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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOOD, CONSUMER AFFAIRS
AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (2020-2021)**

SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA

**MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD
AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION
(DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS)**

{Action Taken by the Government on the observations/ recommendations contained in the Fourth Report of the Committee (2019-2020) on Demands for Grants (2020-21) pertaining to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (Department of Consumer Affairs)}

EIGHTH REPORT



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

February, 2021/ Magha, 1942 (Saka)

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(DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS)**

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Presented to Lok Sabha on 10.02.2021

Laid in Rajya Sabha on 10.02.2021



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

February, 2021/ Magha, 1942 (Saka)

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Composition of the Standing Committee on Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution (2020-2021):-

Shri Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Chairperson

Lok Sabha

2. Dr. Farooq Abdullah
3. Shri Karadi Sanganna Amarappa
4. Shri Girish Bhalchandra Bapat
5. Shri G. S. Basavaraj
6. Shri Shafiqur Rahman Barq
7. Ms. Pratima Bhoumik
8. Shri Anil Firojiya
9. Shri Rajendra Dhedya Gavit
10. Shri Bhagwant Mann
11. Shri Khagen Murmu
12. Shri Mitesh Rameshbhai (Bakabhai) Patel
13. Shri Subrat Pathak
14. Dr. Sanjeev Kumar Singari
15. Smt. Himadri Singh
16. Smt. Kavita Singh
17. Shri Ganesan Selvam
18. Shri Ajay Misra Teni
19. Shri Saptagiri Ulaka
20. Shri Rajmohan Unnithan
21. Shri Ve. Vaithilingam

Rajya Sabha

22. Smt. Shanta Chhetri
23. Shri Satish Chandra Dubey
24. Smt. Roopa Ganguly
25. Shri K. G. Kenye
26. Dr. Fauzia Khan
27. Smt. M. C. Mary Kom
28. Shri Rajmani Patel
29. Shri Sakaldeep Rajbhar
30. Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss
31. Vacant

LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. Shri Pawan Kumar | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. Shri Lovekesh Kumar Sharma | - | Director |
| 3. Shri G. Guite | - | Deputy Secretary |
| 4. Shri Dong Lianthang Tonsing | - | Under Secretary |
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INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution (2020-2021) having been authorized by the Committee to submit the Report on their behalf, present this 8th Report on Action Taken by the Government on the Observations/Recommendations contained in the Fourth Report of the Committee (2019-2020) on Demands for Grants (2020-21) of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (Department of Consumer Affairs).

2. The Fourth Report was presented to Lok Sabha and laid in Rajya Sabha on 13th March, 2020. The Government has furnished replies indicating Action Taken on the recommendations contained in the Report on 19th June, 2020.

3. The Report was considered and adopted by the Committee at their sitting held on 16.12.2020.

4. An analysis of the action taken by the Government on Observations/Recommendations contained in the Report is given in **Appendix II**.

5. For facility of reference and convenience, the Observations/Comments of the Committee have been printed in thick type in the text of the Report.

NEW DELHI;
16 December, 2020
25 Agrahayana, 1942 (Saka)

SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY
Chairperson,
Standing Committee on Food,
Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution

REPORT

CHAPTER - I

This Report of the Standing Committee on Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution deals with the action taken by the Government on the Observations/Recommendations contained in the Fourth Report of the Committee (2019-2020), (17th Lok Sabha) on Demands for Grants (2020-21), pertaining to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (Department of Consumer Affairs).

1.2 The Fourth Report was presented to Lok Sabha and laid on the Table in Rajya Sabha on 13th March, 2020. It contained 20 observations/recommendations. Action taken replies in respect of all the 20 observations/recommendations contained in the Report have been received and these have been categorized as follows:-

- (i) Recommendations/Observations which have been accepted by Government :

Para Nos.: 1.10, 2.10, 2.11, 2.17, 2.25, 2.32, 2.42, 2.43, 2.55, 2.56, 2.68, 2.69, 2.70, 2.76, 2.87, 2.97, 2.98 and 2.109.

- (ii) Recommendations/Observations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of Government' replies :

Para Nos.: 2.24.

- (iii) Recommendations/Observations in respect of which replies of Government have not been accepted by the Committee :

Para No.: Nil

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

Para No. : 2.26.

1.3 The Committee desire that action taken notes on the Observations/Recommendations contained in Chapter I and final reply in respect of recommendation for which only interim reply has been given by the Government, should be furnished to the Committee expeditiously.

1.4 The Committee further emphasize that utmost importance should be given to the implementation of Observations/Recommendations accepted by the Government. In case where it is not possible for the Government to implement the recommendations in letter and spirit for any reason, the matter should be reported to the Committee in time with reasons for non-implementation.

1.5 The Committee will now deal with action taken by the Government on some of the observations/recommendations.

A. Budget Utilization

Recommendation No. 1 (Para No 1.10)

1.6 The Committee in their Original Report observed/recommended as follows:-

“The Committee note that Budget Estimates (BE), Revised Estimates (RE) and Actual Expenditure (AE) during the year 2019-20 were Rs. 229182 lakh, Rs.206950 lakh and Rs.17397 lakh respectively, which means that only 8.4 per cent of the Revised Estimates was actually spent. While the spending pattern of the non-Scheme funds as proportion to RE was 70.55% of the RE, the actual expenditure of Scheme fund as proportion to the RE is 4.12%. The Committee are also concerned to note the lack of uniformity of spending pattern across the schemes/heads. For example, during the year 2019-20, 73% of RE for Consumer Protection (CP) and 72.8% of RE for Consumer Awareness & Publicity have actually been spent. Similarly, there are poor

spendings in Weights & Measures (W&M) and National Test House (NTH) which are 59.3% and of 56.3% of RE respectively. The Ministry have stated that the prevailing and anticipated market scenario being dynamic has been responsible for “non-uniform spending pattern”. Also stoppage of campaign through the Doordarshan (DD), All India Radio (AIR), Bureau of Outreach and Communication (BOC), etc, due to non approval of creatives by AD, Approval Cell, non-completion of work by Central Public Works Department (CPWD) and non-finalisation of the specification and floating of indent/tender for procurement of timing instruments for Time Dissemination Project by National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi (NPL) are stated to be other reasons for the poor expenditure of funds. It is obvious that the nil spending in Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) which constitutes 93.3% of the total fund in the RE (Scheme) has dented the overall spending position. However, even after leaving aside the PSF head, the actual expenditure in proportion to the RE is still as low as 68.96%. The reasons given by the Ministry for poor spending of funds such as non-completion of work by CPWD, non-finalisation of tender for procurement of timing instruments by the NPL, stoppage of campaign through DD, AIR, BOC, etc, are not convincing. The Committee opine that with a closer monitoring, the expenditure rate could have been higher. The Committee desire that the Government should make efforts to identify the problems associated with agencies such as DD, AIR, BOC and the Approval Cell, CPWD and NPL through whom the projects/schemes are executed and plug the loopholes to ensure better fund utilization by the Government.”

1.7 The Ministry in its action taken reply has stated as under:-

(Publicity)The Department is committed to increase consumer awareness through its publicity initiatives and take steps to optimally utilize the funds allocated. It will therefore try to identify the problems associated in utilizing funds through agencies such as DD, AIR, BOC and the Ad Approval Cell.

(Legal Metrology)

CPWD Work: All necessary steps will be taken to ensure that the major construction projects of laboratories buildings are completed at the earliest possible time. The construction work of Regional Reference Standards Laboratory (RRSL) at Varanasi has been started by CPWD, Varanasi. At Nagpur, the land for the construction of

RRSL has been procured from Government of Maharashtra. The Town & Planning Department of Government of Maharashtra has completed the formalities of transfer the land in the name of this Department for the construction of RRSL, Nagpur. The construction of boundary wall is getting to be completed by CPWD, Nagpur. The construction at Nagpur will start shortly after finalising the drawings and estimates of RRSL, Nagpur by CPWD. The civil work of hi-tech laboratory at RRSL, Bengaluru is almost completed and electrical work is going on. During the previous financial year 2019-20 the funds were authorised to CPWD which could not be utilised and therefore, funds are being authorised to CPWD during 2020-21 to complete the work during this Financial Year.

Establishment of Time Dissemination infrastructure with NPL & ISRO:

On the request of Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), the Department of Consumer Affairs has decided to disseminate the Indian Standard Time through five Regional Reference Standards Laboratories of Legal Metrology located at Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Faridabad and Guwahati with the cooperation of National Physical Laboratory (NPL) and a budget provision of Rs. 100 crores was made. An MoU with CSIR- NPL for executing the project for setting up of atomic clocks for dissemination of Indian Standard Time was signed on 28.12.2018. Under the MoU, the hardware and software for setting up the time ensembles will be procured by NPL which shall also be responsible for installation and commissioning of the same including training on equipment operation to the LM personnel. NPL will handhold LM and shall provide requisite technical support. The MoU also envisages setting up of a Disaster Recovery Centre (DRC) at RRSL, Bengaluru. The operational laboratory space and technical manpower would be provided by the RRSLs and the project would be funded by this Department. The 6th Meeting of the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) was held on Tuesday, the 20th of August, 2019 under the chairmanship of Prof. K. Vijayaraghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor (PSA) to the Government of India, wherein this Department was invited to participate on an agenda item National Time Distribution Network. The said meeting was also attended by NPL and ISRO. The second meeting with PSA was held on 09.12.2019, wherein PSA suggested that ISRO technology should be incorporated by NPL while adhering to the time lines given earlier by NPL. The third meeting with PSA was held on 03.01.2020, wherein it was

decided that NPL jointly with ISRO will review and finalize the timing equipment/ hardware specifications and thereafter NPL will procure the timing equipment as per such specifications. ISRO will integrate the indigenous software with the time ensembles to be procured and installed by NPL and NPL will handhold LM for time dissemination to the end users. As per the directions given by PSA the specifications are being finalized by NPL in coordination with ISRO and the process of procurement of timing equipments will be initiated shortly. The allocated funds will be utilised within the financial year, 2020-21 productively.

(National Test House)

Under the head of Machinery and Equipment (M&E) a fund of Rs 1.29 crore could not be utilized within timeframe due to the following reasons:

1) Rs 54 Lakhs for the equipment GCMS:

June 2019: LC was opened and the firm could not supply the equipment and hence in November 2019 revised LC opened. Central Bank of India committed several mistakes while revising of LC and its amendments for which different letters were issued to the Central Bank of India on many occasions for incorporating the necessary corrections. Again amended AT was issued for change of place of inspection as requested by the supplier firm due to COVID 19. Final inspection held on 18.3.2020 and report received on 20.03.2020. After that due to COVID 19 outbreak the consignment could not be dispatched from Germany.

2) Rs 68 Lakhs for the equipment Ion Chromatograph:

LC opened for 03 Ion Chromatograph during May 2019.

M/s Methrom, Switzerland the supplier informed in July 2020 that out of 3 LC, 1 could not be recognized. Validity of LC was expired on 31.08.2019 and hence revised LC was issued in October 2019. Inspection work order placed during November 2019 based on tender process. Inspection was held and the report received on 26.02.2020. Consignment was picked up by the freight forwarder in March 2020. The consignment arrived at Chennai and Delhi Airport on 21.03.2020 and 22.03.2020 respectively. After that due to COVID 19 outbreak started and communication could not be continued with the bank for which the payment could not be released.

