

Plight of tea garden workers in North Bengal raised in Lok Sabha

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NEW DELHI: A BJP member in Lok Sabha today highlighted the pitiable condition of tea garden labourers in West Bengal, saying 2000 of them have died since 2002 due to starvation and disease, prompting the government to assure a comprehensive reply on the issue.

S S Ahluwalia, who represents Darjeeling, said since 2002, 2000 such workers have died due to starvation and illness, out of which 70 have died this year alone.

He claimed the 1951 Plantation Labour Act governing tea gardens was biased towards owners and management who often escaped their responsibility while shutting down the facilities.

Ahluwalia claimed that while Kerala and Karnataka paid a minimum wage of Rs 254 per day to tea garden labourers, their counterparts in West Bengal get Rs 112 per day.

He said these workers should be brought under the ambit of Food Security Act and treated as those living below the poverty line.

Sugata Bose (TMC) said the West Bengal government, despite difficulties, was implementing the Food Security Act. He and his party colleagues also said they were sensitive to the condition of tea garden workers.

Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman termed the issue as a "matter of concern" and pointed out that she has been to the gardens. She assured the House that she would come up with a "comprehensive statement" on the issue.

S Rajendran (AIADMK) raised the issue of workers of salt industry in Tamil Nadu saying they have suffered due to the recent rains as their entire produce has been washed away.

Shreemati Teacher (CPI-M) said while women have started getting their due in local bodies, major parties in Parliament are stalling the Women's Reservation Bill "in the name of consensus". She demanded that the Bill which seeks to provide 33 per cent reservation to women in Lok Sabha and state assemblies be passed at the earliest.

Dharamvir Gandhi (AAP) said a US citizen of Indian origin was recently held while attending 'Sarbat Khalsa' (a religious meeting of the community) and urged the Centre to look into the issue and seek details from the Punjab government in the name of natural justice. A heated exchange of words broke out between him and SAD's Sher Singh Ghubaya on the issue.

Manoj Rajoria (BJP) said against the backdrop of reports of adulteration in products like Maggi and Pepsi, there was a need to check the fast-food being sold by outlets such as KFC and McDonalds. He said the standard of food served by these outlets in India and Europe should be the same and this should be ensured.



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