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PRASAR BHARATI's NEW TRANSFER POLICY - PROTEST AGAINST ARBITRARY CHANGES ADVERSELY AFFECTING EMPLOYEES

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ASSOCIATION OF RADIO AND TELEVISION ENGINEERING EMPLOYEES (ARTEE)

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Date :- 12/04/21

To,
The Secretary
Information & Broadcasting,
Shastri Bhavan,
New Delhi

Sub: PRASAR BHARATI's NEW TRANSFER POLICY - PROTEST AGAINST ARBITRARY CHANGES ADVERSELY AFFECTING EMPLOYEES-REG

[Ref: Prasar Bharati OM No.A-10011/09/2021-PPC Dated 26-03-2021 announcing a new Transfer Policy]

Respected Sir,

With highest regards, your kind intervention is solicited to address the regrettable situation caused by the above referred Office Memorandum, vide which Prasar Bharati has unilaterally done away with the concept of 'Difficult' and 'Most Difficult' stations spread all over the country, thereby closing a just, equitable opportunity for employees to work at reduced tenure in some inhospitable places. We express our strong resentment against this ad-hoc, hurried and ill-conceived change in transfer policy.

The earlier time-tested policy was in effect since 1981/82. As per previous Transfer Policy, in addition to the Difficult Stations declared by DoPT & MHA (stations of North East states, A&N Islands,

Lakshadweep, etc), MIB itself used to treat some stations as Category-C or “Hard Area” or “Tenure Stations”, (with assured transfer to choice place after 2 years) based upon internal on-field reports by officers. Places with extreme climatic conditions, geographical hardship & inaccessibility, pollution, drought / water scarcity, poor medical / educational / accessibility / communication facilities, places with insurgency effect / extremist activities, places where basic amenities like dwelling units are not available, high altitude / remoteness / backwardness etc were some of the criteria used to assess suitability to this ‘Tenure Station’ status. Periodically, new places were added to this list based upon feedback from the heads of newly opened stations in prescribed format.

It is no exaggeration to state that due to this sound and humane policy, our department has been able to serve the people of most backward, remote and inhospitable places of the country by operating radio stations, TV transmitters, PGFs etc with staff willing to face punishing climatic conditions, extremist violence, woeful law & order situations, severe pollution, deserted mountain tops and inaccessible tribal hamlets in the confidence that after two years they can get their choice place. The radio & TV stations in the drought-hit tribal belt of Odisha, the sandy wastes of Thar desert, the polluted mining areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Karnataka, the extremist-affected areas of Central, South-Central India, the cold chilly places of Himachal, Uttarakhand and the Western Ghats, etc are a testimony to this.

[A small example list of such 2 year tenure stations would help in understanding the absolute soundness and necessity of this policy: Desert conditions / drought / water scarcity / fluoride problem : Keonjhar, Bhawanipatna, Jeypore, Joda, Barmer, Khajuwala, Churu, Sri Ganga Nagar; Extreme cold conditions : Ooty, Kodaikanal ; Pollution / mining : Sandur, Markapuram, many places in Odisha, Jharkhand & Chhattisgarh; Hilly / inaccessible conditions: Attappadi, some stations in Uttaranchal state; Law & Order / Naxal activities etc : Some stations in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Jharkhand, Vidarbha region etc.]

It is pertinent to mention here that the conditions which earlier prompted the department to treat these stations as two year tenure stations are still prevailing with same vigor. Neither the chilling cold of Kodaikanal, Gopeshwar, nor the burning desert heat of Barmer, nor the severe pollution of Dhanbad, nor the drought in KBK region of Odisha, nor the extremist violence in the adjoining areas of Chhattisgarh/Maharashtra/Jharkhand/Odisha/Telangana has disappeared.

But as the latest OM indicates, Prasar Bharati thinks differently rather illogically which is most distressing line of thinking with regard to the management of human resources. This OM appears to have been issued without any consultation process/ feedback even from the highest rank of zonal heads, let alone from field offices or stake-holders. In addition, it has also conspicuously taken away the protection given to the Chief Executive of Staff Associations in the matter of transfer, indicating an adverse attitude towards staff associations.

In this context, your kind attention is drawn to the fact that in July 2014, Prasar Bharati published a draft Transfer Policy, and invited suggestions from all stakeholders while seeking to amend the existing transfer policy. **As many as 105 places were declared as Difficult / Tenure stations in this draft Policy.** The latest OM runs counter to this draft transfer policy of 2014.

[In the notified stations also, some stations deserve to be declared as 1 year tenure station. An example is the Car Nicobar Islands of A&N. This place is extremely remote and difficult to reach from Port Blair itself. It has no residential facilities, hotels or markets. But such a place is still considered as a Two-year tenure station along with Port Blair. Similarly many places in Ladakh and J&K like Drass, Poonch, Naushera etc. may be treated as Most Difficult station with One year tenure.]

Sir, it is humbly submitted that such a policy shift having far-reaching ramifications, should be made after transparent, logical and scientific study of the ground realities in consultation with all the stakeholders.

A transfer policy is a vitally important element in an employee's life. It affects his and his family's well-being in fundamental unalterable ways. Such a policy needs to exhibit awareness and humane sensitivity. It needs to be framed through set procedures and a draft proposal needs to be published seeking feedback from all stakeholders as it was done in 2014. Now Prasar Bharati has chosen to ignore the due procedures. Apparently it is unaware of the 2014 document itself. It is not known if PB consulted the Ministry of I&B while embarking on such illogical changes. It has chosen to bring these changes hurriedly, without any consultations, either with employees or with field offices. **It has abandoned its own earlier practice of wider consultations while making such far-reaching changes. If the management had taken inputs from field offices/Zonal offices and employees, the policy would have been more sensitive, humane and realistic.**

Due to this Order, Zonal offices have stopped issuing transfer orders for employees who have already completed their tenure in these places. They find it hard to post replacements as no one would be willing to work in these stations without any assurance of posting back to his chosen place. This would result in a chaotic situation where the staff who are already serving there would not get any replacements and have to continue there indefinitely. If at all, the administration forces employees to go to these places, without assurance of a fixed tenure of One or Two years, it may lead to chaos and legal tangles.

Such arbitrary policy changes made without careful study of ground realities would impede broadcast operations in areas of left wing extremism, desert / hilly / backward / tribal areas, industrial pollution affected places etc and would ultimately result in systemic weakening of the Public Broadcaster particularly in border areas of Rajasthan, UP, Uttarakhand, Himachal, J&K, A&N etc.

In view of the above, it is humbly requested to your kind self to instruct Prasar Bharati to immediately withdraw the Office Memorandum dated 26/3/2021 and start consultations with all the stake-holders for a comprehensive, humane and sound Transfer policy to replace the time tested Transfer Policy in place since 1981/82, if at all Prasar Bharati feels the need for such. It is also requested to your good self to include more stations in the 'Difficult' and 'Most Difficult' category after a careful evaluation and feedback based on criteria such as extreme climatic conditions, geographical inaccessibility, pollution, drought / water scarcity, poor medical / educational / accessibility / communication facilities, places with insurgency effect / extremist activities, places where basic amenities like dwelling units are not available, high altitude / remoteness /backwardness/ extreme climatic conditions etc.

Thanking you in anticipation.

With warm regards,

M.P. Chaudhari

President, ARTEE

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