

Flowers, legal baton to get striking Sanand workers back to work

State govt refers the matter to industrial tribunal even as company officials offer roses to workers to get them to call off strike

Sohini Das | Ahmedabad March 04, 2016 Last Updated at 00:54 IST



The senior

A Tata Motors official offers a rose to workers at the company's plant in Sanand, Gujarat, on February 2, 2016. The workers are protesting the suspension of their 28 colleagues.

officers at Tata Motors and the labour department played a good cop-bad cop routine to end the strike at the auto major's Sanand plant in the western state.

On Wednesday, senior officers of the plant, about 45 km southwest of state capital Gandhinagar, presented flowers to the labourers — a gesture reminiscent of the “Gandhigiri” tactics made popular in the 2006 Sanjay Dutt-starrer Lage Raho Munna Bhai — to persuade them to return to work.

The state government, on the other hand, prohibited the strike and referred the matter to the industrial tribunal.

Confirming the development, K O Shah, additional labour commissioner, Gandhinagar, said: “We have prohibited the strike under Section 10(3) of the Industrial Disputes Act, and have referred the matter to the industrial tribunal in Ahmedabad.”

He explained that now the tribunal would decide if the suspension orders against 28 workers at the plant would be upheld, and also whether or not the workers on strike would be paid their wages for the days they have stayed away from work.

Shah also said the workers were now expected to return to work immediately as their strike had been prohibited.

The company can take legal action if they want, but it is trying other means of persuasion to woo the protesting workers.

On Wednesday, senior officers of the plant (around 80 of them), presented roses to the workers. Along with the flowers was a note in Gujarati: “Tame hamare maatey mulyavaan chho (You are valuable to us)”

“We were indeed taken aback by the gesture,” said a worker on strike, who did not want to be named. “They came to us one by one and gave us the roses. They are trying to break our unity.”

Last week, the company also organised a meditation session with the workers

The labourers, however, had not returned to work on Thursday and were holding meetings to decide on the future of their protest, which has continued unabated for 11 days. Labour department officials noted that if the workers continue to be on strike after it has been prohibited, it becomes illegal.

A company spokesperson said, “The matter is now sub-judice. We expect everyone to conform to the order and restore normalcy, while awaiting the tribunal’s decision.”

There have been tripartite talks between the company, the labour department and workers at the assistant labour commissioner’s office in Ahmedabad — but without yielding any result.

The workers have written to Chief Minister Anandiben Patel, Ahmedabad Collector Sanand Mamlatdar and other senior officers of the government to help them solve the problem.

The plant has an installed capacity of 250,000 units per annum, and is now making Nano. Preparations are in final stages to roll out its new hatchback Tiago.

TROUBLE AT MOTOR PLANT

Tata Motors suspended two workers at the Sanand plant on December 16 last year:

- 2015 -Dec 19: Workers and management decide to take decision on suspension after enquiry
- 2016 -Feb 22: Workers protest at the site demanding the enquiry report, and re-instatement of their suspended colleagues. They allegedly damaged cars. The company suspends 26 more

labourers for indiscipline

- Feb 23: Workers stage a sit-in at the site, demanding re-instatement of all those who were suspended
- Feb 25: Workers and Tata Motors representatives meet at assistant labour commissioner's office; talks fail
- Mar 1: Workers write to the Gujarat chief minister and the Ahmedabad collector
- Mar 2: The labour department prohibits the strike. Tata Motors officials present flowers to the workers

BANNED STRIKES:

Major protests by workers that have been declared illegal in Gujarat in recent years:

General Motors India: **Mar 2011**

RIL Textile **Feb 2012**

Arvind Ltd **Jun 2012**

Hitachi Home & Life Solutions **Jul 2012**

Apollo Tyres **Nov 2012**

Bombardier **Jun 2013**

L&T, Hazira **Dec 2013**

Arvind Ltd **Oct 2015**

Sources: Workers, labour department officials, industry