

## Karnataka government notifies 10-hour work shift for three months

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The State government on Friday notified a 10-hour work shift per day, up from eight hours, for a period of three months. Similarly, the number of weekly working hours was raised to 60 from 48. This came amid opposition from workers' unions to any increase in working hours.

The three-month window started on Friday and will end on August 21. The notification issued by the Labour Department was made under Section 5 of the Factories Act that equips the government to make changes in "emergency" situations for a maximum of three months.

The changes in working hours had been sought by the Commerce and Industries Department, and the notification came amid speculation that the State government could promulgate an ordinance to bring about changes to labour laws, following in the footsteps of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat. Industry bodies, including Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FKCCI) and Karnataka Small-Scale Industries Association, had also sought an increase in working hours and had petitioned Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa and Labour Minister A. Shivaram Hebbar on the matter.

"In an exercise of powers conferred under Section 5 of Factories Act, 1948, the Government of Karnataka is pleased to order that all the factories registered under the Act shall be exempted from the provisions of Section 51 (weekly hours) and Section 54 (daily hours)," the government notification read. It further said that no adult worker would be allowed or required to work in a factory for more than 10 hours a day or 60 hours a week, "The provisions of Section 59 regarding overtime wages shall continue to be applicable without any change," the notification said.

### **'Immoral and illegal'**

Trade unions termed the notification "both immoral and illegal" and having far-reaching impact on workers. They said it would be challenged legally and on the streets. The increase in working hours will result in unemployment as factories could terminate the services of casual and contract workers as shift hours have been increased, All-India Trade Union Congress general secretary D.A. Vijaybhaskar told The Hindu.

"The State government notified the changes without consulting the workers' union and misusing the COVID-19 situation. The government has succumbed to pressure from industries," he said. "While the current notification is for three months, our fear is that it will be extended in the future too." He argued that Section 5 could be invoked in times of grave emergency, but the COVID-19 pandemic was not an emergency where the security of the country was threatened. "While Section 5 can exempt any factory or a class of factories

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from the provisions of the law, it cannot have blanket exemption to all industries across the State,” he added.

Welcoming the government’s decision, FKCCI president C.R. Janardhan said the increase in working hours would improve productivity and revenue for all the stakeholders. “The improved productivity and revenue will also ensure better industrial relations. We are thankful to the government for having heard our plea.”