3) Rs 1.73 Crore was authorized to CPWD(WZ) under head Major Works- Land and Building for completing the remaining portion of the project. The unitization certificate for the Major portion of the fund allocated was not submitted by CPWD leading to underutilization of the fund due to COVID 19 outbreak started.”

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

1.8 The Committee had recommended in their Original Report that the Government should make efforts to identify the problems associated with agencies such as Doordarshan (DD), All India Radio (AIR), Bureau of Outreach and Communication (BOC), Ad Approval Cell, Central Public Works Department (CPWD) and National Physical Laboratory (NPL) through whom the projects/schemes of the Department of Consumer Affairs are executed and plug the loopholes to ensure better fund utilization by the Government. In reply, the Department has stated that it is committed to increase consumer awareness through its publicity initiatives and takes steps to optimally utilize the funds allocated and will try to identify the problems associated in utilizing funds through agencies such as DD, AIR, BOC and Ad Approval Cell.

Regarding Legal Metrology under which 59.3% of RE was spent during the year 2019-20, the Department has informed that all necessary steps will be taken to ensure that the major construction projects of laboratories buildings are completed at the earliest possible time, and the construction work of Regional Reference Standards Laboratory (RRSL) at Varanasi has been started by CPWD, Varanasi. The Department has also stated that at Nagpur, the land for the construction of RRSL has been procured from the Government of Maharashtra.

It has further informed that the Town & Planning Department of Government of Maharashtra has completed the formalities of transfer the land in the name of Consumer Affairs Department of the Union Government for the construction of RRSL, Nagpur and that the construction of boundary wall is getting to be completed by CPWD, Nagpur. The Department has also stated that the construction at Nagpur will start shortly after finalising the drawings and estimates of RRSL, Nagpur by CPWD. The Committee hope that those projects are completed expeditiously. The Department has also informed about the civil work of hi-tech laboratory at RRSL, Bengaluru being almost complete and electrical work being undertaken. It is also stated that during the previous financial year 2019-20, the funds were authorised to CPWD which could not be utilised and as a result of which funds are being authorised to CPWD during 2020-21 to complete the work during the Financial Year 2020-21. The Committee desire that as far as possible, funds allocated for one financial year should be utilised during that year itself.

Regarding Establishment of Time Dissemination infrastructure with National Physical Laboratory (NPL) and Indian Space Research Organisation, the Committee has been informed that on the request of Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), the Department of Consumer Affairs had decided to disseminate the Indian Standard Time through five Regional Reference Standards Laboratories of Legal Metrology located at Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Faridabad and Guwahati with the cooperation of NPL for which a budget provision of Rs. 100 crore was made. An MoU with CSIR- NPL for executing the project for setting up of atomic clocks for dissemination of

Indian Standard Time was signed on 28.12.2018. Under the MoU, the hardware and software required for setting up the time ensembles will be procured by NPL which shall also be responsible for installation and commissioning of the same including training on equipment operation to LM personnel and that NPL will handhold LM and shall provide requisite technical support. The Committee have been informed that the MoU also envisages setting up of a Disaster Recovery Centre (DRC) at RRSL, Bengaluru and that the operational laboratory space and technical manpower would be provided by RRSLs and the project would be funded by the Department of Consumer Affairs. In this connection, the Department has stated that it had been invited to participate on an agenda item viz, National Time Distribution Network, during the 6th Meeting of the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC), held on Tuesday, the 20th August, 2019 under the chairmanship of Prof. K. Vijayaraghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor (PSA) to the Government of India, which was also attended by NPL and ISRO. The Department has also stated that during the second meeting held on 09.12.2019, PSA suggested that ISRO technology should be incorporated by NPL while adhering to the time lines given earlier by NPL. The Department has further stated that the third meeting was held on 03.01.2020, wherein it was decided that NPL jointly with ISRO will review and finalize the timing equipment/ hardware specifications and thereafter NPL will procure the timing equipment as per such specifications. ISRO will integrate the indigenous software with the time ensembles to be procured and installed by NPL which will handhold LM for time dissemination to the end users. As per the directions given by PSA the specifications are being finalized by NPL in coordination with ISRO and the process of procurement of timing equipments

will be initiated shortly. The Department has assured the Committee that the allocated funds will be utilised within the financial year, 2020-21 productively. The Committee hope that the project will be completed in time. As regards National Test House (NTH) where 56.3% of the Revised Estimates for the Financial Year 2019-20 was spent, the Department has stated that under the head of Machinery and Equipment Rs. 54 Lakh for GCMS (Gas Chromatography Mass Spectrometry) and Rs. 68 Lakh for and Ion Chromatograph and major portion of Rs. 1.73 crore under the head of Major Works – Land and Building, could not be utilized within the timeframe due to various reasons such as COVID-19 outbreak, mistakes committed by Central Bank of India and non submission of utilization certificates by CPWD. The Committee are not convinced with the reply of the Government on the reasons for poor performance with regard to the projects in NTH. The Financial Year 2019-20 started much earlier than when the threat of COVID-19 loomed in the country. The concrete and meticulous planning and monitoring by the Department at the right stage could have helped avert the undesirable results/position. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Department of Consumer Affairs get the projects completed without any further loss of time. The Department should leave no stone unturned to ensure that in future the funds allocated are productively utilised in time.

B. Need to Notify Rules on Consumer Protection Act, 2019

Recommendation No. 2 (Para No 2.10)

1.9 The Committee in their Original Report observed/recommended as follows:-

“The Committee observe that the Department of Consumer Affairs administers Consumer Protection Act, 1986. Budget allocation for the year 2020-21 under this head for various schemes/projects which are being implemented, such as Strengthening of Consumer Fora, Computerization and Computer Networking of Consumer Fora (CONFONET), Consumer Protection Cell and Integrated Consumer Grievances Redressal System (ICGRS) is Rs.4900 lakh. The Government have also drafted 8 rules under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, which will replace the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. Out of the 8 rules, 3 have been finalized and sent to Legislative Department for vetting. Rest of the rules are under finalization and will be sent to the Legislative Department for vetting. The Committee are of the view that Consumer Protection is a very important component of the Department of Consumer Affairs and the strengthening of various consumer fora/Commissions, computerization and helplines under this Scheme are essential for achieving the objectives/desired results envisaged under Consumer Protection Act, 1986. The Committee, therefore, recommend that Department should take steps so as to gear up the administrative, legal and technological mechanisms to meet the challenges that may come up when the rules of Consumer Protection Act, 2019 are ready and the new Act put into operation.”

1.10 The Ministry in its action taken reply has stated as under:-

“This has been noted.”

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

1.11 In their original Report, the Committee had recommended that the Department should take steps so as to gear up the administrative, legal and technological mechanisms to meet the challenges that may come up when the rules of Consumer Protection Act, 2019 are ready and the new Act put into operation. The Department of Consumer Affairs has stated in its reply that

observations of the Committee have been noted. The Committee are not satisfied with the casual attitude of the Government. In an atmosphere dominated by app based trade with no sufficient safeguards, the introduction and passage of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 was like a stitch in time to usher in a new era of consumer justice with safety from vices like defective goods and services, misleading advertisements, etc. While reiterating their earlier recommendation, the Committee express their desire that even at late stage the Department would fulfill all the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 without any further loss of time.

C. Need to Activate Consumer Protection Councils

Recommendation No. 3 (Para No. 2.11)

1.12 The Committee in their Original Report observed/recommended as under:-

“The Committee note with concern the fact that the Consumer Protection Councils at the district, State and national levels remain inactive and defunct many a time. The performance of the Councils as per the mandate would have brought about positive changes in the sphere of consumer rights in the country. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Government should activate and ensure that the Consumer Protection Councils at the District and State levels function as per their mandate. They would also desire to be apprised of corrective steps taken by the Government in this regard within three months of the presentation of this report.”

1.13 The Ministry in its action taken reply has stated as under:-

"As per the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, the State/UT Governments are to establish the State Consumer Protection Councils (SCPC) and the District Consumer Protection Councils (DCPC). The Central Government has been writing to the States/UTs from time to time to constitute such Councils and furnish report about their meetings."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

1.14 The Committee had in their original report, recommended that the Government should activate and ensure that the Consumer Protection Councils (CPCs) at the Districts and State levels function as per their mandate. The Department has in the Action Taken Reply, stated that the Central Government has been writing to the States/UTs from time to time to constitute such Councils and furnish report about their meetings. But the reply is silent on the further action taken by the Union Government on the response thereto. The Committee, therefore, reiterate that such Councils/bodies be activated for the welfare of consumers at the earliest.

D. Need to Liberalise Expenditure in Favour of State Consumer Helplines

Recommendation No. 6 (Para No. 2.25)

1.15 The Committee in their Original report observed/recommended as follows:-

"The Committee are also happy to note that the Helpline/Integrated Consumer Grievances Redressal System has partnered with 620 convergence companies and pre-litigation settlement have been made in case of 94.58% of the grievances registered in 2018-19 and 91.92% of the grievances registered between April to December, 2019. It may be noted here that out of the total cases coming in the Consumer Fora/Commissions percentage of cases disposed of fell from 82.50% in 2017 to 80.17% in 2018 to 73.78% in 2019 and further to 70.42% in 2020. The Committee recommend that the Government should make all out efforts to get as many consumer disputes as possible, filtered through the helplines established at the Centre, Zone and State levels by spreading awareness about the existence of such helplines through the JagoGrahakJago campaigns, the Bureau of Outreach and Communication (BOC), etc. The Committee believe that settlement of cases through

the Helpline has a good potential to bring about justice to consumer, and they, therefore, recommend that the Department should be mobilizing funds in favour of helplines by liberalizing their expenditure within the permissible financial rules."

1.16 The Ministry in its action taken reply has stated:-

" Funds are released from the ICGRS Scheme for the State Consumer Helplines and the Zonal Consumer Helplines."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

1.17 The Committee had recommended in their Original Report that the Department of Consumer Affairs should be mobilizing funds in favour of helplines by liberalizing their expenditure within the permissible financial rules. In reply, the Ministry has stated that funds are released from the Integrated Consumer Grievance Redressal System (ICGRS) scheme for the State Consumer Helplines and the Zonal Consumer Helplines. The Committee desire the Government to look for ways to make further suitable increase, within the permissible limit, in the amount allocated for State Consumer Helplines. Efforts should also be made to further strengthen the mechanism of pre-litigation settlement.

E. Utilisation of Grants Released for State Consumer Helplines.

Recommendation No. 7 (Para No. 2.26)

1.18 The Committee in their Original report observed/recommended as follows:-

"The Committee further note that a total grant amounting to Rs. 240.12 lakh has been released to various States/UT Administrations under the Consumer Helpline Scheme during the years 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20, out of which utilization

certificates (UCs) for just Rs. 55.36 lakh have been received. No UC have been received in respect of Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan and West Bengal and UC on a part of the grant received was furnished by the State of Uttar Pradesh. The Committee desire the Department to vigorously pursue with the 7 States/UT Administrations to furnish Utilization Certificates in respect of grants under Consumer Helpline Scheme and apprise them the outcome thereof at the earliest."

