

Dooars stares at crop loss

Calcutta: The ongoing strike in the tea gardens of Dooars and Terai region could result in a loss of Rs 40 crore and impair the ability of the garden owners to pay bonus ahead of the festive season, the tea industry has warned.

An estimate carried out by the Tea Association of India suggests crop loss of over 3 million kg over the three-day strike called by a group of labour unions demanding minimum wage for tea garden workers. Darjeeling gardens are not part of the strike called by the Joint Forum.

"The tea industry in north Bengal is expected to produce approximately 50 million kg in August 2018 (49.63 million kg produced in August 2017) of which the organised sector's share is likely to be 55 per cent. Therefore, if 28 million kg is expected to be produced by Dooars and Terai in the month of August 2018, a crop loss of 3.23 million kg on account of three days strike would cost the industry Rs 38-40 crore roughly," Prabir Bhattacharjee, secretary-general, Tea Association of India, said.

There will be collateral damage also in terms of increase in plucking rounds and, thereby, a drop in the quality of tea, which in turn will lead to a lower price realisation.

"The combination of all these factors would cripple the industry and its capacity to pay bonus," he said.

TAI alleged that the strike was pre-meditated and asked the Bengal government to resolve the matter soon.

The Minimum Wages Advisory Committee is a statutory body (under the Minimum Wages Act 1948) comprising members of employers and employees. It has held 11 meetings till date. However, the last meeting at north Bengal's state secretariat Uttarakanya, after which the strike was called, was not called under the aegis of the Committee, TAI alleged.

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