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LOCKDOWN BLUES

India Inc Faces Big Shortage of Workers

Cos offer extra wages, bonus and transport to woo workers from near and distant states

Fewer Hands

Industries' Estimated Labour Shortfall

Construction & Real Estate	52%	
Manufacturing	44%	
Healthcare & Pharma	42%	
FMCG	30%	
Logistics	28%	
Ecommerce	25%	

Source: TeamLease Services

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Mumbai: Construction and real estate are staring at a worker shortage of 52%, followed by manufacturing at 44% and healthcare and pharmaceuticals at 42%, according to a survey based on initial hiring discussions, enquiries and mandates.

Companies across industries are facing a huge shortage of blue-collar workers as they gradually resume operations after the lockdown, and many are lining up incentives to woo workers from near and far.

Triggered mostly by the mass exodus of migrant labourers from urban centres across the country during the two months-plus lockdown when most of them lost their livelihoods, the overall shortfall is estimated at 40-50% over the next few months, according to a survey conducted exclusively for ET by staffing firm TeamLease Services.

With workers in short supply, firms are going all out to hire people from nearby villages as well as far-off states, offering extra wages, bonus, food, transportation facilities and other support such as providing 15-day isolation facilities for entry into states that require mandatory quarantine.

Storekeepers, Guards in Demand >> 6

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Storekeepers, Guards in Demand

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“The demand-supply gap is high because the blue-collar workforce is hugely dependent on migrant workers and getting them back is a big task,” said Amit Vadera, assistant vice president at TeamLease Services. “We see a temporary wage hike for the blue-collar workers in the form of extra hourly or daily wage, bonus, and other perks as companies will make an attempt to retain the migrants.”

Companies in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), manufacturing, pharma and healthcare, engineering, ecommerce, and logistics sectors have started hiring, Vadera said. Key profiles in demand include maintenance engineers, dispatchers, lab technicians, security guards, sweepers, packers, delivery staff, storekeepers, drivers, masons, tile fixers, electricians and store executives.

Dabur India is recruiting wor-

kers from villages and towns in the areas near their manufacturing units in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. “Also, wherever we are facing shortage, we have sought and received permissions from state authorities to hire workers from other states,” said Biplob Baksi, executive director, HR.

The company has gone to states such as Jharkhand to hire workers and has arranged transportation for them to reach its manufacturing units. “All safety protocols mandated by each state, like social distancing, etc, are being followed during the transportation, and once they reach our manufacturing units,” Baksi said.

Some firms such as KEC International are considering incentives. “We may give incentive/retention pay to people who commit to stay back for some time,” said Vimal Kejriwal, CEO of the power transmission engineering, procurement and construction company that has

started hiring local unskilled labour and giving them training.

SOUTHERN STATES HIT MOST

Experts said the shortage is acute in regions that are more dependent on migrant workers, such as many of the southern states.

Santrupt Misra, CEO of the carbon black business at Aditya Birla Group, however, said the shortage of workers may not be prolonged or debilitating. “There are a lot of people already coming back,” he said. “If payment is done smoothly and income flow regularises, more people will return.”

Misra believes most people who fled to their villages will eventually return to urban centres. “Also, India has a lot of young aspirational workforce that is waiting in the rural areas who will want to come and work in urban centres,” he said.

Some industrialists said it’s important to assuage the concerns of those who were forced to flee the cities. “You have to remove the fear about the virus and give them their jobs back. People will automatically return,” said Niranjan Hiranandani, managing director of the Hiranandani Group.