Reply of the Government

1.19 The Ministry in its action taken note has stated:-

" The State/UT Governments concerned have been asked to furnish the pending UCs in respect of the grants released for State Consumer helplines."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

1.20 The Committee in their Report on Demands for Grants (2020-21) had recommended that the Utilisation Certificates (UC) with regard to grant released under the Consumer Helpline Scheme during the years 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 to Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, be vigorously pursued and the Committee be apprised of the outcome at the earliest. The Department in its action taken reply, has stated that utilization certificates for grants released have been asked for from the concerned States/UT Governments. The reply is, however, too general and does not reflect the desired level of commitment. The Committee opine that any action which lacks vigour would have little or no effect and may even set a bad precedent. The Committee, therefore, desire to be apprised of the time when the States/UTs were asked to furnish pending UCs and the manner in which the same is pursued alongwith results obtained therefrom.

F. Need for Installation of New, and Replacing of Obsolete Computers in District Consumer Fora

Recommendation No. 8 (Para No. 2.32)

1.21 The Committee in their Original Report observed/recommended as follows:-

"The Committee note that the scheme of Computerization and Computer Networking of Consumer Fora in the country (CONFONET) aims to digitalise the functioning of the Consumer Fora at all the three tiers throughout the country, i.e. National, State and District levels. Out of a budgetary allocation of Rs. 33.63 crore made in the year 2019-20, an amount of Rs. 26.63 crore has been utilized. The Committee also note that for the year 2020-21, the allocation made is to the tune of Rs. 29.50 crore. Out of a total of 708 Consumer Fora/Commissions existing in the country, 641 Consumer Fora have been provided with computers. Further, for the newly created District Consumer Fora [Haryana (1), Karnataka (1), Tamil Nadu(2)], site confirmation and Hardware required have been recently received and which would be taken up. Under the scheme for supply of hardware to locations where old hardware has become 5 years old, work orders for supply of new Hardware at 420 locations including National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) and Department of Consumer Affairs had been issued through Government e-Marketplace (GeM) and hardware has been delivered/being delivered at few locations. At 4 locations in Arunachal Pradesh, 2 in Chhattisgarh, 2 in Daman and Diu, 1 in Haryana, 1 in J&K and 3 in Nagaland, computer hardware is yet to be installed. The Department has stated that they follow up the cases by sending emails to respective States. The Committee opine that more efforts than mere sending of emails by the Union Government are needed to convince the State Governments/UT Administrations to come up with the necessary modalities to enable timely installation of hardware at Consumer Fora in line with the slogan of 'Digital India' initiative. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the matter should be pursued more vigorously with the concerned States/UTs to ensure site readiness and informing NIC/State Coordinators at the earliest for necessary further action. Also, replacement of old obsolete Hardware should be carried out without any loss of time to facilitate efficient and uninterrupted monitoring and record keeping in the Consumer Fora."

1.22 The Ministry in its action taken reply has stated as under:-

"The States concerned have been asked to make the sites ready and furnish a site readiness certificate in this regard to NIC so that computer hardware can be installed in aforementioned 13 DCFs."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

1.23 The Committee had in their original report, recommended that the matter of provision of computer hardware to Consumer Fora/Commission at 13 locations may be pursued vigorously with the concerned State Governments/UT Administrations and that replacement of old obsolete hardware should be carried out without any further loss of time. In reply, the Department of Consumer Affairs has stated that the States concerned have been asked to make the sites ready and to furnish site readiness certificate to NIC so that computer hardware could be installed in the 13 District Consumer Fora/Commissions. The Committee desire that the matter should be taken up on an urgent basis. Also, the Government should endeavour to replace the old obsolete computers on priority without any lost of time.

G. Need to Expedite Major Construction Projects with regard to Legal Metrology Early

Recommendation No. 11 (Para No. 2.55)

1.24 The Committee in their Original Report observed/recommended as follows:-

“The Committee observe that the Department of Consumer Affairs are undertaking the strengthening of Weights & Measures (W&M) infrastructures of States/UTs as also of Regional Reference Standard Laboratories (RRSLs) and Indian Institute of Legal Metrology (IILM), Ranchi. Out of the BE of Rs.2000 lakh and RE of Rs. 1906 lakh, the Department of Consumer Affairs have stated that an amount of Rs. 1557 lakh, has been spent during 2019-20, which is 81.6% of the RE on release of grants-in-aid for construction of laboratories, annual maintenance of RRSLs, procurement of equipment and training of officers. RRSLs in locations like Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Faridabad and Guwahati have been vital links in dissemination of values of National Standards of Legal Metrology down to commercial level. As such, the

operationalisation of such laboratories is an urgent necessity in a modern economy. While appreciating the Department's performance in Strengthening of W&M infrastructure of States/UTs, the Committee desire to be apprised of the position with regard to the Strengthening of RRSLs and IILM, Ranchi. The Committee further recommend that the Government should take necessary steps to ensure that the major construction projects and maintenance of such laboratories are completed at the earliest possible time. They also urge the Department to complete procurement of equipments without loss of time."

1.25 The Ministry in its action taken reply has stated as under:-

"The construction work of Regional Reference Standards Laboratory (RRSL) at Varanasi has been started by CPWD, Varanasi. At Nagpur, the land for the construction of RRSL has been procured from Government of Maharashtra. The Town & Planning Department of Government of Maharashtra has completed the formalities of transfer the land in the name of this Department for the construction of RRSL, Nagpur. The construction of boundary wall is getting to be completed by CPWD, Nagpur. The construction at Nagpur will start shortly after finalising the drawings and estimates of RRSL, Nagpur by CPWD. The civil work of hi-tech laboratory at RRSL, Bengaluru is almost completed and electrical work is going on. During the previous financial year 2019-20 the funds were authorised to CPWD which could not be utilised and therefore, funds are being authorised to CPWD during 2020-21 to complete the work during this Financial Year. It is to submit that with regard to the position of strengthening of RRSLs and IILM, Ranchi under the Scheme "Strengthening of RRSLs & IILM, Ranchi" the maintenance of RRSLs and IILM, Ranchi is an ongoing exercise, based on the requirement of the Laboratory or IILM, Ranchi. However, during the previous Financial Year no funds for Minor Works of IILM, Ranchi were requested by IILM, Ranchi, as it was completed during 2018-19 at an approximate cost of Rs. 45.0 Lakhs by CPWD, Ranchi. Hence, the Minor works/ maintenance of Civil and Electrical Works of RRSLs/ IILM, Ranchi is an ongoing process as per requirement of offices. The water meter testing facility has been established at RRSLs through Fluid Control Research Institute, Palakkad, Kerala and Mobile Vans for testing/ inspection of net contents etc. of Packaged Commodities and for carrying standard Equipments for inspection, calibration/ verification purposes will be procured during this year 2020-21 through RITES. The officers will be trained at institutes of National and International Repute. All necessary steps will be taken to ensure that the major construction projects and maintenance of such laboratories are completed at the earliest possible time. The procurement of equipment will also be done at the earliest."

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1.26 The Committee had desired, in their original report, to be apprised of the position with regard to Strengthening of Regional Reference Standard Laboratories (RRSLs) - Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Faridabad and Guwahati and Indian Institute of Legal Metrology (IILM) – Ranchi. Also they had recommended the Government to take necessary steps to ensure that the major construction projects and maintenance of such laboratories were completed at the earliest time. The Department has stated in reply that construction work of RRSL Varanasi has been started by CPWD, Varanasi. The Department has also stated that at Nagpur, the land for construction of RRSL has been procured from Maharashtra Government and formalities of transfer of land in the name of Department of Consumer Affairs of the Union Government has been completed by the Town and Planning Department of Government of Maharashtra. The Department has also informed that boundary wall is getting to be completed by CPWD, Nagpur and that construction will start shortly after finalizing the drawings and estimates of RRSL, Nagpur by CPWD. As regards maintenance of RRSLs and IILM, Ranchi, the Department has informed that the civil work of hi-tech laboratory at RRSL, Bengaluru is almost completed and electrical work is going on. The funds pertaining to the year 2019-20 which could not be utilized are being authorized to CPWD during 2020-21 to complete the work. The Department has also stated that water meter testing facility has been established at RRSLs through Fluid Control Research Institute, Palakkad, Kerala and Mobile Vans for testing/inspection of net contents, etc. of packaged commodities and for carrying standard equipments for inspection, calibration/verification purposes will be procured during the year 2020-21 through RITES and that the

officers will be trained at institutes of National and International Repute. The Department has assured that all necessary steps would be taken to ensure that the major construction projects and maintenance of such laboratories are completed at the earliest possible time and that procurement of equipment will also be done at the earliest. The Committee are happy to note the assurance of the Department for completion of construction projects and procurement of equipments at the earliest. They recommend that such matters should be expedited without any loss of time especially the construction works of RRSLs, Nagpur and Varanasi which seem to have taken too long already.

H. Need for Timely Execution of the Projects of Time Dissemination

Recommendation No. 12 (Para No. 2.56)

1.27 The Committee in their Original Report observed/recommended as follows:-

“The Committee note that the Government has undertaken the project of Time Dissemination in the year 2019-20 with a tentative timeline set at the year 2022 for executing the project, for setting up of atomic clocks for dissemination of Indian Standard Time (IST). They also note that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research- National Physical Laboratory (CSIR-NPL) in this regard. The Committee are fully convinced that a precise time synchronisation and robust, reliable and accurate timing systems have significant impact on all societal, industrial, strategic and many other sectors. They desire that care should be taken to most accurately synchronise all networks and computers in the country with a national clock while implementing the project for ensuring absolute national security and enhanced cyber security with minimal scope of errors in time dissemination. In this connection the Committee are, however, dismayed to note that due to non-finalization of the specifications and floating indent for procurement of timing instruments for Time Dissemination Project by The National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi, the project suffered a setback, due to which only an amount of Rs. 124 lakh out of allocation of Rs. 3000 lakh has been spent on the scheme. The Committee opine that this reflects upon weak implementation of the MoU signed with NPL. The Committee, therefore, recommend the Government to have a relook at the agreement with NPL with a view, if possible, to revise it within the existing legal confines so as not to miss the deadline of completion of the project by 2022. They

desire the Government to spend the allocation of Rs. 3000 lakh productively within the financial year, 2020-21.”

1.28 The Ministry in its action taken reply has stated as under:-

“Due care will be taken to most accurately synchronise all networks and computers in the country with a national clock while implementing the project for ensuring absolute national security and enhanced cyber security with minimal scope of errors in time dissemination.

On the request of Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), the Department of Consumer Affairs has decided to disseminate the Indian Standard Time through five Regional Reference Standards Laboratories of Legal Metrology located at Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Faridabad and Guwahati with the cooperation of National Physical Laboratory (NPL) and a budget provision of Rs. 100 crores was made. AnMoU with CSIR- NPL for executing the project for setting up of atomic clocks for dissemination of Indian Standard Time was signed on 28.12.2018.

Under the MoU, the hardware and software for setting up the time ensembles will be procured by NPL which shall also be responsible for installation and commissioning of the same including training on equipment operation to the LM personnel. NPL will handhold LM and shall provide requisite technical support. The MoU also envisages setting up of a Disaster Recovery Centre (DRC) at RRSL, Bengaluru. The operational laboratory space and technical manpower would be provided by the RRSLs and the project would be funded by this Department.

The 6th Meeting of the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) was held on Tuesday, the 20th of August, 2019 under the chairmanship of Prof. K. Vijayaraghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor (PSA) to the Government of India, wherein this Department was invited to participate on an agenda item National Time Distribution Network. The said meeting was also attended by NPL and ISRO.

The second meeting with PSA was held on 09.12.2019, wherein PSA suggested that ISRO technology should be incorporated by NPL while adhering to the time lines given earlier by NPL.

