

TEA PROCESS BAR TILL FEB 11

OUR CORRESPONDENT Siliguri: Come February 11, tea factories in north Bengal can resume processing of tea leaves both in the hills and plains.

The Tea Board of India, which issued a directive earlier this month mentioned that tea factories, whether the ones in the tea estates or the bought-leaf factories (which buy tealeaves from small tea growers), will have to stop processing tea from December 17.

"This was made to ensure that no low quality tea is produced during the winter months, known as dormancy period in the sector. The tea bushes stop yielding fresh leaves and buds but there are reports that a section of factories still operate and process teas out of whatever old leaves are left in plantations. This time, the directive was issued to stop the practice," said a source at the tea board.

The board that came up with separate cut-off dates for the tea producing states had mentioned in its earlier directive that the last date for plucking of tealeaves was December 15 and by December 17, all factories will have to send a declaration to the board that they have stopped production.

These units however, were allowed to pack and dispatch the teas till December 27 (for CTC teas) and till December 31 (for orthodox and green teas).

LEASH ON HANDS "On December 19, the board has issued a fresh directive that tea factories in Bengal and Bihar can start receiving tea leaves from February 11. Now that the date has been specified, tea companies, BLF owners and small tea growers, can take up pruning and other maintenance works, both in plantations and in factories in a planned manner," said R.A. Sharma, secretary of the Dooars branch of Tea Association of India.

The small tea growers have also welcomed the tea board's plan.

"It was done to ensure the factories resume work only after fresh tea leaves grow. We welcome the step as on one hand, it would ensure standard quality of teas is maintained throughout the year and on the other hand, it can substantially reduce presence of low-quality tea in the market," said Bijoygopal Chakraborty, president, Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers' Associations..

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