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The Telegraph

calcutta, india



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Small twist to tea output tale

Abhranila Das

BREW BOOK			
Apr-Oct output estimates in 2015-16			
In million kg	Estate	BLF*	Total
North India	549	249	798
South India	87	61	148
All India	636	310	946

*Bought Leaf Factory

Calcutta, Dec. 16: Production of tea by bought leaf factories has increased marginally between April and October this year compared with last year, according to data sourced from the Tea Board.

However, production in the larger estates has fallen to 636.39 million kg during the same period, a 1.7 per cent decline from last year's 647.67 million kg.

Officials say the reasons behind the rise or fall in output lie in the age of the bushes.

"Our tea bushes are young and are easier to maintain because of their smaller sizes and hence yield is more. However, we still cannot match the quality of the estates," said Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty, president of the Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers Association.

On the other hand, estate gardens are very old and hence their production capacity has naturally reduced, said C. S. Bedi, managing director of Rossell India.

"Moreover, the organised sector has recently gone for uprooting and replanting of tea bushes, so it will take at least nine years for them to be fully productive," he said.

Small tea growers and bought leaf factories contribute nearly 40 per cent to the total tea produced in the country.

The total production at the factories from April to October this year was 310.58 million kg, a 1.5 per cent growth over last year's 305.92 million kg.

"Any growth in the tea industry is good for the country and the number of small tea growers has been rising significantly over the past few years," said a senior official of the Tea Board.

However, bought leaf factory owners say the statistics provided by the Tea Board also include the production of tea outsourced by the estates to small tea growers.

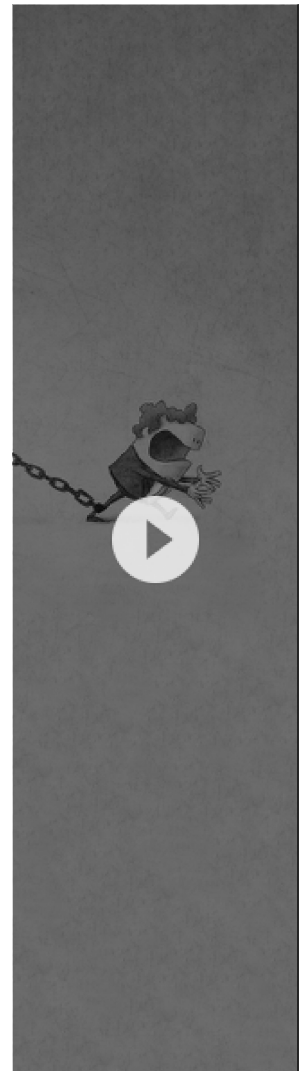
"Production of the bought leaf factories, excluding the estates, has not seen much of a growth and hence the figures provided by the Tea Board do not reflect our actual yields," said Satish Mitruka, president of North Bengal Tea Producers' Welfare Association.





Countrywide production has also fallen 0.7 per cent during the period.

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