The third meeting with PSA was held on 03.01.2020, wherein it was decided that NPL jointly with ISRO will review and finalize the timing equipment/ hardware specifications and thereafter NPL will procure the timing equipment as per such specifications. ISRO will integrate the indigenous software with the time ensembles to be procured and installed by NPL and NPL will handhold LM for time dissemination to the end users.

As per the directions given by PSA the specifications are being finalized by NPL in coordination with ISRO and the process of procurement of timing equipments

will be initiated shortly.

The decision with a view to associate ISRO and to define the responsibility of each party i.e. NPL, ISRO and Legal Metrology so as not to miss the deadline of completion of the project by 2022. The allocated funds will be utilised within the financial year, 2020-21 productively.”

1.29 The Committee had desired in their original report that care should be taken to most accurately synchronise all networks of computers in the country with a national clock while implementing the project of Time Dissemination. They had recommended the Department to have a relook at the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) – National Physical Laboratory (NPL) with a view to not miss the deadlines for completion of the project by 2022. They had also desired that the Government should spend the amount of Rs. 3000 lakh productively within the year 2020-21. The Department has stated in reply that under the MoU the hardware and software for setting up the time ensembles will be procured by NPL which shall also be responsible for installation and commissioning of the same including training on equipment operation to the LM personnel. The Department was invited to participate in an agenda item, viz. National Time Distribution Network at the 6th meeting of the Prime Minister’s Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) held on Tuesday, 20 August, 2019 under the Chairmanship of Prof. K. Vijayaraghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor (PSA) which was also attended by NPL and ISRO. At the second meeting with PSA held on 09.12.2019, the PSA suggested that ISRO technology should be incorporated by NPL while adhering to the time lines given earlier by NPL. In the third meeting with PSA on 03.01.2020, it was decided that NPL jointly with ISRO will review and

finalise the timing equipment/hardware specifications and thereafter NPL will procure the timing equipment and that ISRO will integrate the indigenous software with the time ensembles to be procured and installed by NPL and the latter would handhold LM for time dissemination to the end users. The Department has also informed that as per direction given by PSA, the specifications are being finalized by NPL in coordination with ISRO and the process of procurement of timing equipments will be initiated shortly. The Committee are happy to note the involvement of the PSA to the Government of India in the issue of Time Dissemination. The Committee desire that the matter may be examined in granular details with a view to clearly demarcate the responsibilities of all concerned and ensure that they work in tandem to complete the project on time with the allocated fund. The Committee also desire that the Department should get itself updated on the status of the work done frequently, atleast once a week.

I. Price Stabilization Fund

Recommendation No. 18 (Para No. 2.97)

1.30 The Committee in their Original Report observed/recommended as follows:-

“The Committee note that Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) was set up with an initial corpus of Rs. 500 crore to tackle inflationary trends of some agri-horticultural commodities. The Committee also note that price stabilization operations are determined by the Central Price Stabilization Fund Management Committee (CPSFMC), headed by Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs, which has held 45 sittings since 1st April, 2016. They further note that over and above a balance quantity of about 2884 Metric Tonne (MT) pulses, a quantity of about 15.7 LMT pulses was transferred from PSS to PSF and a quantity of about 1.4 LMT disposed of in 2019-20. A quantity of about 14.24 LMT pulses was in the stock. Also a buffer stock of about 57300 MT of onion was created this year and released into the market. The Committee are of the opinion that price fluctuation is a serious issue for consumers, especially to

those belonging to irregular and low income groups. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Government should carry out market intervention operations with due diligence and sensitivity to the needs of consumers in various parts of the country, including the cyclone-prone areas like Odisha.”

1.31 The Ministry in its action taken reply has stated as under:-

“Government has decided to build a buffer of around 19.50 LMT of pulses for the current year. As the procurement since Rabi-17 was under MSP operation of PSS, pulses procured under Price Support Scheme (PSS) of Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DACFW) have since been channelized to PSF to the extent of meeting buffer requirements. This has ensured effective utilisation of PSS stocks towards stabilization efforts as calibrated releases are made from PSF. Thus, harmonization between PSS and PSF has been achieved with remunerative prices being assured to farmers and intervention on the supply side is undertaken to manage their prices in consumer interest. In various instances from time to time, States/UTs through video-conferencing, written communication, national consultation meetings, etc., are urged to lift stocks from buffer for utilization under their welfare schemes like PDS, MDM, ICDS which largely cater to the need of consumers with irregular/lower income groups as well as for direct retailing in the benefit of consumers. Vide DO No. PS-03/1/2017/PMC/pt.1 dated 11th December 2019, around 8.47 LMT of pulses were offered to States/UTs for utilization under their welfare schemes as well as direct retailing to improve availability and moderation of its prices. Pulses from buffer have also been supplied to Kerala towards flood relief measure in the past. Further, w.r.t. OMS, stock held by designated agencies is available for purchase nation-wide through transparent auction process to moderate prices. In addition to the above, advance provided under State-Level PSF based on assessment by concerned State and proposal sent by them as per due procedure. Such proposal as per Operational Guidelines of PSF may be utilized to cater to State-specific requirements based on their assessment. Centre's share of Rs.25 crore was released in June 2018 to Odisha state level PSF. The State had set up PSF for market intervention in onion, potato and pulses, till date the amount is un-utilized by the State Government.”

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1.32 The Committee had recommended in their original report that the Government should carry out market intervention operations with the Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) with due diligence and sensitivity to the needs of consumers in various parts of the country, including the cyclone-prone areas like Odisha. The Department has stated in its Action Taken Reply that

Government has decided to build a buffer of around 19.50 LMT of pulses for the current year. The Department has also stated that as the procurement since Rabi-17 was under MSP operation of PSS, pulses procured under Price Support Scheme (PSS) of Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DACFW) have since been channelized to PSF to the extent of meeting buffer requirements which ensured effective utilisation of PSS stocks towards stabilization efforts as calibrated releases are made from PSF. The Department has stated that due to this, harmonization between PSS and PSF has been achieved with remunerative prices being assured to farmers and intervention undertaken on the supply side to manage their prices in consumer interest. The Department has also stated that in various instances from time to time, States/UTs through video-conferencing, written communication, national consultation meetings, etc., are urged to lift stocks from buffer for utilization under their welfare schemes like PDS, MDM, ICDS which largely cater to the need of consumers with irregular/lower income groups as well as for direct retailing for the benefit of consumers. The Department has further stated that w.r.t. OMS, stock held by designated agencies is available for purchase nation-wide through transparent auction process to moderate prices. In addition, the Department provides advance under State-Level PSF based on assessment by concerned State and proposal sent by them as per due procedure. Such proposal as per Operational Guidelines of PSF may be utilized to cater to State-specific requirements based on their assessment. In this direction the Department has specifically mentioned the release of Centre's share of Rs.25 crore in June 2018 to Odisha State level PSF, which had been set up for market intervention in onion, potato and pulses, remained un-utilized. The reply is, however, silent on

the follow up efforts, if any, made by the Department to convince the State Government to utilize the fund. While appreciating the efforts of the Department, the Committee desires the Department should find out the reasons for non utilisation of fund by the State Government of Odisha and vigorously pursue the matter at the highest level to ensure the productive use of the fund. The Committee would like to be apprised of the achievement in the matter at the earliest.

J. Need for Setting up of CWF in States/UTs.

Recommendation No. 20 (Para No. 2.109)

1.33 The Committee in their Original Report observed/recommended as follows:-

“The Committee note that for the year 2019-20, an amount of Rs. 1950 lakh had been earmarked for Consumer Welfare Fund (CWF) where the money which is not refundable to the manufacturers, etc. is credited. The actual utilization of the allocated fund is however Rs. 719 lakh (upto 31.12.2019). They also note that financial assistance from CWF is given to various institutions including Universities, Voluntary Consumer Organisations (VCOs), Government Bodies and States for strengthening consumer movement. The Committee hope and expect that the financial allocation of Rs. 26100 lakh would be utilized productively and optimally during the financial year 2020-21. The Committee have also been informed about details of Grants released under CWF scheme during the years 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 to various institutions. The Committee desire that the Department should ensure that such institutions make utilization of the funds in a most productive manner, by insisting on Utilization Certificates (UCs) from them. The Committee also note that so far 15 States/UTs have set up State Level Consumer Welfare Fund with contribution of 75% (90% in case of Special Category States/UTs) from the Union Government. The number of such States was 13 in the year 2018-19. The Committee are of the view that while the steps taken by the Government to convince the States/UTs to set up State Level CWF have yielded some results, however, the Committee are constrained to note that the growth pattern in the scenario is not satisfactory. Considering the urgent need to create consumer awareness and strengthening the consumer movement in the country, the Committee strongly recommend that the Department of Consumer Affairs should vigorously pursue and

impress upon the remaining States/UTs to set up the Consumer Welfare Fund on priority.”

1.34 The Ministry in its action taken reply has stated as under:-

“Recommendations of the Committee have been noted for compliance. The Department of Consumer Affairs has been continuously pursuing and impressing upon the remaining States / UTs to set up the Consumer Welfare Fund in their States and commits to do so more vigorously in future also.”

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1.35 The Committee had recommended in their original report that the Department of Consumer Affairs should ensure that institutions funded from CWF during 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 furnish the utilization certificates. They had also recommended that the Department should impress upon States that have not set up State Level Consumer Welfare Fund, to do the same. In reply the Department has stated that recommendations of the Committee have been noted for compliance and that remaining States/UTs will be more vigorously pursued and impressed upon to set up the State Level Consumer Welfare Fund. The Committee desire that the information about status of Utilisation Certificate should be given by the Department at the earliest. They also desire the Department to continue its efforts to impress upon the States/UTs about the importance of setting up of State Level Consumer Welfare Fund for a better and more convenient consumer advocacy.

CHAPTER II

OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT

Recommendation No. 1 (Para No. 1.10)

2.1 "The Committee note that Budget Estimates (BE) and Revised Estimates (RE) and Actual Expenditure (AE) during the year 2019-20 were Rs. 229182 lakh, Rs.206950 lakh and Rs.17397 lakh respectively, which means that only 8.4 per cent of the Revised Estimates was actually spent. While the spending pattern of the non-Scheme funds as proportion to RE was 70.55% of the RE, the actual expenditure of Scheme fund as proportion to the RE is 4.12%. The Committee are also concerned to note the lack of uniformity of spending pattern across the schemes/heads. For example, during the year 2019-20, 73% of RE for Consumer Protection (CP) and 72.8% of RE for Consumer Awareness & Publicity have actually been spent. Similarly, there are poor spendings in Weights & Measures (W&M) and National Test House (NTH) which are 59.3% and of 56.3% of RE respectively. The Ministry have stated that the prevailing and anticipated market scenario being dynamic has been responsible for "non-uniform spending pattern". Also stoppage of campaign through the Doordarshan (DD), All India Radio (AIR), Bureau of Outreach and Communication (BOC), etc, due to non approval of creatives by AD, Approval Cell, non-completion of work by Central Public Works Department (CPWD) and non-finalisation of the specification and floating of indent/tender for procurement of timing instruments for Time Dissemination Project by National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi (NPL) are stated to be other reasons for the poor expenditure of funds. It is obvious that the nil spending in Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) which constitutes 93.3% of the total fund in the RE (Scheme) has dented the overall spending position. However, even after leaving aside the PSF head, the actual expenditure in proportion to the RE is still as low as 68.96%. The reasons given by the Ministry for poor spending of funds such as non-completion of work by CPWD, non-finalisation of tender for procurement of timing instruments by the NPL, stoppage of campaign through DD, AIR, BOC, etc, are not convincing. The Committee opine that with a closer monitoring, the expenditure rate could have been higher. The Committee desire that the Government should make efforts to identify the problems associated with agencies such as DD, AIR, BOC and the Approval Cell, CPWD and NPL through whom the projects/schemes are executed and plug the loopholes to ensure better fund utilization by the Government."

