Majority of Darjeeling tea to go organic
About 37 p.c. of the total crop grown on the slopes of the eastern Himalayas is organic
Indrani Dutta

KOLKATA: The Darjeeling Tea
Association (DTA) has
mounted efforts to increase
the production of organic tea
so that the majority of the
champagne of teas is organi-
cally produced by 2010.
Industry sources say that at
present about 37 per cent of
the total crop grown on the
slopes of the eastern Hima-
layas is organic tea, as per cer-
tifications given by European
and Japanese agencies.
"Efforts are on now to cov-
er at least two more gardens
that contribute 13 per cent of
the total yield under the orga-
nic cultivation norms," a
source at the DTA, the apex
industry body, told The Hin-
du.
Given the fact that the an-
nual Darjeeling tea crop aver-
ages at about 9.5 to 10 million
kg in volume terms, India
would be offering around five
million kg of the brew as an
organically grown product.
However, initially the crop
would be lower as the con-
version process reduces out-
put by half.
It takes about three years
to convert a garden from con-
ventional plantation to an or-
ganic one. This involves not
only a total ban on chemical

EYE CATCHING: A panoramic view of labourers plucking tea at Lebong tea garden in Darjeeling. - PTI PHOTO

fertilizers and pesticides but
there are also restrictions on
the use of some natural items.
"For instance, use of tobacco
extracts for pest control, is
not allowed," sources said.
Pointing out that the move-

ment on organic production
of teas started about 15 years
ago, the sources said that at
that time it commanded a
huge premium in the interna-
tional market with some of
them selling at Rs. 10,000 a

kg. Japan and Germany were
two of the biggest markets for
organic Darjeeling tea al-
though the U.K. and the U.S.
have also been buying this
tea.
Countries such as Germa-

ny, which imports about 50
per cent of the total Darjeel-
ing tea output (both organic
and inorganic), often re-ex-
port this to European coun-
tries like" the Netherlands and
Switzerland.

At present the 'queen of
brews' is grown over an area
spanning 7,500 hectares in
the Darjeeling district in
West Bengal with some of the
gardens sprawling across
steep slopes sometime at a
height of 6,500 feet.
There are now 87 tea es-
tates growing Darjeeling tea.
However, there is little scope
for increasing the output sub-
stantially although there is a
huge global demand now for
teas, especially premium va-
rieties.

In the beverage space as
well as a nutraceutical, tea is
being re-invented.
The sources said that the
good news was that changes
in ownership and taking over
of sick gardens bodes well for
the Darjeeling tea industry
especially as manufacturing
processes and practices
would improve, but crop
might not increase sizably
even after the Centre's rejuv-
enation and replantation
scheme, the Special Purpose
Tea Fund, which has now got
under way.

<title>Majority of Darjeeling tea to go organic</title>
<author>Indrani Dutta</author>
<keywords>NGR1</keywords>
<publication>The Hindu</publication>
<pubDate>03/04/2008</pubDate>
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<classif>G45c</classif>
<entrydt>26/04/2008</entrydt>
<sd>VD</sd>