

## ALUMINIUM, BAUXITE INDUSTRIES

# Govt extends 'public utility' tag deadline

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The government has extended the deadline for industries involved in alumina and aluminium manufacturing, as well as bauxite mining, classifying them as "public utilities" for the next six months.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment issued a notification on February 2 invoking the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, citing "public interest" and the need to maintain uninterrupted services in these "essential" sectors.

"The central government hereby declares the services of the said industries to be public utility services for the purposes of the said Act for a period of six months with effect from February 4, 2024," the notification said.

A public utility service refers to an industry or service considered essential for the community's well-being and functioning. These services are deemed so critical that disruptions or stoppages can significantly impact public life and cause hardship.

The decision to restrict workers' ability to strike came days before labour unions called for a nationwide strike on February 16. Amarjeet Kaur, general secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress, said that the extension is an attempt to deprive workers of their right to strike.

"The extension is in response to several organisations issuing strike notices. The current notice marks the beginning of a series of upcoming strikes. It reflects the government's strategy to curtail workers' rights," Kaur said.

"Earlier, the governments used to only give warnings, but this government wants to penalise workers," she added.

In all industries, workers' unions are required to give notice of 15 days or more before commencing a strike. However, any strike in public utility services is prohibited.

Labour activists assert that this is not the first instance of such action being taken. These industries have been designated as public utilities since the pandemic period.

However, according to mining industry experts, the decision is driven by the increasing global demand for aluminium, a crucial metal utilised in various applications such as automobiles, airplanes, packaging, and construction.

Industry insiders suggest that the move could provide some stability and predictability in production planning, potentially benefiting businesses in the short term.



**Any strike by unions in 'public utility' services is prohibited. The decision to extend the 'public utility' deadline, restricting workers' ability to strike, came days before unions called for a nationwide strike on February 16**