

Toyota Next Up In Chinese Supplier Strikes

Elaine Kurtenbach, AP Business Writer

SHANGHAI (AP) — Toyota Motor was assessing the impact Friday from strikes that hit two of its China-based parts suppliers, the latest unrest among migrant workers who are the backbone of the country's industrial sector.

Workers at a plastic parts factory of Toyota Motor Corp. affiliate Toyoda Gosei Co. in the northeastern city of Tianjin went on strike Thursday, forcing the plant's production line to shut down in the afternoon, said Toyoda Gosei spokesman Tomotaka Ito, at the company's headquarters in Aichi, Japan.

That walkout followed a one-day strike by workers at another Toyoda Gosei unit and Toyota supplier, Tianjin Star Light Rubber and Plastic Co., which ended Wednesday after the company agreed to review the pay for its 800 workers.

"We are aware of the strike at Tianjin Toyoda Gosei. We are checking its impact on production ... and will continue to closely monitor the situation," said Toyota spokesman Hideaki Homma.

Ito said Toyoda Gosei was still negotiating with workers over their demand for higher wages.

"But at this moment, we don't know when we can resume production," he said. Ito did not say how many workers were involved in the strike.

It was unclear if Toyota's car assembly operations in China were affected by the disputes.

Earlier strikes at several China suppliers of Honda Motor Co. have forced it to suspend car assembly intermittently in the past month due to a lack of parts.

Workers at Honda Lock (Guangdong) ended a strike and went back to their jobs earlier this week after the company agreed to continue with talks on their demands for wage increases.

So far, most of the auto-related labor disputes have been reported in southern China, near Guangzhou, where both Honda and Toyota have manufacturing bases along with their local partner Guangzhou Auto Group. Toyota has a separate joint venture in Tianjin with FAW Group.

Although Beijing has so far said little about specific labor disputes, Premier Wen Jiabao earlier this week signaled the leadership's concern, urging better treatment for the country's legions of young migrant workers.

A labor law that went into effect in 2008 has accelerated an upsurge in workers'

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awareness of their rights. Meanwhile, there has been a generation shift between older migrant workers, who grew up in poverty and usually were the first in their families to seek non-farm work, and their children, who have higher expectations and less tolerance for low wages and harsh conditions.

China bans public dissent, as well as independent labor organizing outside its own All-China Federation of Trade Unions. But authorities often tolerate sporadic, peaceful protests over local issues — perhaps as a way of relieving frustrations that could fester and erupt into violence.

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Associated Press writer Shino Yuasa in Tokyo contributed to this report.

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