

Fired Indian workers lynch CEO

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Corporate India is in shock after a mob of workers bludgeoned to death the chief executive who sacked them from a factory in a suburb of Delhi.

Lalit Kishore Choudhary, 47, the head of the Indian operations of Graziano Transmissioni, a manufacturer of car parts that has its headquarters in Italy, died of severe head wounds on Monday after being attacked by scores of laid-off employees, police said. The incident, in Greater Noida, followed a long-running dispute between the factory's management and workers demanding better pay and permanent contracts.

It is understood that Mr Choudhary, who was married with one son, had called a meeting with more than a hundred former employees who had been dismissed after an earlier outbreak of violence at the plant. He wanted to discuss a possible reinstatement deal.

A police spokesman said: "Only a few people were called inside. About 150 people were waiting outside when they heard someone from inside shout for help. They rushed in and the two sides clashed. The company staff were heavily outnumbered."

Other executives said that they were lucky to escape with their lives. "I locked my door from inside and prayed they would not break in. See, my hands are trembling even three hours later," one Italian consultant told reporters.

More than 60 people were arrested and more than 20 were in hospital yesterday.

A spokesman for the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry said: "Such a heinous act is bound to sully India's image among overseas investors."

The murder has stoked fears that outbreaks of mob rule risk jeopardising the sub-continent's economic rise. Thousands of violent protesters recently forced Tata, the Indian conglomerate that owns Land Rover and Jaguar, to halt work on a plant being built to produce the world's cheapest car, the £1,250 Nano. The move could result in £200 million in investment costs being written off.

Tata stopped work three weeks ago, saying that it could not guarantee its workers' safety at the factory in the state of West Bengal. The billionaire industrialist Mukesh Ambani said that the Nano crisis showed how protesters were creating "a fear psychosis to slow down certain projects of national importance". Other companies, including Vedanta, the London-listed mining company, have encountered similar problems in India.

In a statement issued from Rivoli, Italy, Graziano said that some of Mr Choudhary's attackers had no connection with the company.