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Tea Inc on 1st Kazakh mission for exports push

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Kolkata: In a first, Indian tea industry, led by the top Tea Board of India officials, has embarked on Mission Kazakhstan in order to boost its stagnant export market in the central Asian country. Currently, a team of tea industry stalwarts, including Tea Board deputy chairman Arun Kumar Ray, are canvassing the potential of Indian tea in Kazakhstan, which has always been a CTC (crush, tear, curl) player, consuming around 30 million kg(mkg) of tea in a year.

Talking to TOI from Almaty, Kazakhstan, over phone on their Day One of three-day trip, Ray said: “On behalf of the Board, we have joined hands with the industry players and are facilitating promotional activities across the potential markets.”

Last year, India exported over 12mkg of CTC tea to Kazakhstan and this maiden promotional tour would push the figure up to 15mkg by the next year. Each year, India exports 252mkg of tea worldwide, with Russia, Iran, the UAE, the US, the UK, Egypt, Kazakhstan being the top markets. According to top industry experts, a successful promotion of the Indian brew in Central Asia can help the Tea Board meet its annual exports target of 300mkg in two-three years.

The delegation from India will be participating in interactive meets, one-on-one buyer-seller talks, tea-testing sessions and factory visits during the promotional tour. “We organized a Tea Masters Cup, in which local firms, chefs, hoteliers took part in tea tasting competitions. We also exchanged notes on tea brewing techniques and preparation of flavored and fruity tea mocktails,” said S Patra, secretary, Indian Tea association (ITA), the largest tea producers’ body in India.

Around 95% of the total tea consumed in Kazakhstan is CTC. “However, green tea and organic tea, too, are gaining popularity. India shares 41% of the market, followed by Kenya (33%). The response from Kazakh tea traders has exceeded expectations,” added Ray.

The 23-member-strong delegation includes Krishan Katyal, chairman & Managing director of auctioneer J Thomas, Indian ambassador to Kazakhstan Prabhat Kumar and representatives of top tea players like McLeod Russel, Goodricke, Amalgamated Plantations and Jay Shree tea among others. “Delegates from North and South India tea producers and merchant exporters are also participating in the daily promotional activities in the former Soviet Union territory,” added Patra.

The Tea Board-led tour is being coordinated by ITA and assisted by Embassy of India, Astana, Kazakhstan.

According to Ray, prospect for Indian tea’s flavor, aroma and quality is tremendous in countries like Iran, Egypt, the UAE and Russia. “But, Kenya, too, is gaining popularity here and we have to pull our socks to push our market share up.”

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