

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma for annual hike of tea garden workers' wages

By: PTI July 04, 2021 10:11 PM

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Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday pitched for a "decent practice" of increasing wages of tea garden workers annually to ensure that a seamless working atmosphere is maintained.

The annual increase will also help reduce the sudden burden that tea garden managements face when wages are hiked after three or four years, he said.

"My idea is that instead of waiting for three or four years, there should be an increase (in wages) every year," Sarma said during a launch of an incentive scheme for the tea industry of the state.

"A decent practice should be adopted, which will ensure that there is no tension among the workers and work can go on in a seamless atmosphere," he said.

The chief minister also advocated a change in the "hybrid model" of paying wages to the workers.

Traditionally, tea wages are largely paid in two components -cash and kind. The kind includes ration, health services, education and other facilities.

"Time has come to change this hybrid model as it helps no one. We have already initiated discussion with (tea garden workers') unions to move towards cash-only mode," he said.

The daily wage of tea garden workers in the state was hiked by Rs 38 after the new government was formed in May.

The chief minister also said the government will provide tapped water to all tea garden workers by the end of March next year.

A proposal under the "Jal Jeevan Mission" has been placed before the tea garden owners at Sunday's meeting, he said.

If the proposal is acceptable to the management of tea gardens, a scheme will be announced in the state budget on July 16. Moreover, piped cooking gas will also be provided to houses of the tea garden workers in the Upper Assam districts which are covered by Assam Gas Company, Sarma added.

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