

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do not record anything more in this Bill.

15.49 hrs.

PASSPORTS (AMENDMENT) BILL

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The House shall now take up the Bill further to amend the passports Act, 1967 for consideration. Hon. Minister Shri R.L. Bhatia.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R.L. BHATIA): The administration of the departure of persons from India through issue of passports has been governed by the Passport Act of 1967. The Act has provided a framework for what has become over a period of time, a growing phenomenon of persons traveling abroad for purposes of education, business, employment, pilgrimage and tourism. An increasing number of persons have thus been seeking to travel outside India. There has also been a phenomenal growth over just two years in the recent past in passport applications received in 1990, the Passport Officers throughout the country received over 15 lakh applications just for new passports whereas in 1991, this figure was 24 lakhs.

Based on the experience that we have gained in administering the Act, we found that there were certain aspects that required to be addressed through legislation to make the provisions of the Act current. It will be recognised that the very nature of our passport booklet has undergone major change. This has been the result of an ongoing review to bring it on par with international standards. The changes involve design, materials used and the introduction of several features which make the booklet more in keeping with those of the international community. Further development will over the next five years, lead to the introduction of machine Readable Passports and Visas, also in keeping with international decisions on the subject.

The Bill will enable the Government to take suitable steps to recover the cost of issuing a passport and to provide for more effective deterrence in case of misuse. The cost of issuing a passport has gone up considerably since 1978 when the fee was increased from Rs. 25 to Rs. 50. For the Government to be able to provide effective services in this area, it is essential that the product and the processes be consistently improved in keeping with our requirements and accepted standards in the international community. The issue of passports is clearly not a commercial operation, but at the same time, it is essential that the cost of the service be met by the fee that is charged for it.

Sir, we have also incorporated elements in the Bill to enhance the prescribed in the event of offenses committed under the Act. The penalties were prescribed several years ago and it is desirable that they be made more stringent in order to provide for effective deterrence of fraud or misuse.

In conclusion, I would like to state that the service provided by the Central Passport Organisation is one of the critical areas of activities of the Minister of External Affairs. We are deeply conscious of the need for smooth, effective and timely service to our fellow citizens. The Ministry is embarking on a major review of every aspect of passport activity in view of the tremendous growth that we foresee in this area in coming years. We are confident that this exercise will result in an improved system with enhanced efficiency to cater to the needs of the Indian Public.

Sir, I seek your leave now to request the House to take this Bill into consideration and to pass the Bill in its present form.

I beg to move:

"That the Bill further to amend the passports Act, 1967, be taken into consideration."

MR. CHAIRMAN: Motion moved:

"That the Bill further to amend the

Passports Act 1967, be taken into consideration"

There are amendments to motion for consideration of the Bill. Shri Girdhari Lal Bhargava.

[Translation]

SHRI GIRDHARI LAL BHARGAVA: (Jaipur): I beg to move:-

"That the Bill be circulated for the purpose of eliciting opinion thereon by the 11th March 1993." (1)

SHRI MOHAN SINGH (Deoria): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I beg to move-

"That the Bill be circulated for the purpose of eliciting opinion thereon by the 31st March, 1992". (2)

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Prof. Rasa Singh Rawat's amendment is identical to Shri Girdhari Lal Bhargava's amendment. So, Prof. Rasa Singh Rawat's amendment does not survive.

Shri Ram Kapse may speak now.

15.54 hours.

SHRI RAM KAPSE (Thane): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I generally support the Bill; but at the same time, I am not in a position to support the Bill *in toto*

My first objection is to second amendment which has been moved by the Minister in Section 5 of the Passports Act, 1967. The amendment is:

"Such fee as may be prescribed to meet the expenses incurred in special security paper, Printing, lamination and other connected miscellaneous services in issuing passports and other travel documents".

Here in the Bill, in the paragraph,

Delegated Legislation', it has been said,

"Matters in respect of which rules may be made are matters of procedure and detail. The delegation of legislative power is thus of a normal character."

Originally, in the Bill, the fee was Rs. 25. Then it was raised to Rs. 50. I would have supported if the fees would have been mentioned, say, Rs. 100 or Rs. 200, whatever it is, taking into account the expenses you incur as on today. But you wanted us to delegate our powers to you will decide, that is, the department will decide as to what fees will be charged. We want the Government to be specific about the fees that would be charged because lakhs of people will be going out using your passport. Naturally, we would not like to delegate our powers to any department. We want it to be fixed here and here only as was done in the earlier years. Otherwise, we do not oppose enhancing the fees. It is necessary. But I would like to know that in last March, when we had raised this question of passports in the Parliament, there was an assurance from the Government side that here after there will not be any delay in issuing passports. But we would like to know what is the position as on today. For months together, the people have to wait for passport. For the last so many years, I am in public life. Never was there any person coming to me and telling me: please write to passport authority to issue the passport at the earliest. I have spent three weeks, four weeks five weeks. But I am not getting the passport. Please help me.

But in the last year. I think, it must have been the experience of almost everyone that the people come to us requesting us to write to you passport authority. We do not like writing such letters.

Then, Mr. Madhavsingh Solanki, the Minister at that time, had assured that within five weeks, the passports will be cleared. What is the result. We would like to know about it because his assurance was given on 13th March. Between March 13 and as on today, many things have happened. The

Minister has changed. They are happy about it. But at the same time, we would like to know the position as far as the passport office is concerned. Have you increased the staff? That was the real problem because you yourself had said that in the last two years, there an increase in the number. Then, have you increased the staff?

Have you increased your capacity to issue the passports in time at the earliest? We are happy about the situation there.

The other thing is about the next amendment that is where the passport is issued for a short period, then the prescribed period under section 7, such shorter period shall, unless the passport authority for reasons, be recorded in writing otherwise determines, be extendible for further period...It should not be more than the period for which the passport was issued.

That was the original Act. Now you want to say: which, together with the shorter period, shall not exceed the prescribed period.

That means, it can be even more than the original period, is it so? Then, I would like to know from the Minister as to the reason why this is being done.

The original section, I think, was reasonable. Supposing a person goes out for a year. Extension may be for one more year. That should be a shorter period. Actually, when you call it a shorter period, if it is more than the original period, then I cannot see the fun out of it.

I would like to support the other amendments. They are about the punishment whether they are Indians or whether they are outsiders. Whosoever uses its authority in a wrong manner, for that crime, we support whatever punishments you are going to prescribe by this Act. But at the same time, I would like to know who helped the people from Maharashtra the criminals from Maharashtra who are wanted

under TADA, to go out to Dubai. Was a valid passport issued to Bhai Thakur? He was actually detained at Calcutta. There was an inquiry from Calcutta Airport. Do you want this man. He is going to Dubai.

The name was cleared from Maharashtra side. Ultimately he left India for good. For the last so many months, he wanted under TADA. Now his brother is a Congress MLA. (*Interruptions*) He is wanted under TADA. Whether he has left India or not we do not know.

There are two Congress MLAs from Maharashtra who are to be detained under TADA. It is a record by itself in Maharashtra. But I am concerned more with the use of passport by Bhai Thakur for leaving India and going to Dubai. What happened actually? Was anything wrong as far as the issuance of passport is concerned? How as it used? I would like to know as far as such things are concerned. I think the passport office is not meant to help the criminals, but to see that right persons go outside without any detention from the passport office. Please help in that way. That is the request; that is the suggestion.

SHRI A. CHARLES (Trivandrum):
Thank you, Sir, for giving me an opportunity to speak on the Passport (Amendment) Bill. In Kerala, as you know, the maximum number of Keralites go and seek a fortune outside the country because the employment opportunities are very limited in Kerala. It is the most highly-educated State. So, the problem of unemployment of the educated is the most serious in our State.

It is really very sad that even for those who seek their fortune outside, are unable to go because of the inordinate delay caused in issuing the passport.

