

# AITUC plans to unionise state's migrant workforce

TNN | Dec 10, 2016, 05.25 AM IST



KOCHI: A national-level trade union has taken steps to bring the migrant workers in the state under a common umbrella. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), India's second largest trade union federation, has approached the labour department to register 'Kerala Migrant Workers' Union (KMWU).

The officials are yet to register the union as AITUC has sought time to submit documents. According to AITUC, the widespread exploitation of migrant workers by employees is the reason behind the decision.

Brijesh Babu, state and district council member of AITUC said they have floated the union in Ernakulam, Thrissur, Kottayam, Kozhikode and Alappuzha districts. "KMWU has been formed to address the exploitation

they face at the hands of contractors and employers. Already 30,000 to 40,000 migrant workers have taken membership," he said. The membership is given to those who produce ID proof, contact phone number. They are also levying a registration fee of Rs 100.

"Every day we receive at least five calls from migrant workers complaining that they have been deprived of promised wage. Migrant workers engaged in works of Kochi Metro, Kochi Refinery in Ambalamughal and construction of a private convention centre at Bolgatty Island do not get proper wage. They get only Rs 200 to Rs 270 per day. It is middlemen who play spoilsport here," Brijesh Babu said.

He said workers also face physical harassment. "Three migrants in a worksite in Kakkanad were beaten up brutally after accusing them of stealing the mobile phone of supervisor. This was after workers questioned being paid only half the wage

despite doing overnight duty. When the workers protested against it, the supervisor wrongly implicated the workers," Brijesh said.

District labour officer Muhammad Siyad said the union has not been given a registration number.

Migrant labourers said they are facing a lot of problems with the contractors. "They pay us little and make us overwork. The payment is either delayed or denied. They refuse any help in an emergency and we are left helpless," said Orchimon, a West Bengal native who joined KMWU last year. He has been working in Kochi for the last three years as a construction labourer.

"After joining the trade union I found that many of our problems could be solved. People have come forward to help us both professionally and personally and this has turned out to be a boon for us in Kerala, where even the language is a problem for many," said Hashim, who came as a migrant labourer eight years ago and is now a contractor. Currently KMWU has 17 board members, including 14 migrant workers. The union conducts study classes for new members to impart awareness on their rights and various welfare schemes.