Reply of the Government

2.2 " (Publicity)The Department is committed to increase consumer awareness through its publicity initiatives and take steps to optimally utilize the funds allocated. It

will therefore try to identify the problems associated in utilizing funds through agencies such as DD, AIR, BOC and the Ad Approval Cell.

(Legal Metrology)

CPWD Work: All necessary steps will be taken to ensure that the major construction projects of laboratories buildings are completed at the earliest possible time.

The construction work of Regional Reference Standards Laboratory (RRSL) at Varanasi has been started by CPWD, Varanasi.

At Nagpur, the land for the construction of RRSL has been procured from Government of Maharashtra. The Town & Planning Department of Government of Maharashtra has completed the formalities of transfer the land in the name of this Department for the construction of RRSL, Nagpur. The construction of boundary wall is getting to be completed by CPWD, Nagpur. The construction at Nagpur will start shortly after finalising the drawings and estimates of RRSL, Nagpur by CPWD.

The civil work of hi-tech laboratory at RRSL, Bengaluru is almost completed and electrical work is going on. During the previous financial year 2019-20 the funds were authorised to CPWD which could not be utilised and therefore, funds are being authorised to CPWD during 2020-21 to complete the work during this Financial Year.

Establishment of Time Dissemination infrastructure with NPL & ISRO:

On the request of Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), the Department of Consumer Affairs has decided to disseminate the Indian Standard Time through five Regional Reference Standards Laboratories of Legal Metrology located at Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Faridabad and Guwahati with the cooperation of National Physical Laboratory (NPL) and a budget provision of Rs. 100 crores was made. AnMoU with CSIR- NPL for executing the project for setting up of atomic clocks for dissemination of Indian Standard Time was signed on 28.12.2018.

Under the MoU, the hardware and software for setting up the time ensembles will be procured by NPL which shall also be responsible for installation and commissioning of the same including training on equipment operation to the LM personnel. NPL will handhold LM and shall provide requisite technical support. The MoU also envisages setting up of a Disaster Recovery Centre (DRC) at RRSL, Bengaluru. The operational laboratory space and technical manpower would be provided by the RRSLs and the project would be funded by this Department.

The 6th Meeting of the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) was held on Tuesday, the 20th of August, 2019 under the chairmanship of Prof. K. Vijayaraghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor (PSA) to the Government of India, wherein this Department was invited to participate on an agenda item National Time Distribution Network. The said meeting was also attended by NPL and ISRO.

The second meeting with PSA was held on 09.12.2019, wherein PSA suggested that ISRO technology should be incorporated by NPL while adhering to the time lines given earlier by NPL.

The third meeting with PSA was held on 03.01.2020, wherein it was decided that NPL jointly with ISRO will review and finalize the timing equipment/ hardware specifications and thereafter NPL will procure the timing equipment as per such specifications. ISRO will integrate the indigenous software with the time ensembles to be procured and installed by NPL and NPL will handhold LM for time dissemination to the end users.

As per the directions given by PSA the specifications are being finalized by NPL in coordination with ISRO and the process of procurement of timing equipments will be initiated shortly.

The allocated funds will be utilised within the financial year, 2020-21 productively.

(National Test House)

Under the head of Machinery and Equipment (M&E) a fund of Rs 1.29 crore could not be utilized within timeframe due to the following reasons:

1) Rs 54 Lakhs for the equipment GCMS:

June 2019: LC was opened and the firm could not supply the equipment and hence in November 2019 revised LC opened.

Central Bank of India committed several mistakes while revising of LC and its amendments for which different letters were issued to the Central Bank of India on many occasions for incorporating the necessary corrections.

Again amended AT was issued for change of place of inspection as requested by the supplier firm due to COVID 19.

Final inspection held on 18.3.2020 and report received on 20.03.2020.

After that due to COVID 19 outbreak the consignment could not be dispatched from Germany.

2) Rs 68 Lakhs for the equipment Ion Chromatograph:

LC opened for 03 Ion Chromatograph during May 2019.

M/s Methrom, Switzerland the supplier informed in July 2020 that out of 3 LC, 1 could not be recognized. Validity of LC was expired on 31.08.2019 and hence revised LC was issued in October 2019. Inspection work order placed during November 2019 based on tender process.

Inspection was held and the report received on 26.02.2020. Consignment was picked up by the freight forwarder in March 2020. The consignment arrived at Chennai and Delhi Airport on 21.03.2020 and 22.03.2020 respectively. After that due to COVID 19 outbreak started and communication could not be continued with the bank for which the payment could not be released.

3) Rs 1.73 Crore was authorized to CPWD(WZ) under head Major Works- Land and Building for completing the remaining portion of the project. The unitization certificate for the Major portion of the fund allocated was not submitted by CPWD leading to underutilization of the fund due to COVID 19 outbreak started. "

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Comments of the Committee

(Please see Para No. 1.8 of Chapter -I of the Report)

Recommendation No. 2 (Para No. 2.10)

2.3 "The Committee observe that the Department of Consumer Affairs administers Consumer Protection Act, 1986. Budget allocation for the year 2020-21 under this head for various schemes/projects which are being implemented, such as Strengthening of Consumer Fora, Computerization and Computer Networking of Consumer For (CONFONET), Consumer Protection Cell and Integrated Consumer Grievances Redressal System (ICGRS) is Rs.4900 lakh. The Government have also drafted 8 rules under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, which will replace the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. Out of the 8 rules, 3 have been finalized and sent to Legislative Department for vetting. Rest of the rules are under finalization and will be sent to the Legislative Department for vetting. The Committee are of the view that Consumer Protection is a very important component of the Department of Consumer Affairs and the strengthening of various consumer fora/Commissions, computerization and helplines under this Scheme are essential for achieving the objectives/desired results envisaged under Consumer Protection Act, 1986. The Committee, therefore, recommend that Department should take steps so as to gear up the administrative, legal and technological mechanisms to meet the challenges that may come up when the rules of Consumer Protection Act, 2019 are ready and the new Act put into operation."

Reply of the Government

2.4 "This has been noted."

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Comments of the Committee

(Please see Para No. 1.11 of Chapter -I of the Report)

Recommendation No. 3 (Para No. 2.11)

2.5 " The Committee note with concern the fact that the Consumer Protection Councils at the district, State and national levels remain inactive and defunct many a time. The performance of the Councils as per the mandate would have brought about positive changes in the sphere of consumer rights in the country. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Government should activate and closely monitor situation in order to ensure that these Consumer Protection Councils at the District and State levels function as per their mandate. They would also desire to be apprised of corrective steps taken by the Government in this regard within three months of the presentation of this report."

Reply of the Government

2.6 "As per the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, the State/UT Governments are to establish the State Consumer Protection Councils (SCPC) and the District Consumer Protection Councils (DCPC). The Central Government has been writing to the States/UTs from time to time to constitute such Councils and furnish report about their meetings."

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Comments of the Committee

(Please see Para No. 1.14 of Chapter -I of the Report)

Recommendation No. 4 (Para No. 2.17)

2.7 "The Committee note that for strengthening of Consumer Fora, the Government allocated an amount of Rs. 600 lakh out of which an amount of Rs. 444.22 lakh has been released to States/UTs. Strengthening of infrastructure of the consumer fora being vital for consumer empowerment, the Committee are of the view that monitoring of the progress of implementation of projects cannot be over emphasised. The Committee also note with concern the declining rate of disposal of cases in Consumer Fora from 82.50% in 2017 to 80.17% in 2018 to 73.78% in 2019 and to 70.42% in 2020. The Government could have avoided this dismal scenario through better attention to the Mediation Centres. But it has come to knowledge of the Committee that

the Government neither have data relating to the 3 tiers of consumer disputes redressal fora, nor about Mediation Centres. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Union Government should maintain and update data relating to cases disposed of in Consumer Fora down to the district level and the Mediation Cells attached therewith and also regularly upgrade the level of sophistication of such Fora and Cells, as it would equip the Union Government to initiate steps to strengthen the Consumer Fora/Commissions appropriately. Also, the Department should obtain utilisation certificates for funds released for strengthening of Consumer Fora at the earliest."

Reply of the Government

2.8 " Under the CONFONET (Computerisation and Networking of Consumer Fora in the country) scheme, the Central Government has been providing computer hardware, software and technical manpower to the Consumer Fora in the country for computerisation of their functioning. This facilitates maintenance and updation of data related to cases disposed in Consumer Fora. The computer hardware is replaced every five years. In the financial year 2019-20, the old hardware of 418 Consumer Fora has been replaced with new ones. Under the scheme, an Online Case Monitoring System (OCMS) has been developed, which is used by the Consumer Fora to maintain the database of cases. There is also a website, "the CONFONET website" which has all the database of the cases in the Consumer Fora.

The Central Government also writes to the States/UTs at regular intervals for furnishing the pending UCs in respect of the grant released under the scheme "Strengthening Consumer Fora".

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Recommendation No. 6 (Para No. 2.25)

2.9 "The Committee are also happy to note that the Helpline/Integrated Consumer Grievances Redressal System has partnered with 620 convergence companies and pre-litigation settlement have been made in case of 94.58% of the grievances registered in 2018-19 and 91.92% of the grievances registered between April to December, 2019. It may be noted here that out of the total cases coming in the Consumer Fora/Commissions percentage of cases disposed of fell from 82.50% in 2017 to 80.17% in 2018 to 73.78% in 2019 and further to 70.42% in 2020. The Committee recommend that the Government should make all out

efforts to get as many consumer disputes as possible, filtered through the helplines established at the Centre, Zone and State levels by spreading awareness about the existence of such helplines through the JagoGrahakJago campaigns, the Bureau of Outreach and Communication (BOC), etc. The Committee believe that settlement of cases through the Helpline has a good potential to bring about justice to consumer, and they, therefore, recommend that the Department should be mobilizing funds in favour of helplines by liberalizing their expenditure within the permissible financial rules."

