

Gogoi gifts buses to tea gardens, gives away land deeds

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Dibrugarh: Chief minister Tarun Gogoi has showered his bounty on the tea tribes, apparently to keep the traditional supporters of Congress in good humour and ensure their votes in the ensuing assembly election.

The CM launched the the Bagan Bus (Tea Garden Bus) scheme, land patta (land deed) and Bagan Ghar (Tea Garden house) for the tea garden community and the state's landless and ex-tea workers here on Sunday. Flagging off a fleet of 18 ASTC buses, christened Bagan Bus, under the chief minister's Bagan Bus Scheme on an old government HS school playground, Gogoi said the bus services would end the transport and communication problems in the tea garden areas.

"Communication will not be a problem any more in the tea gardens. Now, the tea community students won't have to walk or cycle 10-15 km everyday to go to schools. The bus service will be free for the students, aged people, pensioners and widows," he said. The route, timing and frequency of the buses will be notified shortly.

Lauding the initiative, state tea tribes welfare minister Atuwa Munda said the private operators were reluctant to ply buses in tea gardens as they found it unprofitable. The communication bottleneck will end now, Munda said.

The CM also launched a Bagan Ghar (Tea Garden house) scheme. As part of the scheme, the beneficiary will be provided a financial assistance of Rs 25,000 to construct houses. In addition to this, a loan of Rs 50,000 will also be provided to them at marginal interest.

Gogoi initiated the land patta (land deed) scheme for the landless and ex-tea workers. Over 2,700 land pattas were handed over

to the beneficiaries in the first phase. Each beneficiary will be entitled to land measuring 1 bigha and 7 lessa. The move is touted as a master stroke by Gogoi as tea workers constitute a major chunk of population mainly in upper Assam.

The tea community has been traditionally Congress supporters and they have been playing a decisive role in every state elections. "I am a son of tea garden. I was born and brought up in a tea garden in Titabor. I studied in a tea garden school. No one can feel the pain and anguish of tea workers better than me. Our government is doing everything to uplift the condition of tea tribes through various schemes," said Gogoi addressing a gathering of over 10,000 workers.