

FOR DISCUSSION

Visiting VRS Proposals

DOT and BSNL are keeping VRS high on their agenda and want to push thro as early as possible. Source of funding is the cause for delay. **But Trade Unions cannot organize members for VRS.**

The managements/ Ministries are doing this under the garb of reducing labour liability-labour cost – thereby freeing themselves from the mounting losses occurring on account of workforce.

BSNL Trade Unions are not the first unions facing VRS in India. The Central Unions AITUC, CITU, INTUC, BMS, HMS and industrial federations like AIBEA have already faced the brunt or heat of VRS. The hard fact is that they could not stop the scheme in their industries and all their struggles had ended as mere protest movements. This does not mean that we should not oppose VRS or struggle against the same. We are not diminishing the struggles and sacrifices of those Unions.. **BSNL Trade Unions should take these experiences into account before deciding their strategy** to face the onslaught of VRS. What we try to convey here is ‘**mere touch and go struggles**’ would not suffice and serve any purpose.

We come to know from the survey of PSUs that 3.5 lakh employees of various PSUs and PSBs have given their consent and gone on VRS. The surveys conducted amongst the optees are tale telling and most of them are not economically in the safe zone after VRS. **Even after knowing all these, if BSNL employees opt on their own volition, then it is up to them to course their destiny,** TUs have no say on that.

BSNL management has started inviting unions to discuss significant issues- VRS issue gained that much significance. Management may try their level best to convince the unions and seek either direct cooperation or tacit support for the scheme. [Some unions may think on the lines of higher compensation.](#) But unions like NFTE or BSNLEU cannot say simply “Yes Sir” for the proposals. In turn they may send messages to the management that we are opposing/ strongly opposing. But [it is our bounden duty to convince one and all that why we oppose VRS.](#)

[Simply terming VRS as retrenchment would not stand,](#) as the judicial pronouncements/ verdicts are not supporting that contention on the basis of ID Act. Though BSNL is claiming that we are not targeting any section, the reality is different. [The two major sections TMs and OTBP BCR SrToAs are targeted.](#) Out of 71000 TMs (above 45 years) 41000 are targeted. Similarly out of 46000 OTBP BCR wallahs 24000 targeted. Out of the aimed 1 lakh, 92000 are targeted from the non-executives side only. Even the executives prefer more applications above the targeted 8000, management may not approve on the basis of their ‘man power inventory’ projected for the POST VRS Period.

[One lakh VRS means that they are going to abolish 1 lakh posts.](#) This may be another cause of irritant affecting certain post based promotions. [Another area of concern is debt.](#) DOT/MOF would not be in a position to give budgetary support and they may advise BSNL to explore possibilities of bank loans or credits from market on the basis of Govt guarantee or LOC. For the sent MTNL proposal, the same advice was given. It is difficult to convince MOF/ Cabinet to get interest free govt loans. There are certain criteria for budgetary support

- The CPSEs are still loss making under the definition given in SICA and DPE resolution dt 6-12-04
- The CPSEs are unable to pay salary due to their poor financial condition
- The revival / closure plan is pending consideration of Govt / BIFR approval based on the recommendations of BRPSE.

BSNL is not a PSU referred to BIFR. So BSNL has no other go except to get bank loan or use its internal savings if any left in the banks for settling ex- gratia.

The most crucial aspect is 'Post VRS' situation. After the exercise of VRS, the employees remain in the BSNL would face immense hardships immediately after the optees retired. There will be chaos in the industry in its day to day activities. Unmindful transfer orders will be issued to balance urban rural mix and to balance business verticals. For no cause of them, and just because tying their destiny with BSNL, they should not be put into ordeal. Trade unions are going to function for them only. VRS retirees may have option to join pensioners' association or can form cooperatives to do the outsourced job of (their erstwhile job) BSNL. What are we going to demand for the employees who are going to remain in the industry? Is it not our duty to safeguard their interest?

Management has already recorded that BSNLTUs are vehemently opposing VRS. Even after knowing this, and setting aside our forth coming struggles against VRS, management may enter in the VRS venture by quoting attractive invitation. If enough applications are not received then management has no option except to give-up the scheme. If applicants are more and number of optees as expected, then VRS may end up as a contract between Corporation and the concerned employee. As per the legal parlance also it is a contract only.

So in the context of VRS, we should ponder Post VRS Period and should demand the following to reassure our members that TUs are firm in their action to back them.

- Restore all Cuts-MRS, LTC etc
- Non PLI Minimum Bonus even if no profit
- Restoration of 5 days week
- Immediate fixation on 78.2

Summing Up:

- Trade Unions cannot organize members for VRS
- VRS is not a new phenomenon for Indian Trade Unions. BSNL TUs should take into account the experiences of different industries. Reality check is the need of the hour
- If VRS is announced setting aside our Views, TUs should not hesitate to concentrate and discuss POST VRS Situation taking cue from VRS Orders
- Protecting the remaining employees should be the foremost job
- Demands like restoration of Cuts, 5 days week, 78.2 fixation, minimum bonus should found a place in the context of VRS

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