

Software lobby to talk to union on layoffs

The software industry is willing to talk to the sector's trade union on layoffs and other work-related issues, a top official of the industry's representative body said Wednesday.

"If you want to talk to me why should I refuse simply because the colour of your shirt is red or green or whatever," Raju Bhatnagar, vice president for business process outsourcing (BPO) and government relations at the National Association of Software Companies (Nasscom) told IANS.

Nasscom will be meeting the Union for Information and Technology-enabled Services (Unites) has enlisted the help of the Switzerland-based Union Network International (UNI).

"Yes, we will be meeting union officials but date is not confirmed," Bhatnagar said.

"It is incorrect to say that Nasscom has a fiat against IT professionals engaging in trade unionism because forming unions is a right enshrined in the Constitution," he said.

Likening it to gagging people despite the right to the freedom of speech, Bhatnagar added: "How can we do that?"

But while he said no meeting date has been finalised, Unites said the global union would meet Nasscom Dec 5.

"UNI general secretary Philip Jennings has deputed Philip Bowyer, deputy general secretary to visit India and he will be meeting Nasscom officials on Dec 5," Unites general secretary R. Karthik Shekhar told IANS.

Unites is one of several Indian affiliates of UNI that is spread out across four regions - America, Africa, Asia-Pacific and Europe.

"The Geneva-based UNI represents 13 sectors, has 15 million members and is present in 130 countries," UNI's Development and Organisation Centre's (UNIDOC) Delhi office director Anjali Sinha told IANS.

Asked about the extent of layoffs that have taken place in Indian IT and IT enabled services industry due to the global financial crisis, Shekhar said: "I can't give exact figures but it is about 5,000-6,000 workers."

Bhatnagar was sceptical about the figures trotted about.

"The various figures being quoted in the media from 6,000 to 10,000 stretches the imagination because I know Goldman Sachs laid off 200-250 and Amex laid off about 100, beyond that I don't know and I would like to be educated about the other companies that have laid off thousands of people," he said.

He said although the financial crisis had impacted every sector, most companies have not muted their guidance.

"If guidance is an indicator then we cannot say that the IT-ITES industry is in so much trouble that it has to cut jobs in a big way," Bhatnagar said.

Countered Shekhar: "Companies are hiring and firing at the same time. We are saying why fire people when you can re-skill them and use them for whatever other work for which you are hiring people."

According to him, this was the right time for Nasscom to ask industry to re-skill and skill employees by using extra staff for training.

'This is also the time to train employees for penetrating other non-English markets in Japan or Europe,' he said, adding: 'Our discussions with Nasscom will focus on these issues so that retrenchment can be kept to the minimum. This is important as there's a possibility that the US market may shrink as Barack Obama has said that he's against outsourcing.'

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