

Tea Board to take over 7 closed tea gardens in North Bengal

Press Trust of India | Jalpaiguri (WB) January 30, 2016 Last Updated at 20:02 IST

The BJP MP from Darjeeling, S S Ahluwalia today said the Union ministry of Commerce and Industry has asked the Tea Board to take over the management of seven tea estates in North Bengal.

The concerned plantations were Birpara, Hamtapara, Garganda, Lankapara, Dhumchipara and Dimdima and the move was initiated on January 28 as per provisions of the Tea Act, 1953, Ahluwalia told PTI here.

They were located in Terai and Dooars belt.

To a question about the fate of other 31 tea estates closed in the region, the BJP MP said while seven tea estates were being served notice, the same process will be followed in other closed plantations in future.

The seven gardens, Ahluwalia said, will be managed by Tea Board but the owners will have to clear pending dues to workers otherwise the law will take its own course.

Meanwhile, Tea Labourers' Joint Coordination Forum Convenor Mani Kumar Durnal welcomed the step but wanted to know the modalities to immediately maintain the plantations keeping in view the leaf plucking season in February.

UTUC Chairman Nirmal Das said, "while notification has been issued for seven tea gardens that is not enough. Since altogether 38 tea estates had been closed and there is no clearcut indication about the fate of the rest.

Das said the state and Centre were involved in a blame game over the affairs of tea gardens "even as the outstanding dues of labourers remained unpaid."

Union Minister of State for Commerce & Industry Nirmala Sitharaman had visited the tea gardens in the region along with Ahluwalia few weeks back.

"West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had also urged me to ensure the Centre do something for the tea gardens during her visit to New Delhi in past," Ahluwalia said talking about the events preceding the Centre's move.

The Tea Act empowers the Central government to assume management control of a tea undertaking or tea unit if the unit has made losses in three out of five years or the average yield of the tea has been lower than the district average yield by 25 per cent or more.