

Kochouseph shoulders his load, unloads errant union

V-Guard MD Demonstrates His Success Formula

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A HEAD honcho of a Kerala-based company on Wednesday demonstrated why he is a success in a state that is not particularly high on entrepreneurial skills. In the process, he also showed what it takes to survive in a state where labour militancy is officially under control but rears its head every now and then.

When the members of CPM trade union, CITU, prevented employees of garment-maker V-star, part of the ₹500-crore V-Guard group, from unloading goods from a truck, the managing director of V-Guard Kochouseph Chittilappily himself got on to the truck and unloaded the cartons, leaving the trade union members aghast and a few policemen looking on helplessly.

The matter has brought to focus the contentious issue of 'nokku kooli', a fee charged by organized trade union workers for just observing work being done by others in their territory. The incident happened near Elamakkara, in the heart of Kochi, Kerala's business capital. Chittilappily's wife Sheela, who is managing director of V-Star, said the godown where the incident happened had been hired at ₹1 lakh per month since the past nine months, but operations had been prevented after three months, owing to labour militancy.

V-Star general manager K Vaidyanthan told ET that the company had decided to go to court regarding the matter. "The godown was in a designated area where labour cards issued by the labour department are required. Our staff hold those cards and are thus eligible to do the work, and yet they were prevented from doing so. We do not entertain requests for 'nokku kooli' because we believe there is no need to succumb to such tactics. After the incident, we have been encouraged by many quarters to go to court and ensure our rights," he said.

CITU state general secretary MM Lawrence



made a caustic remark about the incident, stating it was "good that an owner does unloading, so he'll know what effort workers put into it", adding, "It is unlikely that he will do it everyday". Lawrence, however, said CITU did not believe in seeking wages without working, and that the union would look into the allegation of CITU members preventing workers from their job at the V-Star godown.

Opposition leader Oommen Chandy said 'nokku kooli' had to be seen as a social problem, and that the state government ought to tackle the matter. Earlier this week, Chittilappily, a popular businessman in the state, had made news by deciding to donate his kidney in a philanthropic move.