

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We can discuss your suggestion. ...*(Interruptions)*... Now, I have started Zero Hour. Shri Tapan Kumar Sen. ...*(Interruptions)*... Only what Mr. Tapan Kumar Sen says will go on record. ...*(Interruptions)*... Only what Mr. Tapan Kumar Sen says will go on record. Nothing else will go on record. ...*(Interruptions)*... Shri Tapan Kumar Sen. ...*(Interruptions)*... Nothing else will go on record. ...*(Interruptions)*... Mr. Tapan Kumar Sen, you may speak.

MATTERS RAISED WITH PERMISSION

Problems being faced by mid-day meal workers

SHRI TAPAN KUMAR SEN (West Bengal): Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, I rise to draw the attention of the entire House to the fact that today more than 10,000 mid-day meal workers, all of them women workers, from all over the country, are holding a demonstration, pressing for the Government to respond to some burning issues concerning them. Around 24 lakh mid-day meal workers are executing the Central Government's flagship scheme for feeding about 12 crore children throughout the country under the schooling system. They are playing an important role in promoting the primary and secondary education system in our country. But they are doing this job in lieu of a pittance. They hail from the poorest and downtrodden section of the society, but getting only thousand rupees, that too for ten months out of twelve months in a year. Sir, at the same time, a move was there to hand over the scheme to corporates and NGOs like Vendanta, Reliance, Iskcon, and Naandi Foundation. This also militates against the basic concept of the scheme with which it was introduced that 'immediately cooked hot food will be supplied to the students'. Sir, I urge upon the Government to refrain from such move and wherever that has been taken that must be retraced. Secondly, the 45th Indian Labour Conference -- it was a tripartite conference involving State Governments, Central Government, Trade Unions and Employers' Organisations -- was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister in May 2013. In the Conference, there was a consensus decision across the political forces, because all State Governments and Central Government were there, to recognize mid-day meal workers, and along with them all other similar Central Government scheme workers, as workers so that they can get, at least, the minimum wage and social security benefits. Today, after working for 30-35 years, they go home just empty handed. They are the poorest section of the working people in our country. So, I insist the Government -- the hon. Minister was just here; I am sorry, at the crucial moment, she has gone out -- to consider, at least, the consensus recommendation. I repeat again, consider, at least, the consensus recommendation of the Central Government, State Governments, respective Ministries, all trade union organizations and all employers' organizations.

In the said Conference, the then Minister has also announced that their remuneration will be increased by thousand rupees. ...(*Interruptions*)...

श्री उपसभापति: अब आपका माइक ऑफ हो गया है। Time is over. ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI C.P. NARAYANAN (Kerala): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

SHRI RITABRATA BANERJEE (West Bengal): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

SHRIMATI KANAK LATA SINGH (Uttar Pradesh): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

SHRIMATI JHARNA DAS BAIDYA (Tripura): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

DR. T.N. SEEMA (Kerala): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

SHRI SUKHENDU SEKHAR ROY (West Bengal): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

SHRIMATI JAYA BACHCHAN (Uttar Pradesh): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

SHRIMATI RAJANI PATIL (Maharashtra): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

SHRIMATI WANSUK SYIEM (Meghalaya): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

SHRI SANTIUSE KUJUR (Assam): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

SHRI PANKAJ BORA (Assam): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

SHRI T.K. RANGARAJAN (Tamil Nadu): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

SHRI D. RAJA (Tamil Nadu): Sir, I associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

श्री के.सी. त्यागी (बिहार): महोदय, मैं स्वयं को इस विषय के साथ सम्बद्ध करता हूँ।

श्री प्रवीण राष्ट्रपाल (गुजरात): महोदय, मैं स्वयं को इस विषय के साथ सम्बद्ध करता हूँ।

श्रीमती विजयलक्ष्मी साधौ (मध्य प्रदेश): महोदय, मैं स्वयं को इस विषय के साथ सम्बद्ध करती हूँ।

श्रीमती नाजनीन फारूख (असम): महोदय, मैं स्वयं को इस विषय के साथ सम्बद्ध करती हूँ।

**Concern over the situation due to closed and abandoned tea gardens in
Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts**

SHRI SRINJOY BOSE (West Bengal): Respected Deputy Chairman, Sir, my Zero Hour mention is about the serious concern over the situation prevailing in the closed and abandoned tea gardens in Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts.

As of now, nearly 3500 workers in the five closed and abandoned tea gardens are facing a very uncertain future and are forced to undergo severe hardships. The tea gardens facing severe problems are Dheklapara in Birpara, Bundapani in Alipurduar, Redbank in Jalpaiguri, Surendranagar in Jalpaiguri and Raipur in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal.

I seek immediate action under the relevant provisions of the Tea Act, 1953 which enables the Central Government Tea Board to hand over any closed tea units to new Management to ensure their reopening. Let me assure the Government of India that the Government of West Bengal will provide all possible administrative help and regulatory support for initiatives that the Government of India may like to take.

We also seek the immediate and effective implementation of the Rehabilitation Package announced by the Central Government for closed tea gardens. I am given to understand that the package envisages a slew of very positive measures including loan restructuring, moratoria on interest payments, waiver of penal interest, interest subsidies, waiver of Tea Board loans and providing subsidy under the Special Purpose Tea Fund (SPTF) Scheme for rejuvenation and replantation. The State Government has come with a significant set of interventions in the closed tea gardens. These include supply of subsidised foodgrains, provision of NREGS works, enhanced coverage under social security pensions, intensive health coverage and livelihood assistance in the form of backyard poultries, piggeries and goat-rearing units. I am also given to understand that the Ministry of Commerce is close to finalizing a special targeted intervention for the infrastructure development in tea garden areas. This too needs to be expedited. The Tea Board may also be asked to focus on its Labour Welfare Schemes with a special package for closed tea estates.

I urge upon the Government of India and specially the Ministry of Commerce to urgently call a meeting of all stakeholders in the next few weeks to address this matter and look for an immediate solution.