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**STANDING COMMITTEE
ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

(2014-2015)

SIXTEENTH LOK SABHA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

[Action Taken on the recommendations contained in the Twenty Fifth Report
(15th Lok Sabha) on the subject “Passport Seva Project – Targets and Achievements”]

SECOND REPORT



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

December, 2014 /Agrahayana, 1936 (Saka)

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[Action Taken on the recommendations contained in the Twenty Fifth Report
(15th Lok Sabha) on the subject “Passport Seva Project – Targets and Achievements”]

Presented to Lok Sabha on 1st December, 2014

Laid in Rajya Sabha on 1st December, 2014



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

December, 2014/Agrahayana, 1936 (Saka)

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COMPOSITION OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(2014-2015)

Sl. No.	Name of Member
1.	Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Chairperson
Lok Sabha	
2.	Shri Sirajuddin Ajmal
3.	Prof. (Dr.) Sugata Bose
4.	Shri Ranjit Singh Brahmpura
5.	Shri Arka Keshari Deo
6.	Shri Rahul Gandhi
7.	Shri Anantkumar Hegde
8.	Shrimati Rakshatai Khadse
9.	Shri Raghav Lakhnapal
10.	Shri Jose K. Mani
11.	Shri Feroze Varun Gandhi*
12.	Shri A. Anwar Raajhaa
13.	Shri Magantti Venkateswara Rao (Babu)
14.	Md. Salim
15.	Dr. Mamta Sanghamita
16.	Shri P.R. Senthilnathan
17.	Shri Ram Swaroop Sharma
18.	Shrimati Supriya Sule
19.	Shri Sharad Tripathi
20.	Shri Shivkumar Udasi
21.	Vacant [#]

Rajya Sabha

22. Shri Satyavrat Chaturvedi
23. Shri H.K. Dua
24. Shri Chunibhai Kanjibhai Gohel
25. Shrimati Kanimozhi
26. Shri Ram Kumar Kashyap
27. Dr. Karan Singh
28. Shri D. P. Tripathi
29. Shri Pavan Kumar Varma
30. Vacant[@]
31. Vacant^{##}

Secretariat

1. Shri Cyril John - Joint Secretary
2. Dr. Ram Raj Rai - Director
3. Smt. Rita Jailkhani - Additional Director
4. Ms. Kiran Bhargava - Sr. Executive Assistant

*Shri Feroze Varun Gandhi, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha has been nominated *vice* Dr. K.C. Patel, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha who has been nominated to the Committee on Information Technology *w.e.f.* 11.09.2014.

Shri Vijay Sampla ceased to be Member of the Committee consequent upon his appointment as Minister w.e.f. 09.11.2014.

@ Shri Y. S. Chowdary ceased to be Member of the Committee consequent upon his appointment as Minister w.e.f. 09.11.2014.

Shri Murli Deora, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha had been nominated *vice* Shri Anand Sharma, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha who had been nominated to the Committee on Chemicals and Fertilizers *w.e.f.* 25.09.2014. Vacancy arose *w.e.f.* 24.11.2014 due to his sad demise.

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Standing Committee on External Affairs (2014-15) having been authorized by the Committee to present the Report on their behalf, present this Second Report (Sixteenth Lok Sabha) on Action Taken by Government on the recommendations contained in the Twenty Fifth Report (Fifteenth Lok Sabha) of the Committee on the subject “Passport Seva Project – Targets and Achievements”

2. The Twenty Fifth Report (Fifteenth Lok Sabha) was presented to Lok Sabha & laid in Rajya Sabha on 20th February, 2014. The Action Taken Replies of the Government on all the recommendations/observations contained in the Report were received on 19th May, 2014. The updated Action Taken Replies were received on 26th September, 2014.

3. The Committee considered and adopted this Action Taken Report at their sixth sitting held on 25th November, 2014. The Minutes of the sitting of the Committee have been given at Appendix-I to the Report.

4. An analysis of the Action Taken by Government on the recommendations contained in the Twenty Fifth Report (Fifteenth Lok Sabha) of the Standing Committee on External Affairs is given in Appendix-II.

NEW DELHI
28th November, 2014
7 Agrahayana, 1936 (Saka)

DR. SHASHI THAROOR,
Chairperson,
Standing Committee on External Affairs.

CHAPTER – I

REPORT

This Report of the Standing Committee on External Affairs deals with the Action Taken by the Government on the observations/recommendations contained in their Twenty Fifth Report (15th L.S) on the subject “Passport Seva Project – Targets and Achievements” which was presented to Lok Sabha and laid in Rajya Sabha on 20th February, 2014.

2. The Action taken notes have been received from the Ministry of External Affairs on all the observations/recommendations contained in the report. These have been categorized as follows: -

- (i) **Recommendations/Observations, which have been accepted by the Government.**

Recommendation Nos. 3,7,8,11,16,19,20,21,23

Total-09

- (ii) **Recommendation/Observation which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the Government replies.**

Recommendation Nos. - NIL

Total- 00

- (iii) **Recommendation/Observation in respect of which reply of Government have not been accepted by the Committee and require reiteration.**

Recommendation Nos. 1,9,10,14,15,17,18

Total-07

- (iv) **Recommendations/Observations in respect of which final replies of Government are still awaited.**

Recommendation Nos. – 2,4,5,6,12,13,22

Total-07

3. The Committee desire that final replies to the recommendations/observations for which only interim replies have been given by the Government and also the recommendations/observation on which the

Committee have made their comments, should be furnished within three months of the presentation of this Report.

4. The Committee will now deal with some of the replies received from the Government, which need reiteration or merit comments..

(Recommendation No.1)

5. The Committee were happy to note that as a part of the national e-governance plan of the Government, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had embarked on the ambitious mission Passport Seva Project to make the passport issuance system more efficient. The Committee, however, took note of the undue delay in execution of the Project in the beginning. At the same time, the Committee had noted that before embarking upon the project, the Ministry had overlooked certain aspects which led to significant financial implications/burden on the Ministry as well as created a chaotic situation during the period of transformation from old system to the new system. Thereafter, they had successfully established 77 Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) in different parts of the country in first phase of the Project to handle the work of passport and were in the process of opening Passport Seva Laghu Kendras (PSLKs) in North Eastern States and other areas. The Committee, however, were of the strong opinion that the Ministry had not appropriately dwelt upon the implications of centralization of passport application deposit process and the system going online in view of digital divide and lack of infrastructure and connectivity in the country particularly in semi-urban and rural areas. The Committee had noted that in the second phase of the project the Government propose to open more Centres and therefore, had desired that in view of the experience of the Phase-I and the requirement of infrastructure and connectivity, the Ministry must dwell upon the project in its various dimensions and holistically examine them in its entirety and come up with concrete policy decision on various issues before embarking on the next Phase.

6. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“The recommendation of Hon’ble Committee has been taken note of and it is submitted that the Ministry is committed to providing Passport services in a more efficient, timely and transparent manner. It is also submitted that with a view to address the challenge of digital divide and to provide more access points for filing passport applications online, especially in the rural hinterland, the Ministry in association with M/s. CSC e-Governance Services India Limited {which is promoted by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY)}, has facilitated online filing of passport applications, through the vast network of over one lakh Common Service Centres (CSCs) across the country. The CSCs are the

delivery points for Government, Private and Social Sector services in the areas of agriculture, health, education, banking, insurance, pension, utility bill payments, entertainment, etc. to rural citizens of India at their doorstep.

The passport related services have now been added as part of their bouquet of services. The CSCs facilitate filling and uploading of Passport application form, payment of applicable fee (through debit/credit card or through SBI internet banking/challan mode) and scheduling of appointment for visit to the PSK, at nominal charge

not exceeding Rs. 100/-. As per the appointment schedule, an applicant will have to visit the PSK for completion of application submission process (including collection of digital photographs/biometrics, verification of supporting documents and approval). The services through CSCs are available throughout the week, including during the weekend. The Ministry has also decided to open a PSK each in Indore (Madhya Pradesh) and Solapur (Maharashtra) to increase the outreach of passport services besides adding more counters in various PSKs to augment their handling capacity. The Ministry has also drawn up a plan to organize Passport Seva Camps periodically at various places to take the passport services closer home.”

7. The Committee have keenly observed the rollout of the Passport Seva Project (PSP) since its inception and have constantly commented upon various issues of concern during implementation of the first phase of the Project. That is why the Committee had specifically desired that the Ministry should holistically examine and identify all the issues relating to the implementation of the Project as well as issuance of passports and come up with concrete policy decisions before embarking upon the next phase of the project. However, the Ministry in its reply has elaborately stated only about the measures undertaken by them to provide more access points without any mention of other ground realities and the resultant bottlenecks faced by various stakeholders including the Ministry, passport offices, service providers and the public in general. The Committee are, therefore, of the view that rather than adopting an adhoc approach, the Ministry must come up with

a blueprint of the subsequent phase of expansion and dwell deep upon all the pending issues, viz. opening of additional Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) and new Passport Seva Laghu Kendras (PSLKs), opening of additional counters, plan for organization of Passport Seva Camps, involvement of Common Service Providers (CSCs)/Department of Posts/any other service providers, modes of submission of application, fee and capturing of biometric data should all be resolved before implementation of the next phase.

(Recommendation No.2)

8. The Committee had taken a note of payment made to each agency on the basis of per passport and found that charges paid to TCS for conducting front-end activity in regard to issue of new passport range from Rs. 171.87 to Rs.199.00 while for miscellaneous services, it ranges from Rs. 77.61 to Rs. 103.23 and Rs. 100.00 per passport application was paid to India Post for accepting and forwarding the application to the concerned RPO. The Committee had further observed that the payment made to Department of Police for Police Verification (PV) was only Rs.100.00 in cases where it was received within 21 days, while it was only Rs. 25 .00, if Police Verification Report (PVR) was received after 21 days. The Committee were of the opinion that in view of the tedious nature of the job and the time taken by the police officials in actually visiting residences of applicants, verifying documents and also visiting references in case it was required and involvement of CID in carrying out verification in certain case, the Ministry should enhance the rates paid to police for carrying out verification.

The Committee had also noted that in the new system under the Passport Seva Project, the DPHQs/SPHQs were expected to be e-connected but several States were still following manual process of sending police verification reports which usually took more than 21 days for which police was paid Rs. 25 only for each PVR. The time taken in some States/Union Territories like Andhra Pradesh and Delhi was very less. The Ministry should treat that as model and implement it in all the States so that the time taken for police verification was reduced to minimum days.

9. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“The Ministry would like to inform Hon’ble Committee that the reimbursement to Police for verification of personal particulars and antecedents of applicants is being increased from Rs.100/- to Rs.150/- per passport application provided that states/UTs implement DPHQ model and the verification report is received within 21 days of

making reference to Police. In case the verification report is received after 21 days, the reimbursement would be restricted to Rs.50/-. This has been done to encourage state police to implement DPHQ model and to complete verification process in a time-bound manner without delay. The matter of delay in police verification was raised by Foreign Secretary in a meeting of Chief Secretaries of State / UT Govts. on 13th March, 2014. A Presentation on Police Verification (PV) had also been made by the Ministry before the Chief Secretaries. Subsequently, a handout containing suggestions/proposals to State/UT Govts. for speeding up verification and emphasizing the need for setting up the preferred DPHQ model, is being finalised. It is reiterated that setting up IT infrastructure for Police Verification Reports (PVRs) is the responsibility of the States/UT Govts. and the Ministry can only impress upon them to do so with a view to improving governance in the country. As of now, 475 districts have adopted the DPHQ model. The Ministry has also prepared a detailed draft 'Manual on Police Verification for Passports' for dissemination to State/UT Govts. to introduce uniform and speedy procedures and practices."

10. The Committee are happy to note that the reimbursement for police verification has been increased in the states implementing the DPHQ model. Simultaneously, after meeting with Chief Secretaries of the States/UTs in March, 2014 a handout containing suggestions/proposals to State/UT Governments for speeding up verifications and emphasizing the need for setting up the preferred District Police Headquarters (DPHQ) model is being finalized. But the Committee regret to note that even after a lapse of several months, the handout has not been finalized so far. The Committee, therefore, desire that it should be finalized at the earliest and circulated to all the States and UTs to speed up the police verification process to make the system transparent. The Committee also suggest that the said handout containing suggestions should also be supplied to all the Regional Passport Offices (RPOs) and also be displayed on the main Notice-Board for information of all the concerned. The Committee also desire that detailed draft of 'Manual on Police Verification for Passport' being prepared with an objective of introducing

uniform and speedy procedure and practices should also be finalized without any further delay and circulated to the State/UTs Government. The Committee may also be apprised of the action taken in this regard.

(Recommendation No.3)

11. The Committee had observed that based on the feasibility study conducted by National Institute for Smart Government (NISG), the Government had approved to set up 77 PSKs across the country on the Public Private Partnership (PPP) basis. The Committee had also observed that the only criteria to decide the location of PSKs was the number of applications received by the Passport Offices during 2001-2005 from the areas under their jurisdiction. Thereafter, it had been decided to open 16 Passport Seva Kendras because many of the areas including most of the North Eastern States remained uncovered. Even after that there was a huge demand from various other places for opening of PSKs or PSLKs in view of difficulties being faced by people in the interior areas in the country. Due to such demands the Ministry had again asked NISG to conduct another study to decide the places for opening of more PSKs/PSLKs during the phase II of the Project. The Committee had strongly criticized the approach of the Ministry in deciding the places for opening of PSKs and keeping no provision for identifying other places which require such facilities which was evident due to closure of multiple channels of submission, particularly in the rural and interior areas. Simultaneously, the Committee also did not approve the policy of opening of more than one Kendra in same districts and ignoring other places particularly, the far off districts and the North Eastern States.

The Committee had, therefore, stressed that while deciding the location for opening of PSKs/PSLKs in Phase II, apart from volume of applications received at Regional Passport Offices/Passport Offices other criteria like number of applications received from particular districts/areas and distance/connectivity etc. should also be considered so that the PSKs were evenly located, passport issuance facility was made easily accessible to the applicants and they may not need to travel long distance for the same, particularly, in view of the fact that the PSK was the only channel for capturing biometric data as per the existing model of Passport Seva Project. In view of the then scenario of lack of alternative channels of submission of forms as well as for capturing of the biometric data, the Committee had urged the Ministry of External Affairs to engage with NISG so that the Report was expedited and was finalized at the earliest.

The Committee had observed that Andaman and Nicobar Islands was not yet included in the Passport Seva Project. The Committee had noted that one of the objectives of the Passport Seva Project was to render services through simplified

procedure and conditions of comfort for passport seeking public. The Committee had, therefore, recommended that Ministry should particularly look into the problems being faced by the applicants from Andaman and Nicobar Island as well as Lakshwadeep and address the issues at the earliest. Further, the Committee had strongly recommended that during phase II of the Passport Seva Project, the Ministry must strive to establish PSK/PSLK in each Union Territory.

12. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

- (i) “It is submitted that the location of PSKs under PSP was based on a study conducted by the National Institute for Smart Government (NISG) in 2007. The study had taken into account the number of passport applications received in the years preceding 2006, from regions under the jurisdiction of respective Passport Offices, while recommending locations of the PSKs. In view of high number of passport applications from certain cities and districts, more than one PSK was set up there. As regards North-east states, the position is as follows:
 - a. Passport services are being rendered in **Aizawl** since July 2012 through Passport Application Collection Centre (PACC). The IT infrastructure of PACC would be upgraded to PSLK as soon as financial concurrence for setting up IT infrastructure is received.
 - b. The civil and electrical works undertaken by Meghalaya State PWD for PSLK **Shillong** have been completed. It is likely to be launched by mid-October, 2014. On trial basis, applications are already being accepted.
 - c. The site for PSLK **Gangtok** has been finalized and financial concurrence has been received for civil and electrical works to be carried out by the Sikkim PWD. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
 - d. Lease Deed for the PSLK **Agartala** is under finalisation after which civil and electrical works would be carried out and IT infrastructure installed. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
 - e. A site has been identified in **Imphal** and lease deed is being finalized with Manipur Govt. Expected to be made operational during 2014-15.
 - f. A site has been identified in **Itanagar** and lease deed is under discussion with the State Govt. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
 - g. Following a proposal from the former Chief Minister of Manipur that the PSLK may be set up in **Dimapur** instead of **Kohima** as Dimapur has better connectivity and many State Govt offices are located there, the matter was taken up with the State Govt. by the Ministry. **The State Govt has conveyed that the PSLK may be set up in Dimapur.** Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.

- (ii) The Study Report on setting up additional PSKs/PSLKs has been received from the NISG and has been approved by the Ministry. In keeping with its recommendations, the Ministry has decided to open a PSK each in **Indore** (Madhya Pradesh) and **Solapur** (Maharashtra) to increase the outreach of passport services besides adding more counters in various PSKs to augment their handling capacity. The Ministry has also drawn up a plan to organize Passport Seva Camps at various places to take the passport services closer home.
- (ii) I. As regards the Hon'ble Committee's recommendation to set up a PSK/PSLK in each UT (*Delhi and Chandigarh already have PSKs*), it would be useful to consider the following :---
- (a) Andaman & Nicobar Islands : Population – 3,79,944 ; Approx. annual passport workload -3000 i.e. less than 13 per working day ; passports are issued by Andaman & Nicobar Administration, Port Blair which acts as Passport Issuing Authority and passport booklets are supplied by RPO Kolkata. The Ministry has plans to integrate PSP system with that of Andaman & Nicobar Islands Admn. Along with integration of Missions/Posts abroad.
- (b) Lakshadweep Islands: Population – 64,429 ; Approx. annual passport workload - 1113 i.e. less than 5 per working day ; Passport needs of citizens of Lakshadweep are met by PSK Kochi which is about 300-400 kms away. The RPO, Cochin would be organizing Passport Seva Camp in Lakshadweep periodically to collect passport applications from the citizens.
- (c) Daman and Diu : Population – Daman (1.9 lakh) and Diu (52,000) ; Approx. annual passport workload (Daman) – 2794 i.e. 12 per working day and annual passport workload (Diu) – 3320 i.e. 14 per working day. Citizens from Daman travel to Mumbai which is approximately 175 kms away and citizens from Diu travel to Rajkot which is 220 kms away. It is proposed to organize Passport Seva Camps periodically in Daman . The Camps will also cater to the needs of the people of Dadra & Nagar Haveli which is close to Daman.
- (d) Dadra & Nagar Haveli – Population 3,42,853; Approx. annual passport workload is 804 i.e. less than 4 per working day. Passport needs of citizens are met by PSKs in Mumbai which is 180 kms away. The Camps in Daman will also cater to the needs of the people of Dadra & Nagar Haveli as it is close to Daman.

