

Seventeenth Loksabha

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Title: Regarding conduct of 3-tier panchayat elections in Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts.

**SHRI RAJU BISTA (DARJEELING):** Sir, the hilly regions of Darjeeling and Kalimpong have run without Panchayat since 2006. Our region was kept deprived of the Constitutionally guaranteed grassroots level governance system for 16 years. This has resulted in massive developmental depravation in the region. Various Central Government schemes initiated by the hon. Prime Minister have not reached the people properly. Our people are deprived of basic roads, drinking water, schools, healthcare and all Government schemes. Apart from not conducting Panchayat elections, the Government of West Bengal was appropriating the Panchayat funds meant for hilly regions of Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts. The Central Government finally stopped funding meant for Panchayats in the hills under the 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission. Following which, the West Bengal Government announced for conducting Panchayat elections in the region. The West Bengal Government says that they will only conduct 2-tier Panchayat elections. This is being done to further deprive our region and people, as 2-tier Panchayat system is unconstitutional. It is because of such deliberate acts of discrimination and deprivation by the West Bengal Government like this that there have been *andolans* for separate State of Gorkhaland. Therefore, respecting the sentiments of people, I request the Ministry of Rural Development to order conducting of 3-tier Panchayat Elections in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong Districts.