

DESHAKALYAN CHOWDHURY/AFP

Trucks wait in line on the National Highway at Palsit, 80 kms north of Kolkata, on Wednesday. Delays caused by the ongoing Trinamool Congress party agitation against Tata motors' proposed plant at Singur have caused prices of essential goods to go up by 25 per cent in some parts of the state, while Hindustan Motors' component supplies have been hit.

Stuck in traffic in Nano land

With trucks stranded, parts of Bengal are running out of essential supplies

Sujit Nath & Jaidev Majumdar
Kolkata, August 27

MAMATA BANERJEE may well be fighting for a handful of farmers in Singur, but the blockade of the national highway passing through Singur has triggered a shortage of essential supplies and brought hardship for people in other parts of the state.

So much so that, the state's only automobile-maker, Hindustan Motors, was forced to declare an extended weekend holiday for its employee, as component supplies from Indore and Allahabad were hit by the blockade on NH-2.

More than 40,000 long-distance trucks coming from other states were stuck, resulting in shortage of essential supplies and spike in their prices. Trucks loaded with fish and eggs are causing severe air pollution.

Prices of many daily consumption goods have increased by 20 to 25 per cent in Kolkata, *Hindustan Times* found

out on visits to Jadubabu, Salt Lake, New Market, Kestopur and Asubabu markets.

"We are not responsible for the price hike," said Kamlesh Kumar Gupta, secretary of Calcutta Kirana Merchants' Association. "There is a scarcity of goods and we have to bear the cost of goods, which we are importing from other highways," he said. "The costs of importing daily need items gone up because the transporters are charging more price, as they have to burn more fuel while delivering the goods."

Even ambulance services in the region have been hit.

"We have stopped providing ambulances due to the crises," secretary of Burdwan Ambulance Association Samarath Bhattacharya said.

There are also worries over availability of medicines at hospitals in southern parts of the state.

"Kolkata is one of the biggest market from where medicine mainly goes to

South Bengal. With Mamata Banerjee's siege several patients who are depending on life saving drugs are in major trouble," said Samiranjan Das, secretary of Bengal Chemist and Druggist association.

Meanwhile, Hindustan Motors said it was looking to bring in components using alternative routes, if the crisis prolongs.

HM's Uttarpara plant, which makes the Ambassador and is located in the outskirts of Kolkata, is barely 50 kilometers away from the upcoming Nano plant in Singur.

"So far there has not been an impact on production though component supply has been slightly hit," said Soni Srivastav, spokes at Hindustan Motors. "If the situation does not ease in the next few days then we will have to take a call on how much we will be able to produce next week."

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Hind Motors shuts plant as Singur row hits supply

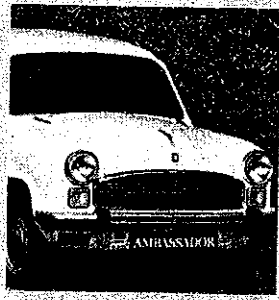
'Plant will be closed till Durgapur Expressway clears'

Sumit Moitra

Kolkata, Aug 27

Hindustan Motors Ltd on Wednesday suspended operations at its Ambassador manufacturing unit in Uttarpara, West Bengal, as supply of raw materials has been hit by traffic disruption caused by Trinamool Congress chief, Ms Mamata Banerjee's agitation against Tata Motors Ltd's proposed car plant in Singur, a top company official told Newswire18.

Hindustan Motors manufactures about 1,000 Ambassador cars a month and will



► "We kept our car manufacturing facility closed today. Till supplies of spares are restored, we wouldn't be able to produce Ambassador cars in our plant."

keep the plant closed until traffic along the Durgapur Expressway is cleared, the

official said.

"We kept our car manufacturing facility closed to-

day giving workers a holiday.

Till supplies of spares are restored, we wouldn't be able to produce Ambassador cars in our plant," Executive Vice-President, Mr Moloy Chowdhury, said.

Mr Chowdhury, however, said the company's plan to launch a commercial vehicle during the coming festival season will not be hit.

"For our commercial vehicle, we are currently in the pilot stage of production. So, the launch is on schedule," he said.

The new commercial vehicle has already been approved by Automotive Research Association of India. Mr C.K. Birla, Chairman, Hindustan Motors, had said earlier that the company plans to launch a commercial vehicle, but did not specify the date of the launch or the vehicle's specifications.

Shares of Hindustan Motors closed at Rs 24.80 on National Stock Exchange today, up 0.8 per cent from Tuesday. — © Newswire18 Pvt. Ltd. 2008