



পশ্চিমবঙ্গ ক্ষেতমজুর সমিতি

PASCHIM BANGA KHET MAJOOR SAMITY

Affiliated to

NTUI (New Trade Union Initiative-National Trade Union Centre for independent Trade Unions)

1, Shibtala Road, Vill- Maheswarpur, P.O- Badu
Kolkata- 700 128, West Bengal, India
Ph: 9433264109/ 8348031441
e-mail: pbkmswb@gmail.com
Blog: <http://khetmajoorasamity.blogspot.com>

Mamata Banerjee announces her decision to clear the pending wages of 21 lakh NREGA workers of West Bengal by 21st February

Another ‘jumla’ or a promise to be fulfilled?

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is on a dharna from 2nd February in Kolkata, protesting against the injustice done to the NREGA workers of the state. Today, from that platform, she announced that by 21st February, the outstanding wages of 21 lakh NREGA workers in West Bengal will be settled from the state government’s fund. PBKMS (Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity) welcomes this announcement of the Chief Minister considering the interests of the workers.

But the Chief Minister's announcement does raise some pertinent questions. Why only 21 lakh workers? The NREGA MIS informs us that the number of active NREGA workers in West Bengal is around 1.4 crore and as of 28th January 2024, a total of 92.6 lakh families possess job cards. So how did the Chief Minister choose the 21 lakh NREGA workers? Questions also arise about the authenticity of her statement. Such an important announcement was made from a Dharna Manch but no government orders or circulars have been issued.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that PBKMS filed a PIL (Public Interest Litigation) in November 2022 before the Hon’ble Calcutta High Court, protesting the denial of wages to legitimate NREGA workers in West Bengal. On 19th January 2024, during a hearing of the PIL, a four-member committee was constituted and assigned the task of identifying the genuine NREGA workers in West Bengal. On 8th February 2024, during the next hearing, the term of office of this committee will also be fixed. We would urge the Chief Minister to get the state government-appointed counsel to file an affidavit with details about her announcement.

Even before this announcement, our union experienced several hollow promises delivered by the Chief Minister on several occasions, concerning NREGA workers, in the recent past. On 21st July 2023, she announced from the stage of a public gathering the “Khela Hobe” scheme to offer work to NREGA workers but to date, no government order or circular has been issued.



পশ্চিমবঙ্গ ক্ষেতমজুর সমিতি

PASCHIM BANGA KHET MAJOOR SAMITY

Affiliated to

NTUI (New Trade Union Initiative-National Trade Union Centre for independent Trade Unions)

1, Shibtala Road, Vill- Maheswarpur, P.O- Badu
Kolkata- 700 128, West Bengal, India
Ph: 9433264109/ 8348031441
e-mail: pbkmswb@gmail.com
Blog: <http://khetmajoorsamity.blogspot.com>

So naturally, when NREGA workers went to seek work under this scheme, they were made to return empty-handed by the administration.

Members of the union met Shri Rahul Gandhi during the "Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra" recently and apprised him of the extremely concerning state of implementation of the public works programme in West Bengal. We received an assurance from him that he would write to both the Prime Minister of India and the Chief Minister of West Bengal in this regard. Shri Rahul Gandhi has also shared his thoughts after meeting our delegation from his social media (X handle) page. This announcement of the Chief Minister is on the very next day. The obvious question that arises is whether there is political pressure behind this announcement.

But again, keeping in mind the interests of the workers, we welcome the announcement of the Chief Minister. We now strongly demand that this announcement be provided the necessary administrative approval through the Chief Minister's Office and or the Department of Panchayats and Rural Development, Government of West Bengal. The announcement should also be filed as an affidavit in the Hon'ble Calcutta High Court through the state government-appointed counsel before the next hearing of the PIL.

Date – 03/02/2024