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Small tea growers staring at huge losses

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Market depressed as bought leaf factories cut production, driving down raw leaf prices

BY OUR STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Sept 15: On one hand, farmers in 22 districts are facing their worst nightmare due to widespread pest attack in the State; on the other, small tea growers in upper Assam, the main tea producing zone of the State, are facing huge losses due to very low market prices they are currently getting by selling raw tea leaves. The month of September is considered peak season for tea growers in the State.

Sources said raw tea leaves grown by small tea growers in upper Assam are currently fetching prices of Rs 8/9 per kg, whereas its actual price should be around Rs 20 per kg. The cost of production per kg of raw tea leaves is around Rs 15, added the sources.

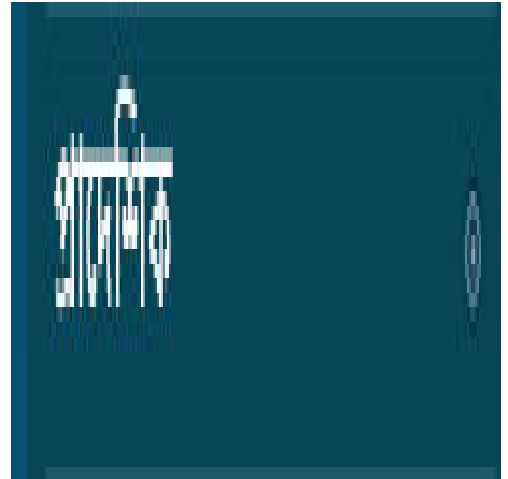
Monoj Singh, a small tea grower of Rajgarh area in Dibrugarh district who is also an office bearer of the Tingkhag regional committee of Assam Small Tea Growers Association, said: "Many unemployed youths in upper Assam have taken up tea cultivation as their profession. More than 15 lakh people mainly in upper Assam are directly or indirectly associated with tea cultivation in small scale, and they have a major share in the overall tea production in the State. But these small tea growers are now facing huge losses due to low price of raw tea leaves."

In the last ten days or so, some big tea companies and bought leaf factories in upper Assam, most of which are run by gas, have cut their production due to falling gas supply. As a result, these factories have refused to buy raw tea leaves from small tea growers, which has depressed the market for raw tea leaves. It needs be mentioned that while big tea companies do not show keen interest in buying raw tea leaves from small growers, the bought leaf factories are generally their reliable customers.

During the previous Congress regime in the State, DCs were asked by the government to monitor prices of raw tea leaves on regular basis, but there were allegations that the effort didn't bear much fruit as big tea companies always maintain good relations with the district administrations and use the government machinery in their favour.

Now, the small tea growers have sought the intervention of the new BJP-led government at Dispur in fixing a minimum support price for their produce so that they will not suffer in future the kind of crippling losses they are presently saddled with.

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Yesterday's Weather

	Maximum	Minimum
•	°C	°C
•	°C	°C
•	°C	°C
•	°C	°C
•	°C	°C
•	°C	°C
•	°C	°C

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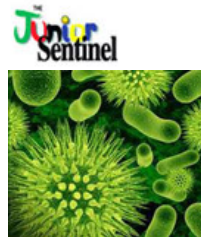
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