

BSNL to retrench another 20,000 contract workers: Employees' union

Synopsis

The union in a letter to BSNL Chairman and Managing Director P K Purwar said the financial condition of the company has deteriorated after implementation of voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) and the faults in the networks have increased due to shortage of manpower various cities.



NEW DELHI: State-owned BSNL has issued a directive to all its units to curtail expenditure on contract works which is likely to result in retrenchment of around 20,000 workers engaged with the telecom firm through contractors, according to BSNL Employees' Union.

The union also claimed that 30,000 contractual workers have already been retrenched under the company's retrenchment process and added that all such workers remained unpaid for more than a year.

The union in a letter to BSNL Chairman and Managing Director P K Purwar said the financial condition of the company has deteriorated after implementation of voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) and the faults in the networks have increased due to shortage of manpower in various cities.

The union also said that BSNL is unable to pay salaries of employees on due date even after VRS and 13 contract workers have allegedly committed suicide due to non-payment of wages for the past 14 months.

Queries sent to BSNL did not elicit an immediate response.

BSNL issued an order on September 1 with the permission of its human resource director asking all the chief general managers "to take immediate steps to curtail the expenditure on contract works and reduce engagement of labours through contractors".

The order said the CMD has desired that "with the implementation of cluster based approach in most of the circles, there is no justification for housekeeping labourers and other contractual staff such as security etc".

According to the order, the CMD has desired that each circle of BSNL should "draw a clear road map for non-engagement of contract labours immediately".

BSNL Employees Union General Secretary P Abhimany told PTI that due to the retrenchment process around 30,000 labourers have been sent home and 20,000 more will be impacted.

"After the implementation of the VRS-2019, through which 79,000 employees have been sent home, the necessity to continue with the existing contract workers became even more compulsory. However, you have decided to retrench thousands of contract workers, which have only helped to worsen the maintenance of our networks at the field level," the BSNL Employees' Union said in a letter dated September 3 to the company's CMD.

The union said that due to reduction in workforce, the quality of BSNL services has undoubtedly deteriorated and all the major unions and associations, which are part of the All Unions and Associations of BSNL (AUAB), are of the same opinion.

"Before the implementation of the VRS-2019, it was tom-tommed in a very big way by you that BSNL will achieve its **financial revival** through the VRS, since it will result in massive reduction in the company's expenditures. However, we have no hesitation to state that the financial position of the company has worsened after the implementation of the VRS," it wrote.

The government last month had approved a plum Rs 69,000-crore revival package for BSNL and MTNL in October 2019 that includes merging the two loss-making firms, monetising their assets and giving VRS to employees so that the combined entity turns profitable in two years.

The BSNL union said that due to deteriorating financial health, the company has been unable to clear salary dues of the employees on the due date.

"Above all, the poor contract workers are not paid wages for the past 14 months, as a result of which 13 contract workers have committed suicide. Who is responsible for all these deaths? Undoubtedly, it is the BSNL management, under your stewardship," the union said.

The employees' union said the revival of BSNL is becoming a distant dream, only because of the denial of 4G technology to the company.

"The decision of the government to allot 4G spectrum to BSNL still remains on paper. Even 10 months after the announcement of the revival package, BSNL has not been able to roll out its 4G service. Exactly, this is the reason why BSNL is not able to increase its revenue," the union alleged.

BSNL is in the process of floating a new 4G tender after its earlier Rs 9,300 crore tender was scrapped following a complaint by domestic telecom gear makers.

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