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People's car in people's court - Tatas in hard sell, Mamata cries blood

OUR BUREAU



Ravi Kant, Tata Motors MD.

The Tatas do have some kind of emotional connect and soft spot for the people of Bengal

Calcutta, Nov. 25: Warned of a "bloodbath", the Tatas have reached out to the people of Bengal to keep the "crown jewel" small-car project on track.

"This is the crown jewel project for the Tatas, who do have some kind of emotional connect and soft spot for the people of Bengal. This is why Ratan Tata chose this state for the second cancer hospital and now this automobile project," Ravi Kant, the managing director of Tata Motors, said here today.

Kant said the project to build the Rs 1-lakh vehicle — which some describe as the people's car — will "change the dynamics of auto industry not only in India but also around the world". "Bengal should not lose such an opportunity and any decision should be taken with a long-term consideration."

As the Tata Motors official spoke, so did Mamata Banerjee some kilometres away. The Trinamul Congress leader warned of a "bloodbath" in Singur, where the Tata project is scheduled to come up, if land is forcibly taken away from farmers.

"I will fight the landgrabbers with my life," added Mamata, who is expected to go to Singur tomorrow to sow potato seeds. Mamata was scheduled to be in Singur, where security has been beefed up, today but the presence of Kant in the state apparently prompted her to postpone the visit and hold a media conference.



Mamata Banerjee

There will be bloodshed if the land at Singur is forcibly taken away from farmers

Kant, who was in Bengal to inaugurate a centre of excellence for automobile engineering at Bengal Engineering and Science University, Shibpur, focused on detailing the dividends the state stands to gain from the car project.

"It is a well-known fact that the city of Pune transformed into a state-of-the-art auto hub after we set up our plant there. If we have done something for Pune on a scale of 10, given a chance, we are willing to do it on a scale of 25 for Bengal," Kant said. Tata Motors is willing to talk to and meet any stakeholder to illustrate what the company has done in Pune, Uttaranchal, Korea, Spain and South Africa.

He said the "sincerity and openness" of the state government — plus the terms and conditions — had prompted the company to change its mind despite deciding on another location for the plant. "Sitting in Mumbai, we just had a perception about the state which pleasantly changed when we started interacting with them."

Kant, who had hinted in September that the company could look at locations elsewhere if the Singur land is not given by the end of this year, today said the progress so far with acquisition has been very encouraging and satisfactory. The government wants to hand over the land in January after the harvest is over.

Several proposals have been received to set up plants in other states, which would be considered depending upon the demand for the small car.

Bengal will be the centre of attraction, the mother plant that would supply components to other plants. Around 70 to 80 component vendors are expected to set up units in the state.

