies in India are extensively focusing on radial tyre production for passenger cars which was earlier more used in trucks and buses.

The radial tyre market in India is expected to reach INR 393 bn by FY 2015 and tyre companies need higher quality natural rubber. India is the fourth largest natural rubber producer in the globe and 90 percent of the production comes from Kerala State.

Due to lack of availability of quality natural rubber which is suitable for radial tyre production, the tyre companies are largely depend upon import from Indonesia and Vietnam. This has directly caused the fall in the demand for natural rubber in the domestic market.

Reacting to the trend, G. Murali Gopal, divisional head purchase, Apollo Tyres, Ernakulam says that, “tyre companies in India including Apollo don’t get quality natural rubber from domestic market which is suitable for radial tyre production, due to this tyre companies have to depend upon imported natural rubber suitable for radial tyre production.”

“Natural rubber sheets produced in the country generally include tiny sand, soil and particles including other impurities. These impurities make the sheets unsuitable for radial tyre production,” pointed Murali.

“At present, a major share of the natural rubber for the production of radial tyres imported from our neighbouring countries (Indonesia, Vietnam and others). In Kerala including India both Rubber farmers & tappers are ignorant about industrial needs.”

“Now, in Kerala we buy natural rubber which is unsuitable for radial tyre production and clean it to make suitable for radial production at an expense of Rs.2 to 3 per sheet, this results in the rise of cost of production,” points G. Murali Gopal.

“We need to educate both rubber plantation owners and tappers regarding the industrial requirements of natural rubber. Rubber Board had initiated many programs to educate the planters and tappers but failed.” he added.

“Tyre companies are getting pure natural rubber here at Kerala but not technically. I am not sure about whether tyre manufacturers are getting technically perfect rubber for their needs,” says Philip Sabu, professor from Kerala Agriculture University.

However, rubber planters are ignorant about the issue. “we don’t know what industry needs and concerned authorities should provide information in this regard. We just tap the rubber and sell it near by market,” some planters said.

Radial tyres are basically made for passenger comfort. However, radial tyres give good fuel efficiency, long life comparing to cross-ply tyre.

India's radial tyre market is expected to move up when it widely used in commercial and light vehicle section.