

Chhattisgarh crippled by shutdown

Road and rail traffic in several parts of Chhattisgarh were hit Saturday by a daylong statewide shutdown called by a community that wants the government to hand over a private, disputed plot of land to them.

The Satnami community, which comes under the Schedule Castes (SC) category, wants to develop the disputed plot in Bilaspur district as a religious site. The owner of the plot had moved court years ago.

The strike paralysed urban areas, including state capital Raipur, Bilaspur, Durg, and the industrial towns of Bhilai and Korba. Buses were off the roads, and all schools, petrol pumps and cinema halls remained shut.

Dozens of protesters marched through Raipur early Saturday, while many squatted on railway tracks at Bilaspur, the headquarters of South East Central Railway.

Though the shutdown had little impact in the interiors, several long distance trains were held up at several places and many highways were blocked.

The community also seeks the immediate release of its spiritual leader Baldas, who was arrested in April for inciting violence. Members of the community had in April clashed with the police while trying to forcibly acquire the plot.

The strike has the backing of the opposition Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).

Bilaspur district authorities, in a bid to restore calm, Saturday said they would acquire 2,500 sq feet of the disputed site and develop it as a religious site for the Satnami community with the help of the Chhattisgarh Tourism Board.

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