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## Tata Motor's car project at Singur on track

SUTANUKA GHOSAL AND TAMAL SENGUPTA

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KOLKATA: The Tata Motors car project at Singur is on track. This extremely crucial announcement was made to the media at a rather hurriedly convened conference by Tata Motors managing director Mr Ravi Kant on Saturday afternoon.

For the past couple of months, the pitch was queered in many ways by a belligerent Opposition morally supported by divisive Left partners -- so much so in fact that serious doubts were raised about whether the Tatas would at all like to go ahead with this showpiece project in West Bengal.

Mr Ravi Kant's declaration on Saturday therefore came as music to pro-industry campaigners in West Bengal. "We are satisfied with the progress of the project. We will do it here," he said.

Of course, he made it clear that the company had been looking at other states also and some of the proposals that had come were actually better. "However, Mr Ratan Tata has a soft corner for West Bengal and we are therefore here," he said.

Ironically, even as Tata Motors virtually sealed the deal in Kolkata, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee threatened to resist the setting up of the Tata Motors factory "even at the cost of bloodshed". Incidentally, the state government has received consent letters from the owners of 927 acres that are to be handed over to the Tatas for the project.

"We will not allow the Tata Motors to set up their plant. We will resist it. I will rush to Singur on Sunday to prevent the district administration fence the acquired land with barbed wires. I can rush to the area even on Saturday midnight, if the farmers call me" Ms Banerjee told newsmen in another media conference in the city.

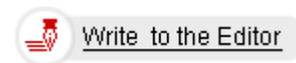
"The government had collected the land at gun point. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's government is so frightened that the district administration of Hooghly is calling police from the neighbouring districts of Howrah and North 24-Parganas. More than 550 persons at Singur have not given consent to the government's land acquisition move," she said.

The Tata Motors chief however refused to comment on the political agitation. "Anybody can agitate in a democratic society. As a company, we do not have anything to do with it. But we are always open to talks with all stakeholders involved in the Singur project. We can explain to them the importance of the project, not only for West Bengal but for the entire eastern region," Mr Kant said.

"The proposed plant will generate employment for 2,000 people directly and 10,000 people indirectly. We will initially manufacture 2.5 lakh cars at Singur. The first people's car will roll out in 2008" Mr Kant said.

Mr Kant also indicated that Tata Motors might consider manufacturing the small car in other states too or adopt a franchisee model once the company achieved one million sales within two to three years of the first rollout.

"Several prototypes have been tested. Orders have been placed with vendors. Machineries have been ordered. Work is on full swing" he said. Earlier, in the day Mr Kant attended the 150th anniversary function of Bengal Engineering and Science University (BESU). He assured the members of Besu to help them to set up a Centre of Excellence on automobile engineering at Besu.



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