

TMC tea unions fail to merge

Alipurduar: Mamata Banerjee's initiative to merge all tea garden trade unions affiliated to the INTTUC, the trade union of the Trinamul Congress, is yet to fructify.

After Trinamul had come to power in Bengal, a number of tea trade unions backed by the INTTUC started functioning in north, particularly in the Terai and the Dooars.

The presence of multiple unions led to confusion within the party and among tea garden workers.

"Other political parties have just one trade union each in the tea industry. But in case of Trinamul, the situation has been completely different since 2011. As many as five-six tea trade unions were floated by leaders of separate lobbies of the party, which led to the confusion," said a senior Trinamul leader in Jalpaiguri.

The confusion continued till August 2016 when Mamata herself took the initiative and announced the formation of the Cha Bagan Trinamul Congress Mazdoor Union (CBTCMU) to end the dispute. Mohan Sharma, the district Trinamul president of Alipurduar, was made its chairman.

"After it was floated, our party supremo had categorically said all other unions should be dissolved and leaders in other unions should join hands and work together," said Sharma.

Despite such instructions, some other unions continued to function, much to the displeasure of Trinamul leaders.

Recently, the disagreements among the unions surfaced again as two unions, the CBTCMU and the Terai Dooars Plantation Workers' Union (TDPWU), announced different set of agitation programmes.

The agitation was announced to counter the Joint Forum, the apex body of tea unions excluding those of Trinamul, that has lined up agitation throughout July.

On one hand, Sharma, who heads the CBTCMU, has said it will hold meetings at entrances to tea estates on July, 6, 7 and 9, put posters and banners demanding minimum wages. Also, on July 9, there will be a 24-hour long hunger strike at the tea board's office in Siliguri and demonstration in front of central government offices on July 16. The CBTCMU is opposing the strike called by the Joint Forum.

On the other hand, the TDPWU has started gate meetings in tea gardens from July 2 that will continue till Wednesday. These are the days when the Joint Forum is also convening similar meetings.

Also, the union, despite being backed by Trinamul, is yet to decide whether it would support the three-day strike.

"We are an older tea union and have considerable support base. On Thursday, we will hold a meeting to decide on our further course of action like launching demonstration in central government offices," said Badal Dasgupta, general secretary, TDPWU.

Asked whether different programmes by unions of same party would lead to misperception among workers, he claimed that their plans were approved by state Trinamul leaders.

A Trinamul leader in Alipurduar, however, differed.

"Different set of programmes by multiple unions would surely leave the workers confused. The Joint Forum has announced its set of programmes and now, if we need to counter it, we will have to be together and work on a single plan. It is disappointing that some trade union leaders of our party are not realising the fact," he said.