

Television industry impasse to continue as workers' body scraps agreement

Television audiences will have to make do with re-runs of old soaps for some more time as technical workers unhappy with a deal signed Wednesday to address their demand for higher wages, decided Friday to scrap the agreement. No shooting was held for fresh episodes Friday as workers did not turn up.

Members of the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE), the workers' apex body, conveyed their unhappiness over the Nov 19 agreement when they met among themselves Friday evening.

The federation office-bearers then sat for an emergency meeting to discuss the fallout of the decision taken by their unhappy affiliates.

The federation decided to scrap the agreement and revert to the one it had signed with the core committee of television programme producers in October, though producers had earlier backtracked from it leading to an impasse in the industry.

The FWICE is, however, yet to convey its decision taken at Friday's meeting to the producers' committee, but is hopeful that the producers would finally be amenable to it.

'I am sure producers who are after all our colleagues in the industry would understand our constraints when we sit with them to discuss the new development that have surfaced,' federation general secretary, Dinesh Chaturvedi, told IANS after the meeting.

He, however, refused to elaborate.

But it is clear that by deciding to scrap the Nov 19 agreement, the federation has given in to the demands of the sound recordists, dressmen and make-up artists - the three categories of professions who in particular were unhappy with the new rates of monthly salary fixed for them and were demanding a further hike.

In view of the stand producers had taken earlier, it can be expected that the impasse in the television industry will continue for long. Until it is resolved, the indirect loser will be the viewers.

Earlier Friday, some associations of technicians failed to report for work though producers said they would resume shooting for their on-going serials.

On Wednesday, the FWICE and the core committee of the television programme producers had signed an agreement over wages and workers were to resume shooting from Thursday.

But soon after the agreement was signed, some associations of technicians complained to FWICE that they were unhappy with the new wages fixed for them.

Sound recordists, whose wage was hiked to Rs.40,000 per month, are now demanding a salary of Rs.55,000. Similarly, make-up artists with their two assistants were offered a consolidated salary of Rs.80,000 per month. But they are demanding that it should be hiked to Rs.130,000.

Hairdressers are also demanding a further hike of Rs.49,000 in their salary newly fixed at Rs.51,000 a month.

Likewise, dressmen, who are in charge of the costumes created by costume designers for artistes and keep the inventories, are not happy with Rs.36,000 monthly salary fixed for them. They are demanding that it be hiked to Rs.100,000.

Producers are categorical that they would do nothing of the sort and have threatened to hire professionals from outside the unions if the technicians do not report for shooting by Saturday.

'We have given every section of the television workers a fair hike in their respective wages and have told them that the hike will stay for a year, besides assuring them timely payment of the same. We cannot afford to give them any more concessions,' Mukesh Bhatt, chairman of the producers' core committee, told IANS Friday.

Ratan Jain, president of the Association of Motion Pictures and Television Programme Producers (AMPTPP) bluntly said that producers would not give workers a rupee more than what was agreed to.

'If they are hoping to get more money by blackmailing us, let me say, they are living in a dream world. It seems they have not yet woken up to the economic reality of the world today. They should consider themselves lucky that, when even big companies are retrenching people to combat today's economic situation, we are not only retaining them but have also given them reasonable salary-hike,' he said.

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