F. No. 1-6/2011-IFD
Government of India
Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change

New Delhi, dated the 24th August, 2014.

CIRCULAR

Subject: Instructions/Guidelines for processing of foreign travel proposal - regarding.

01. Guidelines and instructions on travel abroad of Ministers, their personal staff, various categories of Govt. officials and non-officials have been issued from time to time by the PMO, Cabinet Secretariat and Ministry of Finance. Some of these instructions/guidelines were re-iterated by an internal circular of this Ministry vide F. No. Secy. (EF)/PPS/2011 dated June 14, 2011, while also providing guidelines for processing the proposals related to foreign visits. In the recent past, new instructions have been issued by the Cabinet Secretariat regarding travel by Ministers and officials of the Ministry/Departments. This was followed by a revision in the 'foreign travel proforma' by Ministry of Finance for compliance in proposals that are referred to the Screening Committee of Secretaries (SCOS).

02. In the recent past it has been observed that the aforesaid instructions/guidelines related to foreign visits are not being followed in the right earnest. This coupled with the need to incorporate the recent instructions issued by Cabinet Secretariat and Ministry of Finance has made it necessary to re-iterate the important instructions and the guidelines for processing foreign visit proposals for strict compliance by all the concerned processing divisions in this Ministry.

03. In view of the foregoing, some of the important instructions regarding foreign travel issued by Cabinet Secretariat and Ministry of Finance are reiterated as under:

Proposals of Central Ministers, personal staff of Minister & non-officials to be approved by PMO

i. Proposals relating to visits abroad of Central Ministers (Cabinet Ministers, Ministers of State holding independent charge, Ministers of State or Deputy Ministers) require prior approval of the Prime Minister;

ii. Such proposals should be submitted to the Prime Minister directly after obtaining political clearance from the Ministry of External Affairs. The visits should be coordinated through Ministry of External Affairs to avoid duplication of visits and for effective presentation of our viewpoints with foreign Governments.

[Source: Cab. Sectl. OM No. 21/1/7/94-Cab. dated March 30, 1995]

iii. The foreign visit proposals of Ministers seeking approval of the Prime Minister shall be forwarded to the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) at least 10 days before the proposed date of departure.

iv. The proposal should inter-alia incorporate details of the tasks to be accomplished during the visit, a copy of the previous tour report of the Minister concerned accompanied with a description of further efforts made by the Minister during the interregnum to fully realize the intended outcome of the previous visit and the results thereof.
v. In each case, a post-visit report will also be submitted by Minister concerned to the PM on the immediate outcome of the visit.

vi. The process adopted while processing the proposals for foreign visit of Ministers will also be adopted in respect of visits abroad by Secretary/ Additional Secretary level officers seeking the clearance of the Screening Committee of Secretaries (SCOS) as also the officers upto the levels of Joint Secretary in whose case, the proposal is cleared internally within the Ministry/Department with the approval of the Minister.

[Source: Cab. Sectt. OM No.1/19/2/2014-Cab. dated June 11, 2014]

vii. Minister level visits abroad should be undertaken only in response to formal governmental invitations from the country concerned.

viii. Ministers of Cabinet rank are entitled to take their Private Secretaries along with them.

ix. A Minister of State holding Independent Charge is entitled to take his Private Secretary along with him except when (i) he is accompanied by officials in a delegation which include an officer of the rank of Director or below; and (ii) when he is accompanied by other Ministers and he is not leading the delegation.

x. Proposals for the deputation of a Private Secretary or members of the personal staff of Ministers should be sent to the Prime Minister for his approval along with the proposals for deputation of the Minister concerned. In no circumstances should the proposals for the deputation of the private Secretary or any member of the personal staff be considered under the delegated powers of the Ministry/Department.

xi. In respect of non-officials in respect of whom the expenditure is being borne by the Govt. of India, the approval of the Prime Minister will be required even if their names are included in a composite delegation. Such cases should be submitted to the Prime Minister through the Screening Committee of Secretaries (SCOS). The objectives of including the non-officials should be clearly mentioned and the expenditure likely to be incurred on the visit indicated. It should also be mentioned if the same non-official was sponsored by the Govt. of India for a visit abroad during the last 3 years.

