

Parties blame Dunlop chief, not recession for unit closure

Refusing to buy Pawan Kumar Ruia-owned Dunlop Tyres' claim that the global meltdown had affected its business, West Bengal's mainstream political parties are up in arms against the company management for suspending operations at its Sahaganj unit near here.

Opposition parties also blame the state's Left Front (LF) government for trying to revive the age-old company with the help of the Ruia group, saying the promoter does not have the financial strength to run the ailing unit.

Front partners, too, have joined the opposition in seeking immediate intervention of the government.

'The Dunlop authorities have simply cheated all the workers by hoodwinking the state government. They have nothing to do with the global economic crisis and I am sure Mr Ruia can never prove that he took the decision to suspend operations at the unit for the financial meltdown,' LF constituent Forward Bloc's senior leader Naren Chattopadhyay told IANS.

He said the company's main motive is to close down the unit in the name of the financial slowdown.

'We don't accept this and it's a mere trick of the company management,' Chattopadhyay said, demanding the state government's immediate intervention.

Opposition Trinamool Congress leader Partha Chattopadhyay Friday visited Sahaganj in Hooghly district, neighbouring Kolkata, and interacted with the agitating workers.

'The state government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, can't avoid its responsibility as it handed over the sick PSU (public sector undertaking) unit to the Ruias,' Chattopadhyay said.

Added Senior Congress leader and Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) state president Subrata Mukherjee: 'We want to know how much working capital the Ruia group had chipped in after taking over of the Dunlop unit.'

'They're not supposed to be affected by the recession as they're into the domestic sector. We want to know if they didn't have sufficient working capital, why had they taken over the company. And why did the state government hand over the company to them?' Mukherjee told IANS.

But CPI-M central committee member and party's labour arm Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) state president Shyamal Chakraborty said there was nothing his union could do.

LF partner Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) leader Kshiti Goswami said: 'Whatever decision Dunlop management takes, it should be in consultation with the industry and labour departments of the state government.'

'It was a unanimous decision by both the workers and the owners. They called all recognised unions to meet over the issue and a general meeting was also called in the factory. In this situation to do anything from our end will be completely unreasonable,' he said.

Citing lack of demand due to the global economic slowdown, the West Bengal-based tyre manufacturing firm Monday suspended production in Sahaganj, throwing into uncertainty the future of 1,202 workers who now have to survive on a monthly subsistence allowance of Rs.2,000.

The decision met with angry response from workers, who staged a demonstration at the factory gate.

Dunlop officials refused to comment, but industry sources claimed that not a single state-run bank had come forward to support the company, which Ruia acquired from the late Manohar Rajaram Chhabria's family in 2005.

The company has a full capacity of 130 tonnes a day, with commercial production resuming in January last year, after a five-year closure.

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