

### 16.3 PASSAGE BENEFIT SCHEME

- 16.3.1 The passage benefit scheme which was initially designed for the travel of expatriates from Mauritius to their country of residence has undergone a mutation over successive Reports. At present, the scheme has been overarched to enable reimbursement for expenses in relation to a wide spectrum of uses.
- 16.3.2 Presently, besides travelling and travelling related expenses for beneficiaries and their immediate family members, the total amount accrued for passage benefit may also be used for the payment of School Certificate and Higher School Certificate examination fees; for recreational stay at inland hotels and resorts; and for cost incurred for medical interventions. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the criteria were further subtilised to allow beneficiaries to use their passage benefits to cover the cost of quarantine for themselves and immediate members of the family comprising spouse, their parents and children, irrespective of their age. We are extending the scope of this benefit to beneficiaries' siblings, father-in-law and mother-in-law as well. New provision has also been made to allow encashment of passage benefit for the purpose of house renovation and/or construction.
- 16.3.3 The eligibility criteria for earning passage benefit was reviewed in PRB Report 2016 for more leniency. Currently, officers appointed on a permanent and pensionable establishment earn passage benefit at a rate of 5% of their annual gross salary, provided that they draw a minimum monthly salary of Rs 25525 or reckon at least five years' service.
- 16.3.4 In fact, passage benefit is earned for the period of effective service. Officers, therefore, do not earn passage benefit during probationary period, vacation leave, vacation leave taken as casual leave or reckoned for late arrivals or taken either at a stretch or on and off in case of demise of a near relative or to look after the family around the time of one's child birth, sick leave in excess of 21 working days in a calendar year, maternity leave, adoption leave, parental leave, study leave with or without pay, injury leave, interdiction period, accumulated sick leave taken prior to retirement and leave without pay.
- 16.3.5 For purposes other than travel, beneficiaries are allowed to cash up to 90% of their accumulated passage benefit, provided that the balance standing to their credit is not less than Rs 10000. If both spouses are public officials, they are allowed to cash their passage benefit as long as the accrued joint balance to their credit stands at not less than Rs 20000. However, this condition is not applicable when the beneficiaries use the amount accrued to their balance for payment of School Certificate or Higher School Certificate examinations fees, that is, the balance standing to their credit may be less than Rs 10000.

- 16.3.6 In view of the adverse effect that the COVID-19 Pandemic has had on the country's economy, the option which was provided to beneficiaries to allow them to cash up to 90% of their accumulated passage benefit upon satisfying certain conditions, has been frozen until further notice from the concerned authority. This announcement was made in the Budget Speech 2020/2021 whereby it was decreed that encashment of passage benefits will be limited to travelling abroad and local tourism, meeting medical expenses and for educational purposes.
- 16.3.7 During meeting held in the context of this review exercise, the Federations requested that:
- (i) the eligibility criteria for earning passage benefit be reviewed to allow officers to earn passage benefit from the day of assumption of duty in the public sector; and
  - (ii) officers be allowed to cash in the totality of their accumulated passage benefit for personal usage and emergency cases, regardless of the balance standing to their credit.
- 16.3.8 After examining the various representations received, we are providing those which we find meritorious. Further, in view of present day exigencies, especially with outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic, we are improving the existing recommendations by broadening the grounds on which beneficiaries can claim cash refund for passage benefits.

### Recommendation 1

#### 16.3.9 We recommend that:

- (a) officers on permanent and pensionable establishment drawing a minimum monthly salary of Rs 27400 or reckoning at least five years' service should earn passage benefit at the rate of 5% of the gross salaries annually; and**
- (b) officers should not earn passage benefit during probationary period, vacation leave, vacation leave taken as casual leave or reckoned for late arrivals or taken at a stretch or on and off in case of demise of a near relative or to look after the family around the time of one's child birth, sick leave in excess of 21 working days in any calendar year, maternity leave, adoption leave, parental leave, study leave with or without pay, injury leave, interdiction period, accumulated sick leave taken prior to retirement, and leave without pay.**

### Recommendation 2

#### 16.3.10 We also recommend that beneficiaries should be allowed to make use of their accumulated passage benefit:

- (i) for travel purposes for themselves and for the immediate members of their families namely spouse, brother, sister, parents, father-in-law, mother-in-law and dependent children below 21 years as well as for their dependent**

children aged up to 30 years' old who are following a full time course in a tertiary institution either locally or abroad;

- (ii) to cover expenditures made during travel other than for their air tickets or cash wholly or in part the balance of their accumulated passage benefit at the time of travel;
- (iii) for personal medical treatment or for their immediate family members namely spouse, brother, sister, mother, mother-in-law, father, father-in-law and children irrespective of their age, either locally or abroad;
- (iv) for the purpose of renovation/construction of their primary residence;
- (v) to pay for cost of quarantine for themselves and immediate members of their family comprising spouse, brother, sister, mother, mother-in-law, father, father-in-law and children, irrespective of their age.

### Recommendation 3

#### 16.3.11 We further recommend that:

- (i) officers be allowed to use their accumulated passage benefit provided that the minimum balance to their credit stands at Rs 10000. If both spouses are civil servants, they should be allowed to use their passage benefit provided they have jointly accumulated an aggregate of not less than Rs 20000;
- (ii) officers, including those serving in our mission abroad, be allowed to cash from their accumulated passage benefit, part or the whole amount of expenses incurred in relation to vacation spent at hotels/inland recreational resorts upon production of documentary evidence and provided that the accumulated passage benefit standing to their credit is not less than Rs 10000;
- (iii) officers be allowed to use their accumulated passage benefit to pay the fees in connection to School Certificate, Higher School Certificate examinations or vocational training of their wards as well as for the payment of university fees for themselves and for their wards, either locally or abroad even if the balance standing to their credit is less than Rs 10000;
- (iv) officers be allowed to cash up to 90% of their accumulated passage benefit for any other purpose other than travel provided that the balance standing to their credit is not less than Rs 10000. While, the remaining 10% would be kept as the balance standing to their credit;
- (v) officers working during their pre-retirement leave should be allowed to earn passage benefit at the same rate as per recommendation at paragraph 16.3.9(a);

- (vi) officers who resign from public service should be paid *in toto* the accumulated passage benefit standing to their credit;
- (vii) at the time of retirement, officers should be paid the full amount of the passage benefit standing to their credit; and
- (viii) on the death of a beneficiary, the outstanding accumulated passage benefit should be paid *in toto* to their heirs.

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