

Industries now eye local villages for manpower

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Labour contractors are recruiting youths from hamlets around MIDC areas in full swing, whether skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled; unit's desperately wooing workforce as they limp back to scaling up production.

The tragic exodus of migrant labourers due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent resumption of work in Maharashtra Industrial Development

Corporation (MIDC) areas around Pune has now coincided, resulting in a huge shortage of manpower for units trying to limp back to normal production activities.

Now, to find a solution, a few industries are approaching local villagers to recruit in their new workforce.

Several industries have already assigned labour contractors to hold recruitment camps in nearby villages, in a bid to attract local youths towards their work. Some of these contractors are aggressively reaching out to villagers for the same, asking their staffers to visit the hamlets and hold meetings with viable candidates. They have also printed pamphlets about job openings and are circulating those.

Elaborating on the idea, Rajendra Gore, a labour contractor from Chakan MIDC, shared, "After a two-month lockdown, units here are slowly starting production again, but a large number of migrant labourers have left the area, leaving them struggling for manpower. We all came up with the idea to spread the word on recruitment in nearby villages to attract youths who can join the production field. It will be a win-win situation — locals will get jobs and industry will get its workforce."

Villagers are being assured by these contractors that companies will provide a transport service, free meal and accommodation for those with issues.

Sandip Mahajan, a contractor holding camps at villages in Manchar, Junnar, Khed and Ambegaon, said, "Some industries have infrastructure ready, but migrant labourers have left. We are contacting many villages with the message that if youths have the necessary skills, they can earn more than just daily wages. Some companies are ready to recruit them on the payroll if they work sincerely."

In fact, contractors are looking for not just skilled, but also semi-skilled and unskilled workers among locals, to be recruited depending on educational qualification and work experience. "There will be some graduates who are unemployed. It will be unfair to ask them to be unskilled labourers. For them, some industries are offering work of assisting in departments like in-store, accounts and more, where their academic backgrounds can come in handy. If there are some who have experience of working on machines, we can recruit them as machine or assembly operators," explained Gore.

Further, even if locals do not have previous industrial work experience, units plan to hold training sessions for them to get acquainted with the working culture. "Some industries are ready to invest in labourers if found promising. They will conduct training sessions with all necessary health safety precautions before putting them on the job," added Gore.

As per the labour department, there were around 3.5 lakh labourers in Pune district before the lockdown against coronavirus disease began. In recent weeks, when the Centre and states finally

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allowed movement of migrants to their homes, many returned to their native places, thanks to joblessness and penury here. Ironically, relaxations came into place shortly thereafter.

Encouraging the bandwagon to recruit locally, political leaders from these industrial areas have also joined the fray. Khed sabhapati Ankush Rakshe told Mirror, “Locals have previously complained that they do not get preference in industrial recruitments. Now, with much of the migrant workforce leaving, these locals have a chance to work in this sector. We encourage them to take it up. Some people who work in Mumbai and have come back during the lockdown can also get jobs at MIDCs and don’t need to go back to Mumbai.”

The same local politicians and industrial representatives are also working on holding sessions for villagers regarding recruitment. “We are contemplating a Recruitment rally in association with industries. The latter’s officials are also ready to offer incentives to locals for help in this difficult situation,” said Rakshe.

Workers who couldn’t join exodus back to their states are being offered Rs.2,000-3,000 higher wages per month, and perks like free accommodation, meals and check-ups, as units desperate to resume production although fairly desperate for manpower, some industrial representatives remained insistent that recruitment needs to be on their terms. Vijay Khade, general manager (human resources) of Eternis Fine Chemical Limited in Kurkumbh MIDC, said, “We need manpower to improve our products and with migrant labourers leaving these zones, some contractors have brought in local youths. We are happy to recruit them but they should look at this as an opportunity to get a job, rather than dictating terms.”