

INDIA: Truck Operators Begin Nationwide Indefinite Strike From July 20

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Millions of truckers from across the country are set to go on an indefinite strike from today, demanding a slew of actions from government, including lowering diesel prices and toll fees, a union leader said yesterday.

Unionised truckers claim over 9.3 million members and the strike was announced on May 17.

Government is engaged in last ditch efforts to persuade truckers in the highly road transport concentrated economy not to go ahead with their call, officials said.

"We held a meeting with Union transport minister Nitin Gadkari yesterday but that was inconclusive. We met finance minister Piyush Goyal at 2130 hrs yesterday," Bal Malkit Singh, chairman of the All-India Motor Transport Congress core committee, told PTI over phone.

He, however, sounded sceptical if any solution can be found during the late night meeting and added that the strike will go on as announced.

Mr Singh said truckers will stop rolling from 0600 hrs today and pegged the likely daily loss at Rs. 4,000 crore for them.

Truckers key demands include reduction in Central and state taxes by getting diesel under the GST so that price of the deregulated commodity can be reduced, he said.

Mr Singh said truckers are also against the "flawed and non-transparent" toll collection system that favours road concessioners, and alleged that the time and fuel loss goes up to Rs. 1.5 trillion annually on account of it.

Truckers are also miffed at high insurance premia and want a reduction in third-party premium, exemption on third-party premia from GST, he said.

Apart from this, they are also pressing for exemptions and abolitions in direct taxes, national permits for all buses and trucks and also doing away with the direct port delivery tendering system, he said.

When contacted, an official close to Mr Gadkari's office said during the meeting, transporters were told that instant solutions cannot be found to their demands but assured them the government is looking at all the demands sensitively.

"We are very open to look into all their issues and hope that better sense prevails," the ministry official said.

Meanwhile, the School Bus and Company Bus Owners Association of Maharashtra extended their support to the truckers strike.

The association runs around 8,000 buses in Mumbai and 40,000 buses across the state. "All these buses will be off the road today," Anil Garg, association president told PTI.

He said although truckers are planning an indefinite strike his association will off the road for only a day, to show

solidarity.

Established in 1936, the All-India Motor Transport Congress and calls itself as the apex body of transporters representing over 93 lakh truckers and around 50 lakh buses, tourist taxi and cab operators.