I generally support this Bill. I support all the sections. I share the concern of the hon. Member, Mr. Ram Kapse because it is not always good to delegate everything to the office. But I feel that the office and the Government will be very reasonable. The fee of Rs. 50 is very meagre. Under the

present circumstances, it is not sufficient to issue the passport. So, I will only plead with the hon. Minister to be reasonable when fixing the charge. I do not feel that this is an issue that has to be taken to the Parliament every time to have the enhancement of a small amount whether it is Rs. 100 or Rs. 150 or Rs. 200 because the Government also will be very genuine or reasonable in fixing the fee.

About the punishment side, I feel that computerisation of the passport offices will, to a large extent, solve that problem. It is one thing to enhance the punishment but generally another to avoid the circumstances or keeping the people who commit the crime. So, if you have computerisation, the moment one applies for a passport, it will be very easy to see whether he has suppressed any facts or he is a foreign national or he is eligible for the passport. In that case, I think, 90 per cent of the offences can be avoided. They have this system in all the developed countries. The moment one applies for a passport, if one presses a button, all his background will come there. So, I plead that this should be taken into consideration.

My main request is to avoid the present delay in issuing passport. Trivandrum is the capital of our State. The Government has been very kind enough to open a passport office there ten months back. In the first two to three weeks of opening, if somebody had applied for a passport, he got it within a month or two. Now, after ten months of opening the office, the present number of applications pending for passport is 70,000. As on date, 70,000 applications are pending in Trivandrum office alone. There is a regional office in Cochin. If my information is correct, one year delay is there in that office and our hon. Member, Mr. Murlu will tell about Calicut and his problems. So, hundreds of people approach us when there is a delay after applying for passports. What can we do? On an average, 15,000 applications are coming every month in Trivandrum office alone. At present, 70,000 applications are pending. So, on an average, it will take more than ten

months to clear that 70,000 applications if 10,000 passports are issued every month. That means, at the end of the next ten months, the number of pending applications will be 1,50,000 which is more than double the present number. Ultimately, it may take years for a person to get a passport. There are several cases in which visa problem is there. Some relatives may be there or somebody may be sick or wife or husband has to rush up there. So, it is impossible for them to meet such a situation.

There are three problems which contribute for the delay in issuing passports. The first problem is the police verification. In most cases, it takes a long time. It is a very simple procedure. Under the present system, a Joint Secretary of the Government of India or an Additional Secretary of a State Government or a judicial officer not below the rank of the District Judge is competent to sign the application form. But none of them are signing it because the liability of somebody having some charges against them is there. So, they are scared of the whole thing. They never sign the forms especially when hundreds of applications are coming everyday. As Trivandrum is the capital, applications are more there. But the procedure is very simple. One has to affix his photograph in the application form. Then it goes to the local police station. The local inspector has to certify that there are no cases pending against that particular applicant in the police station and geographical jurisdiction is there. Suppose you make a legislation or a law that within two weeks of the receipt of the application form, the local sub-inspector should give the certificate through the DSP of SP, the matter becomes simple. The time can be made as two weeks by subordinate legislation. More than two weeks is not necessary to find out whether there is any case pending against the applicant or not. If subordinate legislation is made that not more than two weeks shall be taken or before two weeks the final report should go to the passport office, then one problem will be solved.

Then, the problem is requirement of staff. Trivandrum office has requested for an additional 60 clerks and three superintendents who are required for issuing

passports within a reasonable time. Five weeks time is mentioned here. But I would request that a passport should be issued at least within two months time accordingly, staff should be given to every office. I plead that Trivandrum may be provided with at least 60 clerical staff and three more superintendents to meet the requirements.

The third is the requirement of laminating machines. They have opened a new office in Trivandrum and they have given two machines. I have definite information that these machines are often under repair. They are not good machines. They also require three more machines. Unless the office in Trivandrum is equipped with five laminating machines - two already available plus three more new machines - and a staff comprising 60 workers, it will not be possible for them to issue passports in time. And month after month, the total pendency will keep on increasing. As I have already stated earlier, on an average, 15,000 applications are received every month in Trivandrum alone. In Cochin and Calicut, more applications are received. Therefore, I plead that the requirement of these Passport Offices should be taken into consideration and the promise made in this House to the effect that the passport would be issued within five weeks, should also be kept in mind. At least it must be ensured that the passports are issued within eight weeks, viz. two months. This will quite satisfy the people of every State and especially the people of Kerala. As I said earlier, many of our artisans, skilled labour and people belonging to the lower strata and weaker sections of our society go to the Gulf Countries. They work there and earn foreign exchange. Thereby, they are also helping our country in improving our balance of payments position as well. More than getting employment opportunities, etc. this is a major contribution towards helping the financial condition of this country. Therefore, help us to earn foreign exchange and help us to get employment opportunities. All that you have to do is to give the passports within two months. I am sure the hon. Minister will take note of these requirements and do whatever

is necessary so that the passports are issued as quickly as possible.

[*Translation*]

SHRI MOHAN SINGH (Deoria): Mr. Chairman, Sir, the hon. Minister has brought forward a brief amendment to amend the passport Act. Though there is not much to debate on the amendment under consideration or to oppose it, yet, I would like to take this opportunity to give a few suggestions. A need is felt to open more and more passport offices from time to time. Before introducing this amendment to enhance the passport fee, it would have been better had the cost of printing and issuing passport form would have been taken into account. It will be really nice if the increase in fee is quite reasonable keeping in view the pocket of common man in the country.

Secondly, the penal provisions have been sought to be amended which is quite good and welcome. Definitely penal provisions should be there to punish the persons guilty of concealing information for getting the passport issued. Many of our hon. colleagues have given suggestions from time to time, both inside and outside the House, to the Government regarding delay in the issuance of passports. However, I fail to understand the reasons why is the Government not opening up more and more passport offices in the country. The Government is requested to open more and more passport offices and recover the administrative and other expenditures to be incurred thereon from the passport fee.

I may say something about Lucknow. When I went there last month I was told that it takes between 8-10-12 months for getting the passport issued and in the passport office 7,000 applications were pending in October when I went there before Dussehra. What is the difficulty in opening up passport offices in Gorakhpur, Banaras and Bareilly? Before issuing passport, report from the CID is called for within a month. Therefore, if the passport offices are situated nearby, then it will be easier to call for reports from the CID.

[Sh. Mohan Singh]

An assurance and guarantee should be given that within one month of the receipt of the request for the issuance of the passport in the passport office, needful will be done. There is a need to streamline the procedure for the issuance of passport. In 1977 an amendment was made that if an application for passport is signed by a legislator, then it will be considered a sufficient proof. However, for some reasons it was later on amended again. The procedure was simple at that time and the applicants were merely required to get a certificate and the passport form signed by a legislator. I would like to bring to your notice that nowadays people often come to me and complain that despite my approach, passport was not issued. Within the stipulated period of 3 weeks passport could be got issued if Rs. 15,000 in Delhi and Rs. 10,000 in Lucknow could be arranged, while other people have to run from pillar to post. Therefore, this procedure should be simplified.

Under rule 4 three types of passports are issued—first, diplomatic passport; second, ordinary passport and third, Governments staff and officers passport. I would like to submit that circumstances within the outside the country are rapidly changing. With the coming into being of the European Common Market, procedure for the issuance of the passport there has been simplified and the provision for the issuance of the entry certificate has been made. The Government is requested to ponder over at least issuing fourth type of passport to the citizens of the SAARC countries for easy entry and exit facilities from one country to another country. This procedure should be started in our country, because India is a unique nation. Lakhs of Indians are living outside the country. Lakhs of persons from Uttar Pradesh alone are living in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Even in Nepal, Indians are living, but there is not much problem of passport to visit Nepal. However, when any family member of the persons, whose families have migrated to Pakistan and Bangladesh falls ill, then it is quite difficult for these families to visit their ailing family member, if for example son lives

in Moradabad, India and mother lives in Karachi, Pakistan. So, if the mother is on the death bed, then the son cannot go and see his dying mother. I can cite a number of such examples. Therefore, the system of issue of the fourth type of passport should be introduced so that the people can visit neighboring and SAARC countries without much hindrance. This will also boost trade relations to a large extent. Therefore, the Government should take up with SAARC countries the issue of introducing the facility of 'entry certificates' in India on the line of the new procedure evolved by the European Common Market. I think this will be a step in the right direction.

