

Darjeeling tea planters asked to resume operations, give bonus

IANS | Kolkata September 18, 2017 Last Updated at 19:52 IST

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said tea garden owners in the Darjeeling hills have been asked to resume operations and pay bonus dues to workers for 2016-17.

"The Chief Secretary today (Monday) met tea garden owners and asked them to resume operations and pay bonus to plantation workers. A tripartite meeting between representatives of the state government, tea garden owners, and workers' unions will be held on September 21 at Siliguri in the presence of Labour Commissioner to take a decision on the issue," she told reporters at the state Secretariat Nabanna.

Banerjee indicated action if bonus was not paid to the workers. "We do not want to take any action but hope a decision will be taken in the said meeting," she said.

West Bengal Chief Secretary Malay Kumar De, earlier in the day called officials of the Darjeeling Tea Association (DTA) and the Indian Tea Association (ITA) to initiate a dialogue to resolve the stalemate.

Gorkha Janmukti Morcha leaders Binay Tamang and Anit Thapa met Banerjee on Monday to urge for initiatives to make tea gardens in Darjeeling resume operations. They also sought payment of due bonus.

"The two associations were asked to resume operations in Darjeeling. We said the tea gardens were open but it were the workers who were not coming. The Chief Secretary asked us to meet the workers unions and directed the Labour Secretary and Labour Commissioner to hold the September 21 meeting," ITA Chairman Azam Monem told IANS.

"Issues like how to get the tea garden workers to work, and bonus and other issues were discussed. We have started dialogue and let's see what can be done," he said.

All tea plucking and manufacturing operations at the 87 tea gardens in Darjeeling have remained suspended since June 9 due to the indefinite shutdown called by the GJM in the region in support of their demand for a separate Gorkhaland.

Tea planters had moved the Tea Board of India for financial support to meet their obligations.

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