- (e) Puducherry: Population -12,44,464 ; Annual passport workload – 15,212 i.e. 64 applications per working day ; A Passport Application Collection Centre is functioning at Puducherry. The Passport Application Collection Centre in Puducherry would be upgraded to a PSLK. The UT Govt. has been requested to provide additional space for expansion of the existing facility.

II. The approximate cost of procurement and installation of IT equipment for each PSLK is Rs.64.5 lakh besides recurring expenditure of Rs.33.6 lakh per annum towards technical and other manpower. The leasing of site and expenditure on office furniture, furnishings, maintenance and security are additional. As the number of passport applications from Lakshadweep, Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli is very low, it would not be economically prudent to have a permanent establishment there. The passport needs of citizens there can be met by holding Passport Seva Camps.”

13. The Committee take note that the much awaited Study Report by National Institute of Smart Governance (NISG) on setting up of additional PSKs has been received and approved by the Ministry. The Ministry, however, has not provided the details of the recommendations about all the places decided for establishment of PSKs/PLSKs and the revenue model to be followed for establishment of additional PSKs/PSLKs as well as the time frame fixed in this regard. The Committee have also not been informed about the criteria to be followed for identification of places for opening of PSKs/PSLKs and whether the recommendations of the Committee in this regard have been considered or not particularly about opening of centres in UTs and North Eastern States.

Moreover, the Committee take strong objection to Ministry’s reply and reasoning given regarding establishment of PSKs in Union Territories and North Eastern states and reiterate their view that economic prudence alone cannot be the guiding force behind the establishment of PSKs/PSLKs in these areas and the citizens of these areas should get equal facility either through opening of PSLKs or by providing all

facilities including capture of biometric data through Local Administration or their integration with the main system.

Furthermore, regarding the organization of passport seva camps, the Committee are of the view that rather than randomly organizing camps, the Ministry should come up with a policy indicating a fixed monthly/bimonthly schedule to organize such camps in each distinct areas covered under the designated PSK. The Committee assume that such camps are duly equipped to capture biometric data so that applicants can complete the process in the camp itself and they are thus saved from travelling to such centres again from their place of stay.

(Recommendation No.4)

14. The Committee over the years had been expressing their concern over non-availability of PSKs in the North-Eastern States during the Phase I of the Project. Considering the genuine requirement of satisfying the needs of these States, the Ministry had come up with the proposal for establishment of Passport Seva Laghu Kendras and had been assuring the Committee over early execution of the proposals of PSLKs in the capitals of these States. The Committee had, however, noted that the Ministry had assured the Committee to establish Mini-PSK/PSLK in Aizwal by December 2010 and Mini-PSKs in other North Eastern States by end of December 2011. But the Committee found that only one PSLK had started functioning in Aizwal since July 2012 and projects at other places were in various stages of inception and execution. The Committee were dismayed to note that even after a continuous persuasion by the Committee through their Reports and on the spot visits, the Ministry had not been able to do much in establishing the PSLKs in the North-Eastern States and they had not even finalized or located/identified sites at Agartala, Imphal, Itanagar and Kohima. In view of the urgent need of the people of North Eastern States, the Committee had strongly criticized such casual approach of the Ministry and desired that immediate steps should be taken to expedite the work related to the establishment of PSLKs in North-Eastern States and complete them in the shortest possible time in association with respective State Governments .

15. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“As mentioned in ATR 3 , sub-para (i) , the position regarding PSLKs in North-east states, the position is as follows:

- a. Passport services are being rendered in **Aizawl** since July 2012 through Passport Application Collection Centre (PACC). The IT infrastructure of PACC would be upgraded to PSLK as soon as financial concurrence for setting up IT infrastructure is received.
- b. The civil and electrical works undertaken by Meghalaya State PWD for PSLK **Shillong** have been completed. It is likely to be launched by mid-October, 2014. On trial basis, applications are already being accepted.
- c. The site for PSLK **Gangtok** has been finalized and financial concurrence has been received for civil and electrical works to be carried out by the Sikkim PWD. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
- d. Lease Deed for the PSLK **Agartala** is under finalisation after which civil and electrical works would be carried out and IT infrastructure installed. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
- e. A site has been identified in **Imphal** and lease deed is being finalized with Manipur Govt. Expected to be made operational during 2014-15.
- f. A site has been identified in **Itanagar** and lease deed is under discussion with the State Govt. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
- g. Following a proposal from the former Chief Minister of Manipur that the PSLK may be set up in **Dimapur** instead of **Kohima** as Dimapur has better connectivity and many State Govt offices are located there, the matter was taken up with the State Govt. by the Ministry. **The State Govt has conveyed that the PSLK may be set up in Dimapur.** Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.”

16. The Committee are disappointed to note that even after several commitments, the work of establishment of PSLKs in North-Eastern states is still at a very uncertain stage and as per its reply, the Ministry proposes to complete the work and to operationalise the PSLKs at Shilong, Gangtok, Agartala and Imphal during 2014-15. The Committee hope that the new timeline set up by the Ministry would be strictly adhered to and would not be further extended.

The Committee further note that in case of Itanagar and Imphal, the lease deed is under discussion with the respective State Governments, while in case of Dimapur it has been decided to set up PSLK there, no timeframe has been fixed in this regard. The Committee, therefore, expect that these PSLKs would also be operationalised during the year 2014-15. The Committee would urge the Ministry to adopt a realistic approach in dealing with the issues related to establishment and operationalisation of PSLKs in the North Eastern States and apprise the Committee about the progress in this regard.

(Recommendation No. 5)

17. The Committee had observed that the decision of opening of PSLKs was taken up by the Ministry at later stage and these were not covered under the provisions of Passport Seva Project. The full responsibility for their setting up rested with the Ministry which was required to provide full financial, manpower, infrastructural and technical support. It was more surprising to note that the work related to establishment of all the proposed PSLKs were to be completed in June, 2012, but due to multiplicity of factors, the work relating to PSLKs was very slow and had been delayed. The Committee also noted that although Ministry felt that there was need of new revenue model of PSLKs even then, the Ministry had not taken any initiative to develop any such system till then and there were delays in implementation of these projects. The Ministry of External Affairs had also not approached the Ministry of Finance to obtain funds for these PSLKs. More surprisingly, they did not had any such intention because in the recent past they had curtailed the issue of obtaining indication about revenue model from the purview of NISG study. The Committee had, therefore, recommended that Ministry of External Affairs should prepare the desired revenue model on priority basis for the proposed 16 PSLKs and other PSLKs likely to be established in future and obtain the funds for preparing proposals for Cabinet so that these projects were not delayed anymore.

18. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“The NISG has suggested a revenue model for additional PSKs/PSLKs which are beyond the scope of PSP. The PSP envisaged setting up on PPP basis 77 PSKs by the Service Provider, which were to deal with passport applications

from all the regions in India covered by 37 Passport Offices. The Ministry has, therefore, to find a way so that while setting up additional PSKs, it is not faced with a legal challenge by the Service Provider. The matter is under discussion with the Service Provider.”

19. The Committee note that inspite of receiving the much awaited and much delayed Report by NISG, the Ministry is yet to decide the revenue model for 16 PSKs/PSLKs as well as for the new PSKs/PSLKs. The Committee have not even been apprised about the details of the revenue model(s) proposed by the NISG and the rationale behind taking so much time by the Ministry in deciding upon and finalizing the new revenue model. Since all these projects have been delayed a lot due to non-availability of any clear revenue model, the Committee, therefore, desire that the Ministry should examine the feasibility of the revenue model befitting the proposed PSKs/PSLKs and new PSKs/PSLKs and come up with the final decision in the shortest possible time. So far as persisting fear of legal challenges by the service provider is concerned, the Committee desire that it should be dealt cautiously and no scope should be given for any legal challenge by the Service Provider. The Committee would like to be apprised of the details and outcome in this regard.

(Recommendation No.6)

20. The Committee had noted that there was a provision for holding regular tripartite meeting between officers of Passport Office, Department of Police and Postal Department at local level. The Committee had, however, observed that there was lack of any such mechanism at the central level. The Committee had understood that most of the issues pertaining to the passport services had to be dealt at the level of state government as well as locally, yet there were many issues which required involvement/coordination of the concerned Ministries of the Government of India particularly to maintain a uniformity in the system in all the States. The Committee were of the view that during such deliberations a holistic view of the matter related to passport may be taken and issues may be discussed at length as well as in-depth so as

to reduce the procedural hurdles and difficulties in the system arising out of non-communication/non-timely communication between various concerned Ministries/Departments to make the system more pragmatic and practical. The Committee had, therefore, desired that Ministry of External Affairs should establish a coordination mechanism at Central level involving Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Communication with a view to share the views and maintain uniformity in the procedure of Police Verification and delivery of passport to the citizens.

21. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“The Ministry keeps in regular touch with the Ministry of Home Affairs for security dimensions of passport issuance process and Deptt. of IT for the implementation of the e-governance project. Since policing is a State subject, the Ministry has to work with different State Governments for police verification process. A meeting of the Chief Secretaries of State/UT Governments was also taken on 13th March 2014 by Foreign Secretary which dealt with this issue amongst others. As desired by Hon’ble Committee, a coordination mechanism has been set up at Central level for maintaining uniformity in the procedure for police verification for speedy delivery of passport services.”

22. The Committee are happy to note that in view of their suggestion, a coordination mechanism has been set up at Central level for maintaining uniformity in the procedure for Police Verification for speedy delivery of passport services. The Committee, however, have not been provided with the details in this regard and also about the incorporation of all other aspects related to issuance and delivery of passport services and nature of participation of the states/UTs in this system.

The Committee, therefore, would like to be apprised about the objectives/ procedure being followed for effective monitoring and the impact of the established mechanism on delivery of passport services and also whether it is sufficient to facilitate achievable targets within specific time period as defined in the mandate issued by the Ministry.

(Recommendation No.7)

23. The Committee had noted that the prospective applicants had been facing great difficulties in the very first step of getting passport i.e. in seeking online appointment in most of the PSKs. The Committee had also observed that in order to streamline the online appointment system, various initiatives had been taken by the Ministry but in 31 PSKs it was still a challenge, where applicants got an appointment after a gap of 10 to 58 days. In this regard, the Ministry had clarified that problems faced in obtaining appointments has no relation with the portal or the software. The system could generate even a million appointments and that it was a matter of demand and supply and the appointments were released as per handling capacity of particular PSK. The Committee had wondered as to why the number of slots had not been increased in the past when it was in the hands of the Ministry and service provider? In Committee's view organizing the Passport Melas or Passport Seva Camps at sites other than PSKs might be a temporary arrangement to give appointments but it might not resolve the problem. The Committee had, therefore, strongly recommended that the Ministry should seriously examine the issue of handling capacity of each PSK and find a solution to ensure the generation of additional slots with the service provider and take initiative to ensure that the capacity of PSK would be enhanced appropriately or new PSKs would be set up with sufficient manpower to cater to the needs of enhanced number of applicants across the country.

24. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“It is submitted that handling capacity of a PSK depends not only on the number of counters but also the availability of manpower to man these counters. Whereas it is much easier for the Service Provider to recruit manpower from the open market and deploy them at the private counters, the Govt. counters have to be manned by the Central Passport Organisation (CPO) officials where intake is governed by Recruitment Rules. Obtaining the services of officials from other Govt. depts on deputation also cannot be resorted to beyond a limit. CPO officials being from the Govt. are also entitled to various kinds of leave and absence of even one person at PSK impinges on handling capacity. During festival season also, appointments have to be curtailed as many officials are not available. Nevertheless the Ministry has increased the appointments in various PSKs in the last few weeks. As on 16th September, 2014, in 25 PSKs the appointment was available the next day; in 5 PSKs from 2 to 7 days ; in 14 PSKs from 8 to 14 days; in 4 PSKs from 15 to 20 days; in 12 PSKs from 21 to

30 days; in 13 PSKs from 31 to 45 days; in 2 PSKs from 46 to 60 days and in 4 PSKs beyond 60 days (appointment window opened beyond 60 days on experimental basis). The Ministry has stepped up its efforts for organizing passport melas and camps regularly to meet passport demand and from 1-1-2014 to 20-9-2014, 164 melas were organized at which 95,782 passport applications were accepted for processing. A detailed Passport Seva Camp plan is being drawn up for launch in October 2014. Challenges in setting up of new PSKs to meet rising passport demand, have already been indicated in ATRs 3-5.....”

25. The Committee are surprised to note that the Ministry has simply showed their inability in reducing the days for appointment in most of the PSKs due to lack of handling capacity of PSKs. The Ministry has stated that out of the total 77 PSKs, in only 30 PSKs, the appointments are available within seven days and in 49 PSKs, the appointments are available within the days ranging from 8 to 60 days. The Committee are of the considered view that such a situation is beyond the limit of acceptability to the Project’s aim of providing speedy and timely passport services. The Committee, therefore, reiterate that all the constraints of manpower in the staff of Central Passport Organization (CPOs) should be removed through all possible efforts including taking people on deputation.

The Committee support the Ministry’s efforts in organizing Passport Melas and Camps. However, they are of the view that collection of applications should not be the only purpose during such Melas/Camps and all related formalities upto the level of granting of passports should be completed in these melas so that timely disposal of all such applications and issuance of passport to such applicants who apply during the Melas/Camps is completed as per the timelines fixed under aims and objectives of the Passport Seva Project.

(Recommendation No.8)

26. The Committee had noted that as a measure to curb the tendency of 'No Show Cases', the Ministry had introduced provision of online payment of fee through SBI chalans, debit/credit cards etc. and the step had shown welcome results and such cases had come down to 1.2 percent from 30 percent. However, the Committee might not deny the fact that a large section of the population was not electronically connected to the Banks or were not in possession of debit/credit cards of State Bank of India. They might also be facing difficulty in deposition of fee through their SBI cards. The Committee had, therefore, desired that initiatives should be taken to incorporate the credit/debit cards of more popular nationalized/private banks for the purpose of online payment of passport fee to facilitate the applicants.

27. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“It is submitted that for online payment of passport fees, debit/credit cards of all the nationalized/private banks are accepted. Only for e-banking, State Bank of India payment gateway is open. State Bank branches cover almost entire India and payment can be easily made through SBI Challan. It is added that the Ministry in consultation with the Deptt. of IT, has co-opted **Common Service Centre network** comprising 1,00,000 outlets across the country to provide more access points to citizens, especially in the rural hinterland, to file passport applicants online and where passport fees can be deposited in cash also. The Ministry has written to the Secretary, Department of Posts to confirm that requisite IT and non-IT infrastructure is in place to enable the applicants to file passport applications online, make payment online and obtain appointment. A sum of Rs.100/- per passport application would be paid by the Ministry to India Post for the said services. The Secretary, Deptt of Posts, in a meeting with the Ministry’s officials, did not appear inclined to the Ministry’s proposal, expressing manpower and infrastructural constraints. The Ministry, however, continues to pursue the matter of co-opting services of **Speed Post Centres (SPCs) and Head Post Offices (HPOs)** to enable applicants, especially in the rural hinterland, to enable filing of passport applications online. It would still be mandatory for applicants to appear in person at concerned PSKs to give their photographs and biometrics and complete passport application submission procedure.”

28. **The Committee are happy to note that for online payment of passport fee, debit/credit cards of all nationalized/private banks are now accepted. But payment through net banking is permitted through SBI only. The Committee**

would like to suggest that the scope of net banking should also be widened to include payment of fee through net banking of other nationalized and reputed Private Sector Banks. The Committee, however, at the same time would like to caution the Ministry and suggest to them to make the system secure and also set up security features as per international standards so as to ensure safety of the network as well as that of applicants in online transactions.

(Recommendation No. 9)

29. The Committee had noted that the Ministry had accepted that once when on the passport seva portal details were filled online and documents were scanned and uploaded and appointments were obtained, experience of applicants at PSK was very satisfactory. But the feedback available to the Committee and media reports had denied this claim. The experience of applicants were similar at PSKs also and many applicants were called again and again for want of one or other document and felt harassed. The Committee had desired that to minimize this problem, there should be a process of e-verification of documents prior to the designated day for appointments in cases where the documents have already been uploaded by the applicants. The Committee hope that Ministry alongwith Service Provider would come up with technological solution to this problem as this small step by the Ministry might facilitate to end the problems of a large number of applicants.

30. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“It is submitted that the Passport Portal has extensive information on the requirement of supporting documents for the guidance of applicants. The applicants are required to bring original documents along with a copy thereof to the PSK at the appointed time/day where these are verified by the Govt Official. The applicant may be required to make another visit only when the original document itself is of doubtful nature or incomplete in some respect. In view of the fact that original documents in any case have to be produced before the Verifying Officer, pre e-verification of documents would not be of help. However, with a view to simplify passport application submission procedure, it has been decided to accept registered rent agreement also as a

proof of address. It has also been decided w.e.f. 1st August, 2014 to do away with ink signatures on passports and replace these with stamped signatures to save time and manpower. The Ministry has also introduced the system of self-attestation of documents replacing the requirement of attestation by gazetted officers.”

