

Tea workers' wages hiked

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Darjeeling : Here's a sliver of hope for tea garden workers in the state. An agreement has finally been reached to include the deducted ration amount and increase workers' wages from April.

Tea garden workers are paid Rs 132.50 as daily wage. The amount is arrived at after deducting the accumulated fringe benefits (ration, medical and firewood, among others) that adds up to Rs 157 from the total amount (Rs 289).

“On Monday, a meeting of the Minimum Wage Advisory Committee (MWAC) was convened in Kolkata. Several issues, including wages and bonus, related to tea gardens of the Hills were discussed. The garden management usually deducts Rs 24 towards ration benefit. We had

demanded the deducted amount be added to the wage as the state government was providing ration in subsidized rates. The management initially refused but later agreed to add only Rs 9 to the wages, which we have agreed to,” said Bharat Thakuri, general secretary of the Darjeeling Terai Dooars Plantation Labour Union.

The MWAC is represented by members from the state government, tea garden management and the trade union.

Recently, at a tripartite meeting in Siliguri on workers' wage, an agreement was reached to increase the wage by Rs 17.50, which also was an interim agreement. This implies that on the whole, the workers will henceforth receive Rs 159 as daily wage from the existing Rs 132.50.

“For the time being, we’ve agreed to the management’s decision given the prevailing conditions of the tea gardens. But we’ll keep talking to the managements and the government for further wage hike,” Thakuri said.