At the same time the Government is also empowered not to issue passport for the countries who are hostile to India, because a provision is there that in the interest of the country passport is not being issued. So what will the yard stick for it, as this right rests with the Government. This should be extensively debated upon as to what is the largest interest of the country. Impounding of passport of anyone on whimsical grounds is not good as was recently seen in the case of the Speaker of a Legislative Assembly. He is being prosecuted in the Supreme Court and the case is likely to linger on and on. His passport was impounded on the premise that he will most likely not come back to India. Therefore, the Government should explain it thoroughly in the House as to where and in what lies the interest of the country because all avenues are open to the Government for utilising it on political grounds in whatever manner the Government feels necessary as it has been misused by Government from time to time. My hon. friends rightly drew attention to the fact that a passport was issued to a legislator of the ruling party of a particular Legislative Assembly, against whom there are several smuggling charges pending and who has even been detained under TADA. But the passport was issued to him because he is a member of the ruling party. Had he been the member of the opposition party, his passport would have been definitely impounded on the grounds that his foreign junket would have most likely jeopardised the country's interests. So, the country's interests should be explained and well defined by all of us right here in the

House itself. The hon. Minister present in the House should convene a meeting in this regard. I once again request the hon. Minister to make the procedure for the issuance of the passport simple and easy.

With these words I conclude my speech and thank you for giving me time to speak.

[English]

DR. SUDHIR RAY (Burdwan): Mr. Chairman, now the demand for passports is increasing year by year. Already the hon. Minister has informed us that nearly 24 lakh applications for passports are lying with the Passport Office.

A large number of people are going abroad, not to speak of students, teachers, engineers and doctors; even unskilled workers are going abroad especially from Kerala. Lakhs of people are going to Gulf countries for earning their livelihood; and these people are adding to the national wealth by sending money form abroad; the relatives of those people who are working abroad are getting large remittances every year. Therefore, passport procedure should be simplified so that applicants may not suffer any hardship in getting their passports.

But it is found that the Regional Passport Offices make inordinate delay in issuing passports. The applicants have to loiter near the Passport Office; they have to pay money; and passports are not issued even after five to six months. The former hon. Minister of External Affairs, Madhav Singh Solanki, promised in this House that within five weeks a passport will be issued; but that is a long dream. Thousands of applications for passports are lying in the Passport Office.

As Mr. A. Charles observed, the police authority should be asked to clear police verification within two weeks; it should not exceed two weeks. But it is found that the police often takes time. When they make police verification, they often demand money. And an applicant for clearing his police

verification has to pay money. As far as possible, the police verification should be expedited. The Government must tell the police authorities to clear applications for police verification within two weeks.

Travel agents have been authorised to apply for passports. I think the ignorant applicants become victims of travel agents and touts. They extract money from these ignorant applicants and after much delay they are issued their passports. Therefore, the number of regional offices must be increased along with the staff. The Government should appoint more persons for this job.

Since the Government has to pay the actual cost of police verification and get in information to be passed on to the applicant, the cost varies from person to person. And there is a large scope for manipulation. Therefore, I do not object to the passport fees being increased somewhat, because due to inflation and the price rise the passport fees may rise; but it should be fixed by the Government, not by the officers or the police.

People who forge passports, who possess unauthorised documents, should be punished; there should be deterrent punishment for them. I support the argument here. I support the proposed amendment because in India many foreign countries are sponsoring terrorist activities. They are sending all kinds of persons with "fake passports. If these people are detected they should be given deterrent punishment. Anyway, my argument is that the procedure should be simplified, applicants should be issued passports within five weeks and the fees should be prescribed by the Government.

With these words, I conclude.

SHRI K. MURALEE DHARAN (Calicut): Mr. Chairman, Sir, thank you very much for giving me a chance for participating in this debate.

I rise to support this Bill. Even though the Government had assured on the floor of this

[Sh K Muralee Dharan]

House that every pending passport application will be settled within five weeks, but it is not so. What is actually true?

I come from the northern part of Kerala. The most working community in the Gulf countries is from Malabar region in Calicut.

The Passport Office there received nearly 2,02,000 passport application in 1990-91 and only 1,85,000 applications were disposed off. In 1991-92 as far 2,10,000 applications were received so far and only very few cases with special verification certificates were issued passports. This is the fact. But what is the result. The applicants are not getting their passports and because of that they are not getting jobs in the Gulf countries.

Now the passport authorities issue passports only when they receive the original visa. But in some of the Gulf countries passports are required and if the applicants send photocopy of the passport, they and only then they get the visa. But unfortunately, the passport authorities are incompetent to supply the passports, in time.

The main thing is the passport staff working in the Passport Office is very less, especially in Calicut. In Calicut Passport Office, 3 Public Relation Officers' Posts, 1 Assistant Passport Officer's post, 8 UD Clerks' posts and 4 LD Clerks' posts are vacant. How can they issue passports to two lakh people. This is the main problem, especially in Calicut. So the people who apply for passports, do not get them in time. The main thing is that an applicant who has submitted the application along with the special verification certificate from the Superintendent or Commissioner of Police, is given passport without waiting for the CBCID's report. But at the same time, if a common man submits an application it will go to District Sub-branch Office as well as to the CBCI. So they do not get passports soon. What is the result. They lose their jobs. This is the main headache.

So, many request to the Minister is to

issue the passports speedily. You should provide additional staff in Passport Offices in Kerala. You know, in Kerala most of the people are literate, but unfortunately unemployment is very high there, round about 35 lakh people are unemployed in Kerala.

The Government has failed to give jobs for them so they go to Gulf countries. Now the actual truth is that they are not getting passports and they are losing their jobs, they are simply sitting idle in their houses.

This is the fact.

My suggestion is that the Government should introduce a vigilance cell attached to every Passport Office. I also suggest the introduction of computer system linked with the DIG's office to avoid delay in re-confirmation of the verification certificate issued by the Police Officer.

These are my suggestions. I hope that the hon. Minister will accept them.

[Translation]

PROF PREM DHUMAL (Hamirpur)
Mr. Chairman, Sir, I do support the amendment brought through this Bill by the hon. Minister but I would also like to make some suggestions to him. As has also been said by the preceding speakers an unlimited power is being given to the Government or the Department to raise the passport fee. In this regard I would like to submit to the hon. Minister that the passport fee which is at present fixed at Rs. 50 should be raised to Rs. 100 or 200. The amount of fee should be fixed to avoid any scope of exploitation. If the amendment in the Bill is not done on this basis then I would suggest that whenever the issue of passport fee fixation is taken, the Government should arrange for its due publicity so that the general public may come to know as to what is the passport fee. Generally, the people go to the local passport officers, they are not furnished with proper information there, this will surely provide scope for further exploitation. They may be charged Rs. 200 or Rs. 400 in an arbitrary manner. My first submission therefore, is

that the Government should fix a set amount for passport fee.

In the amendment brought forward by the Government a provision has been made under section 10 of the Bill that if a person is in possession of more than one passport then in that case his passports would be seized. Many such cases come to the knowledge of the Government when the smugglers, pirates and terrorists had been in possession of the passports of several countries at a time; so it is not enough to only seize their passports. There should be a provision of severe action to be meted out against such persons so that such malpractices might be curbed properly.

