

STATE BANK OF INDIA OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION

(BENGAL CIRCLE)

(Registered under Trade Unions Act 1926-Regd. No. 6908)

1, STRAND ROAD, KOLKATA-700 001.

Phone: 2213-0663, 2213-0154, 2213-0665 (after 5.30 P.M.), Fax : (033) 2210-1684



e-mail: sbioabengalcircle@gmail.com
www.sbioabengal.com

IP No. 500077

Circular No. 155/2018

Date : 31.10.2018

To All Members (Please Circulate)

We deeply mourn the tragic and untimely demise of Com Soma Biswas

We reproduce hereunder the text of the letter addressed to The Chief General Manager, State Bank of India, Local Head Office, Kolkata, the contents of which are self-explicit.

With greetings,

Soumya Datta
(General Secretary)

To all our Affiliates / Members:

The Chief General Manager
State Bank of India
Local Head Office
Kolkata

Date: 31.10.2018

Respected Sir,

TRAGIC DEMISE OF SOMA BISWAS **BRANCH MANAGER BAMBOOFLAT BRANCH**

On 27th October, 2018, we received traumatic news of the infelicitous death of a young and promising officer, Ms Soma Biswas, posted as Branch Manager, Bambooflat. The entire officers' fraternity of Kolkata Circle has been numbed with agony at the news of the tragic end of this young officer. We are certain that you share the loss and the resultant grief in equal measure. In fact, all of us have been inundated with calls/messages from across the country from the officers' fraternity.

02. Soma Biswas joined as a Customer Associate in our Bank in 2009 and by dint of her industry became a Trainee Officer in 2012. In recognition of her diligence, merit and performance, she was promoted to MMGS-III in May, 2018 and from July, 2018 was posted as the Branch Manager of our Bambooflat Branch. She was a sincere, dedicated and energetic official, possessed of a strong personality. We simply cannot fathom how a person like her could take the ultimate step of ending her life. Her demise not only leaves us bereft of an invaluable and irreplaceable colleague but also opens up a number of troubling questions. If we choose to take our eyes off these deeply disturbing issues at this point, we would certainly be failing in our duty towards our institution.

03. There may be multiple reasons for a person to choose the path of suicide. Why would someone who was merely 31 years old and on track for a promising career in a premiere national financial institution terminate her life? There is no gainsaying that Soma left this world absolutely disillusioned and betrayed. The press and people working alongside in her branch have been abuzz with disclosures, with accounts of her frustration at work, the mounting work load and the huge challenges she faced in managing work pressures and the overall imbalance in work-life balance. Our sources indicate that she had documented her reasons of frustration concerning her office and career, as also the repeated public humiliations she suffered. It is learnt that in the 'P' review meeting held on 8th October, she was humiliated in an open forum for having passed an erroneous BGL entry on 29.09.2018. Again, on 25th October, 2018, she was summoned to RBO late at night and was humiliated by the controller, who supposedly remarked that he was not concerned about her CDS scores; on the contrary, he reportedly remarked that it was due to her non-performance in several areas, viz. review/renewal and negative growth, that his own CDS scores could be affected. She left the premises broken and bitter. The next day she continued to work in her branch to complete the pending review/renewal cases and worked till 9-30 pm. She reached her home at around 10-30 pm. The very next day, which happened to be a holiday, she went to her branch once more in the morning and took the extreme step of ending her life. It is most unfortunate, indeed tragic, that Soma did not receive any mentoring, counselling or compassion from her superiors.

