

Bengal Trade Unions hit out at Tea Board Directive to Celebrate 75 Years of Independence

Criticising the order, several tea trade unions in North Bengal have asked what the central government had done for the approximately six lakh tea workers since 2014.

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A recent directive by the tea board asking workers in the tea plantations of North Bengal to celebrate 75 years of India's Independence from the British rule has been strongly criticised by the unions.

On September 2, a tea board official issued a directive to all tea estates and small tea growers to commemorate 75 years of Independence on September 26 through 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'. The order came after the Independence Day celebrations of August 15 had already passed.

Several tea trade unions in the region hit out at the tea board's directive asking what the Narendra Modi-led central government had done for the approximately six lakh tea workers in North Bengal, the *Telegraph* [reported](#).

According to the directive, the tea estates workers congregated on Sunday in their respective tea gardens to sing the National Anthem while holding a predesigned banner sent to them.

Besides, the tea estates' managements were directed to distribute a packet of 250 grams or 500 grams of tea to each worker for participating in the celebrations. So, after the event, the workers stood in queues to accept the token packets of tea.

"No one has a problem if the workers sing the National Anthem. But the larger question is when the country is celebrating its 75th year of Independence, all that a tea worker gets is a packet of tea," Mannalal Jain, a representative of Cha Bagan Trinamul Congress Mazdoor Union, told the *Telegraph*.

Jain said that the impoverished tea workers had been seeing the Prime Minister and the Union ministers making tall claims about the development of tea workers but no initiative has taken a concrete shape yet.

Unions have also pointed out that the commitments made by central ministers to speed up the re-opening of closed tea estates has not been followed through so far.

Ahead of the Assembly elections in Bengal and Assam this year, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharamana had announced Rs 1,000 crore in the budget for the welfare of the tea estate workers, especially women and children. However, unions say no fund has reached or been allocated to any of the tea gardens even though the year is nearing end.

The tea workers' unions have been fighting for better working conditions and several other demands for a long time. In the absence of support from both the Bharatiya Janata Party-led central government and the Trinamool Congress-led state government, the tea workers and those dependent on the tea trade have been struggling with their livelihoods.

Earlier this month, tea workers across political lines met at a convention in Darjeeling, North Bengal, in the latest move to bolster their fight. They decided to unitedly fight to attain minimum wages and wage restructuring, among other things.

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