

STATE BANK OF INDIA OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION

(BENGAL CIRCLE)

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

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Circular No. 73/2020

Date : 29.03.2020

To All Members (Please Circulate)

We reproduce hereunder the Circular No. 54 dated 29.03.2020 issued by the General Secretary, All India State Bank Officers' Federation, the contents of which are self-explicit.

With revolutionary greetings,

Shubhajyoti Chattopadhyay
(General Secretary)

To all our Affiliates / Members:

Implementation of various Schemes and measures announced by the Hon'ble FM – a way forward

We reproduce hereunder the text of AIBOC Circular No.2020/35 dated 29/03/2020 contents of which are self-explanatory for information of the members.

(Soumya Datta)
General Secretary

Dear Comrade,

Implementation of various Schemes and measures announced by the Hon'ble FM – a way forward

We have sent a communiqué to the Hon'ble Finance Minister of India vide our letter no. AIBOC/2020/19 dated 29.03.2020 on the captioned subject. Copy of the same has also been sent to the Hon'ble Minister of State for Finance, Govt. of India, the Finance Secretary, Govt of India and Hon'ble Chief Ministers of all states and union territories. Text of the communication is appended.

With greetings,

Sd/-

(Soumya Datta)
General Secretary

Text of Letter No. AIBOC/2020/19 dated 29.03.2020

Ref No. AIBOC/2020/19

Date: 29.03.2020

Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman
Hon'ble Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs
Government of India
North Block
New Delhi

Respected Madam,

Implementation of various Schemes and measures announced by the Hon'ble FM – a way forward

We refer to our earlier communiqué addressed to your good office vide letter no. AIBOC/2020/18 dated 27.03.2020 (copy enclosed), wherein we had suggested certain critical measures to be put in place for the safety and security of our employees, officers and other stakeholders. Ever since the Hon'ble Prime Minister has invoked the provisions of The Disaster Management Act, 2005 and The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, to declare the complete lockdown in the country with effect from 24th March, 2020 midnight, a lot of restrictions have been put in place throughout the country. Consequently, various states and many districts are under the Section 144 of CrPC or undergoing curfew.

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The public transport facilities including the suburban / local train as well as metro railway services are suspended, yet bankers are still attending the office and rendering the minimum essential services to the customers despite various constraints besides the risk of getting exposed to the threat of being affected by the deadly Coronavirus. Individual bank managements including State Level Bankers' Committees (SLBCs) have announced a series of measures towards 'Business Continuity Plans', keeping in view that banking is listed under the Essential Services Maintenance Act.

Madam, with the Coronavirus Relief Package announced by your good office on 27th March, 2020, which *inter alia*, included ex-gratia payment to 30 million senior citizens, disbursement of first installment under Pradhan Mantri Kishan Samman Nidhi Yojna, and crediting 204 million accounts of Jan Dhan Yojna for women beneficiaries, through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) *et al.* Implementation of these measures would invariably require the banking channel, and thereby huge workload and responsibilities are cast upon the bankers, where the entire country is advised to '**Stay at Home, Stay Safe**'. It is also obvious that during the next few weeks, there would be abrupt increase in footfall at the bank branches, especially in the rural and semi urban belt, for withdrawing the MGNREGA payments and amount to be credited to 'Jan Dhan' accounts and other DBTs.

From the length and breadth of the country, reports are forthcoming that the number of people affected with the dreaded virus is growing in geometric progression. There could be hundreds of asymptomatic people moving around infected with the dreaded virus, who will be visiting bank branches in the coming weeks thereby making those as potential centres for community spread of the disease. Report of a Mumbai city based bank employee, who was on duty on alternate days, getting infected with Coronavirus has reached our office. During the period, he interacted with nearly 500 people and needless to emphasise that there are ample chances of contamination of several people from the said person affected with COVID-19. Thus, it is evident that during this crisis period, safety of our staff and customers is of paramount importance, in absence of which the cases of contamination of the bankmen may multiply, which in turn can cause serious health hazards to their families, the customers and public in thousands.

All India Bank Officers' Confederation, being seriously concerned of the ground realities, reiterates its demand for the well being of banking fraternity working in the field across the country and proposes following suggestions towards that end so as to ensure successful implementation of the package of schemes and measures announced by the Ministry:

