

Withdraw price hikes, Govt. urged

From Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, Sept. 17.

Several organisations today condemned the increase in the price of petroleum products and appealed to the Government to withdraw the hike because its cascading effect would cause severe hardship to the common man.

And linking their demands to these developments, the Central Government employees today threatened to go on strike if DA increase and bonus issues were not settled by September 25.

In a press release issued here, Mr. S. K. Vyas, Secretary-General of the Confederation of Central Government Employees and Workers, said Central Government employees all over the country were agitated because the orders sanctioning the DA increase of 12 per cent of the basic pay due from July 1 and bonus for 1991-92 had not been issued so far. They had also reacted angrily at the hike in the prices of milk, petrol, diesel, LPG etc.

As the Government had not responded so far to their requests for a discussion of these issues, Mr. Vyas said the Confederation leaders had decided to warn the Government that if the issues connected with bonus are not discussed and settled and orders granting DA increase and bonus are not issued by September 25, the Central Government employees "may have to strike work".

The AFHQ/ISO Employees' Association decided to hold a lunch hour rally at the office of the Finance Minister tomorrow to protest against the hike. Mr. I. A. Siddiqui, Association President, said in a press release, said that Government employees in large numbers were expected to participate in the protest which will also demand immediate release of the DA instalment, increase in bonus limit to Rs. 4,500 and revision of pay-scales.

The National Federation of Indian Women criticised the Government for the increase. Ms. Tara Reddy, Federation General Secretary, appealed to women to come out on the streets to force the Government to immediately withdraw the hike. Ten other women's organisations also

appealed to the women to join them in their united struggle to oppose the Government decision.

Mr. A. U. Sheriff, President, All-India Motor Transport Congress, said because of the increase in the price of diesel, the operating cost of an average truck operator would go up by more than Rs. 29,000, per year. It would not be easy to pass this on to the users because 90 per cent of the truck operators were small entrepreneurs who were struggling to survive in a cut-throat competition scenario. Thus, for quite sometime now, the truck operators had been absorbing a major portion of the operating cost increases by cutting corners and overloading vehicles.

He said the Government was overlooking the loss to the country from overloading, including foreign exchange needed for additional and avoidable import of bitumen and diesel. The instant diesel price hike could easily be obviated only if the Central and State Governments decided to curb overloading on a war-footing. This would balance the Government deficits without adding to the burden of the people, he said appealing to the Government to withdraw the hike in the price of diesel.

Expressing similar views, Mr. B. D. Sharma, President, Delhi Goods Transport Association, expressed the apprehension that because of the difference in the prices of diesel and kerosene more bunks would be tempted to sell adulterated diesel which would reduce the life of truck engines. He appealed to the Prime Minister, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, to withdraw the hike and save the road transport industry.

The Delhi State Organising Committee of the Socialist Unity Centre of India called upon the Left and democratic forces in particular and the Indian masses in general to come forward and strengthen the democratic movements against the Narasimha Rao Government to force it to withdraw its decision.

Prof. J. D. Agarwal, Director, Indian Institute of Finance, said in a press release that the increase was highly irrational from the point of view of economic, political and social considerations. He said the increase would boost unproductive inflation by about two per cent and push up inflation.

The decision was also not justifiable because the pre-increase price was fixed when the international price of petrol was \$ 42 per barrel.