Similarly, an amendment has also been suggested under section 11 of the Bill concerning the present passport fee which is at the moment Rs. 25. As the Government has sought to have the right of amendment under section 5 but no amount thereof has been fixed. Similarly, it would be proper if a set amount is fixed even in this section so that the general public have not to face any difficulty and so that they may be clearly aware as to how much they have to pay.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, all the other amendments are worth welcoming, but I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister to one of the circulars issued by the Ministry of External Affairs in which it is stated that passports would be issued on 'first come first served' basis. But when the passport has to be issued to some one out of turn, then in that case his application will have to be sent to the Delhi based office of the Chief Passport Officer. A TELEX message from the Regional Passport Office will reach to Delhi and in response to that a reply will be sent from Delhi within 24 hours. Mr. Chairman, Sir, the charge of sending a TELEX message from Calcutta to Delhi is Rs. 150 and then Rs. 150 will again be added to that for making a reply message. In this way the applicant will have to spend Rs. 300 in this affair. On the one hand the Government talks of centralisation while on the other hand the

erstwhile power of the Regional Passport Officers is being conferred to the Delhi based chief Passport Officer. Earlier, the Regional Passport Officers enjoyed the power of issuing the out of turn passports if any applicant wasted it in cases of illness, death or any other cases of emergency. In this way an additional economic pressure of Rs. 300 or more is being put on every applicant. I would, therefore, like to submit that the Government should reconsider the point. The hon. Minister should give direction to all the Regional Passport Officers wherever they are located that the Officers there may issue out of turn passports without the botheration of any TELEX message to be sent from Delhi.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, there are many cases in which out of turn passports have to be issued. I would specially like to cite the example of the journalists who have to go abroad for the reporting the important events. A number of news reporters had accompanied the hon. Minister when he made a foreign trip. In such cases, they have to apply to the Regional Passport Office in the nick of time to obtain the passport immediately. For this purpose, if the message is sent to Delhi and again from there a reply is sent back, it involves too much expenditure. I would therefore, like to submit that this system should come to an end. There are too much expenses and wastage of time in it and at the same time the Regional Passport Office also has to face a lot of difficulties in issuing the passport.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, I would again like to cite the example of the Regional Passport Office located in Calcutta. On an average 350 fresh applications for passports are received there everyday. Adequate staff is required to collect 350 applications, to process these applications and to keep a record of them etc., but there is shortage of staff there. The issuance of passports is also a source of income for the Ministry of External Affairs. No passport office is running in loss. When the applications for passport, are received, when passports are prepared and issued it is also a source of income; rather, the position is that lakhs of applications for

[Prof. Prem Dhumal]

the passport are lying pending. I would therefore, like to submit that adequate number of staff should be posted in the different Regional Passport offices of the country.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister to the fact that a widespread resentment prevades among the employees entrusted with the job of passport issue, due to the irregularities in timely promotion. I would, therefore, like to submit that this should be regularised and a directive should be given to ensure timely promotion of the employees working in the Regional Passport Offices so that the officers and employees may get some incentive.

Sir, the hon. Minister has taken an appreciable step for which I would like to thank him. According to that system now any travel agency can put forward the application on behalf of its clients. This will help a lot to those who live in remote areas. I, therefore, welcome, this step of the Government.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister to the report of the Estimate Committee through which the Committee gave its valuable recommendations. According to the report of that Committee the Indian Passport Act, 1967 and the Passport Entry To India Act had to be merged to make such a comprehensive Act in which all the irregularities in the provisions of those two Acts will be removed. I hope that a Bill will soon be introduced under the active leadership of the hon. Minister to ultimately make it into an Act so that all difficulties lying in the way may be removed.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, now I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister to the incidents of unauthorised infiltration in India. It causes great concern that the foreigners are infiltrating into the boundary of India in an illegal way. There are also cases when foreigners come to India for a certain period with due passport and they do not return to their respective countries even after the

prescribed period of their passport is over. It is creating a lot of problems in the country. I hope that the Ministry to which the hon. Minister belongs will pay attention to this problem and it will ensure that no foreigner should stay in the country when the period of their passport is over.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, I would like to give one more suggestion also. proposals to open Regional Passport Offices are pouring in from many regions, particularly from the distant regions. The Ministry should consider to open Regional Passport offices to those places. Besides, proper arrangements should also be made to remove the grievances of the clients. It would be better if the Government employ some non-Government agency with the charge of solving the grievances of the public. If some complaints are registered through such non-Government agencies, then the removal of the aforesaid grievances would be faster and then the burden of the Government would be competent to remove the complaints.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, the hon. Minister hails from a State where there are numerous difficulties in issuing passport. Lastly, I would, therefore, like to submit that arrangements should be made to provide the passport quickly to those who have applied for that. I do not expect that all the difficulties in the way of issuing the passport would be removed by the efforts of the hon. Minister along with the corruptions that go with it.

[Translation]

SHRI VISHWANATH SHASTRI (Gazipur): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to draw your attention towards the Passport (Amendment) Bill presented in this House.

Sir, firstly, I would like to submit that lakhs of cases are pending in the passport offices in my state. Those who have applied more than one year back, are still waiting for the passports. The main problem is that L.I.O. which conducts the verification, gives one report and the police gives another report. As the report is not submitted in stipulated time, it results in undue delay in issuing passports. Therefore, I would like to

submit that the process of issue of passports should be streamlined and the passport should be issued within two months of submission of the application.

As there is only one regional passport office in Lucknow, a lot of cases remain pending there. There has been a long-standing demand for opening branches of Passport office in Varanasi, Bareilly and other places. Similarly the passport fee, to be charged should be fixed. It is not clear in the Bill as to how much fee the Government intends to charge instead of the existing Rs. 50.

The number of employees in Passport office is also less and this creates problem. Therefore, their number should be increased.

SHRI RAJESH KUMAR (Gaya): Mr. Chariman, Sir, I support some of the provisions of this Bill and would like to give some suggestions in this regard. The hon. Member Shri Mohan has rightly said that the passport offices have become a den of corruption. I would like to cite an example in this regard. I had gone to the Patna Passport office with a request to expedite the case of a person. The Passport Officer assured me that the passport will be issued later. But it was not issued. I want to say whether it is the passport office in Lucknow, Bihar or in any other part of the country, it has become a den of corruption.

I would like to suggest that a time-limit of 10 to 15 days should be fixed for the police verification and if the police verification report is not received within the stipulated period, the passport officer should be asked not to wait for it. You should get the investigation report through other agencies. Sometimes, police verification takes as long as one year or more than that. In addition to the other expenditures Police officials also demand money from the applicant. These malpractices should be removed.

Charitable institutions are run by foreign missionaries in the Chhota Nagpur area of

Bihar. The validity of their passports has expired. But in spite of that they stay back. Before the people raise hue and cry about it, the Government should conduct a survey regarding such people and they should be sent back to their respective countries.

Bodh-Gaya, is a place of international importance. A woman named Mary Lyp put is residing there for the last 20 years. She goes from village to village perches and converts people. The labourers of that area are influenced by her as she is spending a lot of money. The validity of her passport has expired a long time ago, neither the police nor the passport checking agency enquires about her. This matter should be investigated.

Besides this, I would like to give another suggestion. No priority is given to the cases recommended by the M.Ps. It appears the like M.L.As, recommendation of M.Ps. are also not given any weightage. This provision should also be included in the Bill.

Passports should be issued on the recommendation of the M.Ps. Ours is a poor country. People go to the Gulf Countries for jobs. As a lot of poor people go there, the passport fee should not be increased to much. Arrangements should be made so that the poor do not have to spend much and more of them can go to the foreign countries. Severe punishment should be given to those who get passports through wrongful means. Severe punishment should also be given to criminals, who are arrested under TADA and travel to foreign countries illegally. I fully support this provision.

The children of M.Ps, who are given diplomatic passports upto the age of 12 years should be given this facility upto the age of 20 years as the desire to travel abroad is increasing day by day.

With these few suggestions, I support some of the provisions of this Bill.

SHRI PIYUS TIRKEY (Alipurduar): Mr. Chairman, Sir, nothing much is there to say about this Bill, but I would like to give one or

[Sh. Piyus Tirkey]

two suggestions. I think there is no need to increase the present passport fee of Rs. 50. As there are different rates for a registered letter or a money order or for speed post similarly. Passports should also be categorized. More fee can be charged from a person who is in urgent need of a passport, but it should not be increased for the common man. This is my humble request.

It has been observed that the policemen demand money for early clearance of Passport case. This should be investigated. The Ministers have also been accepting gifts on this account. Have you every paid attention in this regard?