Soumya Datta
General Secretary
Mobile : 9830044737

State Bank of India Officers' Association

(BENGAL CIRCLE)

: 2 :

04. Whether we hesitatingly agree or fervently disagree, the fact remains that employees of the banking industry are woefully overburdened. With the relentless overdrive in the area of para-banking activities, besides the additional efforts in the domain of normal banking activities, the life of employees in general and officers of all cadres in particular has become stressful, anxiety-ridden, distressed and disturbed. Apart from the workload, many officers are subjected to the frequent humiliation meted out by 'rogue' controllers in various tiers who derive sadistic pleasure in inflicting public insults to those working under them. Be it in the performance review meeting, interaction through social media, telephonic conversation, the disgrace and the humiliation officers are subjected to at the hands of their superiors is inhuman and demoralizing. The atmosphere has become noxious, claustrophobic and vitiated. The basic dignity of officers is being outraged by hostile and egotistic controlling office functionaries. Can our organization truly call itself a family of interconnected human beings? An organisation, irrespective of its size, is about its human assets. Its success emanates not from the numbers but the love and sincerity that the employees put into their work. And so it is the responsibility of those who run the organisation to reciprocate this love with understanding and compassion, a compassion that Soma Biswas was completely deprived of. Indeed, humanity has become a rotten word in our industry: this callous lack of concern for fellow human beings and colleagues has led to several bank officer suicides across the country.

05. You may recall that during the Town Hall meeting held at Nazrul Manch on 6th September, 2018, the undersigned had emphasized the need to address the grievances of internal customers and urged upon one and all the need to be courteous in their dealings with peers, subordinates and superiors. It seems that despite the presence of a large number of senior officers in the gathering, this message went largely unheeded. Till sometime back, our Circle was free from the demon of officer suicide. It is of late that we have begun to see these chilling events. We witnessed the most tragic demise of Shri Ratnadeep Nayek, Service Manager of our Titagarh Branch in September, 2018, who has apparently left a note citing work pressure as the main cause.

06. The issuance of the Circular on work-life balance vide no. CDO/P&HRD-IR/54/2017-18 dated 30/10/2017 was widely appreciated across the country. However, the spirit of the circular has not percolated to all levels. There is an unfortunate culture of working late hours in all RBOs/AOs; officers who leave office even at 7-30 pm are frowned on and branded as 'shirkers'. In certain pockets, using various pretexts, officers are called on to work on Sundays and other holidays. Officers, it appears, have lost the right to work with self esteem and dignity. This has deeply affected the morale of officers, many of whom have been driven to despair.

07. Sir, Article 21 of the Constitution of India, lays down that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except according to a procedure established by law. The constitutional right to life further stresses the right to live with human dignity. Today, as an institution, we truly need to introspect, to ask ourselves whether we are creating a culture and an environment proper to the state of excellence we dream of bringing in our Circle and in our Bank? Shall we all collectively continue to remain silent spectators and shrug off our responsibility by offering mere condolences whenever such tragic incidences occur? Is it not high time that we wake up to felt needs and initiate suitable proactive measures to make the working environment healthy and congenial?

08. Protecting the sanctity of life has been a sine qua non within the precincts of law and justice in India. Apart from ensuring a healthy existence to all humans, this constitutional requirement is also aimed at protecting life itself. The level of respect shown towards a person's life by the state is best explained by the fact that the state not only prohibits a person from taking another person's life but also penalizes a person who himself tries to put an end to his/her life by means of suicide. The former is made punishable under section 302 and the latter under section 309 of the Indian Penal Code. The day may not be far off when we would perhaps witness our Controllers across various tiers getting embroiled in litigation pertaining to abetment to suicide within the ambit of Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code. The family and friends of the deceased could also insist on bringing in Section 306, which interprets abetment as a series of acts on the part of the accused that led to the creation of such circumstances where the deceased had no other option left than to commit suicide. This series of acts may include use of force, words, conduct, wilful omission or deeds, or for that matter even silence on the part of the accused in order to annoy or irritate the deceased, i.e. all such actions that result in the officer taking steps to end his or her life.

We urge upon your good office to rein in our Controllers who rampantly indulge in the culture of accuse and abuse of subordinates only to hide their own deficiencies and inefficiencies. They need to be counseled that mere resorting to shouting, vilification and public humiliation of subordinates cannot fetch results. Such acts are simply counter-productive. On the contrary, the need of the hour is to have a pragmatic, focused, mature and salubrious approach to respond to the challenges that face us. A list of such Controllers will be separately given to you, individuals who are instrumental in making the lives of officers unbearable in such irresponsible, egotistic and ultimately fatal ways.

