



**EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION
EMPLOYEES' PROVIDENT FUND ORGANISATION**

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT, GOVT. OF INDIA

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Regional PF Commissioner -I

Dated the 5th May 2021

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Assistant PF

Commissioner

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EXECUTIVE

Deepak Narwal

Assistant PF

Commissioner

To,
Shri Apurva Chandra, IAS,
The Secretary to the Government of India/
Vice-Chairman, CBT,EPFO
Ministry of Labour & Employment,
Shram Shakti Bhavan
New Delhi

**Sub: Drawing urgent attention to the issues of staff and officers
of EPFO in relation to present wave of COVID-19 pandemic -Reg.**

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Sir,

India is passing through an unprecedented catastrophe. None of us have ever been witness to such a human tragedy as the COVID-19 pandemic is unfolding. These are definitely desperate times. In such extraordinary times, a human being requires, more than ever, support of his family, friends, community and workplace to sail through and survive. But it is with heavy heart I have to say that we are feeling forsaken by top management of our own Organisation EPFO. All pressing issues being faced by employees of EPFO were raised before the management through my letter dated 19.04.2021 & 26.04.2021 (copies enclosed). But, it is regretted to inform that no action has been taken and employees have been left in lurch to fend for themselves. Following issues require your urgent intervention:

EPFO as essential service provider

2. In the first phase of COVID-19 pandemic last year a nationwide lockdown was imposed by the Central Government under the Disaster Management Act-2005. Vide clarificatory D.O. letter No. 40-3/2020-DM-I(A), Central Government declared EPF services to be exempted from the nationwide lockdown imposed on 23.03.2020. Most of the restrictions of lockdown were removed vide Unlock-3 order dated 29.07.2020 and State Governments were given freedom to impose restrictions based on their own assessment. The situation is much grave now in all terms. In many States lockdowns are being imposed by the State Government. In none of these orders, EPF services are exempt from the lockdown. Nevertheless, our staff and officers are being called to offices in clear violation of the order of State Authorities. There is possibility of our officers being prosecuted for the violation of State Government order. More than 40 of our staff & officers' lives are lost. More than 75% of our staff including RPFC-I & RPFC-II in Rourkela Office have been tested positive. Nagpur Office has witnessed 5 casualties due to COVID. In such atmosphere of fear and despair, attendance in the offices has dwindled to an unprecedented level. Taking any harsh measures to enforce attendance would be a great folly. Therefore, we must closedown offices in the states & cities where lockdown orders are in force. We must also temporarily suspend all the functions in those areas where complete lockdown is not in force except for COVID, Death and Pension related claims. COVID claims have to be done in 100% automated online mode without any human intervention. Death and Pension claim should be done with the skeletal staff.

Software Overhaul: Immediate steps towards Claims in Auto mode & implementation of WFH

3. The entire service delivery to stakeholders is being executed through EPF Application Software. This software is more than a decade old. Further, the software is not even a final version. It is a decade old *beta version*, a version of software that is made available for testing, before its final release. We keep finding bugs in it till today and reporting it to IS Division of Head Office, which keeps doing the patch work. The servers remain down very often adversely affecting seamless service delivery. With this rusted and blunted tool in hand, the time period of claim settlement is being reduced whimsically without any study or consultation with the field functionaries.

A study was done by CDAC for the complete replacement of the present software of EPFO. As per available information they have also prepared blueprint and detailed plan for it. But due to paralyzed condition of decision making, the study and plan of CDAC is gathering dust. Therefore, I request that now is the time to completely replace our systems application software and servers with the latest technology so that most of the claim settlement may be automated. An arrangement should also be made for those claims which cannot be done automatically to settle them in online mode from anywhere. This will ensure an effective Work From Home (WFH) functions in EPFO thereby preparing us through this ongoing second wave of COVID as well as for any future third wave.

Immediate implementation of e-Office

4. E-office needs to be implemented in field offices immediately. This will reduce paper work up to 50%. It will also reduce human contacts for staff and officers and will be helpful in fighting COVID.

No command & control system in place

5. A pan India organization like EPFO should be system driven and not individual driven. Our present CPFC unfortunately fell ill due to COVID. While he was on leave for treatment, EPFO was left with no one in command & control. Our staff and officers are dying on daily basis but not a single communication or relief measure has been announced. Here it would be worth mentioning that Public Organizations like Airports Authority India (AAI) converted Indian Aviation Academy, New Delhi into COVID 19 level 1 hospital, SBI allocated 71 Crore rupees for various COVID initiatives including converting their Training Centres into COVID Care Centres and decision to vaccinate all their staff. The big corporate companies have also come in tremendous support for their employees. But nothing was done for us. While we claim to be working for the workforce of this country, we have nothing for our own workforce.

In this time a relief measure for the employees of EPFO would have been more humane. Therefore, I am requesting you to convert our National Training Institute (PDNASS) and Zonal Training Institutes and other guest houses into equipped COVID Isolation cum Oxygen facility.

10 Lac Death Relief (that too only for COVID death) is too meager for loss of earning member of family
6. We need also to understand the hard realities of COVID pandemic at the ground. Many of our staff have died but their death certificate is mentioning cause of death other than COVID-19 such as Cardiac Arrest or Acute Pneumonia. Health authorities are not ready to mention COVID-19 as the cause. In such circumstances the family members are not eligible for increased Death Relief of Rs 10 lacs which itself is too meager. In order to have adequate financial protection in case of death of earning member, an ex gratia payment of 50 lac should also be given in ALL death in service cases. Since no welfare or sport activities have taken place since last year, same can be easily arranged from Welfare Fund. The hospitals are overcharging everywhere and CGHS rates are not being accepted anywhere. In such circumstances, delegation may be given to concerned Regional Offices to authorise expenses incurred for emergency COVID treatment on actual basis.

Vaccination for ALL including contingent staff

7. We hereby place our demand that all our employees, their families and contingent staff should be vaccinated through conduct of special camps by engaging public or private hospitals and cost incurred towards vaccination of all to be borne by Organisation.

Desperate times require desperate measures. But there seems to be complete inaction from top management of EPFO. Therefore, we seek your firm intervention and we sincerely hope that with your direction, relief will be extended to us both to fight the COVID pandemic and to improve our systems during such time.

Thanking You

Encl: as above.

Yours faithfully



(SAURABH SWAMI)
SECRETARY GENERAL-EPFOA

Copy to:
The Central PF Commissioner
EPFO, New Delhi

...for information.