Recently, I had gone to Kashmir. It is a troubled area. The passport office has been shifted from Kashmir. The people now have to go to Jammu to get passports and this causes them a lot of difficulty. So, the passport office should be reopened in Kashmir at the earliest.

There is no passport office in north Bengal. A passport office should be opened in Jalpaigudi, Siligudi or in cooch Bihar. A lot of Bangladeshis come here. They have to get passports, but they face lot of difficulties in going to Calcutta. The Government should choose the location according to its convenience but it is necessary to open a passport office in North Bengal. This will not cast much. The tourist season has started so, there should be no problem.

[English]

SHRI CHITTA BASU (Barasat): Mr. Chariman, Sir, I would like to say only a few words on this Bill.

One of the grievances of the people is the delay in issuing the passports. Even some delay is caused because of some administrative difficulties. My first suggestion would be that the application forms for passports should be supplied through the post offices also. I do not know whether there is any difficulty in this. Presently if somebody

is to apply for a passport he will have to secure the application form from the regional passport office. Therefore, my first suggestion is that the Government should consider the desirability of distributing the passport application forms through various post offices.

My second suggestion is very important. I have known cases where it took more than three years to get the clearance from the police with regard to police verification and character clearance. These two are very important ingredients for a passport. You must get a character clearance. That must be obtained from the police. This police verification taken nearly three years. I have got details of a number of cases where it took at least 3 years for getting the passport and the purpose of visiting a country was not at all fulfilled. Therefore, some steps are to be taken to see that the police verification and character clearance are obtained within two or three months or within a rational time-frame.

Let us take the case of students passports. Indian students go outside for studies. Some grievances have come to me where the students could not get the passports in time as a result of which they could not avail themselves of a particular academic session and they had to wait for another six to eight months. I would request the hon. Minister to see that so far as student passports are concerned, his Ministry should make certain special arrangements so that the students can get the passports as quickly as possible.

Sir, earlier an announcement was made there will be no need of passports for Members of Parliament belonging in the SAARC countries, for travel within these countries. Why should we limit to Members of Parliament alone? Why not we broaden this a little if we want that there should be people-to-people relations amongst these countries? I would, therefore, suggest that the SAARC countries should have that kind of arrangement where people can move from one country to another at the quickest possible time.

Lastly, I submit that there is a provision for impounding the passport. We need some amendments in this too. What is the good of

getting the passports impounded? If you remember the case of Mr. Win Chadha, his passport was impounded. Even then he jumped out of the country. Therefore, this necessity of impounding the passports will be reduced to a great extent if the police verification and character clearance are made with much more caution. With these words, I think the Government will take appropriate action so that the grievances of the people are removed as early as possible.

SHRI OSCAR FERNANDES (Udupi):
Mr. Chairman, Sir, I must thank the hon. Minister of bringing forward this legislation which is long overdue. It is long overdue because all over the country I find that a large number of people who have applied for passports wanting to go abroad are not getting passports issued in time. Therefore, I would like to make a few suggestions whereby it will be possible for the people to get their passports early. One of the reasons put forward is that our passport offices are not manned properly. The passport offices do not have adequate staff. Though we had raised this issue on the floor of the House a number of times and assurances were given that within five weeks passports would be issued, till date the situation is very bad. In my own State of Karnataka, even after nine months of applying for the passport, people are not getting passports.

Sir, there is another peculiar problem as my friend Mr. Muralidharan has stated. There are a lot of opportunities for our people to go abroad and work there. Today, we really have a problem of foreign exchange in our country and the people who came to the rescue of our country were the people who are working abroad sending remittances home to the extent Rs. 5,000 crores per annum and when that is the situation and when a large number of people wanting to go abroad, I feel that we should, on an emergency basis, issue passports so that our people who are getting the opportunity to go abroad will be able to get employment.

Now, in certain countries one of the

requirements is, the passport details should be furnished before the issue of *visa*. When the people go to the passport office and ask for a passport on out of turn basis, the passport officer has instructions that wherever there is a *visa*, a passport can be issued out of turn. But the problem is, people are not getting *visa* without passport details. So, in such cases, some relaxation should be made.

In Kerala, there are three passport offices because of the large number of people going to Middle East and other countries. In Karnataka, we have only one passport office. There was a commitment that in Dakshina Kannada district, one passport office will be opened. My colleague Mr. Dananjaya Kumar is mentioning about Mangalore. Mangalore is my district also. Then, in Uttar Kannada district also, we should have one passport office at Belgaum so that the people of Karnataka who are going in large numbers to other countries for employment will be able to get this facility. Otherwise, to visit Bangalore overnight by bus, they will have to spend a minimum of Rs. 500/- as to and fro bus charges and their stay. Then, there are agents who are, in a way, trying to help the people, but there is a complaint that they are exploiting also. Therefore, if we are able to open more offices as committed earlier, then this will be coming to the rescue of the people so that they will be able to get the passports early.

Simplification of procedure is another matter. There is a provision that if the police verification certificate is not issued within one month, the Passport officer is free to issue the passport. But even after nine months, 10 months or 12 months, passports are not issued. One of the reasons is, the police verification report is not received on time. So, the procedure has to be simplified. The question whether the passport application itself can be submitted to the police officer where he can certify and send it to the passport office or he can send it by telex is to be considered. I think, the procedure has to be simplified.

There are cases where out of turn

[Sh. Oscar Fernandes]

passports are to be issued. If necessary, additional fee may be charged. I do not mind, if they say, additional fee of Rs. 100 will be charged for issue of passport on out-of-turn basis. I know students who have got scholarships could not avail of those since passports are not issued on time. They have lost the scholarships. Many people have lost employment also because of delay in issue of passport. whatever charges, the Government wants to charge reasonably, this is a good provision. The Government may decide what is the fee to be determined. It is because, every time it is not necessary that they should come to parliament for getting the approval. This Bill itself has taken a pretty long time to come before Parliament. We took up the matter when Mr. Solanki was the External Affairs Minister. He agreed for it but the Bill has come after six months. The Minister can do it by notification and the copy of notification can be laid on the Table of the House. If you want to raise a debate, you can do it and discuss it. Time and again to make the Minister to come to the House only for the question of determining the fee will affect the services that we have to render to the people. Therefore, I feel that the provision made is quite in order and it is in the interest of the people. It is not a question of delegating the power. It is a question of dealing with the problem. In the last six months we have been raising about it. We have been assured that the legislation would be brought in. But it has taken six months to bring in legislation. It is to help the people that this provision has been brought in.

At time, bundles of passport applications are opened after three months, six months and people are told that certain requirements are not fulfilled and again back reference is made. My request is, as and when the applications are received, the application should be scrutinised immediately and the people should be told that these requirements are not there at the earliest. Otherwise at the last stage while issuing the passport, if they scrutinise the application after six months and say, this requirement is not there and that is why, there is delay, justice is not done to the applicants. So the scrutiny should be done instantly.

Now I am referring to Bangalore office. It is rendering good service but constraints are there. Every day, there are a large number of people waiting in the queue. Even at five O'clock in the morning, people wait in the queue. Every day, only 200 people are allowed to meet the officers because the officers may be not be able to deal with more people. There is no place for the people to stand in the queue either. Inside the office also there is no place. There must be a new office premises for our Bangalore Passport Office. In order to help more number of people attending to and dealing with these applications certain simplification is necessary. More staff are necessary; computerisation is also necessary so that there would be permanent records and scrutiny will be easier. The index can also be maintained properly. I feel, you have to extend these facilities to our Bangalore office also.

There are a large number of complaints pouring in from other parts of the country and may-be from our State also. I would request the hon. Minister to send a team of Members of Parliament to various State capitals, wherever passport offices are there, to have an inter-action with the people, with the applicants to find out the difficulties so that we will be able to remedy all these things in the coming days.

SHRI S.S.R. RAJENDRA KUMAR (Chengalpattu): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I thank you very much for providing me an opportunity to participate in the discussion on the Passports (Amendment) Bill, 1992 on behalf of AIADMK.

