

The Telegraph

18 lakh take Group D test, 5400 pass

A Bengal government drive to recruit 6,000 Group D employees ahead of next year's Lok Sabha elections has fallen short of the target as only around 5,400 candidates have made the cut so far.

Group D employees are assigned to work as peons, sweepers and security guards at salaries of around Rs 11,000 per month.

Some officials termed the shortfall "surprising" as over 18 lakh aspirants had taken the written test in May last year for the jobs for which the minimum qualification was Class VIII pass. Of the total job seekers, 3.5 lakh have Master's degrees.

Sources said the written test had 85 questions of 1 mark each based on Class VIII history, geography, mathematics and science, besides general knowledge. Around 19,450 candidates were called for an interview, which had 15 marks.

"The final list is yet to be published but the target of recruiting 6,000 might not be achieved as fewer candidates have cleared the exam conducted by the West Bengal Group D Recruitment Board," said a senior official.

The process of recruitment had started soon after chief minister Mamata Banerjee announced the plan in 2015. "These 6,000 marked the first phase of recruitments in the Group D category. But now we are not sure whether there will be enough eligible candidates who can qualify for the 6,000 vacancies," said another official.

There was a cut-off mark in the interview. "It was 4.5 out of 15 for OBCs, 3.75 for SCs and 3 for STs. Except the general and SC groups, none of the other categories had enough successful candidates to fill the quota," said a source.

He added that the number of those called for interview was thrice the vacancies in that category.

The government is now considering a cut in the interview cut-off score for the categories in which the vacancies have not been filled, sources said.

"It is the duty of the board to find a solution. The government will not intervene," said another official.

For example, the Scheduled Tribe category had a vacancy of 420 (7 per cent) and the total number of ST candidates called in for the interview was 1,260. Sources said that the same norm was applied to the SC, OBC, general categories.

Some officials felt the outcome was an "embarrassment" for the government as it raised questions about the state's academic system.

"It is disappointing that 6,000 people could not qualify in an exam meant for Group D employees even if 18 lakh had appeared for the test. It does not send a good signal," said an official.