

IL&FS hostage crisis: Ethiopian staff now insist on 8 months' salary

Road authority backs ransom call; power, water to Indians cut

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Mumbai, December 30

The hostage situation involving the four Indian IL&FS employees in Ethiopia is spiralling out of control with the Ethiopian Road Authority (ERA) backing the local staff's demand of 12.4 million Ethiopian Birr (ETB) from the company for their release.

"The Indian embassy here is only assuring us that we will stay alive, and that the Ethiopian Ministry has given its word that we won't be killed. They are concerned only about our safety at the camp. They have no power to free us from this hostage situation," Chaitanya Hari, one of the stranded employees, told *BusinessLine*.

Earlier, the ERA was against the demand for additional payment as there is no clause to pay extra months' salaries for the termination of the project, said Hari. It was during a meeting held on Friday to resolve the issue that the ERA joined hands with the local employees in backing their demand for fresh payment.

The meeting involved members of the Indian embassy, ERA



The ransom of 12.4 million ETB represents another eight months' salary of the local employees REUTERS

representatives, an IL&FS employee of the company sent to resolve the issue, the local contractors and the labour union leaders.

"After Friday's failed meeting, the locals have become more violent. They have

stopped our water and food supply," said Hari.

BusinessLine had reported on December 11 about the Ethiopian employees demanding more monetary benefits, despite IL&FS paying them the salary that was due. It is with

the ERA that ITNL-Elsamex JV Bure — a joint venture between IL&FS Transportation Networks Ltd and Elsamex S.A. — is working on road projects in Ethiopia.

A source at the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the Ministry is working on the matter.

The MEA won't be able to comment further unless there is any new development on this matter, the source added. This is what the MEA has been saying ever since this issue came to light on November 28, though the employees have been stranded since November 24. IL&FS declined to comment.

Unless the ransom money is paid, the locals won't allow the release of the employees, said Hari.

The other stranded employees are Sukhvinder Singh, Bishnu Nagaraju and Khurram Imam.