The Bill proposes to give general power to the Central Government to prescribe fee for passport applications. The Bill also provides power to the passport authorities to extend the validity of short-term passports to a further period not exceeding the statutory period prescribed. The penal provisions are also being made more stringent. I welcome the measure.

But there are several other areas which require streamlining. The Estimates

Committee has recommended the enactment of one single statute on all aspects relating to passports. Presently, the Passports (Entry into India) Act and the Indian Passports Act, 1967 govern the matters. The Committee has also recommend for setting up of passport offices in the North-Eastern region and in Island territories. These are all constructive suggestions which the Government must give effect.

The Government has taken several steps to streamline the procedure. Application for men now can be presented by persons other than the applicants. The passport offices have been directed to issue passports within five weeks. In certain cases, the police verification has been away with. Indeed, all these steps will reduce the delay.

But there are several things which have to be done. The quickest way of issuing passports would be to computerise the issue of passports. Through a national network of computer based processing of applications and issue of passports, one can avoid applicants obtaining passports by suppressing information. Facility should also be made available to machine read the passports. This would reduce mischief by applicants as well as by the employees in the passport offices. Newspapers have reported the harassment the applicants have to undergo in the Madras Regional Passport Office at the instance of the employees. Files are want only misplaced and unless bribes are paid, the files will not be relocated. This is causing great inconvenience to the passport seekers. A lot of time and energy is wasted due to mischief by the employees of the passport offices. I want strict action to be taken on the employees of the Madras Regional Passport Office. The news item has appeared in the Indian Express dated 13 August, 1992. Honorable Minister may kindly take necessary action and apprise this august House. This malpractice in the passport offices must go.

To avoid long queues at passport offices,

more countries should be opened at the passport offices and the procedures should be simplified and the applicant must be able to get information from one place about the progress of his passport. He should not be made to run from pillar to post.

The police verification must be strictly followed. The Central Government has issued a circular that a verification certificate from a Deputy Secretary in Government of India and from a Joint Secretary in the State Government or issued by sub-divisional magistrate or superintendent of Police is enough and police verification is not required. This is wrong practice and again malpractices will grow. The Police verification must be done by a special police officer appointed in every police station for this purpose. He must on a daily basis report to the Regional Passport Office on all cases referred to him. This should not be dispensed with.

As far as other conditions for obtaining a passport is concerned, the present rules must be liberalised. The rule must be more permitting than restraining. Free movement of men is an indication of development. To check illegal traffic of goods into India, we have to strengthen our borders and Customs and Excise machinery. COFEPOSA and other economic offenders must be barred from having passports or if they have passports, that should be impounded so that foreign visits and economic offences are de-linked. I request the Government to amend the law for this purpose.

Passport applications for study abroad and passport applications for Third World countries must be granted on priority basis. A novel scheme of company applications for ventures in Third World countries must be granted quickly. A special fee may be charged from the company which would give a whole list of persons sought to be taken abroad for work in Third World countries. This should be encouraged so that India as well as the Third World countries can prosper.

With these words, I thank you very much for the opportunity given.

[Translation]

DR. LAXMINARAYAN PANDEYA (Mandsaur): Mr. Chairman, Sir, though the amendment introduced by the hon. Minister, to the 'Passport Act', appears to be a minor one yet it will have wide implications.

17.11 hrs.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, at present the state of affairs in the passport Offices in the country is not at all satisfactory. I would like to make a submission about the passport office in Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, which is housed in only 2 rooms and all the work is done in these two rooms. In the office there is neither adequate place to provide for sitting facility nor are there any other facilities available. Therefore, first of all there is a need to improve the conditions in the Passport Offices so that the people frequenting these offices do get proper treatment and other facilities.

Similarly, the increase in the passport booklet fee too has not been specified. It has also not been made clear as to why it is being increased and what type of paper will be used for the booklet. Does the Government really want to use the good quality paper for it? All the powers in this connection rest with the Government. Government already has the unlimited powers about raising the fee etc. and I think it is not proper for the Government to acquire more such powers through this amendment. Instead it would have been better if the Government had increased the fee by a specific amount say, Rs. 50, Rs. 100, Rs. 150 or by Rs. 250.

Similarly, under the amendment, a few persons, organisations and travel agencies are proposed to be authorised/appointed to make arrangements for securing passports. Just today, a person who had asked a Chandani Chowk based agency for help in getting him the passport and Visa approached me. This agency gave only the Photostat copy of the passport against full payment. However, when this person went to the

Chandani Chowk address of the agency he found that there was no office of that agency at the given address. I have again called him today and have promised him of all possible help in the matter. I think all the necessary steps should be taken to check such types of frauds. It should be made obligatory for all the travel agencies to get themselves registered and information about these should be compiled.

SHRI NITISH KUMAR (Barh): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do not have passport. So, how can I speak on this issue?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: If you do not have passport then apply for the same.

(Interruptions)

DR. LAXMINARAYAN PANDEYA: I would like to urge the hon. Minister to simplify the procedure to issue the passport. Though the time period for police verification has been reduced, yet it takes much time, even upto 6-7 months and sometimes even after that period the police verification is not done. It will be nice if this procedure is simplified so as to enable the people to timely get the passport because often in times of emergency i.e. illness or for any other reason urgent visit is a must. In the case of the persons not considered to be suspicious, there should be no need for police verification and immediately passport should be issued to them.

Recently the 'Estimates Committee' has made certain recommendations about the procedure of issuing passports. I would like to urge the hon. Minister to examine these recommendations and then make suitable changes in the passport procedure. In the light of these recommendations, it will be nice if the functioning of the passport offices is geared up.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, no doubt this Bill is a small one, but under the penal provisions the period of imprisonment has been increased. Under these penal provisions fine has also been increased, but many an other amendment are also necessary. In addition other related Acts also come into

effect simultaneously viz the registration of Foreigners Act, Enemy Act and FERA. There is a need to bring forward a comprehensive Bill, combining all these Acts, so that the other related issues can also be dealt with properly and the persons desirous of seeking passports can get the same with respect and on time. If these arrangements are made then I think the purpose to amend act will definitely be served.

With these words, I conclude my speech and hope that my suggestions will be definitely looked into.

SHRI RAMESH CHENNITHALA (Kottayam): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, at present unemployment is the biggest problem before the country. To remove unemployment many a scheme are formulated by the Government. Unemployment on a number of occasion has been seriously debated upon even in the House, but all types of bottlenecks are being created in the path of providing employment opportunities. Jobs abroad are available in abundance for youth and other persons. I think deliberately hindrances are being created by us in the way of availing these opportunities by them. Many hon. Members made a submission about passport application forms, which are not available in every village, thereby causing lot of inconvenience to people living in far flung areas. The people of the remote areas after receipt of the form deposit the same immediately, but even after waiting for months together they fail to get the passport.

I would like to request the hon. Minister to even raise the fee to Rs. 1,000 if the need be, but the people desirous of going abroad for employment should immediately get the passport. Other hon. colleagues have spoken about their states and I would like to speak about Kerala. In Kerala people get the passport after waiting for upto 2 years. In Cochin, Trivandrum and Calicut there are passport offices, but there are no proper facilities. There is acute shortage of staff. There is not enough staff even for entraining

the applications. The Government may provide additional hands or should go in for computerisation otherwise people won't get the passport in time. In my State S.P. and Secretary to the Government have got no other work except to sign the passport applications. Police officers do not get time for maintaining law and order situation in the State. Everyday the Police Officers are flooded with so many application forms that their whole day goes in just signing these forms. Any other alternative arrangement should be made for this.

A suggestion was made here by Shri Indrajit Gupta that MLAs and MPs should be authorised to sign the application forms and I do not oppose it. I also request for the same. Nowadays Police Officers in Kerala are unable to discharge their duties. Daily the queue in front of their offices is seen since morning. These officers are unable to look after their duties, except disposing off the work of the people standing in the queue. Please either make some alternative arrangement or authorise the MLAs and MPs to sign the application forms. At present, the applications submitted to the SPs are forwarded to the respective police stations, in which months time is wasted. Police verification is done and then the applications are submitted in the passport office, but passport is not issued in time. I would request the hon. Minister to think about some other method in this regard. A schedule should be prepared to remove the difficulties coming in the way of issuing passports. At present, there are two passport offices in Kerala. They are located at Calicut and Trivandrum. There is a public demand of another passport office. It should be opened at Kottayam, a hilly area, for the benefit of the people Kochhi, Pattanogadda and Idukki districts. I also demand that a passport office should be opened at Kottayam, my constituency.

