



EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION
EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND ORGANISATION
MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT, GOVT. OF INDIA
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(Regn. No. 33/2015)

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March 23rd, 2022

To,

Ms. Neelam Shami Rao, IAS,
Central Provident Fund Commissioner,
Employees' Provident Fund Organisation,
New Delhi 110066

Subject: Request for meeting with the EPF Officers' Association –
Submission of agenda on officers' and organisational issues - Reg.

Ma'am,

Please refer to EPFOA letter dated 07.01.2022 on above cited subject matter (copy attached for kind reference).

2. It is submitted that vide above letter the EPFOA had requested your goodself for kindly granting an early appointment to discuss certain pending organisational as well as service-related issues. A proposed agenda for the meeting has also been submitted for kind consideration.

3. It is therefore requested that you may kindly consider above request and grant an appointment to the EPFOA at your earliest convenience.

Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,

A. Swami

[Saurabh Swami]
Secretary-General

Encl: a/a

The proposed agenda for the meeting is submitted as below :-

1. Technology & process augmentation in delivering our services

The current application software is long past its expiry date. We place our appreciation on record for the severely understaffed IS Division in keeping it operational. We request that till the time new claims processing protocols and software are in place, the statutory mandate of settling claims within 20 days is adhered to. Settlement of claims within 20 days pre-supposes availability of sufficient staff in field offices. We understand that presently there are approximately 40%-50% shortage in AO & SS cadre and almost 25% shortage in the cadre of SSA. Our claims settlement and payment reconciliation processes continue to be the same, which were designed more than 20 years ago for manual processing of claims. Finance and Pension Divisions may be advised to not reduce the statutory timelines for claims till the new processes and softwares are in place. We submit that EPF field offices should be focussed on updating and certifying member particulars and member balances. This having been done, claims should be auto processed.

2. Grant of NFU and NFSG to the eligible officers of EPFO

- a) The law states that EPF officers shall have the same pay etc as are available to similarly placed officers in Central Government. The Central Board, EPF can adopt the same without any reference to the Government. This has been judicially tested also and confirmed.

- b) Non-Functional Upgradation (NFU) and NFSG has accordingly been approved by Central Board. However, NFU has not been allowed till date to eligible officers, more than one decade after such an approval by the Board. NFSG is yet to be allowed to few eligible officers on the ground that their vigilance clearance was not available as on date. Categorical instructions of DoPT exist that vigilance status is to be seen on the date of eligibility and not the date when the case is being considered. A needless reference has been made to MoLE on an issue, which has been specified by DoPT. The said reference may kindly be withdrawn and due benefits allowed at the earliest, as specified by DoPT.

3. Service Benefit to officers in the cadre of APFC

In the year 2017, post restructuring, a group of 288 officers were promoted to the cadre of APFC by creating supernumerary posts. That these officers continue to be gainfully employed indicates that there was an actual functional requirement of officers, which, unfortunately could not be sanctioned on regular basis in 2017. As a special case the service of these officers against supernumerary posts, since April 2017, may be allowed to be counted as eligible service for future benefits and promotions.

4. Composite Service Rules for the Commissioner's Cadre

The Commissioner Cadre of EPFO is 1000+ officers strong and it is a unified Cadre, with all India transfer liability. It also has posts from JTS level to SAG level. 50% of the officers at JTS level come directly through UPSC and eventually they become part of the senior management. Barring 0.39% of the total Cadre strength at SAG level, all the officers come from the services of EPFO itself through promotion from JTS level. In a way it is already a composite cadre in substance. There are not many services of the Central Government who have such a strong Cadre presence all over India. But for no justifiable reason, Service Rules for various posts are separately notified. This must be done away with immediately. Therefore, we request you to get composite service rules for the Commissioner's Cadre prepared and approved by the CBT. We had submitted **Draft Rules** for same to CPFC earlier, which may please be processed urgently.

5. Holding DPC in a timely manner

- a) The promotion opportunities in Commissioner Cadre, EPFO, especially at senior levels are very limited. And if DPCs are not held in time even for these limited vacancies, it leads to demotivation. The extant guidelines regarding holding of DPC meetings stipulate that they should be held in accordance with model calendar of conducting DPCs, issued by Government of India. These instructions are periodically reiterated by EPF Headquarters, last such instance being the circular issued on 15th November 2017. Despite that no DPC has been done in the previous calendar year 2020 as well as present calendar year 2021. Therefore, DPC for 2020 & 2021 may be immediately conducted.
- b) It has been seen that Vigilance enquiries are kept pending for years together. Resultantly, for officers whose cases are in sealed cover, vacancies are kept blocked. **It is submitted that instead of keeping the posts blocked for officers whose cases are in sealed cover, the promotional post may be allowed to next person in line of promotion, as is allowed in cases of "deputation vacancies", if the officer concerned is not likely to return from deputation in the vacancy year for which DPC is being held.**

6. Issuance of Vigilance Clearance

- a) The cases of issuance of Vigilance Clearance Certificates (VCC) may be governed strictly in accordance with the extant guidelines of Government of India, which state that vigilance clearance can be denied only on following three grounds: -
 - i. When Government servant is under suspension.
 - ii. Government servants in respect of whom a charge sheet has been issued and Departmental Proceedings are pending; and
 - iii. Government servants in respect of whom prosecution for a criminal charge is pending.