31. The Committee agree with the view of the Ministry stating that the applicant may be required to make another visit only when the original documents themselves are of doubtful nature or incomplete in some respect. The Committee, however, are aware that in several instances, the experience of the applicants has been otherwise. In most of the cases the documents are checked initially by the Service Provider at the front desk and they are in hurry and do not check all the documents to ask the applicant to come with all the requirements on the next date. The applicant is informed about some other lacuna on the next date and asked to visit again. The applicants also have no opportunity to interact with any other officer or any senior officer for redressal of their grievances. The Ministry in its reply is silent on this issue. In view of the prevalent situation across PSKs, the Committee had suggested the Ministry to conduct e-verification of the documents on the Passport Seva Portal itself so that they can carry the originals to the PSK on the date for verification and other formalities so as to minimize the time taken at PSK and obviate the need to revisit. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Ministry should take steps to ensure that the forms and documents of the applicants are thoroughly checked as per their checklist so as to ensure minimum interface between the service provider/PSK officials and the applicants and thus save crucial time of the employees as well as save the applicants from unnecessary harassment.

(Recommendation No.10)

32. The Committee had noted that in each PSK, officials from RPO were present as Passport Issuing Authority (PIA) as well as the employees of TCS to conduct the front end activities. However, the Committee had often come across instances that a large number of cases were being referred to RPO in the name of policy matters. From the figures provided by the Ministry, the Committee found that on an average three cases per PSK per day were being referred to RPO. The Committee had serious doubts on the figures provided by the Ministry in that regard. However, figures of an average per day per PSK at all India level might not give conclusive results because the problem was RPO/PSK specific. In such instances the applicants had to suffer a lot particularly, if he/she was a resident of one particular district and had to visit another district where PSK was located and if referred to RPO, the applicant had to travel to the third district leading to unnecessary hassle and stress. In this context, the Committee were dismayed to take note of Ministry's justification given for referring large number of cases that if the officials at Passport Seva Kendras dwell too long on certain cases, it would lead to delay even in less difficult cases. The Committee had noted that though the Ministry had come out with comprehensive guidelines so that various queries were resolved at the end of PSK only and the applicants were not referred to RPO in large number but with no impact. The Committee had, thereafter, suggested the Ministry to relook and review the role of Granting Officers so as to empower them to consider maximum number of cases except very complex cases and resolve them there at PSK level. If required, the assistance of policy section may be provided there itself. The Committee had also expressed apprehension and had certain information that there might be understating between the Granting Officer and the query resolving officer which could result into referring a large number of cases from the table of a particular Granting-Officer at a particular PSK to policy section for query resolution for their gains. The Committee had, therefore, desired that the Ministry should observe and analyze such cases RPO/PSK-wise and Granting Officer-wise to reach any conclusion.

33. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“It is submitted that Granting Officers (Superintendents/Passport Granting Officers) are Gazetted officers of CPO, having nearly 20 years' experience of passport work and it is felt that they are equipped to handle all sorts of cases. Most of the PSKs are headed by Asstt Passport Officers and their expertise is also available. However, in case of doubtful supporting documents or some other complexity, it becomes necessary to refer the case to the RPO which has a policy section and works under the Head of Passport Office. It would not be practicable to deploy 'policy sections' at each PSK as in many cases there are more than one PSK under the concerned Passport Office due to shortage of manpower. The Ministry is cognizant of complaints of wrong doing and appropriate action is

taken against errant officials. As desired by the Hon'ble Committee, a test check by the Ministry on the passport applications received during April– August, 2014 by the Passport Offices in Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Mumbai reveals that the PSKs under them cumulatively received 11,75,041 applications out of which 50,146 cases were escalated to the respective Passport Office. This comes to 4.3% which does not appear significant. It is also submitted that escalation of cases is part of normal bureaucratic procedure and due diligence and in Ministry's view, escalation helps in supervision and monitoring of work and affords learning experience to junior officials.”

34. The Committee are astonished to note that the Ministry treat the 4.3 percent cases referred to RPOs from the PSKs as insignificant. The Committee consider it at a higher side when the Ministry accepts that only the complex cases are referred to RPOs. The Ministry has given a cumulative figure which may be higher for some PSKs and particular desks. The Ministry is silent on that observation of the Committee about the compilation and observation at various centres with a view to find any possibility of referring of more cases by any particular granting officer. The Committee, therefore, reiterate that the matter should be taken seriously and examine it from all the angles suggested by the Committee and explore the possibility of resolving most of the queries at PSK's level by empowering the granting officers or placing the Policy Section persons at PSKs. The Committee may be apprised accordingly.

The Committee are also appalled to take note that escalation of cases affords experience to junior officers. The Committee feel that persons with experience and wide knowledge of rules and procedures only are posted in the Policy Section.

(Recommendation No.11)

35. Despite a provision of tracking of status of application through website, the Committee had come across several instances wherein the Passport applicant was not

able to know the correct status of his/her application as the status was not regularly updated on the website. This was particularly true for the applicants whose cases were referred to the RPO/Policy Section or the cases that were closed after the expiry of one year term and they were running from pillar to post to know the status of their applications. On being asked, the Ministry had informed that the portal was maintained by TCS in consultation with the Ministry. The Committee had, therefore, felt that there was clear-cut lack of communication between the RPO and the Service Provider which was leading to non-availability of correct/current status of the applications on the website. The Committee had, therefore, suggested the Ministry to maintain and ensure proper flow of information between the RPO and the Service Provider so that the status was updated on real time basis. Similarly, the Committee had also suggested the Ministry to engage with the service provider as well as the Department of Police so that it was ensured that the updated status reflected at the portal mentioned the exact level and reason for keeping the application pending and to guide the applicant about any need to meet the concerned officers in the RPO or Police Station.

36. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“In consultation with the Service Provider, the software has been modified to enable the applicants to ascertain status of their passport application indicating the reasons such as (i) data entry modification, (ii) change of photograph and (iii) documents resubmission etc. along with the advice whether the applicant has to visit the PSK or the Passport Office. The applicant is also informed at print stage that the passport will be dispatched after print and quality check. At dispatch stage, the Speed Post ref. no. is also conveyed to enable the applicant to keep track of dispatch by India Post. The status of passport application when it is sent for police verification (PV) is already accessible to applicants. As the police verification process in states is not fully computerized and no centralized database for PV is available at present, it may not be possible to indicate the level where the applications would be pending in the police department.”

37. The Committee appreciate the modifications in the software being made by the Ministry alongwith the Service Provider. The Committee, however, are of the view that inspite of the modifications, much more needs to be done. In several instances, the applicants are puzzled and are running around from pillar to post to know the status of their application. At Police Stations, they are informed that their reports have been sent to the concerned RPO/PO but this is neither reflected on the

Portal, nor the officials at RPO/PO are able to tell the exact status on enquiry. The Committee, therefore, recommend that there should not be such gaps and the system should be duly modified and applicant friendly.

The Committee are also not convinced with the argument of the Ministry that it is not possible to indicate the level where the applications would be pending in the Police Department because it is not fully computerized in some states as the Committee are aware that it is also not available where it is computerized. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Ministry must strongly pursue the matter with the Service Provider to modify the software to enable the provision of creating central database for Police Verification Reports atleast regarding the states/districts wherever the system is computerized and do the same in the cases where it is computerized in future.

In the same context, the Committee also desire that if PVR is rejected by the Police due to absence of the applicant during the visit by the officials from Department of Police, this status should also be reflected on the portal and otherwise also the cause for rejection of PVR should also reflected on the portal. Similarly, in case of closure of the case due to passage of a year or any other reason, the status should also be reflected on the portal.

(Recommendation No.12)

38. The Committee had observed that smooth and efficient Police Verification was the key to successful implementation of the Passport Seva Project (PSP). Under PSP, there was a provision to electronically receive and update the Police Verification Reports. The matter had been taken up by the Foreign Secretary with Chief Secretaries of State/Union Territory Governments and during interaction of CPV Division Officials with DGPs/Police Commissioners. But the pace of establishment of electronic

connectivity with State Police Headquarters and District Police Headquarter was very slow and that was why in most of the States there was no success in reducing the period for receiving the PVR. Moreover, the Committee had come across instances where they had found that different procedures and levels were being followed in process of Police Verification in different States which was perhaps one of the reasons for delays in obtaining PVRs. The Committee had been continuously asking the Ministry to make sincere efforts to shift to District Police Headquarters (DPHQs)/State Police Headquarters (SPHQs) Model and in all the States to ensure uniformity in approach and process across the country. The Committee had, therefore, desired that the issue of establishing e-connectivity with the respective State Governments and other issues related to Police Verification should be taken up in coordination with Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India. The Committee had also suggested that Ministry should come up with the model procedure for police verification by circulating a draft to all States to seek their opinion/suggestion on the procedures to be followed and amendments to be made in the Police Verification process to make it more pragmatic. Ministry of External Affairs should ensure that the Model procedure for Police Verification was being followed by all the States/Union Territories.

Further, in view of the technological changes and changing nature and profile of crime and including crimes by juveniles, the Committee were of the view that efforts should also be made to connect the Passport Seva Project with Crime and Criminal Tracking System (CCTNS) network, which was being implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

39. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“It is submitted once again that it is for the State/UT govts to take policy decision for improving police verification process and invest in necessary infrastructure to shift to DPHQ/SPHQ model. The Ministry has been exhorting the State/UT Govts to speed up the requisite processes in this regard. Till 31st August, 2014, out of 724 police districts in the country, 480 districts have adopted DPHq model. In the Chief Secretaries Conference held in New Delhi on 13th March, 2014, Foreign Secretary had emphasized on the need to adopt DPHQ model. A Presentation on Police Verification was also made by JS(PSP) & CPO at the Conference. A ‘Draft Standard Operating Procedure for Conducting Police Verification’ was circulated amongst the Chief Secretaries so that they could consult the respective Home Secretaries and Directors General of Police and implement the suggested measures. As regards integration with CCTNS being implemented by MHA, it is submitted that Passport Seva System is connectivity-ready but the CCTNS itself is still not complete and MHA is unable to have connectivity. The CCTNS being

a centralised database, cannot be integrated with Passport Seva till it is fully and finally implemented. The Ministry has been impressing upon the MHA to provide the said connectivity at the earliest.”

40. The Committee note that till 31st August, out of 724 police districts in the country, 480 districts have already adopted DPHQ model and efforts are going on to implement the same in remaining districts. The Committee find that the same was emphasized by the Foreign Secretary during the Chief Secretaries conference in March, 2014, but the Ministry has not informed about the response of the States/UTs towards DPHQ model as well as the draft Standard Operating Procedure circulated to them. The Committee, therefore, desire that the matter should be pursued further at the highest levels and outcome should be conveyed to the Committee. The Committee also desire that the process of integration with the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and System (CCTNS) should also be pursued with the Ministry of Home Affairs and connectivity should be obtained immediately after it is implemented. The Committee hope that with the establishment of the network, the Ministry and the Department of Police would be able to check the antecedents of the applicants and check their criminal records, if any. The Committee, however, are of the view that PVR form should be accordingly modified so that the Police can differentiate between petty crime and criminals.

(Recommendation No.13)

41. During the course of examination, the Committee had come across many issues relating to Police Verifications Forms. For example the forms were auto-generated and there was no option for comments/remarks so as to qualify the reasons and once a 'no' was recorded in the form a rejected Police Verification Report was generated.

Similarly, there was a column pertaining to ongoing police case on the applicant but there was no column for making remarks or qualify it, wherein there was a need to make segregation on the basis of small and petty crimes or heinous crimes or to mention 'no objection for granting of passport by Police'. Moreover, there was no column in the Form regarding mobile number of the applicant on which police could inform the applicant about the time and date for verification. The Committee had, therefore, suggested that such important lacuna/shortcomings in the Form should be discussed with the police authorities and Forms should be appropriately modified.

42. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“It is submitted that the particulars of applicants that are auto-generated by the System for police verification, include mobile number of applicants including those of the ‘references’ mentioned in the Passport Application Form. The Police Verification Form is also being modified and the methodology to answer the queries therein have been amplified in the ‘Draft Standard Operating Procedure for Conducting Police Verification’ besides the detailed ‘Manual on Police Verification for Passports’ which is being worked upon taking into account the concerns of the Committee.”

43. The Committee would like to draw the attention of the Ministry to the replies furnished to the Committee regarding status of ‘Manual on Police Verification’ for Passports. In Action Taken Reply to Recommendation No. 2, the Ministry has stated that the above document has been prepared by the Ministry; however in the Action Taken Reply to this recommendation, the Ministry has stated that the document is being worked upon taking into concerns of the Committee. The Committee would like to know the exact status in this regard and would also like to know as to what suggestions of the Committee have been incorporated and in what manner. Moreover, the Committee desire that the Police Verification Form should also be appropriately modified as suggested by the Committee and if possible the form should incorporate a column regarding number of visits by the official from

Department of Police to contact the applicant to exactly know the efforts made by the Police Department particularly when PVRs are returned.

(Recommendation No.14)

44. The Committee had observed that as per the timeline fixed under the Passport Seva Project for issuance of passport (fresh or reissue) was 3 working days in case of 'no' or 'post police verification cases' and for the 'pre-verification cases', it was 3 working days plus the time taken for Police Verification and for passports under Tatkal Scheme, it was next working day excluding the day of submission. But as informed by the Ministry 68% of normal passports were dispatched within 7 days and 90% within 15 days, excluding time taken for police verification while in case of Tatkal Passport 73% were dispatched within three days and 96% within seven days. While analyzing the factors responsible for delay, the Committee had observed that so far the Ministry of External Affairs had mentioned that delay in receiving Police Verification Report was one of the major factor for delays. The Committee had observed that major factor responsible for delay in receipt of Police Verification Reports but other delays at PSK/RPO level also contributed significantly. The Committee, therefore, strongly desire that initiatives should be taken to minimize the time in forwarding the file as well as dispatch of passports. The Committee had a clear opinion that by streamlining the functioning of RPOs and developing better synergy between RPO and TCS, the Ministry might be able to reduce the time taken and proceed in the direction of achieving the desired target of service delivery.

Moreover, the Committee had noted that in DPHQ/SPHQ Model, PVRs were uploaded by the concerned police and thereafter, the hardcopy was sent to the RPO after a long period. The Committee had, however, observed that the process of passport printing was initiated at the RPO only after the receipt of physical copy of PVR. The Committee had, therefore, recommended that the Ministry should not wait for the physical copy and in order to expedite the process, passport printing should be initiated once PVR were uploaded by the Department of Police or are received online by the RPO.

45. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“The Ministry is always striving to reduce the time taken to issue passport and to attain the desired time line envisaged in Passport Seva objectives. The manpower shortage and infrastructural shortcomings continue to pose challenge in meeting the desired service levels. It is clarified, however, that passport printing is initiated after a clear Police Report is received electronically and the Granting Officer/PV Reviewer at the Passport Office gives go-ahead in the

system. It is not necessary to receive the hard copy for initiating passport printing save in those cases where police verification is still in manual mode.”

46. The Committee note that the manpower shortage and infrastructure shortcomings are always being quoted by the Ministry as an excuse for their failure in adhering to the timeline in passport delivery system. The continuous persuasion by the Committee to improve these fields has not shown the desired results. Though the Ministry in its response has stated that it is not necessary to receive the hard copy of PVRs to initiate passport printing, however, the Committee, are aware of several instances at various RPOs wherein, the officials wait for receipt of hardcopies of PVRs for initiating the printing of passport. The Committee would, therefore, desire that the Ministry should conduct test checks across RPOs to ascertain the factual position in this regard and ensure that across all RPOs/POs passport printing is initiated, once PVRs are uploaded by Department of Police and there are no delays in printing and dispatch of passports thereafter. The Committee would like to be apprised of the action taken in the matter.

The Committee also note that the Ministry in its reply is silent on the issue of developing better synergy between RPOs and the service provider. The Committee, therefore, would like to be apprised about the steps being taken in this direction and outcome thereof.

(Recommendation No. 15)

47. Since the onset of the Passport Seva Project, the Committee had taken a strong objection to closing of multiple channels of submission and had clearly expressed their opinion that existence of PSKs alone would lead to centralization of the system. In context of the passport system going online, the Committee had also often deliberated upon the existence of digital divide, lack of infrastructure and accessibility of hardware

and online connectivity particularly in rural India. The Committee were also aware that there was an immediate need to assist/facilitate those applicants who were not accustomed to computers or not having regular access to computers in filing applications, uploading relevant documents, payment of fee as well as seeking appointments. In view of these practical considerations as well as availability of infrastructure and trained personnel and wide network, the Committee over the years had been strongly recommending the Ministry that the Speed Post Centres should be co-opted and reinvented to be used as channels for submission of forms online as well as for capturing of biometric data so that passport services are made accessible to those in distant areas as well as in rural hinterland.

48. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“It is submitted that the Ministry is actively pursuing the matter of co-opting services of Speed Post Centres (SPCs) and Head Post Offices (HPOs) to enable applicants, especially in the rural hinterland to apply for filing passport applications online. The necessary internal approvals have since been obtained and the Ministry has written to the Secretary, Department of Posts to confirm that requisite IT and non-IT infrastructure is in place to enable the applicants to file passport applications online, make payment online and obtain appointment. The Secretary, Deptt of Posts, in a meeting with the Ministry’s officials, did not appear inclined to the Ministry’s proposal, expressing manpower and infrastructural constraints. The Ministry, however, continues to pursue the matter. It would still be mandatory for applicants to appear in person at concerned PSKs to give their photographs and biometrics and complete passport application submission procedure.”

49. The Committee note that the Ministry has been assuring the Committee that consultation with the Department of Posts has been held and had furnished a blueprint regarding involvement of Speed Post Centres and District Head Post Offices for filling of form for passports online and scheduling of appointment. During the sitting of the Committee held on 16.12.2013 the Ministry had assured the Committee that it would be in a position to start this facility in 2-3 months and that it has received a concrete proposal from Department of Posts. However, the Ministry has now informed that Secretary, Department of Posts does not appear inclined to the Ministry’s proposal. The Committee would like to be enlightened on the issue and

would like to urge the Ministry to look into the differences that developed in the matter and pursue the same with the Department of Posts for reasonable conclusion.

