

No garbage collection as workers call weeklong strike

Jan 25, 2016, 03.10 AM IST

Nagpur: Garbage collection from households, streets and collection points, and its transportation to dumping yard, has come to a halt. Vidarbha Mazdoor Sangh has called a strike, and claimed the response is 100 per cent. However, private operator Kanak Resources Management Limited (KRML), which manages garbage collection and transportation, says half the workers are on strike. Shockingly, Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC) is sitting pretty, claiming it has not got any intimation of the strike from either the private operator nor sanitary inspectors.

A major worry is that the union leading the workers has called for a strike of seven days beginning from January 24 and ending on January 30. However, it is likely that NMC office bearers and administration will intervene on Monday and chalk out a way to end the strike.

Union leader and RTI activist Mukesh Shahu told TOI that over 2,500 workers working with KRML in garbage collection and transportation had gone on strike from 6am onwards. "All vehicles collecting and transporting garbage to Bhandewadi dumping yard were parked for the entire day on Sunday and will continue like this till January 30. There is no one to take care of these workers, whose job is very risky and full of health hazards. I, with the help of a few active workers, met and brought all under Vidarbha Mazdoor Sangh. Workers are paid only Rs160 per day despite the minimum wage being Rs365 per day. They are no facilities of any type, safety gadgets, uniforms, health and life insurance. They got PF facility only after our letters a year ago, which too is not paid regularly by KRML," he said.

Shahu added that KRML did not fulfil the workers' demands despite written assurance given four months ago. "We had called a strike on September 16. NMC health officer (sanitation) Pradip Dasarwar and police officials from Nandanvan police station held meeting in which representatives of KRML and we were present. KRML accepted our demands and also sent us a letter. We called off the strike. Four months have passed but the demands, especially increase in daily wage and safety gadgets, have

not been fulfilled," he said.

Shahu also said that Nandanvan police station did not give approval to an agitation at Bhandewadi dumping yard. "We will stage demonstration at police station and continue with our strike. Rallies will be taken out to NMC, collector office and labour commissioner between January 27 and 29," he said.

Senior manager of KRML Kamlesh Sharma said no intimation about strike was given by union or workers, so the action is not legal. "We had removed seven workers from service for engaging in union activities. A complaint has been lodged against three workers at Pratap Nagar, Sakkardara and Pachpaoli for stopping other workers from coming to work. Half of the 1,450 workers did not come to work. We plan to recruit new workers from Monday and also engage vehicles from available sources. We will ensure work is not hampered. Permission will be taken from NMC for garbage collection and transportation during night too to complete the work," he said.

Sharma added KRML had fulfilled all demands of the workers. "We are paying Rs308 per day to workers with shift of eight hours and Rs180 per day to those working for four hours. Half of the workers are deployed for four hours, so they get paid Rs180 per day. We ensured PF, health insurance to all workers and also distributed safety gadgets," he said.

Mayor Pravin Datke said there will be no inconvenience to citizens or any compromise with sanitation. "We had no intimation about the strike," he said.

Dasarwar said KRML did not intimate them about the strike. "We will levy penalty on KRML if garbage is not collected and transported. We will also deploy staff and vehicles to ensure services, since ultimately it is NMC's responsibility," he said.

NO PAYMENT TO KRML SINCE AUG

Though garbage collection and transportation is considered very crucial and sensitive, NMC has not given any payment to KRML for the last five months citing financial crisis. KRML claims to collect and transport around 1,100 tonne garbage daily from all corners of the city to Bhandewadi dumping yard. The NMC health department pays over Rs3.50 crore per month to KRML.

Sources from KRML told TOI payment from August has not been received. "A large numbers of workers and vehicles are

engaged in the work. Besides, it's a daily affair. Flow of money is very important. Now, it has become routine for payment to be paid late at the end of the month," sources said.

Interestingly, there are many cases where NMC is disbursing payment to private companies and contractors on time for unknown reasons.