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Striking labourers head back to work

NATIONAL


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Reporter : Long Kimmarita

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Workers protest at the Master Blacksmith Metal Products factory in Svay Rieng province on Monday. Nokorvat News

More than 200 striking factory workers in Svay Rieng province have agreed to return to work and allow operations to resume after their employer promised to meet a list of demands.

Provincial Department of Labour and Vocational Training director Ou Sokhoeun said on January 26 that it had been three days since workers at Master Blacksmith Metal Products Co Ltd walked out in protest, gathering in front of the factory with banners and demanding management accede to nine conditions.

Their demands included improvements to facilities, assurances that they would not be terminated without valid reasons of wrongdoing, simplification of procedures to apply for leave, and the reinstatement of some workers whom they said had been wrongfully dismissed.

Workers also requested overtime be made voluntary and offered without coercion. Employees laid off prior to the expiry of their contracts should be paid the remaining earnings specified under each contract, and five per cent of the so-called 13th-month pay and any other applicable bonuses should be paid on the 10th day of each month.

Sokhoeun said negotiations lasted all day on January 25, ending with the employer agreeing to the requests and promising to implement them accordingly.

He added that both parties also agreed that the three-day period during which workers had protested would be deducted from their accrued annual leave.

"The company has made assurances to abide by conditions stipulated by the workers as well as pertinent laws and regulations. If there are any violations or disputes, individual workers may send complaints to the department which will act in mediation. If disagreements persist, the department will refer cases to authorities for resolution," Sokhoeun said.

Owned by a Chinese national, Master Blacksmith produces toys in the Shandong Special Economic Zone in Chrey Thom village of Bavet town's Prey Angkuh commune and employs more than 600 workers. The protests by more than 200 of the workers prevented others from entering the factory to work.

Cambodian Labour Confederation president Ath Thom applauded the compromise and the company's agreement to comply with workers' requests. He remained concerned, however, that the company would fulfil the commitments after employees return to work, noting that most factories in Bavet town do not have independent unions to represent workers' interests.

"Negotiating with the company is a good thing, but the concern is whether the company will follow through. A labour union would be very important to monitor implementation. There should also be labour inspections taking place, but in the past, we have seen there were loopholes," he said.

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