Further, the Committee are also not convinced with the Ministry's reply that even if Department of Posts accepts to file passport applications online, it would still be mandatory for applicants to appear in person at concerned PSKs to give their photographs and biometrics and complete passport application submission procedure. The Committee are of the view that if the applicant is unable to give biometric data at the SPCs/HPOs and has to visit the PSKs, the objective of involvement of SPCs/HPOs is defeated. Therefore, efforts should also be made to provide these facilities in these places. The Committee would like to be apprised of the action taken in the matter.

(Recommendation No.16)

50. The Committee had felt that the Ministry had been ambivalent about the existence and role of DPCs/SPCs in the new system. The Committee had observed that inspite of more than one and a half year of completion of setting up and operationalisation of 77 PSKs in the country in June 2012, the Ministry was yet to decide upon the status and role of DPCs/SPCs. The Ministry in a written submission in 2012 had assured the Committee that recognition of Speed Post Centre and e-seva Kendra would start in 2-3 months and the Ministry had further stated that they had a concrete proposal from Ministry of IT and this was done in Hyderabad on trial basis. However, not much progress had been made so far and the Committee did not approve the casual approach of the Ministry on the issue of consultations with the India Post in that regard. The Ministry had formulated a plan as well as procedure that might be followed in SPCs/HPOs however, that proposal was still awaiting internal approvals. The Committee had hoped that the proposal would be worked upon and properly formulated without any further delay involving all the stakeholders. The Committee had urged the Ministry to actively pursue the issue with India Post and various State Governments and ensure that DPCs and designated HPOs are adequately equipped with infrastructure, IT hardware, broadband connectivity and personnel and it was not proved as another adhoc step by the Ministry.

51. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“ (i) As stated in reply to the preceding Recommendation of the Hon’ble Committee, it is reiterated that the Ministry continues to pursue the matter of co-opting services of Speed Post Centres (SPCs) and Head Post Offices (HPOs) to enable applicants, especially in the rural hinterland.

(ii) The District Passport Cells (DPCs) which are under the administrative control of respective State/UT Govts. were co-opted in 2001, to enable citizens located far away from Passport Offices, to submit passport applications nearer home. However, over the years, it was realised that the DPCs were taking unduly long to send the application forms to the concerned RPOs and there was no traceability because of manual movement. The passport applications received through DPCs were invariably incomplete and full of errors and often accompanied by insufficient or incorrect supporting documents. This resulted in protracted correspondence by RPOs with applicants leading to delay in issue of passports and wastage of resources. This also led to pendency of passport applications at the RPOs and delay in passport issuance. As there was no centralised passport database, there was always a possibility of submission of more than one passport application from different locations resulting in issue of multiple passports to unscrupulous elements. Moreover, only Fresh Passport applications were received at DPCs and, in any case, one had to travel to the concerned RPO for Re-issue of passport or for Miscellaneous Passport Services. The DPCs were relevant when the system was manual but now with the implementation of PSP, it is mandatory for citizens to apply for passports online and to appear in person at PSKs to complete passport application submission procedure. Therefore, the DPCs have been gradually closed down and only very few in remote areas like Leh are functional. As an alternative to the DPCs, the Ministry in association with M/s. CSC e-Governance Services India Limited {which is promoted by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY)}, has commenced accepting Passport applications online through the vast network of over one lakh Common Services Centers (CSCs) across rural hinterland. The initiative would also largely bridge the digital divide in the country. The CSC Scheme was approved by the Government of India in September 2006 for setting up Internet enabled centers in rural areas under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). The CSCs are the delivery points for Government, Private and Social Sector services in the areas of agriculture, health, education, banking, insurance, pension, utility bill payments, entertainment, etc. to rural citizens of India at their doorstep. The passport related services have been added as part of their bouquet of services. The CSCs facilitate filling and uploading of Passport application form, payment of applicable fee (through debit/credit card or through SBI internet banking/challan mode) and scheduling of appointment for visit to the

PSK, at nominal charge not exceeding Rs. 100/-. As per the appointment schedule, an applicant will necessarily have to visit the PSK for completion of application submission process (including collection of digital photographs/biometrics, verification of supporting documents and approval). The services through CSCs are available throughout the week, including during the weekend.

iii. The services were launched in pilot mode on 19th March, 2014 at 15 select CSC locations in Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand and till 31st August, 2014, more than 15,000 passport service related applications have been filed online with the Passport Offices across the country. As the awareness among the citizens about filing passport applications online through CSC network increases across the country, the Ministry's initiative will lead to increased outreach for citizens. The Passport Portal as well as the CSC Portal carries information about launch of the said service. Steps are being taken to publicise the availability of CSCs for online filing of passport applications.

iv. The Ministry has also drawn up a plan to organize Passport Seva Camps periodically at various places to take the passport services closer home."

52. The Ministry in its reply has pointed out problems with the District Passport Cells (DPCs). The Committee, however, are of the opinion that all the problems highlighted by the Ministry viz. taking unduly long time to send application, untraceability, errors and incorrect/insufficient documents, lack of centralized passport database, possibility of submitting more than one application etc., stands irrelevant since the system has gone online. The Committee, therefore, are of the opinion that the problems highlighted by the Ministry viz. DPC do not hold much ground. The Ministry has also stated that District Passport Cells were under administrative control of respective State/UT Governments and instead as an alternative to DPC, the Ministry has commenced a project for accepting passport applications online through the vast network of over one lakh Common Service Centres (CSCs).

The Committee appreciate Ministry's strategy of involvement of Common Service Centres in this Project. The Committee, however, would like to suggest the Ministry to rethink about its views on non-involvement of DPC, especially in view of the new situation appearing before the Ministry in the aftermath of non-interest of Department of Posts in being involved as a channel for filling forms online. The Committee would suggest to the Ministry to revisit and redefine the role of District Passport Cells in view of the system going online and facilitate the people with one more option for submission of applications for passports.

The Committee would also desire to know about the performance of CSCs and the timeframe fixed for participation of more CSCs in this Project.

(Recommendation No. 17)

53. The Committee had taken note of the Ministry's initiative to redress the grievances of the applicants and had welcomed initiatives like organization of Passport Melas by various RPOs. The Committee were informed that during the year 2012, Passport Melas were conducted by 24 RPOs at 62 locations and 83 Passport Melas were conducted by 26 Passport Offices during the year 2013. The Committee had noted that such Passport Melas were random and were held only at few places. Moreover, the Committee had observed that there was no clear cut policy for organizing Passport Melas, the Committee had, therefore, recommended that Ministry should pronounce a policy basically giving a priority to the Passport Offices where citizens were facing the problem of very long appointment dates.

The Committee had also desired that Ministry should ensure that all the passport applications collected during the Passport Melas particularly during the tranistory phase of Passport Seva Project were processed expidiously and were not kept pending because such practice defeats the very objectives behind organizing such Melas.

54. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“The Ministry has directed all the Passport Offices to keep organizing Passport Melas on weekends from time to time to address any appointment challenge due to seasonal variations or sudden spurt in demand.. During 1st January – 20th September, 2014, 164 Passport Melas were organized during the weekends

across the country by various Passport Offices and 95,782 passport applications were accepted for processing. During May – June, 2014, Passport Seva Camps were organized in Karimnagar at which 581 applications were accepted for processing. The applications collected during Melas and Passport Camps are not distinct from the ones accepted at PSKs during normal working days and these are processed in the same way as others. The Ministry has also drawn up a plan to organize Passport Seva Camps periodically at various places to take the passport services closer home.”

55. The Committee note that RPOs organize Passport Melas or Passport Seva camps to address appointment challenge due to seasonal variations or sudden spurt in demand. But it is not clear whether these applications are also processed on priority basis or not and what are the processes completed at the centre and for what processes the applicants have to visit RPOs/PSKs. The Committee, therefore, would like to reiterate that the Ministry should ensure that all the passport applications collected during the Passport Melas are processed expeditiously and are not kept pending because such practice defeats the very objectives behind organizing such Melas.

Further, the Committee are of the view that rather than drawing a plan for organizing Passport Seva Camps periodically, the Ministry should come up with a concrete policy regarding organization of such camps on monthly/bimonthly basis particularly in far off areas. The Committee would further like to reiterate that the new policy provision should be there wherein priority is given to those Passport Offices where the citizens are facing the problem of very long appointment dates.

(Recommendation No. 18)

56. The Committee had observed that in the earlier system registered and reputed travel agents/agencies were recognized/authorized to assist in filling the form, depositing the form and fee on behalf of the applicants and for that they were taking a

nominal charge prescribed by the RPOs. They were regulated by administrative orders and were also liable for any mistake or mischief done by them but in the new system their role had been redefined treating them as middlemen. They were now free like other cybercafé owners to charge any amount from the applicants seeking their assistance in filing applications or getting appointments without any control of passport authorities. The Committee had also observed that when Government was in search of multiple channels to facilitate the applicants on payment of nominal charge, the Ministry should relook at the role of these reputed agencies who might work as authorized centers on payment of nominal fee fixed by the authorities. The Committee did not find anything contrary to the philosophy of e-governance in legalizing those agencies for their limited regulated role to prevent the exploitation of applicants by anyone. Therefore, the Ministry should think to define the role of agents to facilitate the prospective applicant's alongwith incorporating the SPC/DPC/citizen service centers in the passport network.

57. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“It is submitted that the travel agents, like any other individual or internet café operator or the CSCs co-opted recently as stated above, are free to access the Passport Portal to assist citizens in filing passport applications online, making payments and obtaining appointment. The Ministry no longer feels the need to recognize some agents across the country and allotting them log-in IDs, as was the practice earlier, as the Portal is web-based unlike the previous NIC system. The Government had taken a conscientious decision in November 2010 to make the new regulation universal and non-discriminatory so that an applicant may approach any travel agency, whether or not a member of IATA, TAAI or any other body of travel agents, to seek assistance for online registration/enquiry under the PSP. The Ministry's stand had been contested by travel agents in the Special Civil Application No. 917 & 919/2012 filed by Association of Recognised Passport Agents (ARPA) of Gujarat, in the Gujarat High Court, Ahmedabad, whereby the petitioners prayed for (i) restoration of *status quo ante* and continuance of submission of passport applications by travel agents, (ii) access to the new system through log-in, (iii) special counters for travel agents in the PSKs/RPO and (iv) stay on the implementation of PSP. **None of the prayers of ARPA was accepted by the Hon'ble High Court.** In a detailed judgment dated 15th March, 2012. Relevant extracts are reproduced below :--

“ Para 20 : Neither Section 5 nor any other provision of the Act envisages any role on the part of the passport agent in the process of issuance of passport. ... There is no provision in the Act for allowing any agent appointed by individuals to deal with the passport office and on whom any rights have been conferred by any of the provisions of the Act.

21. In the backdrop of the aforesaid statutory position as well as from the facts and contentions noted hereinabove, it is apparent that the claim of the petitioners is not based on any statutory or contractual rights, but is based upon the doctrine of legitimate expectation. The plea of legitimate expectation would be required to be considered in terms of the earlier policy and the impact of the change of the policy under the Passport Seva Project.

.....

29It is manifest that the earlier policy giving recognition to the members of the petitioner associations as recognized passport agents does not cause any obligation on the respondents to continue with the same system.....nor does it create any vested right in favour of the members of the petitioner associations to continue submitting applications on behalf of their clients under the earlier system.....

34. Reverting to the facts of the present case, the overriding reason of public policy is writ large on the face of the policy itself which is made in the public interest and in the interest of national security. Thus, where the state action is as a public policy or is in the public interest, unless the action taken amounts to an abuse of power, the concept of legitimate expectation would have no role to play.

.....

37..... the new policy /system has been introduced on the basis of the recommendation of an expert body after an in-depth study of the subject matter. The policy.....cannot be said to be capricious and not being informed by any reason whatsoever, nor can it be clearly held to be an arbitrary and founded on mere ipse dixit of the executive functionaries nor does the same offend other constitutional provisions or come into conflict with any statutory provisions. In the circumstances, there is no warrant for interference with the policy decision of the executive functionary of the State.

.....

39. In the light of the above discussion, this court is of the view that the petitioners are not entitled to any of the reliefs claimed in the petitions.As to whether or not the members of the petitioner associations can be integrated within the system can only be decided by the respondent no. 1.

*40. Subject to the aforesaid, the petitions fail and are accordingly dismissed.
.....The interim relief granted earlier shall stand vacated.”*

In view of the foregoing, the Ministry is not inclined to create a class within a class of travel agents or to ‘legalise’ a few select ones by allotting login IDs or application quotas as all travel agencies are equal in the field and no accreditation is required from the Passport Office or Ministry of External Affairs.”

58. The Committee has never asked the Ministry to provide login to the reputed travel agents or to establish any special counter for them; rather they had asked the Ministry to define their role in the new system and incorporate them as a recognized option where applicants can visit and complete the filling of applications and getting the appointment after payment of a nominal fee.

The Committee understand that as per the judgement quoted by the Ministry, it is well within the purview of the Ministry to integrate the authorized travel agents within the current system. The Committee are aware that today the cyber cafés and the agents are charging exorbitant amount of money from the applicants at various stages like filling online application, payment of online fee and generating appointments.

The Committee are of the view that the Ministry can authorize reputed travel agents across the country, including in the rural hinterland, who may charge the minimum fee as decided by the Ministry so as to facilitate the applicants particularly, in light of low access to computers, credit/debit cards and net banking in the public. The agent may be able to facilitate the public with filling online form, uploading documents depositing fee online and generating appointment only. The Committee are of the view that once the agents are legalized, it would be easy to

regulate them as in cases of charging of exorbitant amount or any other problem, the citizens would be in a position to lodge a complaint and the Ministry would also be in a position to take appropriate action or blacklist such agents or their security deposits can be confiscated. The Committee, however, at the same time would like to caution the Ministry to ensure that such authorized agents have no role in the system after generating appointment online.

(Recommendation No. 19)

59. The Committee had observed that under the Passport Seva Project there was no effective Grievance Redressal Mechanism. The Passport Adalats were not being organized on regular basis and more cases were being referred for appeal at Chief Passport Officer's level. The Committee, therefore, were of the view that the Ministry should work upon establishing responsive and effective Grievance Redressal Mechanism at RPO/PO level. Moreover, the Committee had desired that the grievance of applicants were heard and resolved within the normal procedure of working of the RPO/PO. The Committee had also noted that the cases were being referred to the Passport Issuing Authority (PIA) for appeal. The Committee had been informed that PIA were vested with quasi-judicial authority and had power to revoke/impound passport and the appeal cases were disposed off as per prescribed guidelines. The Committee had noted that the average time taken for disposal of cases for appeal was three months to six months. The Committee were of the opinion that the cases where information had not been consciously hidden by the applicant or the criminality was not involved, such cases should be dealt at the level of the Passport Officer only and should not be referred at CPO level as Regional Passport Officers/Passport Officers were empowered to deal with such cases. The Committee had further suggested that in cases of non-criminality or unintentionally non-furnishing of information in such cases applicant should be imposed a minimum monetary penalty or if time penalty was imposed, it should include time since the filling of application at RPO because the passport issuance had already been delayed due to delay in considering the case.

60. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“(i) Under the Passport Seva Project (PSP), the Ministry has put in place a strengthened Grievance Redressal system whereby a National Call Centre with a toll free number (1800-258-1800), operating in 17 languages and on 24X7 basis, has been set up to cater to dissemination of information about various services, handling of grievances and citizen feedback, which at present works on a central

system platform. Also a helpdesk has been set up which can be accessed by citizens through the www.passportindia.gov.in portal and where suggestions and grievances can be sent and also monitor its status online. Such grievances are being forwarded directly to the concerned Passport Offices for redressal in time bound manner. It presently handles approximately 20, 000 calls per day out of which 42% are in Hindi and 29% in English.

(ii) **A Public Grievance Redressal Cell (PGRC) has been established in CPV Division** under the supervision of the Joint Secretary (Passport Seva Project) and Chief Passport Officer. It deals with grievances recieved through telephone, e-mail and post, as also references from various Government offices such as President's Secretariat, Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet Secretariat, Central Vigilance Commission and Parliament Secretariat. In addition, all Passport Offices handle public grievances through the Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAM) website of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. The latest position on their applications, alongwith directions for further action, is posted on this website, which can be easily accessed by the public for its benefit. CPGRAM is being monitored by PGRC. During the period 1.4.2014 to 31.08.2014, 4383 public grievance petitions were received out of which 3748 were disposed off.

(iii) Information and Facilitation Counters, Public Grievance Cell and Help Desks have been set up in Passport Offices to assist applicants and to attend to grievances/complaints expeditiously. The complaint/suggestion boxes are also installed on strategic locations at Passport Offices and Passport Seva Kendras. The names, addresses and phone number of the Public Grievance Officer are also displayed in the Passport Offices. There is a Public Grievance redressal mechanism in all Passport offices to enquire into and redress any complaints from citizens in a timeframe.

(iv) It is submitted that Ministry's efforts in improving redressal of public grievances have been appreciated by the nodal agency i.e. the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances. In a letter dated 3 December 2013 addressed to Hon'ble EAM, Hon'ble MoS for Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions has written:

*"...On the basis of data generated on the online Centralised Public Grievances Redress and Monitoring System, as on 21.11.2013, your Ministry has been found to have **improved significantly in reducing the pendency of public grievances**. I congratulate on this and wish to place on record my appreciation for the **commendable effort** put in by your Ministry in this regard..."*

(v) As far as Hon'ble Committee's recommendation on the disposal of cases at the level of Passport Office is concerned, Ministry would like to reiterate here that Passport Offices have been given the powers to dispose off the cases at their level by imposing appropriate penalty. Only those cases, where the appellant is not convinced with the decision of the Passport authorities, are transferred to the Chief Passport Officer for further action. It is also submitted that after refusal of passport by the Passport authority, the applicant appeals to the higher authority *i.e.* the Chief Passport Officer under Section 11 of the Passport Act. The appeal cases, dealt at Headquarters are given top priority and the Ministry holds appeal sessions once a month. The average time taken for disposal of appeal cases would thus be reduced further."