At present, the validity period of a passport is 10 years and after that, it is renewed. I would request that this validity period should be increased to 15 years. This will be helpful to the people. I do not want to take much time of the House. In the end, I would like to make a demand from the hon.

Minister through you that he should take steps to remove the difficulties coming in the way of getting passport application forms and passports

With these words, I conclude

SHRI MOHAMMAD ALI ASHRAF FATMI (Darbhanga) Mr Chairman, Sir, several hon Members expressed their views on this Bill. I rise neither to oppose nor to support the Bill. I only want to make some suggestions

Regarding the fees, I think that the employees of passport offices extort hundred times more than the required fees. This is the main reason behind the delay in the entire process. They take advantage of the situation and ask the concerned persons to give Rs 5000 to Rs 10,000 for early clearance of passports. This is the minimum amount. There is no limit of the maximum. I have written to you earlier also in this regard. In reply, you had written that it is interesting. I would like to say that in view of the number of applicants and the number of the regional passport offices in the country and the staff employed in them, there is no chance of issuing passports before at least one and half years. I would like to point out the suggestion I made in my letter. A procedure should be evolved so that the entire process is done in the office of the district Magistrate or the Deputy Commissioner of the district. They should be empowered in this regard. Applications should be submitted there. As the police department is also present there, supervision can also be done easily and the D M will also put his signature. Then it will reach the regional passport office. The present process creates problem as the application form is first submitted at the regional passport office. Then it goes to the District headquarters and from there the Police Inspector is asked to conduct verification. This constitutes a long process. It will be better if the prepared passports are sent to the D M from the regional passport office and the people collect them from there.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you may recall

that during the disturbance in Kuwait the Indians had to return without passports. The reason behind it was that the passports of some people remained with the Government or with the company owners. Even after the lapse of so much of time, passports have not been issued in all the cases. At least a directive should be given that if the regional passport office had any proof of the concerned persons' presence there and they are going to get employment there again, passport should be issued to them at the earliest.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I stayed in Gulf Countries. I know there are a number of people, who possess job visas, but they are not getting passports. Their employers there will not wait for them and will appoint other persons. They should be issued passports immediately. Recently, a case in regard to Russia came to my notice. Some Kashmiri boys came to me and said that they wanted to study in Tazakistan and for that purpose they have applied for passports in Delhi, but they are not getting them. They will not be able to take admission in medical courses there. So, separate arrangements should be made for providing passports to such students.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is one more suggestion. At present, three types of passports viz diplomatic, official and normal - are issued. If separate passports for employment and education are issued and their validity period is increased, the passport holders will be able to renew them in the countries they are residing and in this way, the work will be done faster. In my opinion, it will be good. As Shri Nitish Kumar said that a number of M P s get invitations from other countries. Therefore, I would like to say that as soon as an M P is elected, like issuing the identity card, passport should also be issued simultaneously with his spouse. An hon Member has also demanded passports for his children also. Therefore, I would suggest that the wards of M P s aged 19-20 years should also be issued passports to facilitate their movement.

I hope my suggestions regarding separate process for providing passports for

employment and study will be included in the Bill and district process system of issuing passports will be adopted.

[English]

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGARHI (Deogarh): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I rise to support this Bill. In fact, most of the points have been covered by the hon. Members who have spoken earlier. This Bill has received support from all sides of the House. There is no controversial provision in the Bill. Only while lending support, some suggestions are being made as to how it could be further improved. There are five provisions on which the amendment is sought by the hon. Minister. Out of the five, there is one new provision which is required to be inserted, that is for stringent punishment for a person who is not a citizen of India, if he makes an offence for a passport by suppression of information, etc. The rest four relate to amendment of the existing provisions.

There is no denial in the fact that the world is becoming closer day by day. There is a necessity for a large number of people to go abroad. As has been rightly stated in our country, we are confronted with a serious problem of unemployment. When we are not able to provide employment and there are job facilities available outside, we should see that there is no hindrance whatsoever coming in their way to go abroad where they are offered jobs. Students are going to pursue higher studies - technical studies. Teachers, scientists and doctors are going. Patients are also going for better treatment. There are some categories where they cannot afford any delay. It has got to be attended to on priority, say, in respect of patients. But what happens in the field?

Of course, the Government of India is aware of this problem inasmuch as the hon. External Affairs Minister categorically stated some months earlier on the floor of this House as to how it could be expedited so that within a period of five weeks, the cases will definitely be cleared. But this remains, by

and large, a pious wish. Actually, this seriousness, as reflected by the Government here is not realised in the field. May be there are some genuine grounds that the offices are not properly staffed.

Secondly, there is also a motive working there in the offices. What to speak of getting ready a passport, even for Revenue Inspector's certificate in the State, a lot of time is consumed. A lot of money is also spent. It also happens in the case of a caste certificate and for old-age certificate. The people who are entitled for old-age pension are like beggars. The concerned officers do not mind exploiting them or expecting money from them. Unless money is paid and their hands are greased, age certificate is also not issued by doctors in some cases. This is the real level of humanity not only in our country but outside also. I really feel concerned about it. In which direction is the society moving. In which way, are we moving?

About staff, there should be more of Regional Passport Offices. They should be properly staffed. I am now reading out a portion of an article which appeared in *The Statesman* of 1st May, 1992:

"It is learnt that, on an average, the regional passport office in Calcutta receives 350 applications daily, out of which 30 to 35 are for urgent purposes. Processing 350 applications is a huge task. Issuing urgent passports is another difficult job, because extra efforts have to be made to prepare them early.

Attending visitors, nearly 200 daily, receiving the money, preparing telex messages, keeping a record of these as well as accounts and giving information to applicants have increased the workload considerably, though some posts are still vacant."

Our highly-qualified boys are available. Only a provision is to be made by the Government of India to give more staff. I would request the hon. Minister to look into

[Sh. Sriballav Panigarhi]

this aspect particularly.

Before concluding, I will give one or two more suggestions. There is a necessity for integration of different laws governing this. There are different laws - at least more than one - governing this. I had the privilege to serve as a Member of the Estimates Committee. That Committee has gone into this matter in detail and come out with its considered report. I would request the hon. Minister to give seriousness to the recommendations made by this Committee which are the outcome of joint efforts of 30 hon. Members of Parliament.

The Estimates Committee of Parliament has recommended enactment of a single statute to govern various aspects relating to issue of passports instead of the existing two - Passports (Entry into India) Act and the Indian Passport Act, 1967.

In its report presented to the Lok Sabha, it has also dwelt upon the question of harmonising the Indian Passport Act with other statutes governing entry of foreigners into India and Registration of Foreigners Act, 1946.

I would not like to go into other recommendations. But at the same time, I would say that the Committee has, therefore, not only called for attitudinal reforms in the actual functioning of regional passport offices but also desired greater involvement of CPV Division in the redressal of grievances. They also have drawn attention to the crying need for strengthening and monitoring grievances redressal machinery at the level of regional passport offices.

Another important suggestion made by the Committee is that it has underlined the need of setting up non-official passport advisory committees and of stipulating a time-limit for disposal of complaints.

We have now fixed the time-limit of five weeks for police verification, etc. it is coming in the way. There are also certain exemptions given in cases which will not come within the

purview of the police verification. It is all right. But at the same time, there should be a board like this to monitor.

