

Vows to look into woes of tea garden workers

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Dibrugarh: Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday interacted with leaders of the tea tribe community in Sivasagar during the first leg of his whirlwind tour of the state on Monday.

Rahul, who arrived here after addressing a rally in chief minister Tarun Gogoi's home constituency in Titabar (Jorhat), met the representatives of various groups, including Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association, Asom Chah Mazdoor Sangha, Assam Pradesh Tea and Ex-Tea Mazdoor Congress, Asom Chah Jangosthi Sahitya Sabha and All Adivasi Students' Association. A range of issues like minimum daily wages, ration, provident fund, gratuity, bonus, housing, electricity, health and drinking water facility were raised.

The Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association demanded the implementation of Plantation Labour Act, 1952, by the tea industry. Another prominent issue which found a place at the meeting was granting of ST status to tea tribe people living in the state. Rahul, who gave a patient hearing to all the participants, promised to take up the issues.

It may be mentioned that the tea tribe community, which constitutes the second largest vote block after the caste Assamese, has been playing a decisive role in every election in the state. The adivasi voters have traditionally been staunch supporters of Congress. However, BJP was able to make inroads into the Congress bastion in tea gardens in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. Congress has been trying to reclaim lost ground since then.

The tea garden community accounts for about 30% of the total voters in 35 of 126 assembly constituencies of the state and plays a decisive role in the polls.

Chief minister Tarun Gogoi, in an apparent attempt to woo the community, had recently started the bagan ghar (tea garden house) and bagan bus (tea garden bus) schemes. He also launched the land patta (land deed) programme for the state's landless tea workers.

Recently, the state Congress reactivated its tea cell and rechristened it as Assam Pradesh Tea and Ex-Tea Mazdoor Congress department to extend its ambit among the community by reaching out to tea workers and former tea workers living in villages near the tea gardens and urban pockets.