

Jorhat Situation Under Control

GAUHATI, April 10.—The situation on Saklatinga tea estate, near Jorhat, where two groups of workers had clashed yesterday, was stated to be under control today, reports UNI.

The Deputy Commissioner of Sib-sagar district said nine people were killed and 39 injured. A total of 223 people had been arrested.

The clash between the labourers of the Assam Tea Corporation and those of Mr Dharmeswar Kalita, who bought the estate at a public auction in Jorhat Court recently.

When Mr Kalita went to the garden yesterday with labourers to take possession, the garden's workers resisted their entry and allegedly attacked them.

Before it was put up for auction, the garden was under the management of the Assam Tea Corporation.

The District Magistrate ordered a magisterial inquiry to ascertain if the management was involved and how labourers had gathered there in such a short time.

Strong police pickets have been posted as a precautionary measure and prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC promulgated.

Police are stated to have seized some documents which reportedly incited the workers against the new proprietor.

Saklatinga tea estate was not running profitably and outstanding dues amounted to nearly Rs 80 lakhs. Provident fund dues were also outstanding and the garden was auctioned by the Deputy Commissioner on November 17 for recovery of the dues. It was purchased by Mr Kalita but according to rules, the sale was to be confirmed within 60 days. Meanwhile, Mr Bagri, the former managing director failed to pay labour wages for several weeks in January last and at the instance of the unions, he handed over the garden to the Assam Tea Corporation.

The ATC paid part of the labour dues and bonus and they were managing the garden. But several cases were filed by different parties, including the Apex Bank and Assam Financial Corporation against the management for realization of their dues.

However, district officials in Sib-sagar gave symbolic possession of the garden to Mr Kalita on March 28. The latter complained to the district authorities that he was not allowed to enter the garden and sought police help.

The ATC also filed a petition opposing the posting of a police force. It said Mr Kalita had purchased only four out of the 21 pattas of the garden and that too without buildings and machinery and even tea bushes. The petitions were being heard and the judgment had not been delivered till the time of their departure to the garden yesterday.

The Additional District Magistrate yesterday delivered his judgment, saying that possession could not be given for the second time.

Mr Kalita is ill and is under treatment in the Christian Hospital.

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The Statesman.