Lastly, I tell you about my own experience also. I do not know whether all the hon. Members will agree. Of course, Mr. Ramesh Chennithala has supported this. He demands whether MPs and MLAs should be involved in this work. I cannot persuade myself to agree to this. It is a very delicate and tricky matter. This matter of issue of passport is not just a very easy thing. For many, it is good and very easy. But certainly, terrorism is growing everywhere - not only in India but outside also. Smugglers are there. They also go outside the country. Smugglers are also coming into our country. We do not know the antecedents of those people. MPs and MLAs, in their anxiety to satisfy their voters and active supporters put their signatures or they are forced to put their signatures. Since you do not know the person and since it is a tricky matter, it is better for MPs and MLAs to keep away from this area. At the same time, there should be a stricter provision so that police and other officials who verify do not unnecessarily delay the process and if their reports go wrong, they should be taken to task. This is my suggestion. With these words, I support this Bill and request the hon. Minister to kindly give personal attention to the report of the Estimates Committee and accept the suggestions which are worth of accepting.

SHRI DILEEP BHAI SANGHANI (Amreli): sir, there is no quorum in the House.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The bell is being rung-

Now there is quorum. Hon. Member, Shri K. Suresh may speak now.

SHRI KODIKKUNIL SURESH (Adoor): Sir, I rise to support the Passports (Amendment) Bill, 1992.

In Kerala, there are three regional passport offices functioning. These passport offices are receiving a number of complaints everyday and in each passport office, lakhs of applications are pending. Thus, the

applicants in Kerala are facing lot of problems. I would like to draw your kind attention of the hon. Minister of External Affairs to the number of unemployed youths in Kerala. Employment requirement is very less in Kerala. So, most of the unemployed youths are interested to go to foreign countries particularly to Gulf countries and for this purpose, they want passports without delay. It takes six months or one year for a person to get a passport in Kerala. Companies abroad advertise and ask people to join within a specified time. But without passport and visa, our unemployed youths cannot go there for their job. Unfortunately, they do not get their passports in proper time. When it takes so much of time, the result is that they lose their chances. I would request the hon. Minister to take urgent steps to avoid this type of delay in issuing the passports.

In all Passport Offices of Kerala, there is a shortage of employees. Though the requirement of staff is more, the number of employees working in these offices is very small. I am aware that a number of employees who are working in the Central government offices outside Kerala are willing to go to Kerala. I have been requesting the hon. Minister to allow those who are interested in going to Kerala, to join the Passport Offices in Kerala. In this way, delay in issuance of passports due to shortage of staff can be avoided.

There is also a serious shortage of passport books. This also causes a great delay in issuing passports. Adequate number of books should be printed and supplied to avoid this sort of a delay.

I would like to mention another point with regard to the procedures followed under the present rules. It is very difficult to get a passport at short notice. Police verification reports are invariably delayed. Therefore, a condition should be laid in the rules that police verification reports should be submitted within two weeks.

Under the present rules, if certain

categories of officials certify a passport, then the passport could be issued without police verification. This provision is likely to be misused by the officials. Instead, the local MPs should be empowered to sign the passport form and then with proper police verification, the passport can be issued.

One more point that I would like to mention is about the availability of passport applications. My suggestion is that the applications should be sent to all the post offices. I hope the hon. Minister will consider all these points and take necessary action.

Finally, I would like to say that the delay in issuing the passport should be removed. There must be a stipulation in the rules that the Indian citizens would get passports within a prescribed minimum period. Delay in getting passports causes a great amount of hardship and this must be avoided at any cost.

SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR (Mangalore): Hon. Deputy Speaker Sir, I am happy that the Government has at last realised the need for amending the provisions of the Passport Act so that those who want to go abroad can get their passports at the earliest possible time.

Sir, the Statement of Objects and Reasons says, "On the basis of the experience gained in the administration of the Passports Act, 1967, it is found necessary to amend the said Act for its better administration." But the hon. Minister, while moving the Bill, did not bring to the notice of this august House as to what is the experience of the Government in the administration of this Act.

Sir, as the very name suggests, this is a kind of permission granted by way of issuing a passport. Passport would simply mean to give permission to pass through a port. In the olden days, people used to travel by ships only and when they go through the ports, they require passes. That is how, introduction of passports came into being. With the scientific and technological advancement, people would like to visit foreign countries as tourists, for higher education, for employment, to visit their relations who may

happen to fall sick and so on.

My basic question is why should you prevent people who would like to go abroad for many reasons? As I understand it, the only objection would be to prevent people with bad antecedents from going away from this country. Sir, in a lighter vein I would like to say that it is better, you send such people away as early as possible so that we can live peacefully. After all, even the Minister is very well aware that mere issuance of Passports will not entitle...

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: If it is vice-versa.

SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR: That is what I am telling now. Mere obtaining of passport will not entitle any citizen of India to go abroad. Again, he will require a visa. Even for getting a visa, he has to complete many formalities. The foreign countries which will be receiving Indian citizens also will take care to see that only good people gain entry in those countries. So my submission is this: Why should the Government of India take such botheration for going through the process of filtering? We want good people here. Why do you want to retain all those people with bad antecedents here and permit only good people to go away?

My submission is that when there is enormous unemployment problem in this country, only the people who will be seeking jobs will be visiting foreign countries. There are a large number of employment opportunities in the Middle-East countries. And recently, due to Gulf war, that is after the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and after its liberation, there are a lot of employment opportunities for people who want to work as artisans, masons, drivers and so on for whom we have no better employment opportunities here. They would like to go through the Government of India and the government of India now wants more time for such cases.

My friend Shri Oscar Fernandes was referring to the difficulties being faced by the people who are coming from our region,

specially, Dakshina Kannada District and the people who come from some parts of Kerala State. So far as Karnataka State is concerned, there is only one Passport Office at Bangalore and so far as Kerala State is concerned, there are only three Passport Offices. In spite of that, still many people, specially from northern parts of Kerala, come to Bangalore for getting Passports. Sir, the situation in the Regional Passport Office in Bangalore is such that, there is absolutely no space for people to get in. We find, there are many people who will be standing in long queues in the roads starting from early morning hours till late in the evenings. The people who are illiterate, they cannot go and interact with the officials in the Passport Offices. So, such people should be assisted and they should not be made to dance everyone and then in the Passport Offices.

Sir, I had the occasion to raise an issue regarding opening of Passport Office in Mangalore long ago. Almost, one year has elapsed, nothing has been done. It was my good fortune that after I made the demand on the floor of this House, the hon. Minister, Shri Faleiro came all the way to Mangalore and made an announcement at Mangalore saying that a Passport Office would be opened in Mangalore. It was way back in January this year that he had made an announcement. After that, sometime during Monsoon Session, I made enquiries from the hon. Minister and he said that "now I am divested of the Passport Department, I am not looking after this particular Division."

He said Mr. R.L. Bhatia is looking after this Division. So, he can only give you the answer. Then jocularly he said, don't worry, before the expiry of your term, we would open a passport office in Mangalore. So, I would submit that before our term expires, let the Government open up an office in Mangalore so that the desire of the people in that area is fulfilled.

I would like to me one or two suggestions. I would agree with the suggestions made by other friends here like giving enormous power in the hands of the Government. If the Government feels that for want of funds

there is a delay in the issue of passports, then, of course, the Government's hands should be strengthened by allowing them to collect more funds. But what the government want is that it is free for all., Now, if really this was the situation nothing prevented the Government from issuing an Ordinance. Why did you wait for introduction of an Amendment Bill? Why do you move now an amendment? First you get permission from the Parliament and then only think of collecting funds. They could have come up with an Ordinance. So, my submission is that it is not the reason. The Government does not want to issue a passport as and when it is required by a citizen; they would like to exercise their power; they would like to throttle the right of the people.

Some definite amount should have been mentioned in the provisions of the Bill itself.

I do not know what does the Government want to do with it?

[Translation

SHRI DILEEP BHAI
SANGHANI(Amreli): Mr. Deputy-Speaker,
Sir, at present, there is no quorum in the
House again.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The bell is
being rung.

it is Six O'clock. Now the House stands
adjourned to meet tomorrow the 1st
December 1992 at 1100 hrs.

18.00 hrs.

*The Lok-Sabha then adjourned till
Eleven of the clock on Tuesday,
December 1, 1992/ Agrahayana 10, 1914
(Saka)*