

New owner for third Duncans gardens

Alipurduar: The Duncans Goenka Group on Friday handed over the Tulsipara tea estate in the Dooars to a new company which will reopen it next week. This is the third garden that Duncans has handed over to the company.

Though the ownership is yet to be changed, the move has led to speculations as to whether the group is slowly withdrawing from the Dooars tea belt.

At a meeting held in the labour department in Calcutta, it was decided that Tulsipara in Birpara-Madarihat block would reopen on July 25.

Leaders of Trinamul-backed trade unions and representatives of Duncans and Merico Agro Industries Ltd, the company that will run the garden, were present.

In Tulsipara, there are 959 permanent workers. Merico, the new company, is also running Huntapara and Garganda, two other tea estates of Duncans.

"On July 23 and 24, the state will distribute two cash as relief among workers (each worker would get around Rs 460) and a fortnight's ration. We will reopen on July 25 and within seven days we will disburse 40 per cent of the due bonus. Also, 60 per cent of the total due wages of workers will be paid soon. At the meeting, the representative of Duncans proposed us to take charge of two other gardens. We however, denied and we need to time to settle down and run the three gardens properly," said Surajit Bakshi, the director of Merico.

Even if Tulsipara reopens, two more gardens of Duncans, Lankapara and Demdima are yet to open. Demdima was reopened by Duncans but was abandoned again within three months.

J.K. Shah, the vice-president of Duncans Goenka Group, who was present at the meeting, declined comment..

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