

# India: West Bengal Zomato Employees' Protest Was Originally About Pay Structure

Sunday 20 October 2019, by [The Wire \(IN\)](#) (Date first published: 13 August 2019).

**The issues of delivering beef and pork were reportedly brought to the forefront after the initial protest got less attention and a BJP leader got involved.**

**New Delhi:** The protest by Zomato employees in Howrah, covered by a number of media houses on Sunday, appears to be more complicated than previously realised.

On Sunday, news agency ANI reported that Zomato employees in Howrah were protesting against having to deliver beef and pork food products on the eve of Eid, saying that the delivery hurts the religious sentiments of both Hindu and Muslim delivery agents.

Employees said, "The company is not listening to our demands & forcing us to deliver beef & pork against our will. We have been on strike for a week now." The strike was said to continue indefinitely.

West Bengal: Zomato food delivery executives in Howrah are on an indefinite strike protesting against delivering beef and pork, say, "The company is not listening to our demands & forcing us to deliver beef & pork against our will. We have been on strike for a week now." [pic.twitter.com/tPVLlQc2SZ](https://pic.twitter.com/tPVLlQc2SZ)

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2019](#)

## BJP influence on 'non political' protest

However, a closer look threw up a number of inconsistencies in the narrative. Among them was the presence of a local BJP leader, [Sanjay Kumar Shukla](#), the secretary of BJP's Uttar Howrah Mandal 2, seen above standing with the Zomato employees in front of the media.

"I am not with the protesting employees as a BJP man," Shukla told the *Indian Express* on Monday.

"We do not want to politicise the issue," he said, and went on to politicise the issue by saying, "But how can a Hindu deliver beef and a Muslim deliver pork?... This hurts a person's religious sentiments."

## Pay structure primary reason for protest

*Indian Express* and [HuffPost](#) both report that the protest was originally concerning the worker's issues surrounding their pay structure, and was brought to the public eye when they included the religious angle.

"Our boys also protested against the delivery of pork and beef then. But mainly it was a payment

issue. But now suddenly the media has highlighted our agitation on the pork and beef issue,” Sujit Kumar Gupta, who has been working with the food delivery app for the past two years, said.

This follows on the pattern of Zomato being in the public eye for religiously motivated protests against their services.

On July 31, a communal Hindu man caused a digital outcry when he protested against his food being delivered by a Muslim man, saying it violated his religious principles. [Zomato took a stand](#) against this, saying that it would not discriminate against its employees. [HuffPost reports](#) that the protest by the workers allegedly began four days after this took place.

On August 5, a Zomato team leader in Kolkata allegedly gathered all his delivery agents in an open field outside their office in Howrah and told them their pay would be slashed.

“When I joined work two years ago, I was assured that I will earn a minimum of Rs 4,000 per week with or without orders. We got Rs 80 to Rs 100 for each delivery. We used to get incentives. Now, we get Rs 25 per delivery... Initially, one would earn Rs 30,000 to Rs 40,000 per month. Now, we hardly make Rs 15,000 despite working from 12 noon to midnight,” said Gupta to *Indian Express*.

*HuffPost* reports that Brij Verma, a protesting delivery agent, approached BJP leader Sanjay Kumar Shukla after the protest went largely ignored by the media. Shukla allegedly helped arrange the press conference on August 12, which brought the matter to the public eye.

This raises the spectre of the protest being leveraged by politically motivated individuals, even if it is based on a valid grievance by the workers themselves.

### **Unfounded rumours of ‘beef selling’ restaurants on Zomato**

Another suspect aspect of this has been the alleged inclusion of restaurants serving beef and pork in the Howrah area as a new and consequently insensitive decision taken by Zomato.

According to [India Today](#), Bajraj Nath Brahma, a Zomato food delivery staff in Howrah, said, “Zomato has presently tied up with some new restaurants that are compelling us to work under any circumstances and we cannot cancel any order at any cost. If any of us deny delivering any particular food then this would fall under denial dispute which would be followed up by manager.”

However, internet sleuths pointed out that there were no restaurants serving beef in the area that would be served by Howrah’s Zomato delivery agents.

When the point was raised with Verma, he said, “*Yeh technical ka zamana hai*. We opened that app and there was a beef restaurant there,” he told *HuffPost India*, trying to explain how he came to know of the ‘beef restaurant’.

“I opened the app, and the restaurant was there,” Verma insisted.

*HuffPost* reports that when he was asked to name the restaurants, he mentioned one called ‘Real’ which isn’t on the Zomato delivery app, but happens to be in the same neighbourhood where Sanjeev Kumar Shukla lives as per his Facebook profile.

The restaurant has apparently been a neighbourhood establishment for 20 years, and while it confirms that it serves beef, it denied any plans to sign up with Zomato.

Verma also said that he was newly informed by ‘a friend’ on August 6, that pepperoni was a product

containing pork, which aggravated the religious sentiments of the Muslim members of the protest.

Mousin Akhter, one of the leaders of the protest, was earlier been reported by *India Today* to have [said](#), “We are also facing pay issues and the lack of medical facilities. All this is hampering the fraternal bond between us as we have to deliver food which is not permitted by our religion. Our religious sentiment is being hurt. The company knows everything, but instead of helping us they are using false allegations against us.”

West Bengal minister Rajib Banerjee [said](#) that the organisation should not force anyone to go against their religion.

“The organisation should not force any person to go against their religion. It is wrong. Now that I have received information in this regard, I will look into it the matter,” Banerjee said.

West Bengal has also seen an increase in food-related religious ‘hurt sentiments’ – a beef festival was [forced to cancel](#) in June this year, after receiving direct threats.

West Bengal currently [does not have](#) any sort of beef ban – unlike several other regions. In 2017, Mamata Banerjee [protested the Centre’s ban](#) on the sale of cattle for slaughter, calling it unconstitutional, and questioning the Modi government on the timing of the ban – just before Ramzan. The West Bengal government also at the time rolled out a ‘[Meat on Wheels](#)’ project to deliver a variety of meat (except beef) to doorsteps.

*Note: This article was originally published on August 11 and republished with new information on August 13.*

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