

RUBBER TREES FACE NEW ENEMY

NATURAL rubber constantly faces debilitating diseases. The most lethal disease on record is the leaf disease, which is endemic in the host country, Brazil.

Yes, the South American Leaf Blight (SALB) has stalked the natural rubber industry for years.

An entire plantation can be wiped out by SALB.

There is no treatment for the disease.

Now a new rubber leaf disease;

pestalotiopsis, is creating a big scare.

The disease appears during heavy rain. When infected, rubber trees lose a lot of leaves, thus lowering latex yields by up to 20 per cent.

There's no treatment for it. The other worry is that trees infected with pestalotiopsis can develop other diseases like phythoptera.

Experts in rubber diseases have proposed doing collaborative research to find solutions.

Under the umbrella of the International Rubber Research and Develop-

ment Board, the research will involve collaboration among scientists from rubber-producing countries.

They say any single approach may not be able to control the disease.

They propose an integrated approach to tackle it.

This refers to a decision-based approach involving multiple tactics to control pathogens.

These may include site selection and preparation; using disease-resistant planting materials; altering planting practices; modifying the environ-

ment by drainage; irrigation; pruning; thinning; shading; and applying pesticides.

We also need to monitor environmental factors, including temperature, moisture, soil pH and nutrients.

Disease forecasting and establishing economic thresholds are other measures.

Accurate diagnosis of the causal agents is needed. Without correct identification and diagnosis, it will be difficult to design a disease control scheme.

An understanding of the disease cycle, including climatic and other environmental factors that influence the cycle, and cultural requirements of the host plant, are also needed to manage the disease.

Climate change is partly to blame for this disease. Research is the only way to develop a solution.

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