

KERALA

Workers erect huts on estate

STAFF REPORTER

KALPETTA: JANUARY 31, 2017 23:39 IST

UPDATED: JANUARY 31, 2017 23:39 IST

A group of workers on Tuesday erected huts on a private tea estate at Mepadi in Wayanad district in protest against the apathy of the management in lifting the lockout declared four months ago.

The management of the Chembra tea estate declared a lockout arbitrarily at three divisions on October 27 alleging that workers were frequently going on strike, with the estate suffering losses.

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Meppadi, from October 28 demanding lifting of the lockout.

Talks convened by the district labour officer and the assistant labour commissioner, Kozhikode, went in vain. The workers changed the mode of agitation on November 12 and started to harvest tea leaves on their own.

P.K. Anilkumar, chairman of the joint action council, said as many as 320 labourers had been working on the 800-acre estate, and the management declared the lockout arbitrarily without informing the workers and the Labour Department. The move was against the plantation Acts, he said.

With the management adopting an apathetic attitude, the workers were forced to act to save their livelihood, which led to today's action, Mr. Anilkumar said. They constructed three huts on the estate.

Meanwhile, Labour Minister T.P. Ramakrishnan called a meeting of the estate management and leaders of trade unions to discuss the issue in Kozhikode on February 7.

"If the estate management continues the negative attitude to the agitation after the discussion, the agitation will be intensified," P. Gagarin, convener of the joint action council and general secretary of the Wayanad Estate Labour Union (CITU) said.

Printable version | Feb 1, 2017 9:51:20 AM |

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