

Railways want to run a physical check of 2.8 lakh of its pensioners above 80 years

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Facing a cash squeeze and a bulging pension bill, the Railways have launched a first-of-its-kind exercise to physically verify whether all its retired employees, aged between 80 and 100 years, are still alive.

Starting this month, hundreds of “Welfare Inspectors” have been fanning out to track down each of the 2.86 lakh former employees in this age group, who form 20 per cent of the Railways’ total pensioner population of 13,75,483 and draw a combined pension of at least Rs 8,000 crore.

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“Legally, every pensioner is supposed to provide physical proof of life to banks every year to continue drawing pension.

The system works fine. But looking at the huge numbers and considering the age group in question, we just want to rule out the possibility of any irregularity there,” a senior Railway Board official told [The Indian Express](#).

Official sources said the “pension reconciliation” exercise was initiated recently by Railway Board Financial Commissioner Sanjoy Mookerjee after an internal assessment found that the number of pensioners between 80-100 years of age was much higher than that of any other government establishment, including defence. The Rail Budget, incidentally, will be unveiled this weekend.

According to government figures, the next in line in this pension segment is the defence ministry, which is far behind with 42,000 pensioners. The Railways, however, is the largest government employer with over 13.35 lakh employees.

Official sources said some of the reasons that prompted the verification drive were:

- * There are 2,30,409 pensioners in the Railways between 80-90 years old. And, pensioners who reach 80 years of age are entitled to an increase of 20 per cent in the form of old-age benefits and Dearness Allowance-linked pay — this amounts to Rs 2,000 crore currently.
- * The number of Railway pensioners in 80-90 bracket constitute 50 per cent of the government’s entire pension liability towards this age group.
- * The number of Railway employees drawing pension between 90-100 years is 55,684, which is 47 per cent of the government’s pension bill in this age bracket.