61. The Committee take note of Ministry's reply that Passport Offices have been given the power to dispose of cases at their level by imposing appropriate penalty. The Committee, however, have come across cases where applicants are invariably asked to go for appeal even in crystal clear cases where guidelines are available regarding resolution of case or there is a clear provision for particular sum of penalty. The Committee have also come across the case wherein the penalty had been imposed and collected yet thereafter the case was referred for appeal. Thus, in view of the practice followed across the RPOs/POs, the Committee would like to recommend that the Ministry should give clear cut directions to the RPOs/POs to use the given powers to dispose of the cases at their level.

Moreover, the Committee would also like to reiterate that the appeal cases should be disposed of as per prescribed guidelines in a time bound manner. The Committee note that the Ministry is silent on Committee's suggestion that in case of time penalty, the time should include time since the filling of application at RPO. The Committee, therefore, would like to reiterate the same.

(Recommendation No. 20)

62. The Committee had observed that unauthorized touts/agents were still active in the new system and were taking the advantage of difficulties being faced by the applicants at each stage of the process. That included charging very high amount for submission of applications online, taking dates and clearance of PVR. Under the new system, there were more opportunities for such elements to harass the applicants. The Committee had also come across advertisements in media as well as reports of exploitation by touts who act as facilitations and charge exorbitant sum from the applicants. The Committee were not satisfied with the information furnished by the Ministry about the measures undertaken to mitigate the situation. The Committee had urged the Ministry to pursue the matter with concerned police officers and conduct surprise raids to curb the mushrooming of agents/touts around the PSKs/RPO. Furthermore, the Committee were also aware of the malpractice by few officials of Department of Police and Postal Departments during the process of police verification and delivery of passports respectively. In this context, the Committee had urged the Ministry to take up the matter with concerned authorities. At the same time, the Committee had stressed upon the need for verification of the antecedents of the employees of the Service Provider that were attached with the Passport Seva Project and conduct regular checks to ensure that those officials and officials from the Ministry of External Affairs/RPO were not involved in nefarious activities.

63. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“(i) As regards, exploitation by touts/agents, it is submitted that the Passport Portal has exhaustive information on the documentation required for application submission procedure. The citizens can also seek passport-related information from the National Call Centre (Toll Free 1800-258-1800) which has facility of communication in 17 languages or can access mPassport Seva App. An e-mail based Help Desk is also available. These measures are aimed at educating the public and minimising the role of middlemen.

(ii) The Ministry had issued a circular on 6th June 2013 directing the Passport Offices to approach the local police for conducting raids around PSKs/RPOs for nabbing touts operating in the area. The instructions have been reiterated on 17th April, 2014. The RPOs have also been directed to send a monthly report on the outcome of their efforts in this regard. The RPOs have written to the concerned police officials to conduct raids to eliminate tout menace. The Passport Portal also carries advisory for the public not to fall prey to machinations of touts who promise ‘speedy’ service.

(iii) As regards malpractices by police and postal employees, necessary remedial action can be taken by the respective administrative Ministries/Departments only. In case specific cases of malpractice are pointed out, the Ministry would forward these to concerned authorities.

(iv) The Ministry would like to inform the Hon'ble Committee that the Service Provider has been having the antecedents of their employees verified. deployed at the PSKs and Passport Offices...”

64. The Committee take note of Ministry's reply regarding directing RPOs/POs to approach the local Police for conducting raids against PSKs/RPOs for nabbing touts operating in the area and the direction issued to RPOs to send a monthly report on the outcome of said efforts. In this context, the Committee would like to be apprised whether the said report is being received on monthly basis from various RPOs. The Committee would like to be enlightened about the finding as well as the impact of the exercise. Further, the Committee would like to recommend to the Ministry to engage/depute persons from within the Department for the specific purpose to keep vigilance on the surroundings of Passport Seva Kendras/Regional Passport Offices/Passport Offices and with the help of the local authorities such elements can be controlled and such deputed persons can also conduct surprise visits in order to know the ground reality.

Further, the Committee are not convinced with the Ministry's reply regarding malpractices by police and postal employees. The Committee are aware that such practices are rampant. Since, these practices adversely affect Ministry's image and give adverse publicity to the entire passport issuance process, the Committee urge the Ministry to take up the issue with the concerned Ministry and the State Governments/UTs.

The Committee note that as per copy of Verification Reports furnished by the Ministry, one criminal case has been found regarding one employee. The Committee would like to know as to what action has been taken in this regard. Moreover, the Committee would further like to clarify that the Committee also stressed upon the need to conduct regular checks to ensure that officials of service provider and the Ministry/Regional Passport Office are not involved in nefarious activities. The Committee would like to be enlightened about what action has been taken by the Ministry/Regional Passport Offices in this regard?

(Recommendation No. 22)

65. The Committee had informed that Indian Missions/Posts were still working under the old application system maintained by NIC and the data was migrated into PSP system as part of Central Database (PRIDE). The Committee had noted that the Ministry had prepared a blueprint for establishing a unified globalized view of the entire passport issuance system, however, the Committee had observed that inspite of launching the Project, so far no view had been taken on the issue of integration of Indian Missions/Posts in the Passport Seva Portal/Project. As a result, in the Missions/Posts, the application forms were still being filled in order to renew the passport and any information required in connection with issuance of passports take too much time, for example the Committee had noted that seven adalats were held in Jalandhar wherein 8350 applications or complaints were received and most of the cases were pending due to non-receipt of reply from Missions/Posts. The Committee had, therefore, desired that the Passport Seva Project should be linked with the Indian Missions/Posts at the earliest so that data was available on real-time basis and also to reduce the delay owing to awaiting information from Missions/Posts abroad in case of applicants whose earlier passports were issued/reissued by Indian Missions/Posts abroad. Further, the Committee were of the view that availability of data on real time basis would also facilitate in case of reissue of Passport/rendering of miscellaneous services in case the applicant who had already been issued his /her passport from Indian Mission abroad and had further requirement for reissue his/her Indian passport in any other country.

66. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“ The Ministry would like to inform Hon’ble Committee that a team led by Joint Secretary(PSP) & Chief Passport Officer / Director (PV & PSP) and comprising representatives of NIC and Service Provider has visited the Missions in Paris, Tashkent and Dubai to study the technical and logistical challenges involved in integration of Missions/Posts abroad with Passport Seva. The techno-commercial proposal in this regard is under preparation and the integration is likely to be attained by the end of this financial year.”

67. The Committee would like to convey their displeasure that such an important task of integrating Indian Missions/Posts with the Passport Seva Project was overlooked by the Ministry and even now, the techno-commercial proposal is under preparation. The Committee hope that the Ministry would expedite the process of decision making in this regard and come up with the final outcome at the earliest. Based upon the past trend in execution of Passport Seva Project, the Committee does not share Ministry’s view that the integration is likely to be attained by the end of this financial year. The Committee would, therefore, like to suggest that the Ministry should adopt a realistic view and furnish the details of the Ministry’s roadmap alongwith the target timelines to achieve integration of all Missions/Posts with the PSP and stick to that.

(Recommendation No.23)

68. The Committee in their Report in the past had taken up the issue of quality of passport booklets. The Committee were informed that the Ministry had taken up the issue of improving the quality and enhancing security features in Indian Passport Booklets with Indian Security Press (ISP), Nasik. The Committee, however, felt that not much had been done by ISP, Nasik in terms of improving the physical quality of the Passport booklets particularly, binding which had led to problems during immigration check for Indian citizen abroad. The Committee had, therefore, recommended that Ministry must pursue the matter with ISP, Nasik to improve the binding of the booklets. The Committee had also come across the news reports about short supply of passport

booklets in various RPOs. The Committee had, therefore, suggested the Ministry to take up the matter with ISP, Nashik for regular supply of desired quantity of Passport Booklets so that the printing of passport would not be delayed due to non-availability of passport booklets.

69. In its action taken reply, the Ministry of External Affairs has stated as under:

“(i) The Ministry shares the concern of the Hon’ble Committee over the less than satisfactory quality and security features of Indian Passport booklets. Over the last decade, the Ministry has been taking up these issues with the Indian Security Press (ISP), Nashik and its parent body Security Printing, Minting and Coin India Limited (SPMCIL), New Delhi, especially the issue of weak binding of passports that comes off the cover easily. The Ministry has also been taking up with ISP the issue of enhancing security features in the passport booklets as per global standards. The Ministry has advised ISP to procure and use reverse lock stitch machines, as per global norms, so as to ensure that stitches in passports do not come off. The design and stitching of the Indian passport were reviewed at a joint MEA-ISP meeting held on 16th April, 2014. The ISP has promised to design, develop and produce better designed passport booklets with stronger bonding by the end of this year.

(ii) There was a temporary shortage of passport booklets which created some backlog in issuance of passports. This was because ISP Nashik, which is the sole supplier of passport booklets to all Passport Offices in India and abroad, had stopped production of booklets twice (Dec 2013 – Feb 2014 and April 2014 – mid June 2014) due to shortage of a raw material (HAUV laminate film) imported from abroad. Due to prompt measures taken by the Ministry, ISP Nashik started regular supplies of passport booklets to Passport Offices in July 2014. By mid-August 2014, all the Passport Offices had adequate stock of passport booklets. Further, the Ministry has also increased the annual indent for blank passport booklets for the year 2014-15 to 20 million in order to create a strategic reserve of 10 million booklets to meet any future exigency. All the arrears on account of print pendency due to shortage of booklets have been wiped out due to intensive efforts by the Passport Office officials.”

70. The Committee take note of efforts made by the Ministry in regard to improve the quality and security features in passport booklets. The Committee, however, are aware that passports are still being issued on the same type of poor quality booklets. In view of Indian Security Press’s (ISP) assurance to the Ministry, the Committee hope that the

desired changes would be carried out by ISP and Ministry would constantly follow up the issue with ISP and inform the Committee accordingly.

The Committee take strong note of the shortage of passport booklets on atleast two occasions in the recent past which have caused great inconvenience to Indian citizens needing to travel abroad urgently. In this context, the Committee desire that the Ministry should constantly monitor the situation and maintain continuous communication with ISP. Furthermore, the Committee appreciate the Ministry's strategy to procure booklets in advance and maintain a strategic reserve so as to avoid such situation in future. The Committee hope that the Ministry actually execute its plan expeditiously.

CHAPTER II

RECOMMENDATIONS/OBSERVATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT

(Recommendation No.3)

The Committee observe that based on the feasibility study conducted by National Institute for Smart Government (NISG), the Government had approved to set up 77 PSKs across the country on the Public Private Partnership (PPP) basis. The Committee also observe that the only criteria to decide the location of PSKs was the number of applications received by the Passport Offices during 2001-2005 from the areas under their jurisdiction. Thereafter, it has been decided to open 16 Passport Seva Kendras because many of the areas including most of the North Eastern States remained uncovered. Even after that there is a huge demand from various other places for opening of PSKs or PSLKs in view of difficulties being faced by people in the interior areas in the country. Due to such demands the Ministry has again asked NISG to conduct another study to decide the places for opening of more PSKs/PSLKs during the phase II of the Project. The Committee strongly criticize the approach of the Ministry in deciding the places for opening of PSKs and keeping no provision for identifying other places which require such facilities which was evident due to closure of multiple channels of submission, particularly in the rural and interior areas. Simultaneously, the Committee also do not approve the policy of opening of more than one Kendra in same districts and ignoring other places particularly, the far off districts and the North Eastern States.

The Committee would, therefore, like to stress that while deciding the location for opening of PSKs/PSLKs in Phase II, apart from volume of applications received at Regional Passport Offices/Passport Offices other criteria like number of applications received from particular districts/areas and distance/connectivity etc. should also be considered so that the PSKs are evenly located, passport issuance facility is made easily accessible to the applicant and they may not need to travel long distance for the same, particularly, in view of the fact that the PSK is the only channel for capturing biometric data as per the existing model of Passport Seva Project. In view of the present scenario of lack of alternative channels of submission of forms as well as for capturing of the biometric data, the Committee would like to urge the Ministry of External Affairs to engage with NISG so that the Report is expedited and is finalized at the earliest.

The Committee observe that Andaman and Nicobar Islands is not yet included in the Passport Seva Project. The Committee note that one of the objectives of the Passport Seva Project is to render services through simplified procedure and conditions of comfort for passport seeking public. The Committee, therefore, recommend that

Ministry should particularly look into the problems being faced by the applicants from Andaman and Nicobar Island as well as Lakshwadeep and address the issues at the earliest. Further, the Committee strongly recommend that during phase II of the Passport Seva Project, the Ministry must strive to establish PSK/PSLK in each Union Territory.

Reply of the Government

- (i) It is submitted that the location of PSKs under PSP was based on a study conducted by the National Institute for Smart Government (NISG) in 2007. The study had taken into account the number of passport applications received in the years preceding 2006, from regions under the jurisdiction of respective Passport Offices, while recommending locations of the PSKs. In view of high number of passport applications from certain cities and districts, more than one PSK was set up there. As regards North-east states, the position is as follows:
 - (a) Passport services are being rendered in **Aizawl** since July 2012 through Passport Application Collection Centre (PACC). The IT infrastructure of PACC would be upgraded to PSLK as soon as financial concurrence for setting up IT infrastructure is received.
 - (b) The civil and electrical works undertaken by Meghalaya State PWD for PSLK **Shillong** have been completed. It is likely to be launched by mid-October, 2014. On trial basis, applications are already being accepted.
 - (c) The site for PSLK **Gangtok** has been finalized and financial concurrence has been received for civil and electrical works to be carried out by the Sikkim PWD. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
 - (d) Lease Deed for the PSLK **Agartala** is under finalisation after which civil and electrical works would be carried out and IT infrastructure installed. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
 - (e) A site has been identified in **Imphal** and lease deed is being finalized with Manipur Govt. Expected to be made operational during 2014-15.
 - (f) A site has been identified in **Itanagar** and lease deed is under discussion with the State Govt. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
 - (g) Following a proposal from the former Chief Minister of Manipur that the PSLK may be set up in **Dimapur** instead of **Kohima** as Dimapur has better connectivity and many State Govt offices are located there, the matter was taken up with the State Govt. by the Ministry. **The State Govt has conveyed that the PSLK may be set up in Dimapur.** Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.

- (ii) The Study Report on setting up additional PSKs/PSLKs has been received from the NISG and has been approved by the Ministry. In keeping with its recommendations, the Ministry has decided to open a PSK each in **Indore** (Madhya Pradesh) and **Solapur** (Maharashtra) to increase the outreach of passport services besides adding more counters in various PSKs to augment their handling capacity. The Ministry has also drawn up a plan to organize Passport Seva Camps at various places to take the passport services closer home.
- (iii) I. As regards the Hon'ble Committee's recommendation to set up a PSK/PSLK in each UT (*Delhi and Chandigarh already have PSKs*), it would be useful to consider the following :---
- (a) Andaman & Nicobar Islands : Population – 3,79,944 ; Approx. annual passport workload -3000 i.e. less than 13 per working day ; passports are issued by Andaman & Nicobar Administration, Port Blair which acts as Passport Issuing Authority and passport booklets are supplied by RPO Kolkata. The Ministry has plans to integrate PSP system with that of Andaman & Nicobar Islands Admn. Along with integration of Missions/Posts abroad.
- (b) Lakshadweep Islands: Population – 64,429 ; Approx. annual passport workload - 1113 i.e. less than 5 per working day ; Passport needs of citizens of Lakshadweep are met by PSK Kochi which is about 300-400 kms away. The RPO, Cochin would be organizing Passport Seva Camp in Lakshadweep periodically to collect passport applications from the citizens.
- (c) Daman and Diu : Population – Daman (1.9 lakh) and Diu (52,000) ; Approx. annual passport workload (Daman) – 2794 i.e. 12 per working day and annual passport workload (Diu) – 3320 i.e. 14 per working day. Citizens from Daman travel to Mumbai which is approximately 175 kms away and citizens from Diu travel to Rajkot which is 220 kms away. It is proposed to organize Passport Seva Camps periodically in Daman . The Camps will also cater to the needs of the people of Dadra & Nagar Haveli which is close to Daman.
- (d) Dadra & Nagar Haveli – Population 3,42,853; Approx. annual passport workload is 804 i.e. less than 4 per working day. Passport needs of citizens are met by PSKs in Mumbai which is 180 kms away. The Camps in Daman will also cater to the needs of the people of Dadra & Nagar Haveli as it is close to Daman.

- (e) Puducherry: Population -12,44,464 ; Annual passport workload – 15,212 i.e. 64 applications per working day ; A Passport Application Collection Centre is functioning at Puducherry. The Passport Application Collection Centre in Puducherry would be upgraded to a PSLK. The UT Govt. has been requested to provide additional space for expansion of the existing facility.

II. The approximate cost of procurement and installation of IT equipment for each PSLK is Rs.64.5 lakh besides recurring expenditure of Rs.33.6 lakh per annum towards technical and other manpower. The leasing of site and expenditure on office furniture, furnishings, maintenance and security are additional. As the number of passport applications from Lakshadweep, Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli is very low, it would not be economically prudent to have a permanent establishment there. The passport needs of citizens there can be met by holding Passport Seva Camps.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.7)

The Committee note that the prospective applicants have been facing great difficulties in the very first step of getting passport i.e. in seeking online appointment in most of the PSKs. The Committee also observe that in order to streamline the online appointment system, various initiatives have been taken by the Ministry but in 31 PSKs it is still a challenge, where applicants get an appointment after a gap of 10 to 58 days. In this regard, the Ministry has clarified that problems faced in obtaining appointments has no relation with the portal or the software. The system can generate even a million appointments and that it is a matter of demand and supply and the appointments are released as per handling capacity of particular PSK. The Committee wonders as to why the number of slots had not been increased in the past when it is in the hands of the Ministry and service provider? In Committee's view organizing the Passport Melas or Passport Seva Camps at sites other than PSKs may be a temporary arrangement to give appointments but it may not resolve the problem. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommend that the Ministry should seriously examine the issue of handling capacity of each PSK and find a solution to ensure the generation of additional slots with the service provider and take initiative to ensure that the capacity of PSK is enhanced appropriately or new PSKs are set up with sufficient manpower to cater to the needs of enhanced number of applicants across the country.