[Source: Cab. Sectt. OM No. 21/1/7/94-Cab. dated March 30, 1995]

Proposals of Govt. officials to be approved by Screening Committee of Secretaries (SCOS)

xii. Delegations where the number of members exceed five in number and composite delegations led by Additional Secretary or above level officers would be referred to the SCOS for prior approval.

[Source: D/o Exp. OM No. E.Coord-2006 dated July 23, 2010]

xiii. No delegation for foreign travel should exceed five members nor should the duration exceed five days. In cases where these numbers have to be exceeded due to unavoidable reasons, the matter may be placed before the SCOS giving detailed justifications, irrespective of whether the proposal is required to come to the SCOS for approval as per the present guidelines.

[Source: Cab. Secy. D.O. letter No. 23(2)/E.Coord/2006 dated 12th June, 2008]

xiv. Case of deputation abroad of officials of the rank of Secretary and Additional Secretary to SAARC countries may be decided by Ministries/Departments in consultation with Financial Advisers.

[Source: Cab Sectt. O.M. No. 21/1/7/94-Cab. dated 30.3.1995]
Proposals of Govt officials (Joint Secretary & below)

xv. Powers to approve foreign visits of officers up to the level of Director and equivalent are delegated to the administrative Secretaries with prior consultation with the Financial Adviser (FA) concerned. With regard to the foreign visits of Joint Secretary/equivalent and above level officers, the existing provisions viz. obtaining Minister's approval for such visits in consultation with FA and the stipulations for the visits of composite delegation, will however continue.

[Source: D/o Exp. O.M. No. 23(2)/E.Coord-2006 dated 7th January, 2010]

xvi. The SCOS approval will not be required in respect of cases where the delegation consists of officers of the level of Joint Secretary and below and expenditure in the case of only 5 members or below is borne by Government of India although the overall size of the delegation may exceed five.

[Source: D/o Exp. OM 23(2)/E.Coord-2006 dated July 23, 2010 & Dec 13, 2010]

xvii. The foreign deputation/visits of delegations comprising more than five members (irrespective of the level of officers), where the Govt. of India is bearing the expenditure in respect of more than five members to SAARC countries and Myanmar are exempt from the requirement of prior approval of SCOS, subject to the following conditions—

a. The Ministries/Departments may manage such visits from funds allocated in their annual budgets under the FTE
b. Where both the Secretary and Minister-in-charge would be away from HQ at the same time, a visit to any SAARC country or Myanmar by the Secretary would continue to be placed before the SCOS.

[Source: D/o Exp. O.M. No. 23(2)/E.Coord-2011 dated Feb 13, 2012]

Proposals of officers of Autonomous Bodies

xviii. Proposals for deputation/delegation of officers of Autonomous Bodies need not be referred SCOS. However, where the proposal involves visit of a composite delegation comprising officials from the Ministry and autonomous body and being led by an Additional Secretary or above level officer from the Ministry, approval of SCOS would be required. In all other cases, viz. foreign visit of delegations comprising officers of autonomous bodies only, (irrespective of the level), SCOS approval is not required. Further, where the foreign tour of officers of autonomous body attract restrictions on foreign travel imposed under economy instructions, issued from time to time, if so deemed by the Financial Adviser concerned, in such case it would require relaxation of the economy instructions by the Department of Expenditure as conveyed vide their ID No.193786/E.Coord-2011 dated 23.12.2011.

[Source: Department of Expenditure O.M. No. 19036/2/85-E.IV dated 16th May, 1985]

Proposals involving acceptance of invitation from foreign bodies/ international organizations etc.

xix. In case invitation to participate in workshop/conference/seminar/study tour/presentation of papers etc. abroad is received directly by the officer by name by virtue of his/her expertise in a particular field, such visits will be treated as in personal capacity for which the officer would have to proceed on leave after obtaining the approval of competent authority. Such visits are to be allowed only if 100% funding support is provided by the organizers. The proposals in respect of the officers of Joint Secretary and below may be considered in consultation of the Minister and the Financial advisor concerned. The proposals in respect of the officers of the levels of AS and above will be
referred to SCOS for consideration. Necessary clearances viz. political clearance from MEA, FCRA from MHA wherever required, may invariably be obtained for such visits.