Reply of the Government

2.10 " Funds are released from the ICGRS Scheme for the State Consumer Helplines and the Zonal Consumer Helplines."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Comments of the Committee

(Please see Para No. 1.17 of Chapter -I of the Report)

Recommendation No. 8 (Para No. 2.32)

2.11 " The Committee note that the scheme of Computerization and Computer Networking of Consumer Fora in the country (CONFONET) aims to digitalise the functioning of the Consumer Fora at all the three tiers throughout the country, i.e. National, State and District levels. Out of a budgetary allocation of Rs. 33.63 crore made in the year 2019-20, an amount of Rs. 26.63 crore has been utilized. The Committee also note that for the year 2020-21, the allocation made is to the tune of Rs. 29.50 crore. Out of a total of 708 Consumer Fora/Commissions existing in the country, 641 Consumer Fora have been provided with computers. Further, for the newly created District Consumer Fora [Haryana (1), Karnataka (1), Tamil Nadu(2)], site confirmation and Hardware required have been recently received and which would be taken up. Under the scheme for supply of hardware to locations where old hardware has become 5 years old, work orders for supply of new Hardware at 420 locations including National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) and Department of Consumer Affairs had been issued through Government e-Marketplace (GeM) and hardware has been delivered/being delivered at few locations. At 4 locations in Arunachal Pradesh, 2 in Chhattisgarh, 2 in Daman and Diu, 1 in Haryana, 1 in J&K and 3 in Nagaland, computer hardware is yet to be installed. The Department

has stated that they follow up the cases by sending emails to respective States. The Committee opine that more efforts than mere sending of emails by the Union Government are needed to convince the State Governments/UT Administrations to come up with the necessary modalities to enable timely installation of hardware at Consumer Fora in line with the slogan of 'Digital India' initiative. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the matter should be pursued more vigorously with the concerned States/UTs to ensure site readiness and informing NIC/State Coordinators at the earliest for necessary further action. Also, replacement of old obsolete Hardware should be carried out without any loss of time to facilitate efficient and uninterrupted monitoring and record keeping in the Consumer Fora."

Reply of the Government

2.12 " The States concerned have been asked to make the sites ready and furnish a site readiness certificate in this regard to NIC so that computer hardware can be installed in aforementioned 13 DCFs "

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Comments of the Committee

(Please see Para No. 1.23 of Chapter -I of the Report)

Recommendation No. 9 (Para No. 2.42)

2.13 "The Committee note that the entire strategy of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities under Consumer Awareness (Advertising and Publicity) scheme has been designed to launch and continue an effective and intensive awareness campaign to urban, semi-urban as well as rural and remote areas through the country-wide multi media campaign titled "JagoGrahakJago". The awareness campaigns are undertaken through the Bureau of Outreach and Communication (BOC), Doordarshan (DD), All India Radio (AIR), LokSabhaTV (LSTV) and National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). The Committee also note that out of Rs. 62 crore allocated during 2019-20, the Department spent an amount of Rs. 29.15 crore, and also that an allocation of Rs. 60 crore has been made for the year 2020-21. Further, they also note that the campaign has been taking up issues relevant to various categories of consumers. The Committee are of the opinion that messages conveyed through the campaign need to be clear, articulate, proper and catchy to dispel the possible sense of inhibition or predicament of consumers in approaching available facilities such as helplines, Consumer Fora/Commissions, test centres etc. Noting the fact and considering the need of active involvement of State Governments in the

campaign, an amount of Rs. 350 lakh has been released to 9 States as grant-in-aid while proposals from more than 10 States have been processed, the Committee desire that States should be given a clear idea on how to spend the money judiciously and optimally so as to achieve maximum results. Also, the views of the people's representatives like MPs and MLAs may also be taken in such matters."

Reply of the Government

2.14 "The Department will review the list of activities for which grants-in aid are released to States for generating consumer awareness so that the money spent is utilized judiciously and optimally. The States will also be requested to take note of the views of the Standing Committee for necessary action whenever grant-in-aid is released to the respective State/UT."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Recommendation No. 10 (Para No. 2.43)

2.15 "The Committee note with concern that out of Rs. 7.18 crore allocated for miscellaneous/Non-BOC Mode/Social Media, an expenditure of only Rs. 2.08 crore (or a mere 28.9% of Rs. 7.18 crore) had been made during the year 2019-20. In a techno driven society of today, the campaign through social media is extremely important. The Committee, therefore, recommend that campaign through social media should be given an even more importance in future. Closely related with this, the Committee also note the apparent connect between advertising and publicity and the cases coming up in the consumer helplines, which is evident in the swelling number of calls received, i.e. from 455029 in 2017-18 to 649571 in 2019-20 (upto January, 2020). The Committee, therefore, recommend that advertisement and publicity campaigns should be fashioned accordingly. "

Reply of the Government

2.16 "The Department has engaged a social networking management agency through open tendering process to increase the use of social media for consumer awareness. Recently, the creatives being uploaded on social media have been focusing on generating awareness about National Consumer Helpline. "

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Recommendation No. 11 (Para No. 2.55)

2.17 "The Committee observe that the Department of Consumer Affairs are undertaking the strengthening of Weights & Measures (W&M) infrastructures of States/UTs as also of Regional Reference Standard Laboratories (RRSLs) and Indian Institute of Legal Metrology (IILM), Ranchi. Out of the BE of Rs.2000 lakh and RE of Rs. 1906 lakh, the Department of Consumer Affairs have stated that an amount of Rs. 1557 lakh, has been spent during 2019-20, which is 81.6% of the RE on release of grants-in-aid for construction of laboratories, annual maintenance of RRSLs, procurement of equipment and training of officers. RRSLs in locations like Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Faridabad and Guwahati have been vital links in dissemination of values of National Standards of Legal Metrology down to commercial level. As such, the operationalisation of such laboratories is an urgent necessity in a modern economy. While appreciating the Department's performance in Strengthening of W&M infrastructure of States/UTs, the Committee desire to be apprised of the position with regard to the Strengthening of RRSLs and IILM, Ranchi. The Committee further recommend that the Government should take necessary steps to ensure that the major construction projects and maintenance of such laboratories are completed at the earliest possible time. They also urge the Department to complete procurement of equipments without loss of time. "

Reply of the Government

2.18 "The construction work of Regional Reference Standards Laboratory (RRSL) at Varanasi has been started by CPWD, Varanasi.

At Nagpur, the land for the construction of RRSL has been procured from Government of Maharashtra. The Town & Planning Department of Government of Maharashtra has completed the formalities of transfer the land in the name of this Department for the construction of RRSL, Nagpur. The construction of boundary wall is getting to be completed by CPWD, Nagpur. The construction at Nagpur will start shortly after finalising the drawings and estimates of RRSL, Nagpur by CPWD.

The civil work of hi-tech laboratory at RRSL, Bengaluru is almost completed and electrical work is going on. During the previous financial year 2019-20 the funds were authorised to CPWD which could not be utilised and therefore, funds are being authorised to CPWD during 2020-21 to complete the work during this Financial Year.

It is to submit that with regard to the position of strengthening of RRSLs and IILM, Ranchi under the Scheme "Strengthening of RRSLs & IILM, Ranchi" the maintenance of RRSLs and IILM, Ranchi is an ongoing exercise, based on the requirement of the Laboratory or IILM, Ranchi. However, during the previous Financial Year no funds for Minor Works of IILM, Ranchi were requested by IILM, Ranchi, as it was completed during 2018-19 at an approximate cost of Rs. 45.0 Lakhs by CPWD, Ranchi. Hence, the Minor works/ maintenance of Civil and Electrical Works of RRSLs/ IILM, Ranchi is an ongoing process as per requirement of offices.

The water meter testing facility has been established at RRSLs through Fluid Control Research Institute, Palakkad, Kerala and Mobile Vans for testing/ inspection of net contents etc. of Packaged Commodities and for carrying standard Equipments for inspection, calibration/ verification purposes will be procured during this year 2020-21 through RITES. The officers will be trained at institutes of National and International Repute.

All necessary steps will be taken to ensure that the major construction projects and maintenance of such laboratories are completed at the earliest possible time. The procurement of equipment will also be done at the earliest. "

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Comments of the Committee

(Please see Para No. 1.26 of Chapter -I of the Report)

Recommendation No. 12 (Para No. 2.56)

2.19 " The Committee note that the Government has undertaken the project of Time Dissemination in the year 2019-20 with a tentative timeline set at the year 2022 for executing the project, for setting up of atomic clocks for dissemination of Indian Standard Time (IST). They also note that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research- National Physical

Laboratory (CSIR-NPL) in this regard. The Committee are fully convinced that a precise time synchronisation and robust, reliable and accurate timing systems have significant impact on all societal, industrial, strategic and many other sectors. They desire that care should be taken to most accurately synchronise all networks and computers in the country with a national clock while implementing the project for ensuring absolute national security and enhanced cyber security with minimal scope of errors in time dissemination. In this connection the Committee are, however, dismayed to note that due to non-finalization of the specifications and floating indent for procurement of timing instruments for Time Dissemination Project by The National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi, the project suffered a setback, due to which only an amount of Rs. 124 lakh out of allocation of Rs. 3000 lakh has been spent on the scheme. The Committee opine that this reflects upon weak implementation of the MoU signed with NPL. The Committee, therefore, recommend the Government to have a relook at the agreement with NPL with a view, if possible, to revise it within the existing legal confines so as not to miss the deadline of completion of the project by 2022. They desire the Government to spend the allocation of Rs. 3000 lakh productively within the financial year, 2020-21. "

Reply of the Government

2.20 "Due care will be taken to most accurately synchronise all networks and computers in the country with a national clock while implementing the project for ensuring absolute national security and enhanced cyber security with minimal scope of errors in time dissemination. On the request of Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), the Department of Consumer Affairs has decided to disseminate the Indian Standard Time through five Regional Reference Standards Laboratories of Legal Metrology located at Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Faridabad and Guwahati with the cooperation of National Physical Laboratory (NPL) and a budget provision of Rs. 100 crores was made. AnMoU with CSIR- NPL for executing the project for setting up of atomic clocks for dissemination of Indian Standard Time was signed on 28.12.2018.

Under the MoU, the hardware and software for setting up the time ensembles will be procured by NPL which shall also be responsible for installation and commissioning of the same including training on equipment operation to the LM personnel. NPL will handhold LM and shall provide requisite technical support. The MoU also envisages setting up of a Disaster Recovery Centre (DRC) at RRSL,

Bengaluru. The operational laboratory space and technical manpower would be provided by the RRSs and the project would be funded by this Department.

The 6th Meeting of the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) was held on Tuesday, the 20th of August, 2019 under the chairmanship of Prof. K. Vijayaraghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor (PSA) to the Government of India, wherein this Department was invited to participate on an agenda item National Time Distribution Network. The said meeting was also attended by NPL and ISRO.

The second meeting with PSA was held on 09.12.2019, wherein PSA suggested that ISRO technology should be incorporated by NPL while adhering to the time lines given earlier by NPL.

The third meeting with PSA was held on 03.01.2020, wherein it was decided that NPL jointly with ISRO will review and finalize the timing equipment/ hardware specifications and thereafter NPL will procure the timing equipment as per such specifications. ISRO will integrate the indigenous software with the time ensembles to be procured and installed by NPL and NPL will handhold LM for time dissemination to the end users.

As per the directions given by PSA the specifications are being finalized by NPL in coordination with ISRO and the process of procurement of timing equipments will be initiated shortly.

The decision with a view to associate ISRO and to define the responsibility of each party i.e. NPL, ISRO and Legal Metrology so as not to miss the deadline of completion of the project by 2022. The allocated funds will be utilised within the financial year, 2020-21 productively."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Comments of the Committee

(Please see Para No. 1.29 of Chapter -I of the Report)

Recommendation No. 13 (Para No. 2.68)

2.21 " The Committee note that Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) implements the National System for Standardization (NSS). Out of 20728 Indian Standards (IS) formulated, 6062 standards have been harmonised with ISO/IEC standards. During the year 2019-20, the BIS has reviewed 2406 standards and revised 313 standards. The Committee desire that utmost care be taken in regard to formulation of new ISs so as to achieve better integration of India with the world in trade and commerce."

