

## CALL FOR CHANGE IN LAND-USE LAWS

### Tea planters root for crop diversification

Siliguri: Tea planters have chanted the mantra of crop diversification for sustenance of gardens and demanded that the Bengal government change land laws to let the industry explore cultivation of supplementary crops along with tea.

"It is necessary to start alternative cropping in tea gardens. Agricultural diversification can largely help strengthen estates. The industry should try to come up with supplementary crops along with tea. Tea gardens are known to be hotspots of biodiversity and this new practice, if implemented, can also contribute in maintaining ecological balance," said Nayantara Palchoudhuri, vice-chairperson, Indian Tea Association (ITA).

She was speaking at the fifty-seventh annual general meeting of the Terai Branch of the ITA here on Thursday.

The planters' meeting in Siliguri on Thursday. Picture by Passang Yolmo As of now, the state allows use of a maximum area of five acres for tourism infrastructure in a tea estate. Planters want the ceiling increased. "Our focus is now to augment (tea) exports...We have gained markets in Russia, Iran, Egypt and Kazakhstan and want teas from Terai and Dooars to make it to these markets," said Palchoudhuri. Speaking on financial condition of the Bengal tea industry, she referred about the interim hikes in wages.

"In one year, the tea industry has to bear four interim hikes, which is unprecedented and eventually, the wage rate has increased by Rs 43.50. The industry has accepted the hikes but the state should not fix the minimum wage at a rate that the industry cannot pay," said the ITA vice-chairperson.

She also spoke about the need for a campaign to augment the per capita consumption of tea. In India, the per capita annual consumption of tea is around 786 grams, lower than a number of other countries.

N.K. Katiyar, chairman of the Terai Branch of ITA, highlighted the rise in cost of production. "We want more central and state schemes to be implemented in tea gardens to reduce the social costs. Tea companies provide workers non-cash components along with the wages."

**SOURCE:** [https://epaper.telegraphindia.com/textview\\_248071\\_1372548\\_4\\_8\\_19-01-2019\\_72\\_0.html](https://epaper.telegraphindia.com/textview_248071_1372548_4_8_19-01-2019_72_0.html)