[Source: D/o Exp. OM No. 23(2)/E. Coord.-2006 dated Oct 27, 2008]

**Composite delegations**

xx. In case of composite delegations consisting of Central Ministries and officials, the proposal relating to officials proposed to be included in the delegation should first be examined in the nodal Ministry/Department in consultation with other Ministries and matter should be referred to the Screening Committee after getting the clearance of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) from FCRA/Political angle. In the delegation to be led by a Central Minister, names of all the officers to be deputed including those coming within the purview of the delegated powers should be mentioned.

xxi. In case of composite delegations consisting of Central Ministries and officials, the proposal relating to officials proposed to be included in the delegation should first be examined in the nodal Ministry/Department in consultation with other Ministries and matter should be referred to the Screening Committee after getting the clearance of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) from FCRA/Political angle. In the delegation to be led by a Central Minister, names of all the officers to be deputed including those coming within the purview of the delegated powers should be mentioned.

xxii. In case of composite proposals in which officers from different departments are required to be deputed, the proposal should be coordinated by the nodal ministry. The nodal Ministry will obtain the list of officers from different Ministries on the prescribed proforma duly signed by the Joint Secretary (Administration), Financial Advisors concerned and submit a consolidated proposal to the Screening Committee.

[Source: Cab. Sectt. OM No. 21/1/7/94-Cab. dated March 30, 1995]

xxiii. In case of composite delegation headed by Secretary/ Additional Secretary and including officers of the level of Joint Secretary and below, a proposal should not be split. A composite proposal in respect of all the officers so nominated for the same event may be sent for consideration of the Screening Committee of Secretaries (SCOS).

xxiv. In case of composite delegations, which also include officials from other Ministries/Departments, it is the responsibility of the nodal Ministry to obtain information viz. budget provision, number of foreign visits previously undertaken by the officer etc. in respect of each and every officer nominated and submit a single deputation proforma for consideration of SCOS.

[Source: D/o Exp. O.M. No. 23(2)/2006–E.Coord dated July 5, 2007]

**Economy Measures to rationalize the expenditure on foreign visits**

xxv. Ministry of Finance, Department of Expenditure has been issuing austerity instructions from time to time with a view to containing non-developmental expenditure and releasing additional resources for priority schemes. In its latest instruction, D/o Expenditure has directed that -

a. Officers may travel by entitled class for international travel; however, officers in apex scale may travel only by business class. In all cases of air travel only the lowest fare tickets of entitled class are to be purchased/ procured. No companion free ticket on domestic/ international travel is to be availed of.

b. It would be the responsibility of the Secretary of each Ministry/Department to ensure that foreign travel is restricted to most necessary and unavoidable official engagements based on functional necessity, and that extent instructions are strictly followed.
c. Where travel is unavoidable, it would be ensured that the officers of the appropriate level dealing with the subject are sponsored instead of those at higher levels. The size of the delegation and duration of visits will be kept to the absolute minimum.

d. Proposals for participation in study tours, workshops/conferences/ seminars/ presentation of papers abroad at Government cost will not be entertained except those that are fully funded by the sponsoring agencies.

e. Travel expenditure (including FTE) should be so regulated as to ensure that each Ministry remains within the allocated budget for the same. Re-appropriation proposals on this account would not be approved.

xxvi. No officer is to undertake more than four official visits abroad in a year and for Ministries where the nature of work demands a higher number of visits, a calendar of visits for the entire year should be prepared and visits should be prioritized.

xxvii. For a proposal relating to visits exceeding four by an officer, detailed justification would need to be furnished, and such visits would be allowed only in exceptional cases. Approval for foreign visits has to be based on functional necessity and not on number of visits/trips already made.

xxviii. As far as possible Ministries/Departments will use our Missions abroad to represent our interest instead of deputing officers from India. Facilities of video conferencing may be used effectively so that all avoidable visits abroad are indeed avoided. Every proposal for foreign travel must be supported by reasons explaining why these alternatives cannot be availed of.

xxix. Travel expenditure (including FTE) should be so regulated as to ensure that each Ministry remain within the allocated budget for the same. Re-appropriation proposals on this account would not be approved. In fact, in one of the case SCOS has directed vide ID note No.DC-531391/E.Coord-2014 dated 21/3/2014 that “for future, MoEF is advised to plan/prioritize their foreign tour proposals in advance as adjustment viz. incurring/adjustments of expenditure from budget heads other than that authorized, will not be allowed”.

