

NATURAL RUBBER: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Tan Sri (Dr.) B.C. Sekhar

Born in Selangor, Malaysia, in November 1929, Tan Sri Dr. B.C. Sekhar was educated in Malaysia, Singapore, USA and UK. He is the first Asian to be appointed Director of the Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia in 1966. He was the first Chairman of the Malaysian Rubber Research and Development Board. Between 1974 and 1984, he was also the Chairman of the International Rubber Research and Development Board (IRRDB) which expanded under his stewardship from a club of three to a dynamic international organization of 14 member countries. Until 1984, he was Adviser to the Association of Natural Rubber

Producing Countries (ANRPC) from its inception and played a key role in the establishment of the International Natural Rubber Agreement (INRA) and the International Natural Rubber Organization (INRO) under UNCTAD. Sekhar is accredited with spawning technically specified natural rubber and thus containing the onslaught of synthetic rubber.

After retirement from the Malaysian Rubber Research and Development Board in 1984, Sekhar held prestigious positions in several organizations including the Palm Oil Research and Development Board, Malaysia Carbon, MARDEC, IT International Tyre and Plant Malaysia. In January 1988, he became the first Asian appointed as the Secretary-General of the International Rubber Study Group (IRSG) based in London. In August 1993, he returned to Malaysia and continues to be active in research and development. During the last six years he has filed six international patent applications.

Sekhar is author of more than 300 scientific publications and keynote lectures and has 28 international patents to his credit. He is a Fellow of numerous scientific organizations including the Lincon Society, Institute of Materials and the Royal Society of Chemistry, UK. He is a Fellow of the Malaysian Institute of Management and one of the seven Senior Fellows of the Malaysian Academy of Science.

Several national and international accolades have been bestowed upon Sekhar which include the Colwyn Gold Medal of the Institution of the Rubber Industry, UK, in 1966; the Ramon Magsaysay Award from the Philippines in 1973; the PSM from the King of Malaysia which carried the title of Tan Sri in 1976; the Tun Razak Award in 1980; the Ridley Memorial Gold Medal in 1984 and the Asian Productivity Gold Medal in 1991.

INTRODUCTION

Rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*) is a relatively new agricultural crop domesticated from the wild. During the twentieth century, natural rubber from this tree emerged as the most versatile industrial raw material produced from plants. As a person closely associated with the developments in the rubber sector for over half a century (to be ex-

act, since 1949 when I joined as Assistant Chemist at the Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia), tracing the history of this industry, highlighting the present and foreseeing the future in a few pages is a difficult task. However, I shall attempt to present a kaleidoscopic view in this first issue of the Natural Rubber Research. In the new millennium of borderless global village the pace