Reply of the Government

It is submitted that handling capacity of a PSK depends not only on the number of counters but also the availability of manpower to man these counters. Whereas it is

much easier for the Service Provider to recruit manpower from the open market and deploy them at the private counters, the Govt. counters have to be manned by the Central Passport Organisation (CPO) officials where intake is governed by Recruitment Rules. Obtaining the services of officials from other Govt. depts on deputation also cannot be resorted to beyond a limit. CPO officials being from the Govt. are also entitled to various kinds of leave and absence of even one person at PSK impinges on handling capacity. During festival season also, appointments have to be curtailed as many officials are not available. Nevertheless the Ministry has increased the appointments in various PSKs in the last few weeks. As on 16th September, 2014, in 25 PSKs the appointment was available the next day; in 5 PSKs from 2 to 7 days ; in 14 PSKs from 8 to 14 days; in 4 PSKs from 15 to 20 days; in 12 PSKs from 21 to 30 days; in 13 PSKs from 31 to 45 days; in 2 PSKs from 46 to 60 days and in 4 PSKs beyond 60 days (appointment window opened beyond 60 days on experimental basis). The Ministry has stepped up its efforts for organizing passport melas and camps regularly to meet passport demand and from 1-1-2014 to 20-9-2014, 164 melas were organized at which 95,782 passport applications were accepted for processing. A detailed Passport Seva Camp plan is being drawn up for launch in October 2014. Challenges in setting up of new PSKs to meet rising passport demand, have already been indicated in ATRs 3-5....

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.8)

The Committee note that as a measure to curb the tendency of 'No Show Cases', the Ministry has introduced provision of online payment of fee through SBI chalcans, debit/credit cards etc. and this step has shown welcome results and such cases have come down to 1.2 percent from 30 percent. However, the Committee may not deny the fact that a large section of the population is not electronically connected to the Banks or are not in possession of debit/credit cards of State Bank of India. They are also facing difficulty in deposition of fee through their SBI cards. The Committee, therefore, desire that initiatives should be taken to incorporate the credit/debit cards of more popular nationalized/private banks for the purpose of online payment of passport fee to facilitate the applicants.

Reply of the Government

It is submitted that for online payment of passport fees, debit/credit cards of all the nationalized/private banks are accepted. Only for e-banking, State Bank of India payment gateway is open. State Bank branches cover almost entire India and payment can be easily made through SBI Challan. It is added that the Ministry in consultation with the Deptt. of IT, has co-opted **Common Service Centre network** comprising 1,00,000 outlets across the country to provide more access points to citizens, especially

in the rural hinterland, to file passport applicants online and where passport fees can be deposited in cash also. The Ministry has written to the Secretary, Department of Posts to confirm that requisite IT and non-IT infrastructure is in place to enable the applicants to file passport applications online, make payment online and obtain appointment. A sum of Rs.100/- per passport application would be paid by the Ministry to India Post for the said services. The Secretary, Deptt of Posts, in a meeting with the Ministry's officials, did not appear inclined to the Ministry's proposal, expressing manpower and infrastructural constraints. The Ministry, however, continues to pursue the matter of co-opting services of **Speed Post Centres (SPCs) and Head Post Offices (HPOs)** to enable applicants, especially in the rural hinterland, to enable filing of passport applications online. It would still be mandatory for applicants to appear in person at concerned PSKs to give their photographs and biometrics and complete passport application submission procedure.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.11)

Despite a provision of tracking of status of application through website, the Committee have come across several instances wherein the Passport applicant is not able to know the correct status of his/her application as the status is not regularly updated on the website. This is particularly true for the applicants whose cases are referred to the RPO/Policy Section or the cases those are closed after the expiry of one year term and they are running from pillar to post to know the status of their applications. On being asked, the Ministry has informed that the portal is maintained by TCS in consultation with the Ministry. The Committee, therefore, feel that there is clear-cut lack of communication between the RPO and the Service Provider which is leading to non-availability of correct/current status of the applications on the website. The Committee, therefore, would like to suggest the Ministry to maintain and ensure proper flow of information between the RPO and the Service Provider so that the status is updated on real time basis. Similarly, the Committee would also like to suggest to the Ministry to engage with the service provider as well as the Department of Police so that it is ensured that the updated status reflected at the portal mentions the exact level and reason for keeping the application pending and to guide the applicant about any need to meet the concerned officers in the RPO or Police Station.

Reply of the Government

In consultation with the Service Provider, the software has been modified to enable the applicants to ascertain status of their passport application indicating the reasons such as (i) data entry modification, (ii) change of photograph and (iii) documents resubmission etc. along with the advice whether the applicant has to visit the PSK or the Passport Office. The applicant is also informed at print stage that the passport will

be dispatched after print and quality check. At dispatch stage, the Speed Post ref. no. is also conveyed to enable the applicant to keep track of dispatch by India Post. The status of passport application when it is sent for police verification (PV) is already accessible to applicants. As the police verification process in states is not fully computerized and no centralized database for PV is available at present, it may not be possible to indicate the level where the applications would be pending in the police department.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.16)

The Committee, however, feel that the Ministry has been ambivalent about the existence and role of DPCs/SPCs in the new system. The Committee observe that inspite of more than one and a half year of completion of setting up and operationalisation of 77 PSKs in the country in June 2012, the Ministry is yet to decide upon the status and role of DPCs/SPCs. The Ministry in written submission in 2012 had assured the Committee that recognition of Speed Post Centre and e-seva Kendra would start in 2-3 months and the Ministry further stated that they had a concrete proposal from Ministry of IT and this was done in Hyderabad on trial basis. However, not much progress has been made so far and the Committee do not approve the casual approach of the Ministry on the issue of consultations with the India Post in this regard. Now, they have formulated a plan as well as procedure that may be followed in SPCs/HPOs however, this proposal is still awaiting internal approvals. The Committee hope that this proposal is worked upon and properly formulated without any further delay involving all the stakeholders. The Committee urge the Ministry to actively pursue the issue with India Post and various State Governments and ensure that DPCs and designated HPOs are adequately equipped with infrastructure, IT hardware, broadband connectivity and personnel and it is not proved as another adhoc step by the Ministry.

Reply of the Government

- (i) As stated in reply to the preceding Recommendation of the Hon'ble Committee, it is reiterated that the Ministry continues to pursue the matter of co-opting services of Speed Post Centres (SPCs) and Head Post Offices (HPOs) to enable applicants, especially in the rural hinterland.
- (ii) The District Passport Cells (DPCs) which are under the administrative control of respective State/UT Govts. were co-opted in 2001, to enable citizens located far away from Passport Offices, to submit passport applications nearer home. However, over the years, it was realised that the DPCs were taking unduly long to send the application forms to the concerned RPOs and there was no traceability because of manual movement. The passport applications received

through DPCs were invariably incomplete and full of errors and often accompanied by insufficient or incorrect supporting documents. This resulted in protracted correspondence by RPOs with applicants leading to delay in issue of passports and wastage of resources. This also led to pendency of passport applications at the RPOs and delay in passport issuance. As there was no centralised passport database, there was always a possibility of submission of more than one passport application from different locations resulting in issue of multiple passports to unscrupulous elements. Moreover, only Fresh Passport applications were received at DPCs and, in any case, one had to travel to the concerned RPO for Re-issue of passport or for Miscellaneous Passport Services. The DPCs were relevant when the system was manual but now with the implementation of PSP, it is mandatory for citizens to apply for passports online and to appear in person at PSKs to complete passport application submission procedure. Therefore, the DPCs have been gradually closed down and only very few in remote areas like Leh are functional. As an alternative to the DPCs, the Ministry in association with M/s. CSC e-Governance Services India Limited {which is promoted by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY)}, has commenced accepting Passport applications online through the vast network of over one lakh Common Services Centers (CSCs) across rural hinterland. The initiative would also largely bridge the digital divide in the country. The CSC Scheme was approved by the Government of India in September 2006 for setting up Internet enabled centers in rural areas under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). The CSCs are the delivery points for Government, Private and Social Sector services in the areas of agriculture, health, education, banking, insurance, pension, utility bill payments, entertainment, etc. to rural citizens of India at their doorstep. The passport related services have been added as part of their bouquet of services. The CSCs facilitate filling and uploading of Passport application form, payment of applicable fee (through debit/credit card or through SBI internet banking/challan mode) and scheduling of appointment for visit to the PSK, at nominal charge not exceeding Rs. 100/-. As per the appointment schedule, an applicant will necessarily have to visit the PSK for completion of application submission process (including collection of digital photographs/biometrics, verification of supporting documents and approval). The services through CSCs are available throughout the week, including during the weekend.

- (iii) The services were launched in pilot mode on 19th March, 2014 at 15 select CSC locations in Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand and till 31st August, 2014, more than 15,000 passport service related applications have been filed online with the Passport Offices across the country. As the awareness among the citizens about filing passport applications online through CSC network increases across the

country, the Ministry's initiative will lead to increased outreach for citizens. The Passport Portal as well as the CSC Portal carries information about launch of the said service. Steps are being taken to publicise the availability of CSCs for online filing of passport applications.

- (iii) The Ministry has also drawn up a plan to organize Passport Seva Camps periodically at various places to take the passport services closer home.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No. 19)

The Committee observe that under the Passport Seva Project there is no effective Grievance Redressal Mechanism. Now the Passport Adalats are not being organized on regular basis and more cases are being referred for appeal at Chief Passport Officer's level. The Committee, therefore, are of the view that the Ministry should work upon establishing responsive and effective Grievance Redressal Mechanism at RPO/PO level. Moreover, the Committee desire that the grievance of applicants are heard and resolved within the normal procedure of working of the RPO/PO. The Committee also note that the cases have been referred to the Passport Issuing Authority (PIA) for appeal. The Committee have been informed that PIA are vested with quasi-judicial authority and has power to revoke/impound passport and the appeal cases are disposed off as per prescribed guidelines. The Committee have noted that the average time taken for disposal of cases for appeal is three months to six months. The Committee are of the opinion that the cases where information has not been consciously hidden by the applicant or the criminality is not involved, such cases should be dealt at the level of the Passport Officer only and should not be referred at CPO level as Regional Passport Officers/Passport Officers are empowered to deal with such cases. The Committee further suggest that in cases of non-criminality or unintentionally non-furnishing of information is there, in such cases applicant should be imposed a minimum monetary penalty or if time penalty is imposed, it should include time since the filling of application at RPO because the passport issuance has already been delayed due to delay in considering the case.

Reply of the Government

- (i) Under the Passport Seva Project (PSP), the Ministry has put in place a strengthened Grievance Redressal system whereby a National Call Centre with a toll free number (1800-258-1800), operating in 17 languages and on 24X7 basis, has been set up to cater to dissemination of information about various services, handling of grievances and citizen feedback, which at present works on a central system platform. Also a helpdesk has been set up which can be accessed by citizens through the www.passportindia.gov.in portal and where

suggestions and grievances can be sent and also monitor its status online. Such grievances are being forwarded directly to the concerned Passport Offices for redressal in time bound manner. It presently handles approximately 20, 000 calls per day out of which 42% are in Hindi and 29% in English.

- (ii) **A Public Grievance Redressal Cell (PGRC) has been established in CPV Division** under the supervision of the Joint Secretary (Passport Seva Project) and Chief Passport Officer. It deals with grievances recieved through telephone, e-mail and post, as also references from various Government offices such as President's Secretariat, Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet Secretariat, Central Vigilance Commission and Parliament Secretariat. In addition, all Passport Offices handle public grievances through the Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAM) website of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions. The latest position on their applications, alongwith directions for further action, is posted on this website, which can be easily accessed by the public for its benefit. CPGRAM is being monitored by PGRC. During the period 1.4.2014 to 31.08.2014, 4383 public grievance petitions were received out of which 3748 were disposed off.
- (iii) Information and Facilitation Counters, Public Grievance Cell and Help Desks have been set up in Passport Offices to assist applicants and to attend to grievances/complaints expeditiously. The complaint/suggestion boxes are also installed on strategic locations at Passport Offices and Passport Seva Kendras. The names, addresses and phone number of the Public Grievance Officer are also displayed in the Passport Offices. There is a Public Grievance redressal mechanism in all Passport offices to enquire into and redress any complaints from citizens in a timeframe.
- (iv) It is submitted that Ministry's efforts in improving redressal of public grievances have been appreciated by the nodal agency i.e. the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances. In a letter dated 3 December 2013.... addressed to Hon'ble EAM, Hon'ble MoS for Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions has written:

*"...On the basis of data generated on the online Centralised Public Grievances Redress and Monitoring System, as on 21.11.2013, your Ministry has been found to have **improved significantly in reducing the pendency of public grievances**. I congratulate on this and wish to place on record my appreciation for the **commendable effort** put in by your Ministry in this regard..."*

- (v) As far as Hon'ble Committee's recommendation on the disposal of cases at the level of Passport Office is concerned, Ministry would like to reiterate here that Passport Offices have been given the powers to dispose off the cases at their level by imposing appropriate penalty. Only those cases, where the appellant is not convinced with the decision of the Passport authorities, are transferred to the Chief Passport Officer for further action. It is also submitted that after refusal of passport by the Passport authority, the applicant appeals to the higher authority *i.e.* the Chief Passport Officer under Section 11 of the Passport Act. The appeal cases, dealt at Headquarters are given top priority and the Ministry holds appeal sessions once a month. The average time taken for disposal of appeal cases would thus be reduced further.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No. 20)

The Committee observe that unauthorized touts/agents are still active in the new system and are taking the advantage of difficulties being faced by the applicants at each stage of the process. This includes charging very high amount for submission of applications online, taking dates and clearance of PVR. Under the new system, there are more opportunities for such elements to harass the applicants. The Committee have also come across advertisements in media as well as reports of exploitation by touts who act as facilitations and charge exorbitant sum from the applicants. The Committee are not satisfied with the information furnished by the Ministry about the measures undertaken to mitigate the situation. The Committee would like to urge the Ministry to pursue the matter with concerned police officers and conduct surprise raids to curb the mushrooming of agents/touts around the PSKs/RPO. Furthermore, the Committee are also aware of the malpractice by few officials of Department of Police and Postal Departments during the process of police verification and delivery of passports respectively. In this context, the Committee would like to urge the Ministry to take up the matter with concerned authorities. At the same time, the Committee would like to stress upon the need for verification of the antecedents of the employees of the Service Provider that are attached with the Passport Seva Project and conduct regular checks to ensure that these officials and officials from the Ministry of External Affairs/RPO are not involved in nefarious activities.

Reply of the Government

- (i) As regards, exploitation by touts/agents, it is submitted that the Passport Portal has exhaustive information on the documentation required for application submission procedure. The citizens can also seek passport-related information from the National Call Centre (Toll Free 1800-258-1800) which has facility of communication in 17 languages or can access mPassport Seva App. An e-mail

based Help Desk is also available. These measures are aimed at educating the public and minimising the role of middlemen.

- (ii) The Ministry had issued a circular on 6th June 2013 directing the Passport Offices to approach the local police for conducting raids around PSKs/RPOs for nabbing touts operating in the area. The instructions have been reiterated on 17th April, 2014. The RPOs have also been directed to send a monthly report on the outcome of their efforts in this regard. The RPOs have written to the concerned police officials to conduct raids to eliminate tout menace. The Passport Portal also carries advisory for the public not to fall prey to machinations of touts who promise 'speedy' service.
- (iii) As regards malpractices by police and postal employees, necessary remedial action can be taken by the respective administrative Ministries/Departments only. In case specific cases of malpractice are pointed out, the Ministry would forward these to concerned authorities.
- (iv) The Ministry would like to inform the Hon'ble Committee that the Service Provider has been having the antecedents of their employees verified. deployed at the PSKs and Passport Offices...

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.21)

The Committee observe that Passport Offices have been facing continuous staff crunch. The Committee also find that under the new system of passport issuance, the Passport Offices have to play a back office role and the staff available with the Passport Offices is to be posted at PSKs as well as RPOs. The Committee, however, have observed during their study visits to Passport Offices that there is no balanced distribution of staff between both the locations. The Committee note that on one hand, there is reduction of work at RPO and on the other hand the Ministry has accepted that due to staff crunch they are unable to release more appointments at Passport Seva Kendras. It clearly shows that there is a need of proper planning for deputation of staff at RPO and PSKs. The Committee, therefore, desire that Ministry should undertake Passport Office specific studies to know the workload and requirement of manpower at particular PO or PSK and ensure optimal utilization of human resource in these offices. The Committee are sure that with the existing manpower and newly created 348 posts the Ministry will be able to handle the system efficiently.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry is constantly striving to maintain balance between the staff strength at PSKs and Passport Offices by dynamically moving the officials available in the system for

optimizing output. During January, 2014, out of 768 Govt. counters, 563 were manned i.e. about 73% whereas during August 2014, the occupancy was 623 out of 776 i.e. over 80%. The productivity of the Verification Officers has gone up from 114 passport applications per day to 123 and that of Granting Officers from 132 to 140 applications per day during April – August 2014. It is also submitted that the passport issuance has gone up by 36% during the period from 2009 to 2013 whereas the staff strength has been increased by 15% only. It is also submitted that the Union Cabinet had approved *inter alia* increase in staff strength by 39 personnel for every one lakh increase in passport applications. At this rate, the strength should have been increased by 693 personnel whereas in fact it was only 348. The Ministry's proposal, in keeping with the Cabinet's said approval, for automatic augmentation in staff strength to keep pace with increase in passport services, was not agreed to by the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry has been in constant touch with the Staff Selection Commission to expedite recruitment of staff. However, as the procedure for recruitment stands at present, it takes more than 15 months since the date of placing indent, to actually deploy an official. From January 2014 till 20th September, 2014, 49 Assistants were promoted as Superintendents, 82 Passport Granting Officers were promoted as Asstt Passport Officers (APOs) and 17 APOs were promoted as Deputy Passport Officers. The Ministry's recent decision to affix stamped signatures in passports in place of physical signatures is likely to free up some gazetted officers who would be deployed to optimize output.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.23)

The Committee in their Report in the past have taken up the issue of quality of passport booklets. The Committee are informed that the Ministry has taken up the issue of improving the quality and enhancing security features in Indian Passport Booklets with Indian Security Press (ISP), Nasik. The Committee, however, feel that not much has been done by ISP, Nasik in terms of improving the physical quality of the Passport booklets particularly, binding which has led to problems during immigration check for Indian citizen abroad. The Committee, therefore, recommend that Ministry must pursue the matter with ISP, Nasik to improve the binding of the booklets. The Committee have also come across the news reports about short supply of passport booklets in various RPOs. The Committee therefore, suggest the Ministry to take up the matter with ISP, Nasik for regular supply of desired quantity of Passport Booklets so that the printing of passport is not delayed due to non-availability of passport booklets.

