

# 50L join trade union strike in state, normal life hit

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BHUBANESWAR: The nationwide dawn-to-dusk bandh called by trade unions on Friday hit normal life in many parts of Odisha. The bandh passed off peacefully barring a few stray incidents.

Accusing the Centre of not paying heed to its 12-point charter of demands and describing the NDA government as anti-worker, members of the trade unions staged protests across the state. People in mining and industrial towns mostly bore the brunt of the bandh because of the large presence of trade unions. Mining operations in Joda, Barbil and Koida areas were suspended.

Train services were hit the most as agitators sat on railway tracks disrupting movement. Armed with flags, the protesters blocked both passenger and goods trains at Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Bhadrak, Balasore, Berhampur, Rourkela, Paradip, Keonjhar and Rajsunakhala. Thousands of passengers were stranded in different stations as the railway authorities cancelled five trains and short-terminated four trains.

Vehicular movement came to a grinding halt as bus services, auto-rickshaws and trucks remained off the road. Banking and insurance services were also hit and schools and colleges remained closed for the day. Major retail markets, shopping malls and other commercial establishments were also shut.

While low attendance was recorded in most of the government offices, functioning of courts, including the Orissa high court in Cuttack, was also affected. Lawyers could not come to the courts because of the bandh.

Chief minister Naveen Patnaik reached the state secretariat amid thick security while a number of his ministerial colleagues, including Sanjay Das Burma, Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak, Arun Kumar Sahoo and Pradip Kumar Amat, took pillion rides on the bikes of their PSOs to reach the state secretariat.

The bandh was spontaneous and total in Odisha. Around 50 lakh people participated in the bandh across the state. "The BJP-led NDA government should take the bandh's success as a warning and come forward to fulfil the genuine demands of the people," said Ramakrushna Panda, all India secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress.

He said the Centre should immediately accept the demands of the trade unions, including minimum monthly wage of Rs 18,000 to workers, social security and pension for labourers of unorganized sectors, to put an end to privatization of Central PSUs and immediate action to control the price rise of essential commodities.

Besides all the left parties, the ruling BJD also extended moral support to the bandh.