

Talent crunch hits India's premier aerospace lab

Opening up of the Indian economy and globalisation are taking a heavy toll on the state-run research and development (R and amp;D) institutions, with scientists and engineers, across the board, quitting in droves for greener pastures, a top aerospace official said here late Wednesday.

'We are hit hard by talent crunch. Many of our well-trained scientists and technologists are either resigning or taking voluntary retirement in droves to join the private sector or multi-nationals in pursuit of professional advancement with hefty pay packets,' National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL) director A.R. Upadhyia told IANS here.

As India's only civilian aerospace lab, the Bangalore-based NAL is a constituent of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) under the ministry of science and amp; technology, with state-of-the-art facilities for designing and developing aerospace technologies. It has an annual grant of Rs 1.2 billion from the funds allocated to the CSIR by the central government.

'Not long ago, NAL was the preferred choice of science and engineering graduates. Today, it is no longer the case, with majority of graduates opting for lucrative career in IT (information technology) or BT (biotechnology),' Upadhyia said.

'Lower compensation and fewer opportunities to move up the value chain in quick time are making middle-level and junior level scientists and technocrats opt out of state-run organisation and join private firms or MNCs (multinationals) making a beeline to India.'

Admitting that the five-decade-old organisation was facing talent crunch in terms of retention or attracting new comers, Upadhyia said during the last two years, despite best efforts, about 30 percent of posts remained vacant for want of better talent for hiring.

'As a result, we are forced to give extension to many senior scientists and technologists on the verge of retirement and promotions to as many to prevent flight of talent. For the 80-100 middle level and junior level posts we have interviewed and selected, only two-thirds have responded and joined belatedly, while the remaining opted for jobs in the private sector,' Upadhyia pointed out.

Besides IT and BT firms snapping up fresh talent from campuses, several private companies and multinational R and amp;D organisations engaged in defence, aerospace and related technologies are hiring scientific personnel from state-run institutions after putting in five-eight years of experience.

'With the opening up of the defence/aerospace sector to the private industry and allowing overseas firms to set up operations on our home turf, attracting bright talent by state-run firms or R and amp;D organisations has become a professional challenge, as we are not able to match either their compensation or career-growth avenues,' Upadhyia noted.

CSIR labs such as NAL are betting on the early announcement of the sixth Pay Commission recommendations as they have to compete with private/multinational establishments for the same scarce talent in scientific and technology areas.

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