

## Tea minimum pay rush with eye on polls

**AVIJIT SINHA** Siliguri: Senior officials of the state labour department will soon draw up the recommendations to fix and implement the minimum wage for tea workers of Bengal and will submit it to the state. The move indicates that the Mamata Banerjee government wants to resolve the issue ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

On Thursday, a meeting of the minimum wage advisory board was held in Siliguri to discuss the issues before the wage rate is finalised. The board has labour officials and representatives of tea planters' associations and tea trade unions as members and was formed by the state back in 2015.

Trade union leaders said the move clearly indicates that Trinamul does not want the BJP to take mileage ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. In neighbouring Assam, the largest tea producing state in India, the announcement of a new minimum wage is just a matter of time.

In Assam, the current daily wage rate is Rs 167 while it is Rs 176 in Bengal.

"As of now, the daily wage rate is higher in Bengal than Assam, but only marginally. However, unlike Bengal, the Assam government has already proposed a composite daily wage rate of Rs 351.33 and has sought opinions from planters so that it can be finalised. It is obvious that Mamata Banerjee and her party colleagues will never want Assam to announce the minimum wage first," said a senior trade union leader.

"If the state manages to announce the minimum wage ahead of Assam, it would largely help Trinamul in galvanizing support in the tea belt and simultaneously use the issue while campaigning against BJP during the Parliament polls," said an observer.

In Bengal, there are at least four Parliament constituencies where results depend on votes of the tea population.

"We have also said that the next meeting, where some recommendations are likely to be drawn up, should be held within December 21," said Mani Kumar Darnal, the joint general secretary of Intuc-backed National Union of Plantation Workers.

Those representing the planters however, maintained that the consumption units per worker should be less than 1:3, as has been demanded by the unions.

"We have however, mentioned that the number of dependants should be less as in tea sector, there are many families where there two workers," said Prabir Bhattacharjee, secretary general, Tea Association of India (TAI)..

**SOURCE:** [https://epaper.telegraphindia.com/textview\\_240618\\_141036116\\_4\\_8\\_14-12-2018\\_72\\_0.html](https://epaper.telegraphindia.com/textview_240618_141036116_4_8_14-12-2018_72_0.html)