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EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND ORGANISATION
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March 29th, 2020

To,

**Shri Sunil Barthwal, IAS
Central Provident Fund Commissioner,
Employees Provident Fund Organisation,
NEW DELHI 110 066**

Subject: Proposal for settlement of advance claims under Para 68L(3) of EPF Scheme 1952 through auto mode in the software as being implemented for other claims in some regional offices – Immediate implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) – Regarding

Respected Sir,

Under your able leadership, EPFO has always been in the forefront of providing timely financial assistance and service to the poorest of the poor section of the society. Perhaps one of the most shining example of EPFO's social dedication has been the manner in which you have ensured that the monthly pension under EPS 1995 was credited into the bank accounts of poor and aged pensioners well before due date, despite a nation-wide lockdown and curfew in many states. Under your able directions and guidance, EPFO officers and staff ensured that the BRS and Pension cheques were delivered to the concerned banks unmindful of their own personal safety and health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. It is encouraging to note that the above yeoman service of EPFO was duly appreciated by your goodself as well as at the highest level of the Government, and it is a matter of organisational pride that now the Central Government has made EPFO an integral part of the comprehensive economic package under the PMGKP. It is indeed our national duty to rise to the occasion and ensure that the benefit declared by the government reaches the due beneficiaries at the earliest.

3. In this regard it is submitted that as per the available statistics, EPFO received around 2.92 Crore claims during the present year, of which around 2.08 Crore claims were settled. Of these, around 1.09 Crore claims were advance claims under different provisions of the EPF Scheme. At the moment there are around 4.5 Crore EPF Subscribers in the country, and even though as per above statistics almost 40% of total claims received are advance claims, at a conservative estimate we may expect that 20% of subscribers may file advance claims under the PMGKP due to current economic crisis and prevalent job uncertainty. The above percentage of expected advance claims may even increase further if the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic continue for longer. Thus, conservatively speaking, we may expect to receive advance claims to the tune of above 80 lakhs claims in next few weeks.

4. It is submitted that for immediate settlement of above advance claims under Para 68L(3), firstly, EPFO services would have to be declared essential service by the MHA under the relevant rules. However, even if that is done, the Central Government in the Annexure to MHA Order No. 40-3/2020-D dated 24.03.2020 has prescribed that the exception offices providing essential services should also work with minimum number of employees. In fact, you have also appropriately directed on ZOs&ROs WhatsApp Group that bare minimum dedicated staff is to be identified by ROs/ZOs for setting such advance claims on top priority basis.

5. However, Sir, it is submitted that it may simply not be possible to settle the expected number of PMGKP advance claims even if 90% to 100% of available staff is present in office in a short period of time. In fact, if we attempt to start settling these claims with bare minimum staff it will not only create an immense workload for future but also generate grievances from those members whose claims are not immediately settled. However, calling more staff to office for faster settlement of claims is not a practicable solution as it will not only be against explicit Government directions but also may be potentially harmful to health as it is not possible to maintain Social Distancing with full staff present in the offices. It may also be considered that even if we call more staff to office despite above misgivings, it will take a long time to liquidate the expected pendency and not solve our immediate problem.

6. The only way out of this problem is utilizing the auto-settlement facility for all advance claims received under Para 68L(3). As you are aware, the said facility is already being tested on pilot basis in around 8 Regional Offices. It is our submission that this software facility may immediately be rolled out to all offices specifically for settlement of advance claims under Para 68L(3). The experience of pilot offices have shown that at present the claim settlement process through this facility is not optimum, however,

a major reason for this are the flags / conditions listed for auto-settlement of claims. It is proposed that these flags / conditions can be relaxed for specific purpose of auto settlement of claims under para 68L(3), without in any manner compromising the integrity of the claim settlement process. This will ensure that we will settle a very large number of claims with bare minimum staff and in the shortest possible time, while at the same time the members will receive the benefit promised by the Government under PMGKP immediately instead of months later.

7. It may further be considered that above claims are only advance claims and not final settlement claims, and furthermore, we are assuredly due to receive the next three months of PF contributions under the PMGKP, albeit for a certain category of members. Therefore, even if any inadvertent error creeps into the auto-settlement process, we are in a position to adjust the same from the member's PF account later.

8. Sir, auto-settlement of advance claims under the PMGKP is not only a functional necessity for the organisation due to the need to settle a large number of expected advance claims while ensuring social distancing in our offices, but also it will ensure extremely speedy and efficient service to the members, which will create a new wave of positive reaction for EPFO in the public eye.

9. It is also submitted that a number of EPFO officers and a majority of EPFO staff are dependent on public transport services and private transport contractors to reach their offices on a daily basis. However, at present due to the COVID-19 pandemic, public transport facility is at best unreliable and private transporters are not allowed on the roads, therefore, even for bare minimum dedicated staff to reach the office, safe transport facility should be provided. This will go a long way in boosting the morale of our officers and staff in these trying and exceptional circumstances.

10. It is assured that as always, the EPFO officers are committed to ensure that our organisation remains at the very forefront of public service under your able leadership and work as an asset to the Government at this crucial juncture.

Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,

A. Swami

**[Saurabh Swami]
Secretary-General**

Copy to:

**Hon'ble Chairman,
CBT, EPF /
Hon'ble Minister for Labour & Employment,
Shram Shakti Bhawan,
NEW DELHI 110 001**

----- for kind information please

A. Swami

**[Saurabh Swami]
Secretary-General**