

Supreme Court of India

Union Of India & Ors vs Executive Officers Association ... on 23 February, 1995

Equivalent citations: 1995 AIR 1746, 1995 SCC Supl. (1) 757

Author: F Uddin

Bench: Faizan Uddin (J)

PETITIONER:

UNION OF INDIA & ORS.

Vs.

RESPONDENT:

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION GROUP-C

DATE OF JUDGMENT 23/02/1995

BENCH:

FAIZAN UDDIN (J)

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FAIZAN UDDIN (J)

AGRAWAL, S.C. (J)

CITATION:

1995 AIR 1746

1995 SCC Supl. (1) 757

JT 1995 (2) 533

1995 SCALE (2) 40

ACT:

HEADNOTE:

JUDGMENT:

1. Delay condoned.

2. Leave granted. The counsel for ties are heard.

3. This appeal has been directed by the appellants against the judgment dated May 28, 1993 passed by the Central Administrative Tribunal, Guwahati Bench (hereinafter referred to as Tribunal) in O.A. No. 172 of 1972. By the said judgment the, Tribunal held that the respondents are entitled to Special Duty Allowance in terms of Office Memorandum dated December 14, 1983 with effect from the date specifically indicated in the said Office Memorandum and directed the appellants herein to pay and clear the Special Duty Allowance to the respondents herein within 90 days from the date of receipt of copy of the judgment in respect of the due and to release the current Special Duty Allowance with effect from the month of June, 1993.

4. The respondent No. 1 is an Association of Group (C) Inspectors of Customs and Central Excise under the Collectorate of Customs and Central Excise, Shillong and respondent Nos. 2 and 3 are its President and General Secretary respectively. The respondents approached the Tribunal claiming Special Duty Allowance on the strength of Office Memorandum No. 20014/2/83-E.IV dated December 14, 1983 and the Office Memorandum No. 20014/16/86.IV/E.II(13) dated December 1, 1988 issued by the Ministry of Finance, Government of India. The respondent-Association claimed that its members have all India transfer liability under the Central Excise and Land Customs Department Group (C) Posts Recruitment Rules, 1979 which were applicable to its members and in pursuance of which three of its members had been transferred and one Smt. Lisa L. Rynjah of Shillong had been posted at Goa under the said recruitment Rules and, therefore, they are eligible and entitled to claim Special Duty Allowance. The appellants herein opposed and contested the aforesaid claim of the respondents before the Tribunal. The appellants took the defence by stating that the Office Memorandum No. 20014/3/83.E/IV dated April 20, 1987 had clarified that the Special Duty Allowance is payable only to those officers, incumbents of Group (C) of posts who are having all India transfer liability defined in the said Office Memorandum keeping in view the original Office Memorandum dated March 14, 1983 and that the conditions stipulated in the Recruitment Rules, 1979 referred to above cannot be taken as basis for saddling the respondents or its members with all India transfer liability and consequent payment of Special Duty Allowance to them. The appellants also took the plea that all India transfer liability of the members of any service/cadre or incumbent of any posts/ Group of posts is to be determined by applying the tests of recruitment to the service/cadre/post made on all India basis and that mere clauses in the Recruitment Rules/ Appointment Order stipulating all India transfer liability does not make him/them eligible for grant of Special Duty Allowance in terms of Office Memorandum dated December 14, 1983.

5. After considering the rival contentions the Tribunal observed that the contents of Office Memorandum dated April 12, 1984 as well as the letter No. 7/47/ 48.EA dated September 28, 1984 have been fully discussed by the Full Bench, Calcutta and held that the real test/criteria for determination is whether all India transfer liability exists and opined that without recalling the Office Memorandum issued in 1983 the concerned departments had no reason to deny the benefit of memorandum available to certain classes of employees and to withdraw its application to certain other classes. Relying on the said Bench decision of the Central Administrative Tribunal, Calcutta, the Tribunal allowed the application of the respondents by the impugned judgment and granted the relief as stated above against which this appeal has been preferred.