Reply of the Government

2.22 " As a policy while developing any standard, new or revised, the possibility of harmonizing the Indian Standards with corresponding International Standards of ISO/IEC, to the extent possible keeping in consideration local conditions / technologies, is always considered by technical committees of BIS. This ensures that Indian Standards are in line with International requirements / practices so as to achieve integration of Indian products / services with the world in trade and commerce."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Recommendation No. 14 (Para No. 2.69)

2.23 " The Committee observe that the Bureau of Indian Standards(BIS) has been implementing the Plan scheme for setting up of Gold Assaying and Hallmarking Centres (AHC) in India with Central assistance. They also note that 900 BIS recognized Assaying & Hallmarking Centres (AHCs) are currently in operation in the country. Further, the Implementation Committee, in its meeting held on 9 August, 2019 had given a go-ahead on 16 applications against Expression of Interest and the centres would be ready for assessment in 6 months. The Committee further note that with regard to capacity building, a total of 67 training programme for artisans, 28 for AHC personnel and 9 for BIS officers during the years 2016-17 to 2019-20 has been organized. India being one of the top consumers of gold jewellery items in the world, the Committee are of the view that setting up of more AHCs will go a long way in serving the interests of gold jewellery consumers, especially those residing in the small towns and remote areas. They, therefore, recommend that all possible efforts be made to enable early recognition of more AHCs in the larger interest of the consumers. Since awareness of the rights is extremely important in the matter of hallmarking of gold jewellery, the Committee further recommend that all jewellers should be made to display the addresses and contact numbers of nearby test laboratories/AHCs in their

bills/vouchers in respect of hallmarked gold jewellery sold by them for the convenience of consumers."

Reply of the Government

2.24 " At present 915 BIS recognized AHCs are in operation in the Country. The AHCs are set-up by private entrepreneurs and setting up of AHCs is a market driven activity where decision to open an AHC is taken by the entrepreneur based on commercial viability at that location. It is expected that as the hallmarking of gold jewellery and artefacts has been made mandatory from 15th January 2021, the demand would increase and the market would drive new AHCs to come up at locations where demand arises. Based on the recommendation of the Standing Committee, BIS has already revised the Guidelines for Grant, Operation, Renewal, and Cancellation of Certificate of Registration of Jewellers in January 2020. As per the revised Guidelines Doc. No. HM/Jeweller/Guidelines /1, January 2020, all the BIS Registered Jewellers in addition to the indication of separate description of each article, net weight of precious metal, purity in carat and fineness, and hallmarking charges in the bill or invoice of sale of hallmarked precious metal articles as specified in BIS (Hallmarking) Regulations, 2018, also have to mention in the bill or invoice of sale of hallmarked precious metal articles that "the consumer can get the purity of the hallmarked jewellery/artefacts verified from any of the BIS recognized A&H centre. The list of BIS recognized A&H centre along with address and contact details is available on the website www.bis.gov.in."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Recommendation No. 15 (Para No. 2.70)

2.25 " The Committee also note that out of a total of 51 cases filed for violation of BIS Act, 2016 on hallmarking, 28 cases have been decided, all in favour of BIS. A total of 23 cases are still pending for settlement in the States/UTs of Chandigarh (1), Chattisgarh (2), Delhi (3), Goa (1), Haryana (4), Kerala (1), Maharashtra (3), Odisha (2), Punjab (1), Tamil Nadu (2), Telangana (1) and West Bengal (2). The Committee desire that the Ministry/BIS should closely monitor the cases and also make concerted efforts to ensure that there is speedy settlement of cases which are pending in the Courts. The Committee would like to be apprised of further progress made in this regard."

Reply of the Government

2.26 " Communication has been made to the Heads of the Regional Offices of BIS, under whose jurisdiction the cases are pending, with the request that the complaint officers as well as the empanelled Counsels handling these 23 pending court cases in 12 States/UTs to follow up the cases vigorously for speedy settlement of the complaints in the interest of BIS."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Recommendation (Para No. 2.76)

2.27 " The Committee note with appreciation the fact that National Test House (NTH) has completed 107 years of dedicated service to the nation under the administrative control of the Government of India. They also note that apart from the major and minor maintenance works already undertaken for NTH, the Government have plans to undertake major works for NTH, like construction works at NTH Mumbai and Chennai. The Department are also planning to procure Impulse Voltage Generator for NTH, Chennai, Tensile Testing Machine for Guwahati, QUV Accelerated Weathering Tester for Mumbai, equipment for Routine Testing of Transformers, Carbon SulphurAnalyser, Photo-biological Test Set up and Impulse Voltage Generator for Kolkata and Fourier Transform Infrared Spectrometer for Ghaziabad. The NTH being an important institution for testing and quality evaluation of different kinds of products, the Committee urge to complete the major works undertaken, procurement of machineries and equipments, minor works or maintenance or upgradation of machinery and infrastructure in the various regions without any delay, on top priority."

Reply of the Government

2.28 " Projects under construction through CPWD:

The construction of the G+4 Phase II building at Mumbai and Impulse Voltage Laboratory at Chennai have been executed by CPWD and majority of the work is completed due to continuous efforts of Regional In-Charges as well as Director General, NTH and DoCA. However, due to sudden outbreak of COVID – 19, Rs 1.25

crores out of Rs 1.73 crores authorized to CPWD(WZ), Mumbai could not be utilized. Furthermore, final bill in respect of construction of High Voltage Laboratory at NTH(SR), Chennai remains unsettled probably due to paucity of fund in the year 2019-20.

Necessary action will be initiated for timely completion of the remaining part of the project on receipt of the demand raised by the concern CPWD authorities through regional heads of NTH.

Procurement of Machineries & Equipment:

The tender enquiries for the procurement of Impulse Generator for both the regions of NTH(SR) Chennai and NTH(ER) Kolkata were floated through CPP. On technical evaluation of the bids submitted by the firms, it was found that no bid was technically qualified as per the recommendation of the duly constituted Purchase Committee and hence the tendering process was cancelled.

The process for procurement of Impulse Generator for NTH(SR) will be initiated by floating fresh tender enquiries through CPP, as the building for Impulse Voltage Laboratory is completed at NTH(SR), Chennai.

To strengthen the laboratories of NTH(NER),Guwahati, a functional laboratory for testing facility of Rubber, Plastic, Paper and Textile (RPPT) materials will be established and one tensile testing machine will be procured as per the requirement of the laboratory. Further, one Universal hardness testing machine will also be procured for Mechanical Laboratory of NTH (NER).

The process of procurement of QUV Accelerated Weathering Tester for Mumbai, equipments for Routine Testing of Transformers, Carbon SulphurAnalyser, Photo-biological Test Set up and Impulse Voltage Generator for Kolkata and Fourier Transform Infrared Spectrometer for Ghaziabad, will be initiated as per the availability of fund.

All out efforts will be made at regional as well as in the level of NTH (HQ) for timely upgradation& Maintenance of machinery and equipments and infrastructures in addition to the procurement of machines and equipments and completion of major works.”

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Recommendation No. 17 (Para No. 2.87)

2.29 " The Committee observe that out of the BE of Rs. 200 lakh and RE of Rs. 160 lakh, an expenditure of Rs. 110 lakh has been incurred during the year 2019-20 by the Department of Consumer Affairs for strengthening the existing mechanism of price monitoring, both at the Centre and State levels. For the year 2020-21, an amount of Rs. 200 lakh has been earmarked. The Committee note that regular monitoring is done by way of organising workshop (regional, zone wise and State workshop), inter-alia, to review the prices, its authenticity and ensuring regularity of price reporting from the 114 centres. Time to time, field visits are also being undertaken by officers of the Ministry, whenever necessary. The Committee are concerned to note that while States have come forward to increase the number of Price Reporting Centres, it is sometimes seen that all the centres do not report prices regularly and considerable follow up is required. The Committee are of the opinion that regular review and supervision of the price collection at these centres by State government officials will go a long way in improving the quality of this information, which is vital for timely intervention decisions. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Government should utilize the allocated funds in a most prudent manner and ensure that the States/UTs report prices regularly, accurately and from the widest range of centres. They also recommend that the States/UTs may be reminded to exercise powers available as per relevant provisions of the law in the interest of the consumers. The Government should ensure that uniform price of essential commodities prevail across the States/Union Territories in the country."

Reply of the Government

2.30 " To make price data more representative, and improving coverage and building a robust system for collection and reporting of prices, States/UTs have been asked to identify and add new price reporting centres from semi-urban/rural areas also. 20 new price reporting centres are to be added in the Price Reporting mechanism every year.

Regular follow up with States/UTs regarding sending of financial proposals for strengthening of their Price Reporting Centres (PRC) as per the revised guidelines which additionally allows for engaging services of one Data Entry Operator per centre and a hand held device. States/UTs have been asked to provide PFMS details and timely submission of Utilisation certificate required for releasing of funds under the Scheme for both recurrent and non recurrent components as per the revised guidelines on Strengthening of Price Monitoring Cell.

5 Zonal Conferences cum training workshops proposed to be conducted for all the Price Reporting Centres spread across the country in the FY-2020-21."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Recommendation No. 18 (Para No. 2.97)

2.31 " The Committee note that Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) was set up with an initial corpus of Rs. 500 crore to tackle inflationary trends of some agri-horticultural commodities. The Committee also note that price stabilization operations are determined by the Central Price Stabilization Fund Management Committee (CPSFMC), headed by Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs, which has held 45 sittings since 1st April, 2016. They further note that over and above a balance quantity of about 2884 Metric Tonne (LMT) pulses, a quantity of about 15.7 LMT pulses was transferred from PSS to PSF and a quantity of about 1.4 LMT disposed of in 2019-20. A quantity of about 14.24 LMT pulses was in the stock. Also a buffer stock of about 57300 MT of onion was created this year and released into the market. The Committee are of the opinion that price fluctuation is a serious issue for consumers, especially to those belonging to irregular and low income groups. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Government should carry out market intervention operations with due diligence and sensitivity to the needs of consumers in various parts of the country, including the cyclone-prone areas like Odisha."

Reply of the Government

2.32 " Government has been decided to build a buffer of around 19.50 LMT of pulses for the current year. As the procurement since Rabi-17 was under MSP operation of PSS, pulses procured under Price Support Scheme (PSS) of Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DACFW) have since been channelized to PSF to the extent of meeting buffer requirements. This has ensured effective utilisation of PSS stocks towards stabilization efforts as calibrated releases are made from PSF. Thus, harmonization between PSS and PSF has been achieved with remunerative prices being assured to farmers and intervention on the supply side is undertaken to manage their prices in consumer interest. In various instances from time to time, States/UTs through video-conferencing, written communication, national consultation meetings, etc., are urged to lift stocks from buffer for utilization under their welfare schemes like PDS, MDM, ICDS which largely cater to the need of consumers with irregular/lower income groups as well as for direct retailing in the benefit of consumers. Vide DO No. PS-03/1/2017/PMC/pt.1 dated 11th December 2019, around 8.47 LMT of pulses were offered to States/UTs for utilization under their welfare schemes as well as direct retailing to improve availability and moderation of its prices.

Pulses from buffer have also been supplied to Kerala towards flood relief measure in the past. Further, w.r.t. OMS, stock held by designated agencies is available for purchase nation-wide through transparent auction process to moderate prices. In addition to the above, advance provided under State-Level PSF based on assessment by concerned State and proposal sent by them as per due procedure. Such proposal as per Operational Guidelines of PSF may be utilized to cater to State-specific requirements based on their assessment. Centre's share of Rs.25 crore was released in June 2018 to Odisha state level PSF. The State had set up PSF for market intervention in onion, potato and pulses, till date the amount is un-utilized by the State Government.”