Prior Consultation with IFD

xxx. As per the instructions issued by Ministry of Finance, Department of Expenditure and by this Ministry time and again, prior approval of IFD must be obtained before referring the file for approval of Minister or Secretary to ensure that the Secretary and Minister have the benefit of views of IFD before taking a decision. In the recent past, SCOS vide their ID Note No. DC-170294/E.Coord-2013 dated 19.9.2013 followed by ID Note No. DC-112330/E.Coord-2014 dated 9.7.2014 has advised the Ministry to ensure that the foreign tour proposals are routed through the IFD before the approval of Competent Authority viz. Minister-in-Charge or the Administrative Secretary is obtained, failing which proposals will be returned unprocessed.
Guidelines for processing the foreign visits proposals

04. Keeping in view the instructions as referred to above, the following guidelines shall be followed by Processing Divisions for processing the cases of foreign deputation –

(i) All the Processing Divisions (PDs) where foreign visits are anticipated shall prepare a calendar of visits at the beginning of each financial year and obtain the approval of competent authority. In case the PD doesn't have a budget allocation for foreign travel expenses, the calendar of visits shall be sent to the IC Division of the Ministry who in turn will consolidate all such visits and obtain the approval of the competent authority. The approved calendar of visits shall be sent to the Administration Division for uploading on the MoEF website, latest by April 30. The calendar of visits should besides indicating the details of meeting, level of participation and expected number of participants for each visit also indicate the availability of funds and tentative budget per visit delineating the financial support, if any, expected from the organizers as per earlier convention.

(ii) The proposal must be routed through the IFD for prior consultation before the approval of competent authority in the Ministry is obtained. In case this is not followed, IFD will not accord concurrence.

(iii) The proposal should generally be submitted to IFD at least 20 days before the date of departure in the latest format for Foreign Travel Proforma (FTP) prescribed by the Department of Expenditure for submission to the Screening Committee of Secretaries (vide OM No. 4(1)/E.Coord-2014 dated July 2, 2014). The FTP should be accompanied with the following enclosures –

a. Invitation letter
b. Agenda
c. Brief/country position duly approved by the competent authority
d. Clearances from MEA, PMO, MHA etc., as necessary,
e. Self-verified list of foreign visits undertaken in last three years in respect of each participant
f. Information regarding support, if any, available from the sponsoring organization(s) to cover the cost of visit
g. Certificate that the composite delegation has not been split and the nodal Ministry or the concerned Division in the Ministry has been consulted on the matters covered by the visit

(iv) All the columns in the FTP should be complete in all respects and provide clear and concise information sought therein. The FTP should be duly verified by the JS(Admn).

(v) All proposals for foreign travel seeking approval of SCOS should be forwarded by the Additional Secretary & Financial Adviser (AS&FA) to the appropriate authority as per subject orders and not by any other officer.
(vi) The time-lines for submitting a proposal to PMO and SCOS for approval are at least 10 days/15 days respectively before the date of departure. In case a proposal is delayed, condonation of delay from PMO/Cabinet Secretary must accompany the proposal.

(vii) On return from tour abroad, the leader of the delegation/official concerned besides the submitting the tour report shall also submit a separate note summarizing the major achievements of the visit, follow up action needed in the interregnum and way forward. In respect of cross cutting issues relevant to more than one Division in the Ministry, the delegation should give a presentation to the Secretary (E&F) and senior officers of the Ministry.

(viii) The PDs shall ensure that appropriate object head with availability of funds is indicated in the proposal. It must be ensured that adjustment viz. incurring/adjustments of expenditure from budget heads other than that authorized has not been proposed.

(ix) Cases of officers of Autonomous Bodies of the Ministry will be decided by the Autonomous Bodies on their own except where Ministry has decided otherwise.

(x) Visits to be uploaded on website within a fortnight after return of the concerned officer.

(xi) A copy of the sanction order for deputation should invariably be endorsed to IFD.

(xii) Any deviation/departure from or contrary to the subject orders shall not be concurred and the file returned back unprocessed.

This issues with the approval of MEF&CC.

Secretary (EF&CC)

All Divisional Heads
CC: All Additional Secretaries/ADGs

Copy to Deputy Director (OR) for Permanent Hindi Version.