**SUGAR OUTPUT DOWN 7% AT 14.87 MT UNTIL JAN 15**

NEW DELHI: INDIA’S sugar production this season, which started on October 1, 2023, was 14.87 million tonnes (mt) until January 15. This is seven per cent lower, according to co-operative sector sugar mills body. Since the sugar recovery rate is at par with last year, the actual sugar output will depend on how much sugarcane crop comes to the mills for crushing.

“Considering the lower sugarcane output estimated by the Agriculture Ministry, the Government has already taken several initiatives to increase the availability of sugarcane for production of sugar,” an official source said.

**ETHANOL PROGRAMME**

The ban on sugarcane juice for ethanol and increased rate for ethanol when produced from C-heavy molasses, have resulted in more cane diversion towards sugar, the official said pointing to 9 per cent fall in sugar production until December 15. But, according to Ravi Gupta, an executive committee member of West Indian Sugar Mills Association (WISMA), sugar production is higher than estimated both in Maharashtra and Karnataka and there is room to make more ethanol from syrup and B-heavy molasses. He favours India to continue its ethanol programme with full force and do not generate sugar surplus, amid Brazil raising its sugar production.

According to National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories (NFCSF) data released on Wednesday, 509 factories are operational now against 511 factories until December 31, which is due to 4 factories in Karnataka closing their operations early and 2 in Maharashtra starting operations late this year, during past fortnight.

So far, sugar mills across the country have crushed 156.3 mt of sugarcane and produced 14.87 mt of sugar with an average sugar recovery at 9.51 per cent, between October 1 and January 15 in 2023-24 sugar season. In the corresponding period of last season, 519 mills were operational and had crushed 168.15 mt of sugarcane to produce 16 mt of sugar with average sugar recovery at 9.52 per cent.

**Jaiprakash Dandegaonkar, President of NFCSF, said the sugar production in the country is expected to be at least 30.55 mt by the end of the current sugar season.**

**STATE-WISE OUTPUT**

In Uttar Pradesh, 120 factories are in operation and have crushed 46.57 mt of sugarcane to produce 4.61 mt of sugar with 9.90 per cent average recovery until January 15.

In Maharashtra 197 sugar mills have crushed 54.84 mt of sugarcane to produce 5.1 mt of sugar with 9.3 per cent recovery.

According to NFCSF, Uttar Pradesh is expected to produce 11.5 mt of sugar (against 11 mt estimated earlier), Maharashtra 9 mt (8.5 mt), Karnataka 4.2 mt (3.8 mt).

(THE HINDU BUSINESS LINE; MUMBAI: JANUARY 18, 2024)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*