Reply of the Government

- (i) The Ministry shares the concern of the Hon'ble Committee over the less than satisfactory quality and security features of Indian Passport booklets. Over the last

decade, the Ministry has been taking up these issues with the Indian Security Press (ISP), Nashik and its parent body Security Printing, Minting and Coin India Limited (SPMCIL), New Delhi, especially the issue of weak binding of passports that comes off the cover easily. The Ministry has also been taking up with ISP the issue of enhancing security features in the passport booklets as per global standards. The Ministry has advised ISP to procure and use reverse lock stitch machines, as per global norms, so as to ensure that stitches in passports do not come off. The design and stitching of the Indian passport were reviewed at a joint MEA-ISP meeting held on 16th April, 2014. The ISP has promised to design, develop and produce better designed passport booklets with stronger bonding by the end of this year.

- (ii) There was a temporary shortage of passport booklets which created some backlog in issuance of passports. This was because ISP Nashik, which is the sole supplier of passport booklets to all Passport Offices in India and abroad, had stopped production of booklets twice (Dec 2013 – Feb 2014 and April 2014 – mid June 2014) due to shortage of a raw material (HAUV laminate film) imported from abroad. Due to prompt measures taken by the Ministry, ISP Nashik started regular supplies of passport booklets to Passport Offices in July 2014. By mid-August 2014, all the Passport Offices had adequate stock of passport booklets. Further, the Ministry has also increased the annual indent for blank passport booklets for the year 2014-15 to 20 million in order to create a strategic reserve of 10 million booklets to meet any future exigency. All the arrears on account of print pendency due to shortage of booklets have been wiped out due to intensive efforts by the Passport Office officials.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

CHAPTER III

RECOMMENDATIONS/OBSERVATIONS WHICH THE COMMITTEE DO NOT DESIRE TO PURSUE IN VIEW OF THE GOVERNMENT'S REPLIES

-NIL-

CHAPTER IV

RECOMMENDATIONS/OBSERVATIONS IN RESPECT OF WHICH REPLIES OF GOVERNMENT HAVE NOT BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE COMMITTEE AND REQUIRE REITERATION

(Recommendation No.1)

The Committee are happy to note that as a part of the national e-governance plan of the Government, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has embarked on the ambitious mission Passport Seva Project to make the passport issuance system more efficient. The Committee, however, take note of the undue delay in execution of the Project in the beginning. At the same time, the Committee note that before embarking upon the project, the Ministry had overlooked certain aspects which led to significant financial implications/burden on the Ministry as well as created a chaotic situation during the period of transformation from old system to the new system. Now, they have successfully established 77 Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) in different parts of the country in first phase of the Project to handle the work of passport and are in the process of opening Passport Seva Laghu Kendras (PSLKs) in North Eastern States and other areas. The Committee, however, are of the strong opinion that the Ministry had not appropriately dwelt upon the implications of centralization of passport application deposit process and the system going online in view of digital divide and lack of infrastructure and connectivity in the country particularly, in semi-urban and rural areas. In the second phase of the project the Government proposes to open more Centres. The Committee, therefore, desire that in view of the experience of the Phase-I and the requirement of infrastructure and connectivity, the Ministry must dwell upon the project in its various dimensions and holistically examine them in its entirety and come up with concrete policy decision on various issues before embarking on the next Phase.

Reply of the Government

The recommendation of Hon'ble Committee has been taken note of and it is submitted that the Ministry is committed to providing Passport services in a more efficient, timely and transparent manner. It is also submitted that with a view to address the challenge of digital divide and to provide more access points for filing passport applications online, especially in the rural hinterland, the Ministry in association with M/s. CSC e-Governance Services India Limited {which is promoted by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY)}, has facilitated online filing of passport applications, through the vast network of over one lakh Common Service Centres (CSCs) across the country. The CSCs are the delivery points for Government, Private and Social Sector services in the areas of agriculture, health, education, banking, insurance, pension, utility bill payments, entertainment, etc. to rural citizens of India at their doorstep. The passport related services have now been added as part of their bouquet of

services. The CSCs facilitate filling and uploading of Passport application form, payment of applicable fee (through debit/credit card or through SBI internet banking/challan mode) and scheduling of appointment for visit to the PSK, at nominal charge not exceeding Rs. 100/-. As per the appointment schedule, an applicant will have to visit the PSK for completion of application submission process (including collection of digital photographs/biometrics, verification of supporting documents and approval). The services through CSCs are available throughout the week, including during the weekend. The Ministry has also decided to open a PSK each in Indore (Madhya Pradesh) and Solapur (Maharashtra) to increase the outreach of passport services besides adding more counters in various PSKs to augment their handling capacity. The Ministry has also drawn up a plan to organize Passport Seva Camps periodically at various places to take the passport services closer home.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No. 9)

The Committee note that the Ministry has accepted that once when on the passport seva portal details are filled online and documents are scanned and uploaded and appointments are obtained, experience of applicants at PSK is very satisfactory. But the feedback available to the Committee and media reports deny this claim. The experience of applicants are similar at PSKs also and many applicants are called again and again for want of one or other document and feel harassed. The Committee desire that to minimize this problem, there should be a process of e-verification of documents prior to the designated day for appointments in cases where the documents have already been uploaded by the applicants. The Committee hope that Ministry alongwith Service Provider would come up with technological solution to this problem as this small step by the Ministry may facilitate to end the problems of a large number of applicants.

Reply of the Government

It is submitted that the Passport Portal has extensive information on the requirement of supporting documents for the guidance of applicants. The applicants are required to bring original documents along with a copy thereof to the PSK at the appointed time/day where these are verified by the Govt Official. The applicant may be required to make another visit only when the original document itself is of doubtful nature or incomplete in some respect. In view of the fact that original documents in any case have to be produced before the Verifying Officer, pre e-verification of documents would not be of help. However, with a view to simplify passport application submission procedure, it has been decided to accept registered rent agreement also as a proof of address. It has also been decided w.e.f. 1st August, 2014 to do away with ink signatures on passports and replace these with stamped signatures to save time and manpower. The Ministry has also

introduced the system of self-attestation of documents replacing the requirement of attestation by gazetted officers.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.10)

The Committee note that in each PSK, officials from RPO are present as Passport Issuing Authority (PIA) as well as the employees of TCS to conduct the front end activities. However, the Committee have often come across instances that a large number of cases are being referred to RPO in the name of policy matters. From the figures provided by the Ministry, the Committee find that on an average three cases per PSK per day are referred to RPO. The Committee have serious doubts on the figures provided by the Ministry in this regard. However, figures of an average per day per PSK at all India level may not give conclusive results because this problem is RPO/PSK specific. In such instances the applicants have to suffer a lot particularly, if he/she is a resident of one particular district and has to visit another district where PSK is located and if referred to RPO, the applicant has to travel to the third district leading to unnecessary hassle and stress. In this context, the Committee are dismayed to take note of Ministry's justification given for referring large number of cases that if the officials at Passport Seva Kendras dwell too long on certain cases, it would lead to delay even in less difficult cases. The Committee note that though the Ministry has come out with comprehensive guidelines so that various queries are resolved at the end of PSK only and the applicants are not referred to RPO in large number but with no impact. The Committee, thereafter, would like to suggest the Ministry to relook and review the role of Granting Officers so as to empower them to consider maximum number of cases except very complex cases and resolve them then and there at PSK level. If required, the assistance of policy section may be provided there itself. The Committee also have apprehension and certain information that there may be understating between the Granting Officer and the query resolving officer which can result into referring a large number of cases from the table of a particular Granting-Officer at a particular PSK to policy section for query resolution for their gains. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Ministry should observe and analyze such cases RPO/PSK-wise and Granting Officer-wise to reach any conclusion.

Reply of the Government

It is submitted that Granting Officers (Superintendents/Passport Granting Officers) are Gazetted officers of CPO, having nearly 20 years' experience of passport work and it is felt that they are equipped to handle all sorts of cases. Most of the PSKs are headed by Asstt Passport Officers and their expertise is also available. However, in case of doubtful supporting documents or some other complexity, it becomes necessary to refer the case to the RPO which has a policy section and works under the Head of Passport Office. It would not be practicable to deploy 'policy sections' at each PSK as in many cases there

are more than one PSK under the concerned Passport Office due to shortage of manpower. The Ministry is cognizant of complaints of wrong doing and appropriate action is taken against errant officials. As desired by the Hon'ble Committee, a test check by the Ministry on the passport applications received during April– August, 2014 by the Passport Offices in Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Mumbai reveals that the PSKs under them cumulatively received 11,75,041 applications out of which 50,146 cases were escalated to the respective Passport Office. This comes to 4.3% which does not appear significant. It is also submitted that escalation of cases is part of normal bureaucratic procedure and due diligence and in Ministry's view, escalation helps in supervision and monitoring of work and affords learning experience to junior officials.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.14)

The Committee observe that as per the timeline fixed under the Passport Seva Project for issuance of passport (fresh or reissue) is 3 working days in case of 'no' or 'post police verification cases' and for the 'pre-verification cases', it is 3 working days plus the time taken for Police Verification and for passports under Tatkal Scheme, it is next working day excluding the day of submission. But as informed by the Ministry 68% of normal passports are dispatched within 7 days and 90% within 15 days, excluding time taken for police verification while in case of Tatkal Passport 73% are dispatched within three days and 96% within seven days. While analyzing the factors responsible for delay, the Committee observe that so far the Ministry of External Affairs has mentioned that delay in receiving Police Verification Report is one of the major factor for delays. The Committee observe that major factor responsible for delay in receipt of Police Verification Reports but other delays at PSK/RPO level also contributes significantly. The Committee, therefore, strongly desire that initiatives should be taken to minimize the time in forwarding the file as well as dispatch of passports. The Committee have a clear opinion that by streamlining the functioning of RPOs and developing better synergy between RPO and TCS, the Ministry may be able to reduce the time taken and proceed in the direction of achieving the desired target of service delivery.

Moreover, the Committee note that in DPHQ/SPHQ Model, PVRs are uploaded by the concerned police and thereafter, the hardcopy is sent to the RPO after a long period. The Committee, however, have observed that the process of passport printing is initiated at the RPO only after the receipt of physical copy of PVR. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Ministry should not wait for the physical copy and in order to expedite the process, passport printing should be initiated once PVR are uploaded by the Department of Police or are received online by the RPO.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry is always striving to reduce the time taken to issue passport and to attain the desired time line envisaged in Passport Seva objectives. The manpower shortage and infrastructural shortcomings continue to pose challenge in meeting the desired service levels. It is clarified, however, that passport printing is initiated after a clear Police Report is received electronically and the Granting Officer/PV Reviewer at the Passport Office gives go-ahead in the system. It is not necessary to receive the hard copy for initiating passport printing save in those cases where police verification is still in manual mode.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No. 15)

Since the onset of the Passport Seva Project, the Committee have taken a strong objection to closing of multiple channels of submission and have clearly expressed their opinion that existence of PSKs alone will lead to centralization of the system. In context of the passport system going online, the Committee have also often deliberated upon the existence of digital divide, lack of infrastructure and accessibility of hardware and online connectivity particularly in rural India. The Committee are also aware that there is an immediate need to assist/facilitate those applicants who are not accustomed to computers or not having regular access to computers in filing applications, uploading relevant documents, payment of fee as well as seeking appointments. In view of these practical considerations as well as availability of infrastructure and trained personnel and wide network, the Committee over the years have been strongly recommending the Ministry that the Speed Post Centres should be co-opted and reinvented to be used as channels for submission of forms online as well as for capturing of biometric data so that passport services are made accessible to those in distant areas as well as in rural hinterland.

Reply of the Government

It is submitted that the Ministry is actively pursuing the matter of co-opting services of Speed Post Centres (SPCs) and Head Post Offices (HPOs) to enable applicants, especially in the rural hinterland to apply for filing passport applications online. The necessary internal approvals have since been obtained and the Ministry has written to the Secretary, Department of Posts to confirm that requisite IT and non-IT infrastructure is in place to enable the applicants to file passport applications online, make payment online and obtain appointment. The Secretary, Deptt of Posts, in a meeting with the Ministry's officials, did not appear inclined to the Ministry's proposal, expressing manpower and infrastructural constraints. The Ministry, however, continues to pursue the matter. It would still be mandatory for applicants to appear in person at concerned PSKs to give

their photographs and biometrics and complete passport application submission procedure.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No. 17)

The Committee take note of the Ministry's initiative to redress the grievances of the applicants and welcome initiatives like organization of Passport Melas by various RPOs. The Committee were informed that during the year 2012, Passport Melas were conducted by 24 RPOs at 62 locations and 83 Passport Melas were conducted by 26 Passport Offices during the year 2013. The Committee note that such Passport Melas are random and are held only at few places. Moreover, the Committee observe that there is no clear cut policy for organizing Passport Melas, the Committee, therefore, recommend that Ministry should pronounce a policy basically giving a priority to the Passport Offices where citizens are facing the problem of very long appointment dates.

The Committee also desire that Ministry should ensure that all the passport applications collected during the Passport Melas particularly during the tranistory phase of Passport Seva Project are processed expidiously and are not kept pending because such practice defeats the very objectives behind organizing such Melas.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry has directed all the Passport Offices to keep organizing Passport Melas on weekends from time to time to address any appointment challenge due to seasonal variations or sudden spurt in demand.. During 1st January – 20th September, 2014, 164 Passport Melas were organized during the weekends across the country by various Passport Offices and 95,782 passport applications were accepted for processing. During May – June, 2014, Passport Seva Camps were organized Karimnagar at which 581 applications were accepted for processing. The applications collected during Melas and Passport Camps are not distinct from the ones accepted at PSKs during normal working days and these are processed in the same way as others. The Ministry has also drawn up a plan to organize Passport Seva Camps periodically at various places to take the passport services closer home.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No. 18)

The Committee observe that in the earlier system registered and reputed travel agents/agencies were recognized/authorized to assist in filling the form, depositing the form and fee on behalf of the applicants and for that they were taking a nominal charge prescribed by the RPOs. They were regulated by administrative orders and were also liable for any mistake or mischief done by them but in the new system their role has been

redefined treating them as middlemen. They are now free like other cybercafé owners to charge any amount from the applicants seeking their assistance in filing applications or getting appointments without any control of passport authorities. The Committee also observe that when Government is in search of multiple channels to facilitate the applicants on payment of nominal charge, the Ministry should relook at the role of these reputed agencies who may work as authorized centers on payment of nominal fee fixed by the authorities. The Committee do not find anything contrary to the philosophy of e-governance in legalizing these agencies for their limited regulated role to prevent the exploitation of applicants by anyone. Therefore, the Ministry should think to define the role of agents to facilitate the prospective applicants alongwith incorporating the SPC/DPC/citizen service centers in the passport network.

Reply of the Government

It is submitted that the travel agents, like any other individual or internet café operator or the CSCs co-opted recently as stated above, are free to access the Passport Portal to assist citizens in filing passport applications online, making payments and obtaining appointment. The Ministry no longer feels the need to recognize some agents across the country and allotting them log-in IDs, as was the practice earlier, as the Portal is web-based unlike the previous NIC system. The Government had taken a conscientious decision in November 2010 to make the new regulation universal and non-discriminatory so that an applicant may approach any travel agency, whether or not a member of IATA, TAAI or any other body of travel agents, to seek assistance for online registration/enquiry under the PSP. The Ministry's stand had been contested by travel agents in the Special Civil Application No. 917 & 919/2012 filed by Association of Recognised Passport Agents (ARPA) of Gujarat, in the Gujarat High Court, Ahmedabad, whereby the petitioners prayed for (i) restoration of *status quo ante* and continuance of submission of passport applications by travel agents, (ii) access to the new system through log-in, (iii) special counters for travel agents in the PSKs/RPO and (iv) stay on the implementation of PSP. **None of the prayers of ARPA was accepted by the Hon'ble High Court.** In a detailed judgment dated 15th March, 2012. Relevant extracts are reproduced below :--

" Para 20 : Neither Section 5 nor any other provision of the Act envisages any role on the part of the passport agent in the process of issuance of passport. ... There is no provision in the Act for allowing any agent appointed by individuals to deal with the passport office and on whom any rights have been conferred by any of the provisions of the Act.

21. In the backdrop of the aforesaid statutory position as well as from the facts and contentions noted hereinabove, it is apparent that the claim of the petitioners is not based on any statutory or contractual rights, but is based upon the doctrine of legitimate

expectation. The plea of legitimate expectation would be required to be considered in terms of the earlier policy and the impact of the change of the policy under the Passport Seva Project.

.....

29It is manifest that the earlier policy giving recognition to the members of the petitioner associations as recognized passport agents does not cause any obligation on the respondents to continue with the same system.....nor does it create any vested right in favour of the members of the petitioner associations to continue submitting applications on behalf of their clients under the earlier system.....

