

Tea forum issues general strike call

Alipurduar: Leaders of the Joint Forum, the apex body of tea unions other than those backed by Trinamul, said on Tuesday that they would call a 12-hour general strike on July 24 in the tea-producing areas of north Bengal, except the Darjeeling hills, to mount pressure on the state to fix minimum wages.

"We have launched protests since the beginning of this month. Unless any major decision is made on our demand, we will go ahead and observe a three-day strike in tea industry from July 23 to July 25. On July 24, that is, on the second day of the tea strike, we will call a 12-hour general strike and will approach people to support us," said Ziaur Alam, convenor, Joint Forum.

The general strike would be called in the sub-divisions of Siliguri, Islampur and Mekhliganj and in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar, he said. All these areas are tea-producing zones.

Alam also claimed that the Bharatiya Tea Workers' Union (BTWU), backed by the BJP, is a constituent of the forum.

On Monday, BTWU leaders had held a meeting in Birpara and decided to launch movement on tea workers' issues. "They can always take up programmes as an individual trade union but they are in the forum as a constituent," said a representative of the apex body.

The forum's plan to go ahead with its three-day industry strike and the 12-hour general strike has left Trinamul leaders of the region under pressure.

"This is because they are against the strike but want minimum wages to be fixed. The Trinamul-backed trade unions have also taken up programmes on their own during this month. Now that trade unions of all our political contenders are in a same platform and supporting the strike, it would be a tough task for them to try and persuade the workforce to join their work," said an observer.

Otherwise, he said, questions would be raised again over the support base of Trinamul and its trade unions in the tea belt.

Mohon Sharma, chairman, Cha Bagan Trinamul Congress Mazdoor Union, however, is confident to persuade the workers.

"By observing strike, workers never get benefitted and instead, lose a day's wage. We will try to apprise workers about their losses and that the state is working on the issue of minimum wage," Mohon Sharma said.

Source: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/west-bengal/tea-forum-issues-general-strike-call-244015?ref=west-bengal-new-stry>