

Gujarat govt starts process to recognize workers' union at Tata Motors plant

To ensure that the protest does not snowball into a state-wide agitation, the government has started taking corrective measures



Photo: Bloomberg

Ahmedabad/Mumbai: The Gujarat government has hastened the process to look into the demands of workers agitating at the Tata Motors Ltd factory at Sanand, in a bid to hammer out an amicable solution.

The government move comes after as many as 384 workers were detained on Monday afternoon by the police in Ahmedabad after they staged a protest outside the district collector's office. All of them were later released.

To ensure that the protest does not snowball into a state-wide agitation, the government has started taking corrective measures, a top official with the state's labour department said on condition of anonymity.

The government has already begun the process to recognise a workers' union at the factory. This is one of two key demands of the workers who went on strike last month after the company suspended

some workers for alleged indiscipline and damaging of vehicles.

As per Tata Motors policy, the company has always recognized the right of its workers to form a union, the company said in a media statement today. "In fact, we have a strong history of working with Unions and we are in full agreement with this," it said.

The state government hopes to resolve the issue in a week's time, including through the recognition of a workers' union, said the senior government official quoted above.

"This is a clear case of retaliation for formation of union. Soon after a union was formed last month at Tata Motors' Sanand plant, the company first suspended two workers on grounds of alleged indiscipline and two days later fired 26 more workers for their protest," said Ashim Roy, vice-president of the National Trade Union Initiative (NTUI).

He said that on Monday about 600 workers from as many as 22 trade unions, including All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) had joined their protest.

“Apart from recognizing the union, our other major demand is that the company should retain the 28 employees it fired last month. We have given our demands to the government today. If we don’t see any amicable solution being worked out in next few days, we will hold a *dharna* in Ahmedabad on Saturday,” Roy said over the phone.

The main objective behind forming a union is to negotiate a better pay for the workers, he added. The plant, which was manufacturing only Nano cars initially, had earlier this year started making the new Tiago hatchback, bookings for which have opened. It has a capacity to produce 250,000 cars a year.

Due to the ongoing strike, production of Tiago and Nano has suffered substantially, said Roy.

“On our part, we have committed today to the district collector towards a fair and expedited inquiry process of the 26 suspended workmen with utmost speed, within six months subject to no delays by any party during the enquiry. Moreover, the enquiry will be conducted in all fairness by an independent enquiry agency in due compliances to rules and processes which can only take place if the situation returns to normal,” the company said, urging the workers to return to work soon failing which action would be initiated against them.