

ASO shortage plagues State Secretariat

An acute shortage of Assistant Section Officers (ASOs) is hampering functioning of official work at the State Secretariat.

Nearly 1,500 posts of ASOs could not be filled at the Secretariat due to legal disputes, and nobody is sure as to when the posts will be filled. Several cases related to filling of the ASO posts are pending in various courts, including the State Administrative Tribunal (SAT).

The Government had asked the OPSC to fill 800 posts in the Secretariat and a few ASO posts in the Raj Bhavan Secretariat way back in 2011. However, a case was filed in the SAT opposing the advertisement notification. Sources said the OPSC issued a notification keeping over a 65-per cent reservation for the ST and Socially Backward Classes.

Reviewing several Supreme Court and High Courts verdicts, the SAT rejected the Act, cleared by the State Government reserving a 27-per cent quota for backward sections. A case challenging the verdict is pending in the Orissa High Court.

Moreover, the Supreme Court has directed to confine the reservation limits to a maximum of 50 per cent while the latest advertisement by the OPSC for the ASO posts has kept the reservation limits to 11.25 per cent from the 27 per cent in the Socially Backward Classes category.

On the other hand, several candidates have also filed cases demanding relaxation of age limits for the posts.

Currently, there are 300 ASOs working at various departments in the Secretariat against the 1,741 sanctioned posts. While 30 to 40 ASOs are due for promotion, the number of ASOs is likely to go down to about 260, sources said.

Further, about 250 ASOs attend office regularly while the rest remain on leave citing health, personal and other grounds.

The pressure is immense on the staff in all the departments due to the launching of several populist and new schemes by the State Government to expedite the official work.