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| Wednesday , January 4 , 2017 |

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Cash push for tea wage

Abhranila Das



Calcutta, Jan. 3: The Centre is pushing tea gardens to pay the wages of their workers entirely in cash by proposing to alter the definition of "wages" in the Plantation Labour Act (PLA), 1951 through Plantation Labour (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

At present, PLA follows the definition provided by the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, which reads: "Wage means all remuneration, capable of being expressed in terms of money, which would be payable to a person employed ... (and includes house rent allowance)."

Tea workers were so far paid in both cash and kind.

The new definition proposed by the Centre reads: "Wage means all remuneration, whether by way of salary, allowances or otherwise, which would be payable to a worker only in cash in respect of his employment ... and includes any house rent allowance."

"We have been demanding the payment of wages fully in cash for a very long time and the Centre's move will help us a lot," said a tea union leader.

The daily cash wage of garden workers in Assam Valley is Rs 137. In Bengal, it is Rs 132.5. While in Kerala the daily wage is Rs 310.04, in Karnataka it is Rs 263.29. Tamil Nadu pays Rs 241.31 daily.

"In view of the proposed amendment, more clarity is necessary as to whether the employer would also have to provide the 'kind' benefit along with cash," said an industry veteran.

The ministry of labour and employment will hold its first meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday to discuss the proposed bill with stakeholders, including representatives from producer groups and workers unions.

Officials from Bengal, Assam and various tea-growing states in south India are also expected to join the discussion.

The Centre also plans to insert a new provision in the PLA to create an "appropriate agency" by the Centre, state government, municipality or panchayat.

Various social and public welfare schemes for the workers may be implemented by this agency. The agency will also have the power to draw up new schemes.

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