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Comments of the Committee

(Please see Para No. 1.32 of Chapter -I of the Report)

Recommendation No. 19 (Para No. 2.98)

2.33 " The Committee also note that State-level corpus funds are created with Centre-State sharing on 50:50 basis, which is 75:25 ratio in case of NE States. They also note that Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal, Odisha, Assam and Tamil Nadu have set up State-level Price Stabilization Funds to tackle inflationary trends in commodities like onion, potatoes and pulses while the rest of the States have been urged to set-up State/UT level PSF. The Committee recommend that the States/UT may be vigorously pursued to set up the Fund to tackle situations of scarcity in pulses, onions and other essential commodities. The Committee also desire that in the event of requests or demands for such perishable commodities received from the States/UTs, the same should be favourably responded to."

Reply of the Government

2.34 " The matter of setting up of State-level PSF is pursued with States regularly through video-conferencing, written communication, national consultation meetings, etc. to tackle situation of scarcity in availability of pulses, onion and rise in their prices. States are urged to assess need w.r.t. setting up State-level PSF as per Operational Guidelines of PSF. Diverse responses have been observed from States/UTs. This is on account of diversity on various parameters such as

a) whether the State/UT is a deficit/surplus state;

b) extent of price moderating impact through market flows - when arrivals from other States suffice and/or sufficient carry over stocks are available with trade, need for maintaining buffer stock may not be felt given the costs it entails

c) to what extent price fluctuations are witnessed in the State - Notwithstanding nation-wide average price increase, prices in given State/region may be short-term and comparatively less volatile and may not necessitate intervention by State-Government

d) consumption pattern of the State

e) extent of storage and retailing infrastructure/wherewithal to carry out necessary market interventions in an effective manner - lack of such infrastructure/mechanism results in absence of effective disposal mechanism required to intervene effectively in the market especially in case of perishables like onions.

2. W.r.t. the long run, the following may be noted:

a) stabilizing domestic production is key to stabilize prices. Agriculture being a State Subject, this comes under the purview of the States/UTs. Sustainable production would require enhancement in productivity and greater role of NFSM, inter-cropping, etc. On the other hand, procurement of rice, wheat and sugarcane at MSP may be rationalized keeping in view stability in their prices, self-sufficiency in production, ample buffer stocks. This is essential to enable shift towards less-water intensive crops and aligning cropping pattern based on environmental endowments and consumer demand, to stabilize prices. Enhanced availability will ensure access at affordable prices and much needed shift to recommended nutrition rich diets especially for irregular/low income groups which is also in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

b) A one-size fits all approach may not be best suited in the long run and it does not result in optimal resource allocation and blurs accountability which affects efficient utilization of resources and as well as efficiency of outcomes (States have been reluctant to lift onion and pulses from Central buffer stocks despite frequent and repeated requests made by the Centre). While States have been proactive in involving Centre in procurement operations, their involvement in disposal of stocks has been very lukewarm. The very fact that Agriculture is a State subject is testimony to its diverse nature across States and need for tailored approach.

c) In this context, trend of total financial flows State-wise towards Agriculture Sector should be aggregated for necessary analysis and performance evaluation. Setting up a permanent version of Finance Commission in the nature of a Fiscal Secretariat may be pertinent in this regard. This would help in devolution of greater amount of untied funds to States in a phased manner over time for utilization in ways as deemed effective by them given their requirements. This is

essential to align production pattern based on consumer preferences and environmental endowments and provide needed flexibility to States to intervene in an efficient manner to achieve better outcomes as accountability would be delegated in a clearer manner”

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Recommendation No. 20 (Para No. 2.109)

2.35 " The Committee note that for the year 2019-20, an amount of Rs. 1950 lakh had been earmarked for Consumer Welfare Fund (CWF) where the money which is not refundable to the manufacturers, etc. is credited. The actual utilization of the allocated fund is however Rs. 719 lakh (upto 31.12.2019). They also note that financial assistance from CWF is given to various institutions including Universities, Voluntary Consumer Organisations (VCOs), Government Bodies and States for strengthening consumer movement. The Committee hope and expect that the financial allocation of Rs. 26100 lakh would be utilized productively and optimally during the financial year 2020-21. The Committee have also been informed about details of Grants released under CWF scheme during the years 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 to various institutions. The Committee desire that the Department should ensure that such institutions make utilization of the funds in a most productive manner, by insisting on Utilization Certificates (UCs) from them. The Committee also note that so far 15 States/UTs have set up State Level Consumer Welfare Fund with contribution of 75% (90% in case of Special Category States/UTs) from the Union Government. The number of such States was 13 in the year 2018-19. The Committee are of the view that while the steps taken by the Government to convince the States/UTs to set up State Level CWF have yielded some results, however, the Committee are constrained to note that the growth pattern in the scenario is not satisfactory. Considering the urgent need to create consumer awareness and strengthening the consumer movement in the country, the Committee strongly recommend that the Department of Consumer Affairs should vigorously pursue and impress upon the remaining States/UTs to set up the Consumer Welfare Fund on priority."

Reply of the Government

2.36 "Recommendations of the Committee have been noted for compliance. The Department of Consumer Affairs has been continuously pursuing and impressing upon the remaining States / UTs to set up the Consumer Welfare Fund in their States and commits to do so more vigorously in future also."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Comments of the Committee

(Please see Para No. 1.35 of Chapter -I of the Report)

CHAPTER III

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

Recommendation No. 5 (Para No. 2.24)

3.1 " The Committee note that the Government allocate funds under the scheme of Consumer helpline wherein the National Consumer Helpline, Zonal Consumer Helplines and State Consumer Helplines are integrated under the new scheme of Integrated Consumer Grievance Redressal System (ICGRS). The Financial Assistance from this scheme is being provided for social media initiatives such as developing applications etc. They, therefore, desire that the Government should deploy part of the fund for developing computer application for use in the Mediation Centres with a view to eventual integration of the centres with the entire network of the NCH/ICGRS through the INGRAM V2.3."

Reply of the Government

3.2 "As per the provisions of Consumer Protection Act, 2019, at the first hearing of the complaint after its admission, or at any later stage, if it appears to the District Commission that there exists elements of a settlement which may be acceptable to the parties, except in such cases as may be prescribed, it may direct the parties to give in writing, within five days, consent to have their dispute settled by mediation. The mediator shall prepare a settlement report of the settlement and forward the signed agreement along with such report to the concerned Commission. Therefore, the process through Mediation is a post-litigation mediation process.

The Department runs National Consumer Helpline with a National Toll Free No. 1800-11-4000 and a short code 14404. A consumer can call to seek information, advice or guidance on the queries raised and file complaints. The complaints received on telephone Help-line, online, emails, SMS etc. are processed on the INGRAM portal which is equipped to perform backend operations. Furthermore, under the convergence model, which is an out of court dispute redressal mechanism, NCH partners with companies who have a proactive approach for efficient consumer complaint resolution. NCH escalates and follows up the complainants received at NCH with the convergence company, for speedy redressal. Thus, NCH acts as a bridge in building symbiotic synergies between consumers and service providers/Companies. Therefore, NCH works as a pre-litigation process.

Mediation centres and NCH/ICGRS have different work sphere and complementary to each other and cannot be integrated."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

CHAPTER IV

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

NIL

CHAPTER V

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

Recommendation No. 7 (Para No. 2.26)

5.1 " The Committee further note that a total grant amounting to Rs. 240.12 lakh has been released to various States/UT Administrations under the Consumer Helpline Scheme during the years 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20, out of which utilization certificates (UCs) for just Rs. 55.36 lakh have been received. No UC have been received in respect of Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan and West Bengal and UC on a part of the grant received was furnished by the State of Uttar Pradesh. The Committee desire the Department to vigorously pursue with the 7 States/UT Administrations to furnish Utilization Certificates in respect of grants under Consumer Helpline Scheme and apprise them the outcome thereof at the earliest."

Reply of the Government

5.2 " The State/UT Governments concerned have been asked to furnish the pending UCs in respect the grants released for State Consumer helplines."

[Department of Consumer Affairs (Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution) O.M. No. N-13/5/2020-P&C]

Comments of the Committee

(Please see Para No. 1.20 of Chapter -I of the Report)

**NEW DELHI;
16 December, 2020
25 Agrahayana, 1942 (Saka)**

**SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY
Chairperson,
Standing Committee on Food,
Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution.**

APPENDIX I

MINUTES OF THE FIFTH SITTING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOOD, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (2020-2021) HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 16 DECEMBER, 2020

The Committee sat from 1100 hrs. to 1300 hrs. in Committee Room 'D',
Ground Floor, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

PRESENT

Shri Sudip Bandyopadhyay - Chairperson

Members

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Karadi Sanganna Amarappa
3. Ms. Pratima Bhoumik
4. Shri Anil Firojiya
5. Shri Bhagwant Mann
6. Shri Khagen Murmu
7. Shri Mitesh Rameshbhai (Bakabhai) Patel
8. Shri Subrat Pathak
9. Smt. Himadri Singh
10. Smt. Kavita Singh
11. Shri Ajay Misra Teni
12. Shri Saptagiri Ulaka
13. Shri Rajmohan Unnithan
14. Shri Ve. Vaithilingam

Rajya Sabha

15. Shri Satish Chandra Dubey
16. Smt. Roopa Ganguly
17. Dr. Fauzia Khan
18. Shri Rajmani Patel

SECRETARIAT

1. Shri Pawan Kumar - Joint Secretary
2. Shri Lovekesh Kumar Sharma - Director

2. At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the Members to the sitting of the Committee convened to: (i) adopt 4 draft Reports on Action Taken by the Government on observations/recommendations contained in Reports on Demands for Grants (2019-20) and also for the year 2020-21 pertaining to the Department of Food and Public Distribution and Department of Consumer Affairs; and (ii) XXXX XXXX XXXX. The Committee unanimously adopted the 4 draft Action Taken Reports without any modifications/amendments.

XXXXXX

3. XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX

4. XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX

XXXXXX

XXXX XXXX

The Committee then adjourned.

XXXXXX *Matter does not pertain to the Report*

APPENDIX II

(Vide Para No. 4 of Introduction of the Report)

ANALYSIS OF THE ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT ON THE OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THE FOURTH REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOOD, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (2019-20)

(SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA)

- (i) Total number of Recommendations: 20
- (ii) Observations/Recommendations which have been accepted by the Government :
- Para Nos.:- 1.10, 2.10, 2.11, 2.17, 2.25, 2.32, 2.42, 2.43, 2.55, 2.56, 2.68, 2.69, 2.70, 2.76, 2.87, 2.97, 2.98 and 2.109.
- (Chapter – II, Total - 18)
Percentage : 90%
- (iii) Observations/Recommendations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the replies received from the Government
- Para Nos. 2.24.
- (Chapter – III, Total - 1)
Percentage : 5%
- (iv) Observations/Recommendations in respect of which replies of the Government have not been accepted by the Committee and which require reiteration:
- Para Nos. NIL
- (Chapter – IV, Total -Nil)
Percentage : 0
- (v) Observations/Recommendations in respect of which the interim replies of the Government have been received.
- Para Nos.:- 2.26
- (Chapter – V, Total - 1)
Percentage : 5%