

Jan Dhan push for tea workers

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Kolkata: The Narendra Modi government's demonetization move is changing the century-old practice of fortnightly cash payment of daily wage or talab in tea gardens. Late on Thursday, the Tea Board of India has issued a circular to all tea producers' bodies to open new bank accounts under the Prime Minister Jan Dhan Yojna (PMJDY) for the workers — both permanent and temporary ones — in their member gardens.

This move will directly add 10.75 lakh bank accounts for as many listed tea estate workers employed in 1,472 gardens in India. "The uniqueness of this circular is that the producers' bodies are encouraged to open KYC-easy Jan Dhan accounts. It will help remove all the hurdles for opening so many workers' accounts at one go," a top official in the Tea Board told TOI. Earlier on November 25, both the secretaries of Union finance and labour ministries had issued a joint circular in this regard and gave a thrust on organizing special camps to open tea workers' bank accounts. The chief labour commissioner of the Central government, too, came up with an order on the same day. But none of the circulars mentioned or pushed Jan Dhan Yojna schemes for opening accounts.

Putting a clear thrust on the Centre's inclination towards digital economy, the Board's circular says: "...you are requested to impress upon your member gardens to take necessary action towards opening of new accounts under the Prime Minister Jan Dhan Yojna (PMJDY) for all individual workers/employees engaged in tea plantation for remitting their wages and salary in their individual accounts with immediate effect. This will enable them to mitigate towards digital payment system, cashless economy..."

However, neither the circular nor a senior Tea Board official couldn't give an idea on whether the bank transfer of salary/wage would be made on fortnightly, or weekly or monthly basis. The board's circular hasn't given any deadline.

The union leaders protested the latest RBI order on making bank payments to only 2.5 numbers of workers per hectare in two fortnights. Currency crisis brought hapless workers of the most tea gardens to the streets of North Bengal since last week.