Soumya Datta
General Secretary
Mobile : 9830044737

State Bank of India Officers' Association

(BENGAL CIRCLE)

: 3 :

09. The Deputy Managing Director & CDO has already initiated a step in the right direction by addressing the Controllers to stop this unbridled and ignominious style of functioning. We hope that, following in the footsteps of the Corporate Centre, the Circle Management will also usher in suitable initiatives by providing valuable advice to the modular heads to bring a halt to this trend and provide much needed respite to the officers' community from daily embarrassment, harassment and humiliation. We have seen proactive and positive initiative on the part of the HR Department of our Circle to mitigate this menace. However, due to unabated onslaughts at the operational level, the efforts of the HR department have not produced desired results except in certain pockets. The moment has come for a broader and more effective role to be envisaged for HR. This should receive the necessary support of the Circle management, and should enable HR managers at different levels to effectively promote a congenial work culture as well as appropriately address and redress the grievances of employees and officials. Sir, you will surely appreciate that no work environment, no department, no office, no organization can survive devoid of the simple courtesies. It is therefore quite stupefying that while we are on a mission to improve the health of our institution, we do so in a thankless culture shorn of a basic sense of both ethics and decorum.

10. Sir, it is time to ponder. Where are we headed with this culture of unwarranted verbal bashing and public disgracing of our colleagues? Have we not in all our previous oaths, thoughts, debates, and discussions contemplated and held dear only the success and improvement of our beloved institution? Have we not been striving incessantly for the betterment of our Bank by rendering the required service to our customers uninterruptedly within the country and beyond, while remaining sensitive to the needs of all our other stakeholders? This hour categorically calls on us to reverse our trend of unrealistic demands and public insult of juniors; otherwise, our very growth story stands in danger of being reversed.

11. Sir, we urge upon your good office the pressing need to initiate a thorough probe to unearth the facts and to identify the reasons, motives and the person(s), if any, who, instead of counselling and reassuring Soma Biswas, were actually instrumental in her decision to end her life. We feel a retired senior executive should be assigned the task of conducting an enquiry and complete the proceedings within 7 days. We also demand that you be unsparing in your justice if it is found that flawed people, and a flawed process and system have caused the loss of a precious human life. Soma Biswas was compelled to take this dreadful step to escape the insult and ignominy meted out to her. We demand that you stand firmly in favor of exemplary punishment to anyone who is responsible for this crime. We repose faith in your wisdom and we are convinced that appropriate measures will be initiated.

12. We are certain this will convey the sternest message to all perpetrators of such misdeeds to introspect and change for the better, failing which the Bank will treat such acts as unpardonable and will not demur to take the stringent action as warranted. Simultaneously, we also urge upon you to initiate suitable measures to address the work-life balance issue from the right perspective. As stakeholders and as partners-in-progress of this esteemed organisation, we wish to offer the following suggestions to be put in place for the overall improvement of the present scenario:

- a) Curb the tendency to sit late at administrative offices, processing centres and branches
- b) Stop abuse/misuse of WhatsApp messages
- b) Stop calling officers on Sundays and holidays
- d) Sensitise administrative functionaries about the need to show compassion to operational functionaries
- e) Stop all unethical behaviour and practices

Sir, you will recall that the present Chairman in a press briefing immediately after assuming charge of the Bank had spoken about work-life balance, something received wide coverage in the media. This was followed up by the landmark circular on work-life balance issued by the Bank. Bizarre incidents of suicides, which are attributed to work pressure, have drawn adverse reactions and much negative publicity, all of which has sullied the image of our esteemed institution.

We look to you with hope; we believe that you will set the tone and direction in this regard.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

Soumya Datta
General Secretary

Soumya Datta
General Secretary
Mobile : 9830044737