6. Learned counsel for the appellants submitted that the Tribunal has failed to appreciate the true meaning, intention and spirit behind the term 'all India transfer liability' which occurred in the Finance Ministry Office Memorandum referred to above and has thus seriously erred in holding that the members of the respondent Association are entitled to the Special Duty Allowance. He further submitted that the package of incentives contained in the Ministry's Office Memorandum dated December 14, 1983 (as amended) is based on the recommendations of the committee to review the facilities and allowance admissible to Central Government Employees in the North-Eastern Region and it was with a view to attract and retain competent officers service in the States and Union Territories in the North-Eastern Region that the Government of India on the recommendations of

the committee made the provision for Special Duty Allowance to be paid to such officers who come on posting and deputation to North-Eastern Region from other Regions. It was, therefore, submitted that since the members of the respondent-Association belonged to the North-Eastern Region itself who were recruited and posted in the same Region, they were not entitled for Special Duty Allowance.

7. The main source for claiming the Special Duty Allowance is the Office Memorandum dated December 14, 1983 the very first paragraph of which reads as under:-

"The need for attracting and retaining the services of competent officers for service in the North-Eastern Region comprising the States of Assam Meghalaya, Manipur Nagaland and Tripura and the Union Territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram have been engaging the attention of the Government for some time. The Government had appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Secretary Department of Personnel & Administrative Reforms, to review the existing allowances and facilities admissible to the various categories of Civilian Central Government employees serving in this region and to suggest suitable improvements. The recommendations of the Committee have been carefully considered by the Government and the President is now pleased to decide as follows."

8. A careful perusal of the opening part of the Office Memorandum reproduced above would show that the Government had appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of the Secretary Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms to review the existing allowances and facilities admissible to the various categories of Civilian Central Government Employees serving in the North-Eastern Region so that competent officers may be attracted and retained in the North-Eastern Region States. The use of words 'attracting and retaining' in service are very much significant which only suggest that it means the competent officers belonging to the Region other than the North-Eastern Region. The question of attracting and retaining the services of competent officers who belong to North-Eastern Region itself would not arise. The intention of the Government and spirit behind the Office Memorandum is to provide an incentive and attraction to the competent officers belonging to the Region other than the North-Eastern region to come and serve in the North-Eastern Region. It can hardly be disputed that the geographical, climatic, living and food conditions of people living in North-Eastern Region and the States comprising therein are different from other Regions of the country. The North-East Regions is considered to be 'hard zone' for various reasons and it appears that it is for these reasons that the Government provided certain extra allowance, benefits and other facilities to attract competent officers in the North-Eastern Region at least for two to three years of tenure posting. The Ministry's Office Memorandum in question came up for consideration before this Court in Chief General Manager (Telecom) v. S. Rajender C.H. Bhattacharjee & Ors. [JT 1995 (1) SC 440] which was decided by us by judgment dated January 18, 1995 in which this Court took the view that the said Office Memorandum are meant for attracting and retaining the services of competent officers in the North-Eastern Region, from other parts of the country and not the persons belonging to that region where they were appointed and posted. This was also the view expressed by this Court in yet another case reported in J.T. 1994 (6) 443 Union of India v. S. Vijaya Kumar & Ors. In Vijaya Kumar (Supra) the point for

consideration was exactly identical, with regard to the entitlement to Special Duty Allowance to those employees/officers who are residents of North-Eastern Region itself After considering the memorandum dated December 14, 1983 and other related Office Memorandums indicated above, it was held that the purpose of the allowance was to attract persons from outside the North-Eastern Region to work in the North-Eastern Region because of inaccessibility and difficult terrain. In the facts and circumstances stated above the view taken by the Tribunal cannot be upheld and deserves to be set aside.

9. For the reasons stated above the appeal is allowed. The impugned order of the tribunal is set aside and the application filed by the respondents before the tribunal for grant of Special Duty Allowance to them is dismissed. In the facts and circumstances of the case, we make no order as to costs.