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Ttitle: Need to include Cooch Behar of West Bengal and other districts of the country having 50% of SC/ST population under the Backward Regions Grant Fund Scheme.

SHRIMATI PRATIMA MONDAL (JAYANAGAR): Madam, kindly allow me to speak from here.

Madam, Speaker, the Backward Region Grant Fund Scheme covers 250 districts in 27 States. It is a unique Central fund as it puts the panchayats and municipalities at the forefront of planning and implementation and gives them free rein to use the funds as long as it fills a development gap and the identification of the work is decided with people's participation. In rural areas, 56 per cent Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and 40 per cent OBCs are beneficiaries of this Scheme.

One of the parameters of identifying a district as backward is based on the number of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population. The district of Cooch Behar in West Bengal has a population of which 50.11 per cent comprise of people from Scheduled Castes. However, Cooch Behar has not been identified as a backward district. The district is basically agrarian but modern agricultural techniques have not been adopted on a large scale. Hence, this sphere needs special attention. Agricultural marketing also needs to be improved with proper development of rail, road, cold storage, markets etc. Also, credit facilities are not smoothly available to the MSE sector. A 15 per cent tax rebate on setting up of new industries, which backward districts are entitled to, would greatly help in the development of the area and raise the standard of lives of the people.

Madam, Speaker, I would urge the Government to include Cooch Behar and other districts in the country which have more than 50 per cent Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population in the BRGF Scheme for all-round development of the district and to improve the lives of the people. I would also like to bring attention to the worrying fact that West Bengal still owes 40 percent of Central funds for BRGF over the last five years.

Thank you, Madam, for giving me this opportunity to speak.