

Jumbos kill 1, tea industry mulls plan

**DEVAJIT BARUAH AND
ROOPAK GOSWAMI**

Jorhat/Guwahati: Sushil Mili, 42, was trampled to death by a herd of elephants at Almur village in the district on Friday night.

Divisional forest officer Davinder Suman, quoting villagers, on Saturday said Mili heard the sound of the herd and went out to see whether the paddy crops had been damaged. He immediately came face to face with the herd and was trampled to death.

Local sources said a marauding herd of elephants has been wreaking havoc in Janjimukh area under Jorhat forest division over the past few days. Janjimukh is one of the worst man-elephant conflict zones in Assam. Elephant herds stray out of Arunachal Pradesh and destroy crops and vegetation in adjoining villages, especially in winter.

The tea industry has called for a multi-party collaboration for development of a broad

human-elephant conflict management protocol to be followed by all gardens.

This was resolved at a meeting called by the Indian Tea Association (ITA) in Calcutta recently to address the problem of human-elephant conflict faced by tea gardens in Assam and West Bengal.

The meet was initiated by Karan Paul, chairman of Apeejay Tea, a member of the ITA which has been implementing conflict-mitigation strategies with World Wildlife Fund (WWF) for the last three years to significant impact.

The WWF presented a strategy to the ITA members and success stories of its three-year collaboration with Apeejay Tea at the meet, which was attended by 15 top tea companies and senior WWF officials.

Paul, chairman of Apeejay Surrendra Group and Apeejay Tea, said, "Apeejay Tea was perhaps the first tea company to fund an intensive conflict-management strategy in Sonitpur because four of our

gardens were in the hot zone. As a donor and a victim of human-elephant conflict, the successes of Apeejay Tea's partnership with WWF-India for the past three years have brought us valuable insights on solutions to the human-elephant conflict issue. We have shared these with the ITA and hope to see a multi-party collaboration that will lead to development of a broad human-elephant conflict management protocol followed by all tea gardens uniformly."

He hoped the move would stem loss of life and injury to people working in tea gardens and elephants across the Brahmaputra landscape.

ITA chairman Vivek Goenka said a multi-stakeholder collaboration would aid implementation of largescale interventions across the tea sector.

Dipankar Ghose, director, species and landscapes programme, WWF-India, said they have used multi-pronged approach to address human-elephant conflict.