

In a move that will surely not go down well with the private companies in Goa, the government has issued show cause notices to 22 firms for participating in a trade fair in Sawantwadi. The rationale for the notices served by the Department of Labour and Employment, on the instruction of Labour Minister Rohan Khaunte, is that private companies operating in Goa should hire Goans – or at least should give preference to Goans first. In order to tighten the screws on such companies, the government is also mulling a move that would make it mandatory for private companies to obtain NOCs from the Employment Exchange to hire non-Goans, and also link jobs in private sector to the controversial Aadhaar card.

This move comes on the heels of the mining ban in March, which has led to a sudden loss of employment for several thousands. The government, therefore, needs to demonstrate that they are sincerely attempting to tackle the rising rates of unemployment in Goa. The move appears to be rather cosmetic, especially because Goans are unhappy with the current situation of employment in government and private sectors.

As such, is it wise for the government to promote private employment as a way out? While a government job would provide one with job security and benefits, the same cannot be said of the private sector. Especially those in so-called blue collar jobs are vulnerable to the uncertainties of the global markets and arbitrary changes by the managements. The question, therefore, is whether private companies are offering good working conditions, minimum wages, job security, and benefits such as maternity leave.

The Constitutional obligation of decent work, which also includes decent pay, should bind the private sector as well. Though there are laws that guarantee minimum wages and childcare/maternity benefits (amongst others), violations of these provisions are rarely reported, let alone fixed by the governmental authorities. Persons who work in private companies, especially the young ones who have just joined or are about to join the job market, are misguided by the myth that it is beneficial to work in extremely alienating conditions while earning less as that would bring out their inner potential.



Many state governments in India, such as Goa and Karnataka, deny private companies incentives if they fail to hire the requisite amount of “unskilled” locals. These rules are only confined to hiring of so-called “unskilled” workers in private firms; none in the government will ever think of interfering with recruitment to “skilled” positions. It is clear that the current initiative pushes blue collar Goan workers to settle for bad jobs, while the white collar jobs mostly go to non-Goans. At this point we need to ask why aren’t all the white collar jobs also reserved for Goans? In response, many within the government and private companies would assert that there aren’t enough Goans skilled to take up these jobs; they simply lack the merit. But the truth is that there is (and will be for sometime) a mismatch between the jobs available and Goans who are trained for them. Why does this happen?

The answer is the lack of access to quality and equal education. It is clear that such protectionist moves are aimed at giving jobs to the “unskilled” persons who hail from disadvantaged groups, particularly in terms of educational opportunities. Therefore, it is incumbent on the government that while they try to attract industry and investment it should simultaneously also invest in making Goan schools, colleges, and the lone university as centres of excellence. Tackling unemployment, therefore, is not just about creating jobs, but also reducing social inequalities. The lack of access to equal and quality education at all levels leads to increasing disparities between ‘skilled’ and ‘unskilled’ workers.

The other side of the issues is that Goans prefer employment in the government sector because private companies cannot provide job security. But this desire for government jobs comes with a catch! In the government, jobs are mostly disbursed as largesse by the politician to his constituents; the people on their parts also expect jobs in return for votes. Jobs are often allegedly purchased by way of heavy bribes. The current situation in Goa is one of broken promises: either there are very few temporary posts, as was seen with the 2500 candidates who sought 64 temporary posts. Or the government seems to be not serious in filling permanent vacancies, as about 2500 posts need the attention and approval of the absent and ailing Chief Minister of Goa. Add to this is the fact that Constitutionally-mandated reservations are scuttled in government employment.

How the elected legislators will deal with the issue of unemployment needs to be keenly

watched. For now, their feel-good politics do not appear to be promising. While there is an urgent need to tackle rising rates of unemployment, there is also an equally urgent necessity to ensure that this employment contributes to the betterment of the society.

The debate, thus, needs to shift elsewhere. One of the ways in which any change in the unemployment scenario can be achieved is by creating egalitarian conditions for the acquisition of skills/training and the eventual access to the job market – often through well thought out legislation (and not executive orders). Finally, it is critical that the government ensures that rights of the workers are secured in all forms of employment, not just in offices, but also in the industries, fields, and in construction sites.

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