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Title: Need for Central assistance to address the problems being faced by the Tea Garden workers in West Bengal.

SHRI BIJOY CHANDRA BARMAN (JALPAIGURI): I would like to draw the attention of the Government towards the alleged starvation deaths of tea garden workers in Jalpaigudi, West Bengal. In view of media report about 'starvation deaths' of tea garden workers in west Bengal, the ground realities have been verified. The workers of the tea gardens are the worst sufferers of the system and are impoverished in spite of being engaged in the organized tea sector which is one of the most profit-making industries in our country. They have been deprived of basic working and living condition due to the unconcerned attitude of the garden owners. Rampant violations of PLA (Plantation Labour Act), which envisages mandatory protection of rights of the workers are very common. Their wages are abysmally low and stagnated over almost 50 years and never linked to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) causing distress, poverty sometimes even unrest. Sudden closure of tea gardens by the owners on the pretext of loss have been common. However, all the required measures have been taken, including the offer to provide support to 30 stressed or closed tea gardens/industry owners and a revision was done in wages of the workers through tripartite agreement. But, whatever steps have been taken so far are not enough to mitigate their sufferings. Hence, the Central Government should bear some responsibility in this regard. The erratic weather condition with scanty and excessive rainfall have been affecting the quantity & quality of production. Proper re-plantation of old tea bushes also could not be carried out due to paucity of funds. As a whole, the future of tea sector in Himalayan footsteps including the world famous Darjeeling tea is in the dark. In this situation, I urge upon the Hon'ble Minister of Commerce & Industry and Hon'ble Finance Minister to take the issue seriously and extend help to the State Government for revival of tea gardens in West Bengal.