

## Punjab slapgate gets wider; protestors caned before Badal



IANIS

Wednesday, 07 December 2011

**CHANDIGARH: Scores of protestors were assaulted by police with batons as they blocked way to Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal's motorcade in Sukhna Abloo village of Muktsar district Wednesday, a union leader said.**

The village, some 280 km from here, has been in the news in the last four days after its resident and woman teacher Barinder Pal Kaur was repeatedly slapped by a ruling Shiromani Akali Dal village sarpanch (headman), Baljinder Singh, Sunday. A spokesman for the state Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) teachers claimed that at least eight teachers were injured in the police cane-charge and also when the chief minister's car hit two protesting women teachers.

"Two women teachers were hit by the CM's car. But the CM did not stop and women teachers kept crying after getting serious injuries. Police did not spare villagers. An octogenarian was slapped by a policeman. Women teachers were beaten up with lathis. Five people were detained and eight others were injured. The police also manhandled media persons," EGS Teachers Union president Prithipal Singh said.

When Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal reached the village Wednesday, he met the victim and other protesting teachers. As they demanded harsher punishment for the headman, Badal said that a case had already been registered. As Badal refused to give any commitment on giving permanent jobs to EGS teachers, they and other villagers staged a protest outside the venue of Badal's 'Sangat Darshan' (meet the public) programme.

When Badal's high-security motorcade started moving, the protestors, including teachers and villagers, blocked its way and some even tried to sit on the bonnets of the cars. However, the police chased them away with a mild cane-charge.

Barinder Pal Kaur, whose slapping by village headman Baljinder Singh has reverberated across the country, and her protesting EGS teacher colleagues have announced they will immolate themselves outside the house of Deputy Chief Minister and Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal in Chandigarh Thursday, the birthday of the chief minister.

Baljinder Singh was caught on camera mercilessly slapping and assaulting the woman teacher. Baljinder was Tuesday booked for assaulting Barinder Pal Kaur as she tried to reach ruling Shiromani Akali Dal MP from Bathinda, Harsimrat Badal, the chief minister's daughter-in-law, to submit a memorandum seeking permanent jobs for teachers.

He was finally arrested Tuesday evening but let off by the police on personal bail.

Baljinder was charged with only causing hurt and wrongful restraint -- both bailable offences -- and continued to roam free Tuesday and refused to even apologise for the incident. "I have done nothing wrong. Why should I apologise? I did not slap her. The media is only playing up the whole issue," Baljinder claimed.

The National Commission for Women (NCW) Tuesday slammed the Punjab government for not taking strong action against the headman and said it has taken cognizance of the incident and asked the state to send a report why this happened.

NCW chairperson Mamta Sharma said a committee will be sent to the state to probe the case.

The Akali Dal has been left embarrassed by the slapgate incident. In recent months, there have been several instances of protestors, mostly seeking jobs, being beaten up by police in the vicinity of Akali Dal leaders, particularly of Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal.

Assembly elections will be held in Punjab in February-March next year.