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Press Release Details

COVID-19 and Temi Tea Estate -The Taste of a Distant Saga

Information & Public Relations Department

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The small state of Sikkim has one and only tea garden located at a tiny place called Temi in South District. Established in 1969, this tea estate is well known for its range of white, green, and oolong tea. There are a total of four seasons of Temi tea which are Spring- its also the first flush, Summer- the second flush, Monsoon- the third flush, Autumn-the final flush. In the year 2008 this garden was certified as an organic tea garden and is known all around the globe as one of the finest organic teas. Grown at an elevation ranging from 1400 to 2000 meters above sea level, the tea leaves of each season have their own flavoursome

temperament.

One visit to Temi tea garden as of now will welcome one to a bottomless chasm of tea bushes covered in varying layers of green colour. Currently the first flush of Temi tea is being plucked this flush last between late March to April, but it highly depends upon the weather and harvest. It maybe mentioned here that 'First Flush' is defined as the first growth of new leaves on the tea plant during the spring time after these plant wake from the dormancy of the cold winter season in this himalayan place. This flush often have a floral aroma many describe this aroma as 'muscatel' suggesting muscat grapes. Tea which is made using the leaves of the first flush is generally light yellow in colour and highly desirable among the tea connoisseurs. This particular flush is also one of the largest revenue generator as compared to the tea leaves of other three season.

Amongst, the many tea workers we caught up with 41 year-old Dil Kumari Rai, who is also a part of Temi Labour Union, she was busy plucking the first flush tea leaves in one corner of the garden. Speaking regarding the COVID-19 she said that tea management has briefed her and other workers about the dos and don'ts of this disease. They have also been provided with face mask and sanitizers and has been strongly advised to follow the guidelines so as to guard the workers from this new and rapidly spreading disease. She also adds that she alongwith other tea workers has already received the Chief Ministers relief of rice, pluses, oil, salt, potato and onion which was arranged by the panchayat of the locality. However, she emphasises that plucking and looking after the Temi tea estate can be summed up as a kind of tea farming that they have done since a long time, it's similar to people who opt for cultivating of vegetables, fruits and that it's this tea cultivation that they have consistently practised.

Assistant Manager Pratik Gautam informed that the lockdown may adversely effect the first flush of Temi tea production as approximately 22-30 ton is produced during normal season but this year due to the nation wide lockdown a total of 18 ton may only be processed. He adds that the welfare of the tea workers has been kept as one of the highest priority and that every day the workers are handed over a new face mask when they head out to pluck the first flush tea leaves. He updated that the workers as well as other employees have already been provided with hand sanitizers. As for social distancing while plucking tea leaves the garden workers usually maintain social distance due to the natural gap of the tea bushes and that incharge of the various section of the garden has been vigorously instructed to maintain the same. During weighing of the plucked leaves the tea workers are compulsory made to stand at a 6 feet distant while adhering to the COVID-19 instructions laid down by the government. One of the most commendable job that the tea management has done is that they have voluntarily sprayed sanitizers in all of the 10 settlements which is a residential area and comprises of a total number of 215 houses most members of these houses work at the tea factory. The management also gave paid leave to the tea workers from 25th to 31st March in order to streamlined the administration in view of this disease adds the assistant manager. Currently, the Temi Tea Estate works with half of its employees including its tea workers as per the norm of Sikkim State Government and also in view of the rising case of nCoV.

It maybe mentioned that Sikkim State Government has also recently announced an additional incentive wage of Rs. 300/- per day for Temi tea workers who are working diligently during this lock down period. The Government of India has also directed that all manufacturing units engaged in production and industries having continuous process are not covered by the lock down order and tea plantation and manufacturing business is a continuous process but in light of COVID-19 it has also been made mandatory by the Sikkim State Government that all precautionary measures should be stringently followed by the overseeing supervisors

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