- b) It has been observed that one has to wait for the VCC till the last moment of retirement or till the last hour of any other crucial deadline in which VCC is required. As per the existing DoPT guidelines, vigilance status should be informed to the pay & accounts branch of the office 3 months in before the retirement so that all the preparation for retirements may be done in time bound manner. **The EPF manpower database now is digitised through HRSOFT. Those persons who are not clear from Vigilance angle, as per DoPT guidelines specified above, should be so marked in HRSOFT. This would then enable the respective cadre controlling authorities at Central/Zonal/ Regional levels to download the VCC for timely processing for promotions/retirements/deputation etc.**
- c) We request that time bound action to complete Vigilance enquiries may please be taken. Further, once an enquiry is completed necessary administrative action, especially in cases where an officer is exonerated must be taken so that long overdue benefits are allowed.

7. Avoidable confirmation of Local Vigilance Status in respect of Group 'A' officers from the field offices

- a. As a new exercise started recently, Local Vigilance Status is being called from the field offices from Group 'A' officers. As you are aware any information having a bearing on the vigilance status of a Group 'A' officer is maintained at H.O. It has been a meticulous practice from the side of field offices to immediately bring to the attention of H.O. all the information which may have vigilance angle. Perhaps, there has not been a single precedent where due to inadvertence or delay on the part of field offices, wrong vigilance status has been reported by the HO/CVO.
- b. Therefore, calling Local Vigilance Status in respect of Group 'A' officers is only leading to delay in granting vigilance clearance. It is important that vigilance clearance is granted in prompt manner and no officer should suffer due to want of vigilance clearance.
- c. Hence, it is humbly requested that this practice of calling Local Vigilance Status should be immediately done away with. It is further requested to grant vigilance clearance promptly in strict accordance with DoPT O.M. No. 11012/11/2007-Estt(A) dated 14.12.2007 in all eligible cases.

8. Removal of avoidable functional work at the level of Officer-in-Charge

- a. Many routine and avoidable work such as KYC correction and claim settlement over certain limit is being disposed by OIC. There does not appear to be any cogent reason other than that potentially serious cases should be disposed at senior level. But it is a misplaced reason. To think that Account Officers or Assistant P. F. Commissioners would not be serious or reliable enough to deal with such cases is totally unreasonable. It may be noted that even direct recruit

AO/EO in EPFO come through UPSC at 4800/- G.P. And D.P. of the same cadre, by necessary implication, must be considered of equal calibre. It is an indication that Parliament, in its greater wisdom, thought that Group 'B' officers of EPFO would be taking higher responsibilities, and therefore they must be recommended through UPSC. Therefore, there is no reason why such functions as name and D.O.B correction and claim settlement should be pushed upwards based on few bad experiences. The alternative should have been to make the system robust by plugging the loopholes learning from the past experiences. But without any improvement on that front, one is being satisfied by pushing up the work.

- b. Due to this, OICs are not being able to do their monitoring work properly which rather than solving the existing problems, is creating many others. It is high time we had belief in the capacity of our existing cadres and these important but routine work may be devolved at the level of AO, APFC and RPF-III.

9. Comprehensive training policy

Group 'A' officers are the brains of the organisation who not only contribute to the daily work management but also towards long term policy formation. The better trained they are the better shape the organisation would take in future. Therefore, a comprehensive and constant quality training of the officers is indispensable. The officers' training should have three essential components. (i) Frequent in-house training at PDNASS, (ii) One training in conjunction with any Institute of National Importance, and (iii) one training with international institutions such as ILO etc. Moreover, the officers, who want to go for higher education, should be encouraged by immediate sanctioning of leave, recommendations and VCC. In this line a comprehensive training policy may be formed as soon as possible.

10. Lease entitlements of officers

In accordance with extant approvals of CBT and EC **the lease entitlements of officers** are to be enhanced by 15% every three years. The last revision was made on 09.07.2021 for the period April 2019 to March 2022. It may be noted that last order was issued belatedly which created lot of uncertainty and monetary problems for the officers of the Board. It is requested that next three-year period is falling due in April 2022. Therefore, order for April 2022 to March 2025 may be issued in time bound manner soon.

Further, in many locations even these enhanced lease entitlements will not enable securing proper accommodation. There cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution for all locations. Many proposals for this have been formulated but none could be finalised. Therefore, it is requested that the following may be considered: -

- a) Extension of leased accommodation facility to officers in the grade of ACC(HQ) {Level 14} and ACC {Level 13A}.

