

Tea estates clear workers' wages

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DIBRUGARH: The brief period of uncertainty over the issue of payment to tea garden workers in the state following the Centre's demonetization drive has finally come to an end with most tea gardens being able to pay wages to their workforce.

In the upper Assam tea belt comprising Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat districts - which has around 380 of the 850-odd big tea gardens of the state - the process of wage disbursement began from Sunday afternoon following intervention by the state government.

The gardens had been unable to pay their workers due to acute shortage of lower denomination notes. Most tea gardens pay wages on a fortnightly basis, on Fridays and Saturdays, and in cash.

General secretary of Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS) Dileswar Tanti said most tea gardens had been able to pay workers by Tuesday evening.

"On Sunday, around 20% of the tea gardens in the upper Assam districts were able to pay their workers after withdrawing cash from banks. Since Monday was a bank holiday, the remaining gardens have started paying from Tuesday. The process should finish today or by tomorrow (Wednesday) morning," Tanti said.

General secretary of ACMS's Dibrugarh circle Nabin Chandra Keot said all 121 tea gardens in the district had paid their workers.

On Sunday, 28 tea gardens had paid their dues while the remaining made their payments on Tuesday.

"Approximately, Rs 15 crore is needed to pay the fortnightly wages of tea garden workers in Dibrugarh district. The SBI made special arrangement for small denomination notes following instructions from the government. We hope that the workers don't face any difficulties. We wholeheartedly support demonetization as it is a fight against corruption and black money. At the same time, the poor workers should not face any harassment," Keot said.

The state has around 9 lakh tea garden workers, of which 4 lakh workers are temporary. All of them are paid a daily wage of Rs 126.