

Mamata govt. and trade unions head for a showdown on general strike

- Special Correspondent

State government says leave will not be allowed on the day of strike but also one day preceding and following it

The Mamata Banerjee government and the Central trade unions are heading for a major showdown over the all India general strike called on September 2 with neither of two sides budging from its stand. While the ten Central trade unions, including the major left trade unions and that of Congress are emphasising that the strike will be total in the State. Ms Banerjee is determined to make the strike a damp squid.

While she has emphatically said that her government will “not allow any bandh”, a circular issued by the State government said that leave will not be allowed not only on the day of strike but one day preceding and following it. Hoardings have put up by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) the city's civic body in the city urging people to thwart the strike.

“After setting up her party, in the first 13 years she has organised as many as 72 bandhs now she threatening us with police cases,” Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) State president Shyamal Chakraborty said. Pointing out that the strike has been called by the central trade unions to protest against the anti-worker policies of the Centre and raising a specific charter of demands Mr Chakraborty said that the strike has not been against West Bengal government. However, she (Ms Banerjee) is acting to protect the interest of the BJP, he alleged.

Other than CITU, Left trade unions like AITUC, UTUC Hind Majdoor Sangha and Congress backed INTUC are also behind the strike. INTUC State president Ramen Pandey said that by involving KMC the Chief Minister is trying to foil the strike. "It is irresponsible," Mr Pandey said.

Other than trade unions, bank officers association has come out in support of the strike. All India Bank Officers Confederation (AIBOC) representing lakhs of officers working in the public sector banks have supported the strike and the demands of trade unions. Sanjay Das, Secretary AIBOC, said that confederation will join the the industrial strike on September 2 opposing the "privatisation of PSU banks, insurance and other PSU entitie." Mr Das also demanded the publication of the list of "willful corporate defaulters" who have defrauded the banks.

Since assuming power in 2011, State's Chief Minister has been opposing bandhs. On this occasion she has gone a step further by saying her government would compensate for damages if any to public transport, shops and other establishments during the Strike. Representatives of the Left trade unions said that before opposing the strike Ms Banerjee should promise that she will never call a strike when she will be in Opposition and seek apology from the people for the bandhs she called while in Opposition.