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Work on Rubber City set to begin end of the year

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DEVELOPMENT of the proposed Rubber City, a technology park devoted to the commodity, is expected to begin at the end of the year, Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said.

The project, first mooted four years ago, is awaiting approval from the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department. It will be a fully privatized venture on a 1,400ha site owned by the Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia (RRIM) experimental station in Sungai Buloh, Selangor.

"I am hopeful that the plan to turn that plot of land into Malaysia's first full-fledged Rubber City technology park will take off by the end of the year," Dr Lim told reporters on Tuesday after opening the Fairview International School in Kuala Lumpur.

The concept for the park was mooted by several industry players. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in 1997 that the project would be included in the Seventh Malaysia Plan.

Rubber City will be totally devoted to the rubber industry. It will house the Malaysian Rubber Board and its laboratories, a rubber industrial park, housing, recreational facilities, the Rubber Products Promotion Council and other regulatory bodies under one roof.

Rubber City will be providing expertise, market information, worldwide market promotion services, product testing and even financial advice and assistance to tenants, industry players, and associated manufacturing industries.

Dr Lim said Rubber City will be a suburban city complete with a rubber research centre, housing and recreational facilities and a university which will offer courses such as rubber technology, rubber economics and rubber chemistry.

"This Rubber City concept will hopefully bring in further investments encompassing the rubber industry and other industries as well, and benefit Malaysia as a whole," he added.

Dr Lim said it is important for Malaysia to maintain its strategic position as one of the world's top rubber producers even though it is a high-cost producer.

He added that it does not make sense for Malaysia to import rubber from neighbouring countries when the commodity can be produced locally.

He said what is important is that the various smallholders diversify their crops rather than concentrate on palm oil alone because of its cyclical nature and fluctuating prices.

Malaysia is the world's third largest producer of natural rubber after Indonesia and Thailand. Exports of rubber and rubber-based products jumped from RM390 million in 1986 to RM4.2 billion in 1996. Last year total exports were worth RM13 billion.

Meanwhile, Dr Lim lauded the Malaysian Rubber Board's move in converting its idle land in Kuala Lumpur into sites for schools and commercially viable projects.

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