- b) Rule 3(m) of EPF (Allotment of Residence) Rules 1972 states that **"residence" means a residence hired or owned by the Central Board.**" The area entitlements of an officer for Government accommodation are defined in terms of their respective pay grades. It is accordingly requested that instructions may be issued that a suitable accommodation may be hired by EPFO, on behalf of Central Board, within a maximum of 10 kms radius of the office to which the officer concerned is posted, as per entitlement of the officer concerned. There should not be any generic monetary ceiling for lease entitlements.

It is high time we extended leased accommodation facility to ACC(HQ) and ACC immediately. Also, CBT needs to provide hired accommodation, at least in all the big urban centres of India for the officers. This will also be beneficial for EPFO as many officers will be willing to go to these big urban centres voluntarily and offer their services with dedication without worrying about the problem of tiring commute and balancing family and social life.

11. Provision of office vehicle

- a) A decision was taken in the year 2013 **to provide vehicles to all officers in the grade of RPFC-I {level 12}** and above. In 2013, there was no sanction of RPFC-I posts in Zonal Offices and Training Institutes and accordingly the instructions issued in 2013 do not provide for vehicles for RPFC-Is in Zos and Training Institutes. After Organisational restructuring in January 2017 sanction of RPFC-Is have been made for ZOs and Training Institutes. However, the RPFC-Is in Zonal Offices and Training Institutes are not being allowed this facility because administrative instructions are silent on this issue. This is patently absurd and unjust. It is requested that instructions originally issued in 2013 may kindly be modified to allow office vehicle to RPFC-Is posted in Zonal Offices and Training Institutes.
- b) A separate and comprehensive review of provision of office vehicles to EPFO offices, especially the District Offices is urgently required as they have now evolved into a full-fledged office focussed on Compliance management and grievance handling. Also in the existing ROs, workload has increased manifold in last few years and provisions of additional vehicles is urgently required.

12. Removal of Inter-operability between, APFC & RPFC – II

The officers in the grade of RPFC-II are posted as Officers-in-charge of 35 Regional Offices. However, in other offices of EPFO, the functional distinction between RPFC-II/APFC has been removed after Organisational restructuring in January 2017. It is requested that the functional distinction and hierarchical structure, as it existed prior to January 2017, be restored.

13. Amending the Transfer Policy

The existing transfer policy of Commissioners' cadre defining policy in terms of tenures, stations and Zones needs to be modified. The nature of work in EPFO has changed substantially and is poised to change further with increasing ingress of technology. The transfer policy accordingly needs to give greater weightage to personal and familial needs of officers. Till the time this modification is done, while operating the existing transfer policy, the counting of tenures may be done from the date the transfer policy was notified and not from the date of joining of respective officers, which predates the date of notification of policy for most.

14. Timely completion of the Annual General Transfers (AGT) for 2022

Transfer Policy for EPF Officers in Commissioner Cadre was notified in year 2015. But, except in the year 2019, in none of the years since then, the transfers have been done as per the timeline specified in policy. The delay in transfers causes undue hardships and problems for EPF officers. It is requested the process of AGT should not be delayed and completed as per the prescribed timeline.

15. Provision of refundable advance on transfer

With approval of Executive Committee, officers having all India transfer liability were allowed a refundable advance equal to two months' pay & DA on each transfer involving change of station. This was allowed as a liquidity measure to facilitate settling-in at new station. This has been abruptly discontinued without any reference to Executive Committee, apparently under a mistaken impression that this was an advance of pay, which has been disallowed after implementation of recommendations of Seventh CPC. This approval of Executive Committee maybe restored immediately.

16. Empanelment of movers & packers

EPFO had earlier empanelled movers & packers to shift the household goods of EPFO officers upon their transfers, in lieu of grant of transfer grant. This was of immense help to officers as they have all-India transfer liability and empanelled agency was expected to create minimal hassles at time of transfer. However, currently no agency is empanelled and officers have been left to fend for themselves. Therefore, it is requested that a suitable & reputed agency may be empanelled as mover & packer by EPFO at the earliest. We understand that ESIC is having a long association with a packer and mover. We can possibly engage the same agency on extant terms and conditions.

17. Group Term life policy

Group Term life policy with death benefit of Rs 50 lakh may be purchased in lieu of CGEGIS. Similarly, a group medical cover for all officers (and employees) and their families for at least Rs. 25 lakh per family may be purchased. Government of Kerala has recently taken such a policy for its employees (& retirees) and this could be taken as a template for EPFO employees also.

18. Provision of laptops to all Group 'A' officers

During COVID-19 pandemic work from home (WFH) has truly gained momentum and without proper provision of infrastructure WFH is severely handicapped. The extant instructions on providing laptops are very restrictive. These may be modified to allow provisioning of laptops to all officers. With remote working and WFH due to become the norm in near future, a laptop would be a very essential aide to officers for discharge of their functions. As per the approved accounting policy and the allowed depreciation rates therein, the value of laptops becomes zero at the end of three years. Accordingly, after three years, the laptops may be retained by the officers concerned. Change of administrative instructions as above would suffice for same with due budgetary sanctions.
