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## Strike cripples workers at DVC Mejia plant

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It is reported that the ongoing strike by workers employed by contractors at Damodar Valley Corporation's Mejia plant brought down the generation at the plant to one third on Friday.

Located in Bankura district of West Bengal the Mejia plant is DVC's largest thermal power plant. The drop in generation is expected to create 100 MW shortfall in peak power supply in the State. West Bengal gets a share of the generation by the central power utility.

Sources in DVC said that out of a total capacity of 940 MW by six units, the Mejia plant, located approximately 150 km from Kolkata, was producing approximately 360 MW from two units on Friday. The generation was hit as the agitating unions were not allowing coal supplies to the plant.

The strike has been called by CITU and Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh led unions demanding wages higher than the State Government prescribed minimum wages for industrial workers. The INTUC led union, which initially supported the strike, opted out of it at a later stage.

According to sources, DVC has outsourced various operations of the power plant including coal handling, electrical maintenance, instrumentation maintenance, cleaning and so on to a number of contractors. As part of the contract agreement, DVC ensures that the workers employed by these contractors are paid the stipulated minimum wage of INR 126 a day plus medical, house rent and other allowances.

A source told Business Line that "The CITU and BMS led unions at Mejia are demanding a minimum wage of INR 187 a day in line with payments made to some temporary workers in our old units in Jharkhand. However, while such temporary workers are not offered any allowances, the unions at Mejia want the allowances too adding that efforts to resolve the differences through dialogue failed at a series of meetings mediated by the State Labour Commissioner's office."

DVC has reportedly made it clear that it would follow the State prescribed norms in fixing minimum wages for such workers employed by the contractors.

A DVC source said that "We may force contractors to offer higher wages provided the State Government amends its laws accordingly."

(Sourced from Business Line)

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