

## Double standard slur at BJP on tea wages



### PICKING A QUARREL

**Alipurduar:** Trinamul tea union leaders have accused the BJP of "double-speak" on tea wages by opposing interim wage hikes in Bengal while pushing it in Assam.

BJP leaders had criticised the Bengal government for proposing an interim hike in March this year, saying it delayed the fixation of minimum wages for the tea industry.

But last week, BJP-ruled Assam agreed to a similar interim hike at a meeting in Guwahati chaired by Pallab Lochan Das, the state labour minister.

"The BJP is displaying double standard. Here, their leaders are crying hoarse at the state government for the interim relief while in Assam, a similar proposal has been formulated in presence of the state labour minister," said Mohan Sharma, chairman, Cha Bagan Trinamul Congress Mazdoor Union.

Stakeholders of tea industry said like Bengal, the minimum wage rate for tea workers is yet to be fixed and implemented in Assam. As of now, a tea worker in Bengal earns Rs 150 a day while in Assam the daily wage rate in tea industry is Rs 137.

So far, tea wages in Bengal were fixed through tripartite talks. The last wage agreement has expired on March 31 last year. Since then, most tea trade unions are reluctant to accept fresh agreements and want the minimum wage fixed.

As discussions on minimum wage is in progress, the state labour minister had held talks with the planters' fraternity and had announced an interim daily hike of Rs 17.50 over the existing wage rate (of Rs 137.50) on March this year. The rate was made effective from January, 2018.

This decision had prompted non-Trinamul trade unions and parties like BJP and the Left to slam the state.

The matter also figured in panchayat poll campaign.

"Our government wanted to ensure that unless the minimum wage rate is fixed, workers get some additional money as wages. But the Opposition, including the BJP, criticised the decision. We will now apprise tea workers about Assam where the same decision was made. People should know that BJP takes different stands in different states," said Sharma.

As the development has made Trinamul draw a new strategy to thwart BJP from consolidating support in tea belts, a section of BJP leader play ignorant and unperturbed.

"We don't have any information about decision of interim hike on tea wages in Assam. But in Bengal, we are against the measly interim relief provided to workers will stick to our stand. Our only demand is that the state should immediately fix and implement minimum wage in tea gardens," said Manoj Tigga, the BJP MLA from Madarihat-Birpara.

"All parties in the Opposition, the BJP in particular, raised the question of delay in minimum wage fixation time and again during campaign. It is obvious now that as Trinamul has got a chance to prove the difference in BJP's stand in the neighbouring states and that too in the same sector, it will not leave the opportunity," said an observer.

**Source:** <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/west-bengal/double-standard-slur-at-bjp-on-tea-wages-238493>