

China buyers sip north Bengal tea

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Jalpaiguri: Two tea buyers from China touring north Bengal to study the cultivation and production of tea in Darjeeling and the Dooars held discussions with small tea growers and tested the brew produced in the region on Friday.

Bing Zia and Xiao Wu, the two buyers, said they were associated with companies involved in production of green tea.

"But these days, a considerable portion of tea drinkers in China, particularly the young generation, prefer CTC tea. That is why we are here to check out the cultivation of tea leaves and the production process so that we can import more CTC tea," Bing, who is associated with the Zhejiang Tea Group, said.

"We want to know how much pesticide and fertilizers are used at the tea plantations, both in tea estates and in small gardens," Bing added.

"There will be a global conference on tea in China next May. We will invite tea producers and small tea growers at the event to know more about Indian CTC tea," he said.

On Friday, the duo held talks with the small tea growers at a private resort in Raninagar, 10km from Jalpaiguri.

Bijoygopal Chakraborty, the president of the Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers' Associations, said the visit



The Chinese buyers sip tea at a tasting session in Raninagar, near Jalpaiguri, on Friday. Picture by Biplab Basak

by the Chinese buyers could help in increasing export of Indian tea to the neighbouring country.

"We had invited officials of the tea board and the Tea Research Association so that our guests from China can get more information about tea. We had also conducted a tea-tasting session in association with the TRA. We told the Chinese buyers that the small tea sector contributes around 40 per cent of the total production of tea in India. The tealeaves we produce are processed into CTC tea at bought-leaf factories," he said.

According to Chakraborty,

around 8.52 million kg of CTC tea was exported to China last year.

In the current fiscal, there is a target to export around 20 million kg of tea to the neighbouring country.

"We want tea produced in the factories run by the growers' cooperatives to be exported to China. The tea bushes in our plantations are young and CTC tea of excellent quality can be produced from these leaves," he added.

At the conference that is scheduled next year, the small tea growers will also advocate the signing of a bilateral trade agreement.