1. An Insurance scheme with coverage of **Rs 50 lakh** per head be announced for the bankers as well as the Business Correspondents / Contractual workers associated with providing banking service who are working in highly risk prone conditions – handling currency notes and instruments, which are possible mediums of virus contamination and dealing with thousands of customers who could be possible vectors of the case.
2. All the banking personnel with pre-existing vital medical conditions such as heart related issues, diabetes, cancer and other critical diseases and the expectant mothers / ladies having infants shall be strictly not called to attend office and to 'work from home' etc., since they constitute the section of the workforce that is most vulnerable to possible infection. In such cases, a blanket instruction to treat the absence of these bank employees as special leave may also be passed on.
3. In order to combat with the impending situation, an instruction may also be passed on to rationalise the number of officers and employees presently attached to all the administrative offices and centralised processing centres (CPCs) immediately and redeploy them strictly on rotation basis for ensuring essential branch functions as indicated by your Ministry as well as Indian Banks' Association (IBA). The weekly roster of employees / officers required to be present (not more than twice a week) be prepared by all branch / sectional heads involving all the available human resources (after excluding those mentioned under point no. 2. above), while other bank staff shall remain confined at home so as to "break the chain".
4. Strict directions be passed by DFS to all the State level Bankers' Committees to ensure that the bank branches in urban / metro areas are opened on alternate days and in a cluster approach as has already been implemented in certain States and UTs. However, while forming clusters, staff should be redeployed in such a manner that the number of staff gathered in a branch on any particular day does not exceed the norm of 'barest minimum', because such events will defeat the very aspect of 'social distancing', which is a dire necessity in the present scenario. Rural and semi-urban branches may be made functional for maximum number of 4 days a week only as per local requirement, subject to availability of workforce for rotation. In fact, some of the states which had passed such orders to restrict banking hours and days, have since reviewed their earlier order and issued full-fledged functioning of all bank branches, which would certainly be counter-productive to the safety measures and the norms of 'social distancing'. We urge upon you to ensure continuation of restriction of banking hours from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM, to minimise the chances of exposure.
5. It is gathered from our state units that certain districts are seriously affected by the outbreak of the COVID-19 and a community spread is suspected. Such areas may be considered for a total lockdown even for bank branches after ensuring that the ATM channels are replenished and operational, subject to maintaining the sanitisation protocols advised by the authorities.
6. The data from Govt. sources confirm that 29.14 crore number of RuPay Debit cards have been issued in Jan Dhan accounts across the country. 81 percent ATM penetration along with the recent decision of the Finance Ministry to waive off the limits in ATM transactions and charges for ATM usage will further facilitate the aforesaid skeletal functioning of branches / total lockdown of branches in highly susceptible geographies, as indicated under point nos. 4 and 5 respectively. Mobile ATM vans can also be deployed in select locations – particularly in rural and semi-urban areas so as to extend cash withdrawal facilities. We expect around 29 crore beneficiaries will be visiting bank branches / customer service points in the ensuing week, who in

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turn will be visiting groceries / vegetable markets / ration shops / medical stores etc. A conservative estimate suggests that at least 5 crore people will be coming in contact with the beneficiaries of the schemes. The entire effort of the government to 'Break the Chain' will be defeated, as there would be likely exponential growth in the number of affected people in the coming weeks to contain the pandemic.

7. As a one-time measure, the dormant accounts under PMJDY be activated globally at central level, since such accounts will not allow ATM operations in the dormant status. The present guidelines to activate the accounts at branch level after obtaining the request from customers will impede the ongoing social distancing efforts and public will flood the branches.
8. Strict strategies and modalities be passed on to the SLBCs to ensure social distancing in bank branches. The individual banks must ensure that adequate masks, gloves / sanitisers / preventive measures are available to the frontline staffs who are directly dealing with the customers. DFS shall immediately issue necessary instructions to the individual banks to ensure protection of bank staff as well as fumigation of bank branches as sanitary measures. Police / Security personnel be provided at all branches to regulate the crowding customers and allow them inside the premises one by one. They should also ensure that the likely beneficiaries of the Schemes / measures announced by the Ministry are allowed in a staggered manner after thorough application of all laid down protocols and not allowed to come to the branches *en masse* on any single day.
9. The bankers on duty be provided with adequate transportation facilities and adequate number of pool cabs (invariably with 'on emergency services' stickers duly approved by the local administrative authorities) be arranged in order to enable them to attend the bank branches since the public transportation facility is totally suspended across the country. Several incidents have come to the fore of bank employees and officers including lady staff have been harassed by police when they attempt to attend the branches. This sensitive issue may be addressed by proper instruction to all police stations to issue 'on emergency services' passes to all concerned.
10. The exponential progression and spread of COVID-19 is a serious concern especially for the bankers across the country since they are handling the currencies and instruments like cheques / drafts etc., which are very much likely to act as contaminated surfaces that can be transmitting the virus. The asymptomatic transmission of Coronavirus is another encounter for the nation, since the bankers if infected will act as a vector for disease communication to various customers and fellow bankers, which could be fatal in due course. Bankers working in the branches without adequate preventive measures are more prone to the infection and will be acting as catalyst in spreading the disease. Bank branches could possibly become epicentre of spreading the virus unless strict administrative measures are implemented.

We urge upon your good office to address these sensitive issues along with other pertinent issues referred in our previous communiqué as stated above in the right perspective and frame necessary guidelines for the banks in the best interest of the entire nation and its 'financial army'.

