

Press Release: 219th Board Meeting Held at Kumarakom on June 22

Dinesh Sharma elected Tea Board VC; small tea growers in the limelight

Kolkata, June 27: Shri Dinesh Sharma, vice-president, All Assam Small Tea Growers' Association (AASTGA), has been unanimously elected Vice-Chairman of the Tea Board at its 219th board meeting held at Kumarakom, Kerala, on June 22.

The post of Vice-Chairman of Tea Board is held by a South Indian and North Indian representative of the tea industry by rotation every year. Mr Sharma will be holding the post for the year 2012-13, succeeding incumbent Vice-Chairman CN Nataraj, who is president of the UPASI. This is for the first time that a representative of the small tea growers from the North East has been elevated to such a high post on the apex decision-making body of the Tea Board.

Congratulating Mr Sharma on his appointment, Shri MGVK Bhanu, Chairman, Tea Board, said that the AASTGA vice-president is highly suitable for the post. He further said it is about time that small tea growers, who contribute to about 26 per cent of the country's total tea production, get adequate representation and a platform to voice their issues.

Several other important issues pertaining to the development of the tea industry in general and the welfare of the small and unorganised tea sector in particular were discussed at the meeting.

Following key issues were discussed and approved in the meeting:

- A proposal for extending a grant-in-aid of Rs 3 lakh per annum to the Sikkim University for running a specialised course -- Post Graduate Diploma in Tea Development and Management. It will help in the development of the tea industry by providing technical manpower.
- A proposal for setting up a laboratory at the Tea Board Headquarters to coordinate and monitor the quality of tea and in particular total iron content in tea and its infusion. The laboratory will undertake continuous in-house monitoring of iron filings in tea samples collected from different tea estates as well as from the market from time to time. Determination of iron filings in tea samples by the Board will help the tea traders who are reported to face harassment from PFA authorities in various States.
- A proposal to engage IIM Kolkata to undertake a study on the organisational structure and management of the Board and to suggest suitable measures for improving the working efficiency of the Board.
- A proposal for organising three study tours, providing computers to Self-Help Groups, and reach-out training programmes for the benefit of small tea growers in North Bengal.
- In order to recognise and reward progressive small growers making good quality teas, the Board has considered the renewal of the Qualitea Award Scheme for the current financial year in the South. This year, six more new categories of awards have been proposed to encourage growers and manufacturers in South India adopting innovative newer technologies and methods. The Board members agreed that a similar award scheme should be instituted for the benefit of small tea growers in North India as well.

- Financial support will be provided to small tea growers affected by hail damage in Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, and Chopra block of West Bengal during the months of March-May. It has also been decided that financial assistance will be extended to individual affected tea growers as working capital at the rate of Rs 10,000 per hectare provided they come under the umbrella of SHG.
- Assistance of local NGOs are proposed to be utilised by the Tea Board for the organisational and managerial development of small growers.
- Given the growing importance of the small tea sector which accounts for 26 per cent of the all-India production, it has been proposed to implement a new scheme at a proposed outlay of Rs 300 crore for addressing the development needs of small growers.
- After deliberating on the findings of the CAG and KPMG, an independent agency, the Board members unanimously agreed that the foreign offices of the Tea Board, located at London, Dubai and Moscow should be closed down and overseas promotion should be undertaken from the Headquarters in Kolkata. The officers posted overseas be relocated in Kolkata.