

ಪತ್ರಿಕಾ ಪುಸ್ತಕಗಳು
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ಇಲಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: 72 Transport

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: The Hindu

ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE: 22/05/2021

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Strike called off on day 15

Deputy Chief Minister and Transport Minister Laxman Savadi thanked employees who reported back to duty on Wednesday. "From Thursday, the RTC will be able to ply buses as per the schedule," he said in a press release. Buses will be operated as per the new COVID-19 guidelines issued by the State government. During night and weekend curfew, buses will be operated as per demand.

Validity of monthly pass extended
In the interest of over lakh monthly bus passengers, the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTCC) has decided to extend the validity of its passes. Passengers who had purchased the passes for April will be able to use them till May 16, 2021. The BMTCC stated that the extension of the validity would come into force immediately.

Strike by RTC staff called off on day 15

Majority of employees report back to duty even before formal announcement

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

On Wednesday, after remaining off the road since April 7, buses started pulling into major bus stands across the city in large numbers after employees of the road transport corporations (RTCs) called off their indefinite strike.

As the Statewide strike, one of the longest in recent history, entered the 15th day, honorary president of the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation Employees League Kodihalli Chandrashekar announced that they were postponing the stir in the wake of the High Court of Karnataka's observations.

HC observations

On Tuesday, the High Court said that strike by employees of the four public transport corporations amid the COVID-19 pandemic violated



Festival shield: People in costumes of Ramayana characters distributing masks at the Kempe Gowda bus stand in Bengaluru, on the occasion of Ramanavami on Wednesday. • SUDHAKARA JAIN

the fundamental rights of other citizens.

While expressing disappointment with the government's response to the strike, Mr. Chandrashekar said, "The 15-day-long indefinite strike was one of longest observed in transport corporations. Un-

expectedly, the Karnataka High Court intervened noting that in the interests of the general public employees should immediately report back to duty. We respect what the court has said. The strike has been postponed temporarily."

On Wednesday, even be-

fore the strike was formally called off, all the four RTCs were able to run more than 12,500 buses across Karnataka, indicating that employees were not waiting for a formal announcement.

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RTC workers' strike ends without settlement

KSRTC Employees' League criticised; staff fail to get salaries revised as per Sixth Pay Commission recommendations

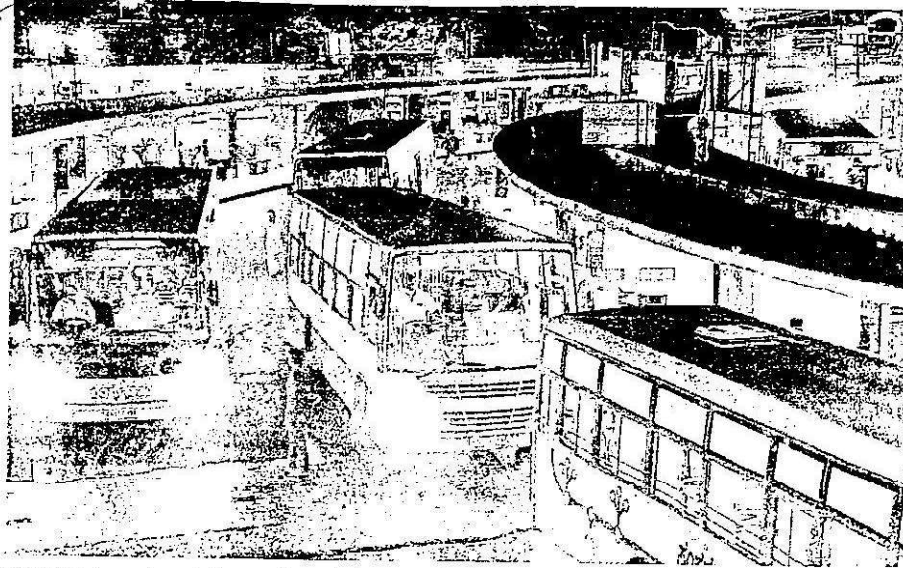
SUCHITH KIDIYOOR
BENGALURU

One of the longest strikes by the road transport corporations ended on Wednesday without a settlement. Even after observing the strike for 15 days, employees were unable to get the cash-strapped State government to revise their salaries as per the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations. The State government categorically refused to entertain any talks with the KSRTC Employees League, the union that had called for the strike.

However, the government had yielded to eight of the nine demands even before employees went on strike. On the contentious issue of salary revision, the government had promised interim relief of 8% hike to be paid to them after elections.

The government maintained that it had paid over ₹2,000 crore towards the salary of the staff during the lockdown despite facing severe financial constraints.

Nevertheless, the league decided to go ahead with the strike, a decision that did not



BMTC buses arrive at Kempe Gowda bus stand after the strike was called off, in Bengaluru on Wednesday. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

garner it much sympathy especially as Karnataka was fighting a fierce second wave of COVID-19.

Many feel that the outcome of the strike undermined RTC employees, causing them more troubles. H.V. Ananthasubba Rao, president of KSRTC Staff and Workers Federation, said until now all

their strikes had ended in settlements and there was no victimisation of employees.

For the first time, bus stands of KSRTC, BMTC and others opened for private operators. "This will open the floodgate for privatisation. The timing was bad, as people are dying because of the pandemic and hospitals are full.

The strike has projected KSRTC employees in poor light," Mr. Rao added.

Due to the pandemic, RTCs incurred revenue loss of over ₹4,000 crore. They also started raising loans from banks to pay pending bills related to pension and provident fund.

The RTCs used every trick in the playbook to foil the

strike from issuing notices to over 7,600 employees, suspending more than 2,900 and even dismissing 1,970 people who were on their rolls. The labour union declared the strike illegal. Employees who took part in the strike were not paid salaries for March.

When asked about how they were going to protect the interest of employees who were dismissed or suspended from service, president of KSRTC Employees League R. Chandrashekar said: "Managements have taken illegal action against the employees. We will approach the High Court seeking justice."

However, managing director of BMTC C. Shikha said there was no question of reinstating dismissed trainee employees as they had violated rules by taking part in the strike. "Employees who have been suspended from service will face disciplinary action as per the set rules. Further action will be taken based on their response."

Mr. Rao claimed that Kodihalli Chandrashekar, honorary president of the league,

was not aware of the issues. "In December, they started a strike with a demand to consider RTC workers as government employees. They later gave that up and started asking for pay revision as per Sixth Pay Commission recommendations. Two days ago, Mr. Kodihalli said some employees had gone to the court earlier and that the court had ordered a salary hike of 20% from 2004 with 6% interest. He claimed that if implemented, it would be more than the Pay Commission recommendations," said Mr. Rao.

"It was our union that had raised the demand, which was referred to the Industrial Tribunal in Bengaluru not the High Court. After a 12-year struggle, in August 2017, the tribunal gave order on eight or nine points, including revision salary by 20% from January 1, 2004. Later, the management approached the court and brought a stay. He is referring to this case and saying some staff approached the court. If he wants revisions as per the tribunal, why was the strike needed?" asked Mr. Rao.