

Committee recommendation for tea



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Ritupallab Saikia 12 August 2012 10438 views

After getting the state drink status, Assam Tea moves one step closer to be accorded national drink status. This move comes when the department related to parliamentary standing committee on commerce which was constituted w.e.f. 31st August, 2011 under the chairmanship of Shanta Kumar, with 31 members, out of which 10 are from the Rajya Sabha and 21 are from the Lok Sabha submitted its report on "Performance of plantation sector - Tea and Coffee Industry" to the Rajya Sabha on 9th August, 2012 and laid on the table of the Lok Sabha on 9th August, 2012. The Committee has given a total of 105 recommendations, out of which 48 recommendations are for the Tea Sector and another 57 recommendations are for the Coffee Sector. The committee during its interactions with the stakeholders and study visits noticed an overwhelming demand from nearly all the stakeholders of the tea industry that tea should be given the status of "National Drink". The Committee was informed that 83 per cent of households in India consumed tea while penetration of tea is purportedly in the range of 96 per cent to 99 per cent in both urban and rural areas of the country and probably no other beverage in the world had such high level of penetration.

With a land area of 580,000 hectares and more under tea cultivation, India offers the widest range of teas in terms of taste, strength and flavour-Darjeeling, Assam Orthodox, Assam CTC, Dooars-Terai, Nilgiri CTC, Kangra and green. It is the fourth largest exporter of tea with a share of about 12% of global exports. In view of the huge volume of consumption of tea in India, even much higher to that of milk, the high level committee requested that tea should be declared as India's national drink and getting this formal recognition would give a major impetus to building the brand of the beverage which is indigenous to India. The Committee learns that many countries have declared their national drinks for instance Argentina has declared Mate as its national drink; in Brazil Cachaga enjoys this status. Similarly, Pakistan has identified sugar cane juice as its national drink long ago and China also declared green tea as its national drink.

The Committee wonders as to why tea has not been given the status of national drink despite its presence in everyday life of Indians. Though the matter was examined by the Ministry of Commerce in the year 2006, no decision has been taken yet. The Committee is of the view that tea is an integral part of the socio-cultural milieu of the country and enjoys a space in the hearth of every home irrespective of caste, class, religion and economic status of the person. Fears were expressed before the Committee that declaring tea as a 'national drink' will be at the cost of coffee or other beverages. However, the Committee agrees with the submission offered before it that the declaration of mango as national fruit did not undermine the position held by apple or other fruits for that matter. Similarly, declaration of tiger as the national animal did not endanger other animals. So the fear that declaring tea as national drink will out shadow any other beverage appears unfounded. Such a declaration will only help tea further build its brand image.

Reacting over the recommendation of the high powered department related parliamentary standing committee on commerce to declare Tea as National Drink, the Joint Forum of Assam Tea Planters' Association (ATPA), North Eastern Tea Association (NETA) and Bharatiya Cha Parishad (BCP), thanked the Chairman and members of the committee for the recommendation. Bidyananda Barkakoty, Chairman of NETA on behalf of the joint Forum of ATPA, NETA & BCP said that like many other countries in the world, India should also have a National Drink and certainly tea deserves the tag because tea is indigenous to India apart from a host of other reasons. India, China and Vietnam are the three countries of the world where the three main cultivated varieties of tea have originated. Therefore, Tea is indigenous to India and is an area where India can take a lot of pride. He further added that, with the recommendation by the Committee, the appeal to declare tea as National Drink of India is now in a much stronger position and we hope that Govt. of India will make the declaration very soon.

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BY RITUPALLAB SAIKIA

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