

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY
(DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE)

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 4796
TO BE ANSWERED ON 24th MARCH, 2021

TEA AND CINCHONA PLANTATION WORKERS

4796. SHRI RAJU BISTA:

Will the Minister of **COMMERCE & INDUSTRY** (वाणिज्य एवं उद्योग मंत्री) be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the COVID-19 pandemic has brought acute financial distress to tea and cinchona garden workers, who are already paid lesser than minimum wages;
- (b) if so, whether any provisions have been made by the ministry towards extending financial assistance to the tea and cinchona plantation workers during/after the COVID-19 lockdown;
- (c) if so, the details thereof;
- (d) whether the Darjeeling Tea Industry is still awaiting payment of subsidies earmarked for them under various schemes;
- (e) if so, the time when the Tea Board of India is likely to clear all subsidy payments due to the tea growers, both small and large in the Darjeeling hills, Terai and Dooars region; and
- (f) the steps that are being taken by the Government to provide relief to tea growers, both large and small, following the COVID pandemic?

ANSWER

वाणिज्य एवं उद्योग मंत्रालय में राज्य मंत्री (श्री हरदीप सिंह पुरी)

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND I NDUSTRY
(SHRI HARDEEP SINGH PURI)

(a) to (c): Plantation workers are covered by the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 which inter-alia provides for the welfare of plantation workers including tea workers and cinchona workers. The Tea Board is also extending certain welfare measures for the tea workers and their

wards/dependants, which are supplemental in nature. The labour welfare measures are being undertaken within the ambit of the Human Resource Development (HRD) component under the Tea Development & Promotion Scheme.

The workers are also covered by various industrial and social security legislations such as Employees Compensation Act, 1923, Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972, Payment of Bonus Act, 1965, Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, Payment of Wages Act, 1936, Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 and Industrial Employment (Standing Order) Act, 1946 as applicable. The fixation of minimum wages for workers falls under the purview of State Governments, which are the appropriate Government to fix/revise the minimum wages as per the provision under the Minimum wages Act, 1948. Moreover, the wages of tea garden workers are fixed as per agreement reached between producer associations and workers' unions. The Central Government has announced a special scheme to be implemented during 2021-22 to 2025-26, with budgetary outlay of Rs.1000 cr. for the welfare of tea workers especially women and their children in the States of Assam & West Bengal

(d) & (e): Subsidy claims received from Tea growers of the country including Darjeeling, are settled as per the guidelines of the Tea Development and Promotion Scheme. Subsidies related to long term development activities like uprooting & replanting, rejuvenation pruning and infilling, become due for payment after a gap of a few years, which creates some backlog. During the period 2017-18 till February, 2021, the Tea Board has provided financial assistance of Rs. 71.58 Crore in the State of West Bengal, including Rs. 8.31 Crore for the Darjeeling Hills.

(f) In wake of COVID-19 pandemic, the Government/RBI have taken various policy measures to ease the financial stress in various Sectors including Tea by providing relief on debt servicing, improving access to working capital, grant of moratorium till 31st August, 2020 on payment of all installments in respect of term loans, etc. In addition, to ensure that farmers do not pay higher interest during moratorium period, the benefit of 2% Interest Subvention and 3% Prompt Repayment Incentive were also extended to them.
