

Tea board

'last dates' raise brows in brew belt

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Siliguri: A recent directive by the Tea Board of India for the brew belt of north Indian states, which includes the tea-producing north Bengal, where the board has stated various last dates in December for plucking and processing of leaves, has evoked a mixed response here.

For the past couple of years, the board has been issuing a directive on dates to state that no tea can be produced in the estates and in bought-leaf factories after that.

On August 31, the board's deputy chairman issued the directive that in Darjeeling hills, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, tea leaves can be plucked till December 4 and production can be carried out in factories till December 6. For Terai, the Dooars and neighbouring Bihar, the dates given are December 18 (plucking) and December 20 (production).

Bijoygopal Chakraborty, president of the Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers' Associations (Cista), said they had urged the tea board to extend the dates this year, because they felt production could go on till December-end because of the steady yield in plantations.

"The price of tea leaves has declined. We expected that by the end of the season, we could recover (the losses somewhat)," he said, justifying their request.

In 2019, 1,390.08 million kilos of tea was produced in the country, which reduced to 1,257.53 million kg last year. This year, production is expected to go up again.