

Kerala's protesting ASHA workers march to CM's residence

To observe protest day on Thursday across the State

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THE HINDU BUREAU



Police use water cannons to disperse ASHA workers attempting to cross the barricade in front of Devaswom Board junction during their Cliff House march, after 8 months of protest outside Secretariat, in Thiruvananthapuram, on Wednesday | Photo Credit: KRIPA SURESH

A section of ASHA workers who have been staging an agitation for eight months seeking an increase in their remuneration and retirement benefits ramped up their protest by taking out a march to Cliff House, the Chief Minister's official residence, in the State capital on Wednesday.

The ASHAs, under the umbrella of the Kerala ASHA Health Workers' Association (KAHWA), decided to organise a protest day across the State on Thursday in protest against the action against ASHAs. They will wear black clothing and badges and wave black flags during the protest.

Earlier in the day, the ASHAs who had been staging a protest in front of the Secretariat for 255 days marched from PMG Junction to the Cliff House. The police had put up barricades to block them. The police also used water cannons multiple times on the protesters, but it failed to deter them. The protesters, holding placards and shouting slogans, climbed the barricades, leading to a standoff. The protesters who went over the barricades were taken into custody by the police.

The ASHA workers alleged that their leaders M.A. Bindu and S. Mini were forcibly taken into custody.

The police released the ASHA workers and assured them that an opportunity to meet with the Chief Minister would be arranged, Ms. Mini said.

Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan called the police action anti-democratic.

In a statement on Wednesday, Mr. Satheesan said a protest seeking a hike in wages was not the first in the State. However, the government was dealing with them as if they were foes. The police used water cannons on the women. There were allegations that the clothing of some women was torn by the police. The arrest of UDF secretary C.P. John who had reached the spot to express solidarity with the protesters could not be defended.

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