

## ECONOMY

# Payment deadlock broken for West Bengal tea-garden workers



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The deadlock over payment of wages to tea-garden workers in West Bengal seems to have been broken. Payment modalities through the State administration have been finalised and banks have agreed to set up facilities at all the gardens by March 2017.

Garden managements have also been told by the State government to help the workers to open bank accounts by March 31, 2017. It has been decided that the RBI will arrange for necessary currency including current and arrear wage dues.

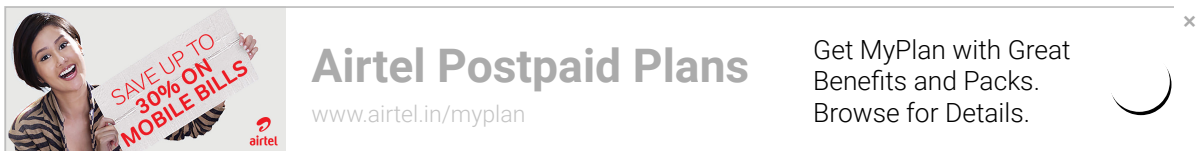
It may be mentioned that hitches over routing payment through district magistrates, slapping of formula on garden owners, limiting payouts and lack of banking facilities had all compounded to cause misery for the nearly five lakh workers in West Bengal's 287 gardens . As

a result after some initial payouts, wage payment has all but stopped and the workers have dues for two fortnights now (since end-November).

The thaw followed a conference by West Bengal Chief Secretary with top RBI officials here, a day after RBI Governor Urjit Patel's meeting with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

It has been decided that while in areas where the financing bank is able to provide funds, payment will be through direct-banking mode. In other areas, the concerned DM will route the funds and this system will continue till January 31 or till banks are able to provide facilities in each garden.

It was decided at that meeting that all banks will set up ATMs, micro ATMs or business correspondents in all tea gardens by March 31. Garden owners will facilitate accounts opening and an employers' certificate would suffice as KYC norm. ITA secretary general Arijit Raha welcomed the initiative, but hoped that adequate funds would be made available through the banking system.



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