

Dharna on tea minimum pay



Siliguri: Representatives of the Joint Forum, which comprises 24 trade unions of tea garden workers, except those of Trinamul, held a five-hour dharna at Uttarkanya here on Monday after a meeting to discuss the minimum wage for the sector ended.

The dharna was launched with a demand that the labour department that called the meeting take a decision on the wage immediately.

The forum also announced a three-day tea industry strike in the Terai and the Dooars from Tuesday and said tea would not be dispatched from gardens in the hills during the three days.

After the meeting started, labour commissioner Javed Akhtar said the state was proposing a minimum daily wage of Rs 172. As of now, a tea worker in Bengal earns Rs 159 in day. The Trinamul-backed unions appreciated the proposal.

However, those from the forum rejected it outright and placed a counter proposal of Rs 239 per day.

The labour commissioner said another round of talks would be held in Calcutta on August 20.

The forum, however, demanded that the meeting continue till a final decision was taken. The labour officials, representatives of tea planters and even some trade union leaders left the meeting hall.

This made the forum leaders launch a sit-in inside Uttarkanya - the first protest at the north Bengal branch secretariat. #
"We wanted the meeting to continue till a decision is taken. There is no point of calling yet another meeting on the issue that has been dragged on for three years," said Alok Chakraborty, an Intuc leader based in Siliguri.

Leaders of Trinamul-backed trade union said they would oppose the strike.

"The forum has political intentions. We were waiting for the August 20 meeting but they plan to foil the negotiations. From Tuesday, we will put all efforts to ensure that normality prevails in gardens," said Prabhat Mukherjee, the vice-president of the Cha Bagan Trinamul Congress Mazdoor Union.

Around 10pm, senior labour department officials and Siliguri police officers assured those on the dhara that there would be another session at Uttarkanya at 4pm on Tuesday in continuation of Monday's meeting.

Following the assurance, the dharna was withdrawn.

Source: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/west-bengal/dharna-on-tea-minimum-pay-250516>