

After last year's lockdown, Assam tea industry now reeling under deficit rains

PTI | Published: 22nd May 2021 12:47 AM

GUWAHATI: On the International Tea Day on Friday, the production situation in the world's largest tea-growing region, Assam, is not very impressive as the yield is very low due to climate change and Covid-19 pandemic.

The industry suffered due to lockdown last year while severe deficit of rainfall caused havoc in production in the early part of the season this year, North Eastern Tea Association (NETA) Chairman Sunil Jallan said.

"The year 2021 has been an unusual year till now for the Assam tea industry as far as production is concerned. A study has been carried out to assess the crop loss due to the impact of prolonged drought like situation. This study has also taken into account the recent rainfall," NETA Advisor Bidyananda Barkakoty said.

As per the study, the crop deficit from January to May this year will be about 60 million kgs compared to the production in the same period in 2019, said Barkakoty.

"We have not compared this year's figures with those of 2020, because last year the crop deficit from January to May was 78 million kgs due to Covid lockdown. In percentage terms, the crop deficit from January to May this year will be about 40 per cent compared to the same period of 2019," said Barkakoty.

Assam tea is grown in the lowlands of the state and is cultivated in Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys with the tea estates collectively yielding approximately 680.5 million kg tea annually.

Now, due to very low crop production till May, which is likely to continue in June as well, the revenue deficit would be huge, Bharatiya Cha Parishad (BCP) Chairman Nalin Khemani said.

Extreme weather fluctuations both in terms of temperature and rainfall have severely impacted the growth of tea leaves, said BCP Advisor Mrigendra Jalan.

The drop of temperature from 34 to 19 degrees centigrade coupled with hardly any sunshine for the last one week, is playing havoc with the crop, he said.

"We do not remember facing such a prolonged drought in the last 30 years," said Manoj Jallan, former Chairman of NETA.

"Apart from the huge loss of crop due to rainfall deficit, the drought at the very beginning of the tea season has also delayed the application of fertilisers by around two months. This will add to the loss of crop during the coming peak harvesting months," he said.

Amid the grim scenario, Guwahati Tea Auction Buyers Association secretary Dinesh Bihani sounded hopeful on the International Tea Day, saying that due to rainfall across all tea growing districts in Assam during the last 10 days will help boost production as well as yielding the best quality second flush teas.

The United Nations has designated 21 May as International Tea Day to promote and foster collective actions to implement activities in favour of the sustainable production and consumption of tea and raise awareness of its importance in fighting hunger and poverty.

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2021/may/22/after-last-years-lockdown-assam-tea-industry-now-reeling-under-deficit-rains-2305814.html>