



Workers force the manager to walk in Banarhat on Wednesday. Picture by Biplab Basak

Jalpaiguri: The manager of a tea estate near Banarhat was abused and assaulted by a section of workers on Wednesday.

Pranab Mondal, the manager of Haldibari tea estate, was forced to wear a garland of shoes and walk for around 5km, after which police rescued him.

Members of tea planters' fraternity have demanded immediate action against the accused labourers.

Sources said a group of workers of the Haldibari estate went to the office on Wednesday morning and resorted to a demonstration, alleging that the management was not providing fringe benefits to them.

The garden has around 1,150 permanent workers.

A delegation of five workers later went to meet Mondal in his office. Mondal allegedly got agitated and misbehaved with them. Hundreds of other workers, along with their families, reached the office.

Around 11am, there was an altercation between the workers and the manager. The workers forced him to come out of the office and thrashed him.

"Then, the manager was forced to wear a chain of shoes and paraded for over 5km, close to Banarhat police station. Soon, a police team reached and rescued him," said a source.

The workers didn't, however, leave. They started shouting slogans in front of the police station, demanding expulsion of the manager. The demonstration continued for around five hours and additional policemen reached the spot.

"The manager never listens to our problem. Whenever any worker meets him to speak on any issue, he misbehaves with him. We do not get any health service from garden and payment of wages and disbursement of rations are irregular," said Jyoti Tirkey, a local leader of the Progressive Tea Workers' Union.

The union leader said the workers had repeatedly mentioned the problems before the manager, but nothing had changed.

"When we went to speak to the manager on certain issues today, he spoke arrogantly. It has left the workers annoyed," the leader added.

The planters' fraternity has criticised the incident.

"Workers may have some demands. But whatever they did to the manager to get their demands fulfilled is wrong. We condemn the incident and demand punishment to all those involved in it," said Sumanta Guha Thakurata, the secretary of the Dooars Branch of Indian Tea Association.

Sources said Mondal had been kept in safe custody by the police. Later, a meeting was held at the police station where it was decided that the garden would function normally from Thursday,

"On March 27, a bipartite meeting would be held to discuss the issue," said the source.

Source: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/west-bengal/tea-official-hit-and-paraded-with-shoes-217488>