

# Teaotia urges tea plantations to reinvent for better price realisation

Commerce Secretary also wants Tea Board to look beyond sops

V SAJEEV KUMAR

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Union Commerce Secretary Rita A Teaotia has called upon the plantation sector to reinvent itself in process, quality, branding and other areas for better price realisation.

She said that while many competing countries are getting better prices, Indian teas are far behind due to quality issues.

Speaking at the India International Tea Convention 2016 at Ooty on Thursday, she also called upon the Tea Board to reinvent itself to meet the industry's need rather than focussing only on subsidies, while asking the industry to come forward to help with suggestions to make the sector more self-reliant, especially when it comes to

funding. "Today, most of our plantations are over 50 years old, the Centre has taken serious efforts to help them to upgrade. Last year alone around 43,000 hectares were replanted and 9,700 hectares were rejuvenated. However, this is only one third of what we set out to do," she said.

## Promotional initiatives

While calling for more brand building initiatives, Teaotia also said that her Minister has taken up initiatives, especially in social media, to promote Indian tea and the plantation sector.

Teaotia said the Commerce Ministry is working with the Labour Ministry to create transparency in the wage structure.

To bring down the burden on the planters, she said, the Ministry has asked State governments to provide basic facilities, such as water and housing, through NREGA and other schemes, so that the bur-



Rita Teaotia, Commerce Secretary

den on the plantation sector comes down. N Dharmaraj, President, Upasi, said that for more sustainable development, the focus should be on improving quality, more value addition and mass marketing.

He noted that of the 1,250 million kg (mkg) tea produced in India today, around 20 per cent is produced in South India. Of the total production, 240 mkg are exported

and in the export South India's share is around 40 per cent. "Today one of the major challenge is labour cost, which accounts for 60 per cent of the total cost," he said.

Bidyananda Barkakoty, Vice-Chairman, Tea Board, said more dialogue is needed between the stakeholders to find solutions for various problems.

"Cutting down production is not the solution, but it can create demand.

The Tea Board plans to support entrepreneurs to set up boutiques in India through financial support and will support them with up to ₹2 crore to set up packaging units outside India.

Around 1,421 tea gardens are graded in the country by the Tea Board under seven categories to identify problems of the gardens and to take corrective measures.

The writer is in Ooty at the invitation of UPASI to cover IITC 2016

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