34. Reverting to the facts of the present case, the overriding reason of public policy is writ large on the face of the policy itself which is made in the public interest and in the interest of national security. Thus, where the state action is as a public policy or is in the public interest, unless the action taken amounts to an abuse of power, the concept of legitimate expectation would have no role to play.

.....

37..... the new policy /system has been introduced on the basis of the recommendation of an expert body after an in-depth study of the subject matter. The policy.....cannot be said to be capricious and not being informed by any reason whatsoever, nor can it be clearly held to be an arbitrary and founded on mere ipse dixit of the executive functionaries nor does the same offend other constitutional provisions or come into conflict with any statutory provisions. In the circumstances, there is no warrant for interference with the policy decision of the executive functionary of the State.

.....

39. In the light of the above discussion, this court is of the view that the petitioners are not entitled to any of the reliefs claimed in the petitions.As to whether or not the members of the petitioner associations can be integrated within the system can only be decided by the respondent no. 1.

40. Subject to the aforesaid, the petitions fail and are accordingly dismissed.The interim relief granted earlier shall stand vacated.”

In view of the foregoing, the Ministry is not inclined to create a class within a class of travel agents or to ‘legalise’ a few select ones by allotting login IDs or

application quotas as all travel agencies are equal in the field and no accreditation is required from the Passport Office or Ministry of External Affairs.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS/OBSERVATIONS IN RESPECT OF WHICH REPLIES OF GOVERNMENT ARE STILL AWAITED

(Recommendation No.2)

The Committee take a note of payment made to each agency on the basis of per passport and find that charges paid to TCS for conducting front-end activity in regard to issue of new passport range from Rs. 171.87 to Rs.199.00 while for miscellaneous services, it ranges from Rs. 77.61 to Rs. 103.23 and Rs. 100.00 per passport application was paid to India Post for accepting and forwarding the application to the concerned RPO. The Committee further observe that the payment made to Department of Police for Police Verification (PV) is only Rs.100.00 in cases where it is received within 21 days, while it is only Rs. 25 .00, if Police Verification Report (PVR) is received after 21 days. The Committee are of the opinion that in view of the tedious nature of the job and the time taken by the police officials in actually visiting residences of applicants, verifying documents and also visiting references in case it is required and involvement of CID in carrying out verification in certain case, the Ministry should enhance the rates paid to police for carrying out verification.

The Committee also note that in the new system under the Passport Seva Project, the DPHQ/SPHQ are expected to be e-connected but several States are still following manual process of sending police verification reports which usually take more than 21 days for which police is paid Rs. 25 only for each PVR. The time taken in some States/Union Territories like Andhra Pradesh and Delhi is very less. The Ministry should treat that as model and implement it in all the States so that the time taken for police verification is reduced to minimum days.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry would like to inform Hon'ble Committee that the reimbursement to Police for verification of personal particulars and antecedents of applicants is being increased from Rs.100/- to Rs.150/- per passport application provided that states/UTs implement DPHQ model and the verification report is received within 21 days of making reference to Police. In case the verification report is received after 21 days, the reimbursement would be restricted to Rs.50/-. This has been done to encourage state police to implement DPHQ model and to complete verification process in a time-bound manner without delay. The matter of delay in police verification was raised by Foreign Secretary in a meeting of Chief Secretaries of State / UT Govts. on 13th March, 2014. A Presentation on Police Verification (PV) had also been made by the Ministry before the Chief Secretaries. Subsequently, a handout containing suggestions/proposals to State/UT Govts. for speeding up verification and emphasizing the need for setting

up the preferred DPHQ model, is being finalised. It is reiterated that setting up IT infrastructure for Police Verification Reports (PVRs) is the responsibility of the States/UT Govts. and the Ministry can only impress upon them to do so with a view to improving governance in the country. As of now, 475 districts have adopted the DPHQ model. The Ministry has also prepared a detailed draft 'Manual on Police Verification for Passports' for dissemination to State/UT Govts. to introduce uniform and speedy procedures and practices.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.4)

1.42 The Committee over the years have been expressing their concern over non-availability of PSKs in the North-Eastern States during the Phase I of the Project. Considering the genuine requirement of satisfying the needs of these States, the Ministry has come up with the proposal for establishment of Passport Seva Laghu Kendras and have been assuring the Committee over early execution of the proposals of PSLKs in the capitals of these States. The Committee, however, note that the Ministry had assured the Committee to establish Mini-PSK/PSLK in Aizwal by December 2010 and Mini-PSKs in other North Eastern States by end of December 2011. But the Committee find that only one PSLK has started functioning in Aizwal since July 2012 and projects at other places are in various stages of inception and execution. The Committee are dismayed to note that even after a continuous persuasion by the Committee through their Reports and on the spot visits, the Ministry has not been able to do much in establishing the PSLKs in the North-Eastern States and they have not even finalized or located/identified sites at Agartala, Imphal, Itanagar and Kohima. In view of the urgent need of the people of North Eastern States, the Committee strongly criticize such casual approach of the Ministry and desire that immediate steps should be taken to expedite the work related to the establishment of PSLKs in North-Eastern States and complete them in the shortest possible time in association with respective State Governments .

Reply of the Government

As mentioned in ATR 3 , sub-para (i) , the position regarding PSLKs in North-east states, the position is as follows:

- a. Passport services are being rendered in **Aizawl** since July 2012 through Passport Application Collection Centre (PACC). The IT infrastructure of PACC would be upgraded to PSLK as soon as financial concurrence for setting up IT infrastructure is received.

- b. The civil and electrical works undertaken by Meghalaya State PWD for PSLK **Shillong** have been completed. It is likely to be launched by mid-October, 2014. On trial basis, applications are already being accepted.
- c. The site for PSLK **Gangtok** has been finalized and financial concurrence has been received for civil and electrical works to be carried out by the Sikkim PWD. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
- d. Lease Deed for the PSLK **Agartala** is under finalisation after which civil and electrical works would be carried out and IT infrastructure installed. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
- e. A site has been identified in **Imphal** and lease deed is being finalized with Manipur Govt. Expected to be made operational during 2014-15.
- f. A site has been identified in **Itanagar** and lease deed is under discussion with the State Govt. Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.
- g. Following a proposal from the former Chief Minister of Manipur that the PSLK may be set up in **Dimapur** instead of **Kohima** as Dimapur has better connectivity and many State Govt offices are located there, the matter was taken up with the State Govt. by the Ministry. **The State Govt has conveyed that the PSLK may be set up in Dimapur.** Likely to be operationalised during 2014-15.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No. 5)

The Committee observe that the decision of opening of PSLKs was taken up by the Ministry at later stage and these are not covered under the provisions of Passport Seva Project. The full responsibility for their setting up rests with the Ministry which is required to provide full financial, manpower, infrastructural and technical support. It is more surprising to note that the work related to establishment of all the proposed PSLKs were to be completed in June, 2012, but due to multiplicity of factors, the work relating to PSLKs is very slow and has been delayed. The Committee also note that although Ministry feels that there is need of new revenue model of PSLKs even then, the Ministry has not taken any initiative to develop any such system till date and there are delays in implementation of these projects. The Ministry of External Affairs has also not approached the Ministry of Finance to obtain funds for these PSLKs. More surprisingly, they do not have any such intention because recently they have curtailed the issue of obtaining indication about revenue model from the purview of NISG study. The Committee, therefore, recommend that Ministry of External Affairs should prepare the desired revenue model on priority basis for the proposed 16 PSLKs and other PSLKs likely to be established in future and obtain the funds for preparing proposals for Cabinet so that these projects are not delayed more.

Reply of the Government

The NISG has suggested a revenue model for additional PSKs/PSLKs which are beyond the scope of PSP. The PSP envisaged setting up on PPP basis 77 PSKs by the Service Provider, which were to deal with passport applications from all the regions in India covered by 37 Passport Offices. The Ministry has, therefore, to find a way so that while setting up additional PSKs, it is not faced with a legal challenge by the Service Provider. The matter is under discussion with the Service Provider.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.6)

The Committee note that there is a provision for holding regular tripartite meeting between officers of Passport Office, Department of Police and Postal Department at local level. The Committee, however, observe that there is lack of any such mechanism at the central level. The Committee understand that most of the issues pertaining to the passport services have to be dealt at the level of state government as well as locally, yet there are many issues which require involvement/coordination of the concerned Ministries of the Government of India particularly to maintain a uniformity in the system in all the States. The Committee are of the view that during such deliberations a holistic view of the matter related to passport may be taken and issues may be discussed at length as well as in-depth so as to reduce the procedural hurdles and difficulties in the system arising out of non-communication/non-timely communication between various concerned Ministries/Departments to make the system more pragmatic and practical. The Committee, therefore, desire that Ministry of External Affairs should establish a coordination mechanism at Central level involving Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Communication with a view to share the views and maintain uniformity in the procedure of Police Verification and delivery of passport to the citizens.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry keeps in regular touch with the Ministry of Home Affairs for security dimensions of passport issuance process and Deptt. of IT for the implementation of the e-governance project. Since policing is a State subject, the Ministry has to work with different State Governments for police verification process. A meeting of the Chief Secretaries of State/UT Governments was also taken on 13th March 2014 by Foreign Secretary which dealt with this issue amongst others. As desired by Hon'ble Committee, a coordination mechanism has been set up at Central level for maintaining uniformity in the procedure for police verification for speedy delivery of passport services.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.12)

The Committee observe that smooth and efficient Police Verification is the key to successful implementation of the Passport Seva Project (PSP). Under PSP, there is a provision to electronically receive and update the Police Verification Reports. The matter has been taken up by the Foreign Secretary with Chief Secretaries of State/Union Territory Governments and during interaction of CPV Division Officials with DGPs/Police Commissioners. But the pace of establishment of electronic connectivity with State Police Headquarters and District Police Headquarter is very slow and that is why in most of the States there is no success in reducing the period for receiving the PVR. Moreover, the Committee have come across instances where they have found that different procedures and levels are being followed in process of Police Verification in different States which is perhaps one of the reasons for delays in obtaining PVRs. The Committee have been continuously asking the Ministry to make sincere efforts to shift to District Police Headquarters (DPHQs)/State Police Headquarters (SPHQs) Model and in all the States to ensure uniformity in approach and process across the country. The Committee, therefore, would like that the issue of establishing e-connectivity with the respective State Governments and other issues related to Police Verification should be taken up in coordination with Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India. The Committee would also suggest that Ministry should come up with the model procedure for police verification by circulating a draft to all States to seek their opinion/suggestion on the procedures to be followed and amendments to be made in the Police Verification process to make it more pragmatic. Ministry of External Affairs should ensure that the Model procedure for Police Verification is followed by all the States/Union Territories.

Further, in view of the technological changes and changing nature and profile of crime and including crimes by juveniles, the Committee are of the view that efforts should also be made to connect the Passport Seva Project with Crime and Criminal Tracking System (CCTNS) network, which is being implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Reply of the Government

It is submitted once again that it is for the State/UT govts to take policy decision for improving police verification process and invest in necessary infrastructure to shift to DPHQ/SPHQ model. The Ministry has been exhorting the State/UT Govts to speed up the requisite processes in this regard. Till 31st August, 2014, out of 724 police districts in the country, 480 districts have adopted DPHq model. In the Chief Secretaries Conference held in New Delhi on 13th March, 2014, Foreign Secretary had emphasized on the need to adopt DPHQ model. A Presentation on Police Verification was also made by JS(PSP) & CPO at the Conference. A 'Draft Standard Operating Procedure

for Conducting Police Verification’ was circulated amongst the Chief Secretaries so that they could consult the respective Home Secretaries and Directors General of Police and implement the suggested measures. As regards integration with CCTNS being implemented by MHA, it is submitted that Passport Seva System is connectivity-ready but the CCTNS itself is still not complete and MHA is unable to have connectivity. The CCTNS being a centralised database, cannot be integrated with Passport Seva till it is fully and finally implemented. The Ministry has been impressing upon the MHA to provide the said connectivity at the earliest.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No.13)

During the course of examination, the Committee have come across many issues relating to Police Verifications Forms. For example the forms are auto-generated and there is no option for comments/remarks so as to qualify the reasons and once a 'no' is recorded in the form a rejected Police Verification Report is generated. Similarly, there is a column pertaining to ongoing police case on the applicant but there is no column for making remarks or qualify it, wherein there is a need to make segregation on the basis of small and petty crimes or heinous crimes or to mention 'no objection for granting of passport by Police'. Moreover, there is no column in the Form regarding mobile number of the applicant on which police could inform the applicant about the time and date for verification. The Committee, therefore, have a view that such important lacuna/shortcomings in the Form should be discussed with the police authorities and Forms should be appropriately modified.

Reply of the Government

It is submitted that the particulars of applicants that are auto-generated by the System for police verification, include mobile number of applicants including those of the ‘references’ mentioned in the Passport Application Form. The Police Verification Form is also being modified and the methodology to answer the queries therein have been amplified in the ‘Draft Standard Operating Procedure for Conducting Police Verification’ besides the detailed ‘Manual on Police Verification for Passports’ which is being worked upon taking into account the concerns of the Committee.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

(Recommendation No. 22)

The Committee are informed that Indian Missions/Posts are still working under the old application system maintained by NIC and the data is migrated into PSP system as part of Central Database (PRIDE). The Committee note that the Ministry has prepared a blueprint for establishing a unified globalized view of the entire passport issuance system, however, the Committee observe that in spite of launching the Project, so far no

view was taken on the issue of integration of Indian Missions/Posts in the Passport Seva Portal/Project. As a result, in the Missions/Posts, the application forms are still being filled in order to renew the passport and any information required in connection with issuance of passports take too much time, for example the Committee have noted that seven adalats were held in Jalandhar wherein 8350 applications or complaints were received and most of the cases were pending due to non-receipt of reply from Missions/Posts. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Passport Seva Project should be linked with the Indian Missions/Posts at the earliest so that data is available on real-time basis and also to reduce the delay owing to awaiting information from Missions/Posts abroad in case of applicants whose earlier passports were issued/reissued by Indian Missions/Posts abroad. Further, the Committee are of the view that availability of data on real time basis would also facilitate in case of reissue of Passport/rendering of miscellaneous services in case the applicant who has already been issued his /her passport from Indian Mission abroad and has further requirement for reissue his/her Indian passport in any other country.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry would like to inform Hon'ble Committee that a team led by Joint Secretary(PSP) & Chief Passport Officer / Director (PV & PSP) and comprising representatives of NIC and Service Provider has visited the Missions in Paris, Tashkent and Dubai to study the technical and logistical challenges involved in integration of Missions/Posts abroad with Passport Seva. The techno-commercial proposal in this regard is under preparation and the integration is likely to be attained by the end of this financial year.

(File No. CPV/PMU/125/67/2013)

NEW DELHI
28th November, 2014
7 Agrahayana, 1936 (Saka)

DR. SHASHI THAROOR,
Chairperson,
Standing Committee on External Affairs.

**MINUTES OF THE SIXTH SITTING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2014-15) HELD ON 25th NOVEMBER, 2014**

The Committee sat on Tuesday, 25th November, 2014 from 1500 hrs. to 1610 hrs. in Committee Room 'C', Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

PRESENT

Dr. Shashi Tharoor – Chairperson

Members

Lok Sabha

2. Prof. (Dr.) Sugata Bose
3. Shri Arka Keshari Deo
4. Shrimati Rakshatai Khadse
5. Shri Raghav Lakhanpal
6. Shri A. Anwhar Raajhaa
7. Shri Magantti V. Rao (Babu)
8. Md. Salim
9. Dr. Mamta Sanghamita
10. P.R. Senthilnathan
11. Shri Sharad Tripathi
12. Shri Shivkumar Udasi

Rajya Sabha

13. Shri Shri H.K. Dua
14. Shri Chunibhai Kanjibhai Gohel
15. Shrimati Kanimozhi
16. Shri Ram Kumar Kashyap
17. Dr. Karan Singh
18. Shri Pavan Kumar Varma

Secretariat

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------|---|---------------------|
| 1. | Shri Cyril John | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. | Dr. Ram Raj Rai | - | Director |
| 3. | Smt. Rita Jailkhani | - | Additional Director |

2. At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the Members to the sitting of the Committee.

3. Thereafter, the Chairperson informed the Committee about sad demise of Shri Murli Deora, MP, Rajya Sabha and Member of the Committee and adopted Condolence Resolution followed by silence.

4. XXXX XXXXX XXXXX

5. The Committee then took up for consideration the draft Report on action taken by the Government on the recommendations/observations contained in the Twenty Fifth Report (15th Lok Sabha) on the subject 'Passport Seva Project – Targets and Achievements'. The Chairperson invited the Members to offer their suggestions, if any, for incorporation in the draft Report. The Members suggested some minor modifications. The Committee adopted the draft Report with minor modification.

6. The Committee then authorized the Chairperson to finalize the Reports incorporating the suggestions made by the Members and present the same to the Parliament.

The Committee then adjourned.

(Vide Para 4 of Introduction of Report)

**ANALYSIS OF ACTION TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT ON THE
RECOMMENDATIONS/OBSERVATIONS CONTAINED IN
THE TWNETY FIFTH REPORT (FIFTEENTH LOK SABHA) OF
THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

(i) Total Number of Recommendations 23

(i) Recommendations/Observations, which have been accepted by the Government.

Recommendation Nos. 3,7,8,11,16,19,20,21 and 23.

Total-09

Percentage: 39.13%

(iii) Recommendations/Observations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the Government replies.

Recommendation Nos. NIL.

Total-00

Percentage: 00.00%

(iv) Recommendations/Observations in respect of which replies of Government have not been accepted by the Committee and require reiteration.

Recommendation Nos. 1,9,10,14,15,17 and 18.

Total- 07

Percentage: 30.43%

(v) Recommendations/Observations in respect of which final replies of Government are still awaited.

Recommendation Nos. 2,4,5,6,12,13 and 22.

Total-07

Percentage: 30.43%