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AS OPERATIONS NORMALISE AND BUSINESS BOOMS...

Staff Crunch Grips Hospitality Sector

After Covid-led workforce reduction, hotels and restaurants now need about 350,000 workers

**Anumeha Chaturvedi
& Mohit Bhalla**

1 New Delhi: The hospitality industry in India could be facing a significant shortage of around 350,000 workers as the business has boomed post the third wave of Covid-19, and operations and working hours have normalised, industry associations and professionals told **ET**.

Leading Indian and global hotel chains, along with large quick service restaurant (QSR) brands, are all experiencing a staff shortfall primarily due to redundancies created during the pandemic, people familiar with the matter said.

"The demand aggregation of the industry for skilled staff is increasing post the pandemic with

Revival Pressures

Laid off workers have moved to more rewarding sectors, reluctant to return

Stress levels considered lower, pay better in other industries



Difficult to retain people in engineering, finance, IT and HR: **Vikramjit Singh of Lemon Tree**

Demand likely to appreciate as industry on a constant road to recovery: **THSC**

Hotel chains focusing on multitasking, new talent: **KB Kachru of Radisson**



new hotels, outlets, restaurant chains, and cloud kitchens opening and expanding aggressively," said Rajan Bahadur, chief executive officer of Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC), promoted by Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) to help fill skilling gap in tourism

and hotel industries.

"We have already received a demand of over 300,000 workers for different tourism and hospitality job roles in the 2021-22 period," he said. "At present, the industry has a requirement of over 350,000 manpower at various levels.... This number is likely to

appreciate as the industry is on a constant road to recovery post the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic."

Industry insiders said many workers who were laid off during the pandemic have moved to other sectors, such as retail and banking, and are now reluctant to return as there is a feeling that hospitality roles are insecure, not as rewarding, and far too demanding.

Shortage of staff is a "big challenge" and "almost all hotel companies are addressing this in terms of putting a lot of focus on multi-tasking and also developing new talent," according to KB Kachru, chairman emeritus and principal advisor, South Asia, at Radisson Hotel Group.

Looking for Quality >>> 7

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Looking for Quality

►► From Page 1

“We are working closely with Skill India, which is helping out in terms of developing talent for different departments; whether it’s housekeeping or maintenance, each area has to be addressed separately,” said Kachru, who is also vice-president of Hotel Association of India.

Vikramjit Singh, president at Lemon Tree Hotels, said since stress levels are “comparatively low” in other industries, people are choosing them over hotels, adding that many have moved to hospitals, call centres, retail and real estate.

“Post Covid, it has become very difficult to get quality staff at prevailing salary structures,” he said. “We are finding it difficult to get frontline staff in departments such as front office, housekeeping, food and beverage service. It has also become difficult to retain engineering, finance, IT and HR resources as they are changing the industry to get decent salary hikes.”

BOUNCE BACK RIPPLES

Sanjay Bose, executive vice-president



for human resources, learning and development at ITC Hotels, said with business bouncing back faster than estimated, the industry is under immense pressure to have a ready workforce to cater to the enhanced footfalls. “We are also seeing the phenomenon of large-scale attrition, with organisations dealing with the workforce crunch by aggressively hiring from competition. However, this is expected to settle down over the next six to 12 months,” he said.

While this is an industrywide pro-

blem, at ITC Hotels, the impact is “minimal” as jobs, salaries and benefits were protected during the pandemic and the workforce remained intact, Bose claimed.

Chains such as Indian Hotels Company, Accor and McDonald’s India North and East declined to comment on the matter. Others such as Marriott International, Oberoi Group, Sarovar Hotels, and Jubilant FoodWorks did not respond to emails seeking comments till the time of going to press.

EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

Industry body National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) partnered with staffing and employment platform Kaam.com this year to launch a nationwide recruitment, skill development, and financial inclusion platform for all workers within the hospitality industry.

At an NRAI townhall this month to discuss restaurant staffing solutions, Rishi Khiani, founder of Kaam.com, said attrition is a big part of the problem. “Within the sector, 80% of people are migratory. Reverse migration during the pandemic led to a massive vacuum. A lot of people didn’t return,” he had said.