With best regards,

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

(Soumya Datta)
General Secretary

Encl. : As above

Ref.No. AIBOC/2020/18

Date : 27.03.2020

Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman
Hon'ble Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs
Government of India
North Block
New Delhi

Respected Madam,

Coronavirus Relief Package announced by the Government – further critical measures proposed

Greetings from All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC), the largest trade union of officers in the banking sector having a membership of over 3.20 lakh in the industry.

This communiqué relates to the economic relief measures that your good office announced yesterday afternoon in the backdrop of the nationwide lockdown to arrest the spread of the dreaded Covid-19. We feel that the lockdown is a much needed step and the economic relief measures for the weaker sections of the society initiated by the government are most welcome at this critical hour. We also appreciate the proposal of the government in covering the healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses and sanitation workers, who are in frontline in the fight against the deadly virus, with insurance cover of Rs.50 lakh per head. This is a right initiative in recognising the noble and selfless service being rendered by such persons.

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2. Madam, from the measures announced by the government, it transpires that majority of them are the ones which are intended to provide economic/financial relief to the citizenry, calling upon the deeper involvement of banks and its officers and staff and the BC channel. DBT to identified eight categories of beneficiaries, release of 'Kisan Samman Nidhi' first installment in first week of April, disbursement of increased wage revision under MGNREGA, ex-gratia through 'Jandhan' accounts, collateral free loans to women SHGs, disbursal/withdrawal of non-refundable advance from EPF accounts *et al* are basically bank-centric activities. Disbursement of collateral free loans to women SHGs will definitely devolve humungous workload on bank officers. It may please be taken cognizance of that, under the circumstances, where entire society is being forced upon to 'Stay at Home, Stay Safe', maintaining social distance from each other, bank officers and employees are constrained to take extra load, to work for extra hours, to undergo extra pain, besides contacting and meeting more and more people, thereby exposing themselves to grave risk of contagion and in turn, spread of the same to their families. It is therefore necessary that they and their families need to be insulated from risks arising from such obvious eventualities.

3. You will appreciate that bank employees and officers constitute the 'financial army' of the country, who are extending banking facilities to the customers all over the country, risking their own lives and also the same of their family members even at the time of this all pervading catastrophe. We apprehend that in view of the measures announced by the government now, bank branches across the nation will be drawing huge footfall in the coming weeks. Bankers will be required to work in the fullness of time and perhaps more than the schedule, with a view to implementing the special economic package to the desired level. In the fitness of things, it is the dire necessity and therefore it would be most humane, minimum and legitimate step on the part of the government to extend insurance cover of Rs.50 lakh per head to the bankmen as well, as they are also required to provide a very essential service to the society risking contamination. Additionally, we urge upon your good office to put in place a policy that immediate compassionate appointment be given to the next of the kin of any employees, if they lay down their lives, in the line of duty having been affected with the dreaded COVID-19. Furthermore, we recommend that the insurance coverage should also be extended to the Business Correspondents working at the counter of Customer Service Points providing service especially to the 'Jandhan' a/c holders so as to make them feel secured at this moment while extending their uninterrupted service.

4. We also urge upon you to ensure that proper logistic and administrative support is extended to all employees and officers, who will be required to commute from their residences to branches / offices in this critical period. Considering that majority of the bank employees and officers are required to travel a long way and in the given scenario are required to incur a huge expenditure just for everyday travelling as public transport has been suspended, they may also be adequately compensated. Further, adequate administrative support is extended to ensure that the branches are not congested in the coming weeks so as to enable us to perform our duty of providing the essential services delineated by IBA and at the same time, implementing the schemes introduced by your office in a successful and desired manner.

5. Further, in view of the proposed amalgamation of the 10 public sectors banks, the entire process of DBT will be seriously impeded without the technological integration of the 'target' banks with the 'acquirer' banks. This will only add to the chaos and confusion of a larger scale. We, therefore, once again request you to revisit the decision of merging the public sector banks in its true perspective and have a thorough and careful study of the possible second order effects, which may be arising out of any hasty decision on immediate implementation of the 'Amalgamation Schemes' in the backdrop of announcement of "Coronavirus Relief Package", in absence of which we may rather invite the infamous 'Cobra effect' that would give rise to various unsolicited and unwelcome consequences.

6. In view of the immediate requirement of implementation of the slew of measures announced by you yesterday, we further request your good office to actively consider extension of annual closing related activities and the revision of the closing date itself from 31st March, 2020 to 30th June, 2020, which is not only the expectation of the entire banking fraternity, but also the paramount need of the hour.

7. An immediate announcement of the aforesaid critical measures including extension of insurance coverage of Rs 50 lakh per head to bankers and workers of BC channels will be highly appreciated.

With best regards,

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-
(Soumya Datta)
General Secretary

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