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Heavy rains push plantations in Kerala deeper into trouble

The sector was just about recovering from last year's floods followed by a drought

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Nature seems to have dealt another blow to the fortunes of Kerala's plantations just when the sector was recouping from last year's deluge and the drought that followed.

The current spell of rains lashing the State, including the high ranges, since Wednesday has caused landslides in many places such as Munnar and Wayanad affecting plantation crops, especially tea and cardamom.

Kanan Devan Hills Plantations Company (KDHP) — which owns majority of tea plantations in Munnar covering seven estates— is anticipating 20-25 per cent crop loss due to the 18-19-inch downpour. The high intensity rainfall will impact production during August-September, a senior company official said.

He attributed the erratic weather pattern that has resulted in extended drought, frost, poor distribution and heavy spells of rainfall in the high ranges to climate change. It will impact production, he said.

Heavy rains have caused landslides in Kerala's plantation belt

In Munnar, at Wentworth and Vandiperiyar estates of Harrisons Malayalam, plucking has been temporarily stopped due to power supply disruption. There has been no production in the last few days, company CEO Venkitaraman Anand said.

Ajith BK Secretary, Association of Planters of Kerala, estimated that landslides have have affected large plantation areas forcing companies to close down estates. A detailed report on the losses is awaited.

According to the plantation sector, losses during last year's floods had amounted to ₹3,300 crore and the sector was yet to make up them up. The current floods would not only delay the recovery but also aggravate the financial crisis in the sector, he said. According to Sadasiva Subramaniam, Secretary, Kerala Cardamom Growers Association, inundation in several low-lying areas has affected the cardamom crop in Vandanmedu. Productive plants in some areas have been totally damaged and the situation is expected to be worse than in the previous year. Normally, Vandanmedu, Kerala's cardamom belt, receives 30 cm of rain in one monsoon month. But the region received the entire quantity in just 24 hours during the current season, he said.

Rubber Board officials said that the heavy rains have hampered tapping in many plantations in the central Travancore belt even though the moisture content is beneficial for latex production. Normally, the peak production period for rubber starts from August and can continue up to January.

The officials also pointed out that the flash floods at Nilambur in Malappuram district have hit operations of Group Processing Centres of the Board, destroying stocks of rubber-sheets and latex.