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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(1996-97)**

ELEVENTH LOK SABHA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

*[Action Taken on the Recommendations contained in the 1st Report of
the Committee (Eleventh Lok Sabha) on Demands for Grants
of the Ministry of External Affairs for 1996-97]*

THIRD REPORT



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

8.3657A
N 6.3.2

April, 1997/Chaitra, 1919 (Saka)

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(1996-97)

(ELEVENTH LOK SABHA)

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

*[Action Taken on the recommendations contained in the 1st Report of
the Committee (11th Lok Sabha) on Demands for Grants of the
Ministry of External Affairs for 1996-97]*

Presented to Lok Sabha on 22.4.1997

Laid in Rajya Sabha on 22.4.1997



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

April, 1997/Chaitra, 1919 (Saka)

C.O.E.A. No. 03

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Published under Rule 382 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha (Eighth Edition) and Printed by Jainco Art India, 13/10, W.E.A., Saraswati Marg, Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110 005.

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COMPOSITION OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(1996-97)

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee — *Chairman*

MEMBERS

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Manabendra Shah
3. Col. Rao Ram Singh
4. Dr. Ramesh Chand Tomar
5. Shri Chandresh Patel
6. Dr. Gunawant Sarode
7. Shri D.B. Roy
8. Shri Vijay Mude
9. Shri Faggan Singh Kuleste
10. Smt. Rajnee Patil
11. Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao
- *12. Shri Ajit Singh
13. Shri Bijoy K. Handique
14. Smt. Meira Kumar
15. Shri A.C. Jose
16. Begum Noorbano
17. Dr. Hari Singh
18. Shri Pinaki Misra
19. Shri Anchal Das
20. Shri Anil Kumar Yadav
21. Shri Rupchand Pal
22. Shri S. Ajaya Kumar

* Ceased to be a member of the Committee consequent upon his resignation from Lok Sabha *w.e.f.* 10 September, 1996 and renominated to the Committee *w.e.f.* 26.2.97.

23. Shri Rajesh Ranjan
24. Shri P.N. Siva
25. Shri Hindurao Naik Nimbalkar
26. Shri George Fernandes
27. Shri Pramothesh Mukherjee
28. Shri Tilak Raj Singh
29. Shri G.G. Swell
30. Shri Arvind Kumar

Rajya Sabha

31. Smt. Margaret Alva
32. Smt. Chandresh Kumari
33. Smt. Vyjayantimala Bali
34. Shri V.N. Gadgil
35. Shri Bhuvnesh Chaturvedi
36. Shri Sikander Bakht
37. Shri Triloki Nath Chaturvedi
38. Prof. Vijay Kumar Malhotra
39. Smt. Kamla Sinha
40. Shri M.A. Baby
41. Dr. D. Masthan
- *42. Shri Wasim Ahmad

SECRETARIAT

1. Dr. Ashok Kumar Pandey — *Additional Secretary*
2. Shri V.N. Gaur — *Director*
3. Shri Ashok Sarin — *Deputy Secretary*
5. Shri R.K. Saxena — *Under Secretary*

INTRODUCTION

1. The Chairman, Standing Committee on External Affairs having been authorised by the Committee to submit the report on their behalf, present this Third Report on Action Taken by Government on the Recommendations contained in the First Report (Eleventh Lok Sabha) of the Committee on the "Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for 1996-97"

2. The First Report was presented to Lok Sabha on 6 September, 1996 and was laid in Rajya Sabha on 2 September, 1996. The Government furnished their replies indicating Action Taken on the Recommendations contained in the Report.

3. The Draft Report on the basis of Action Taken Notes was considered and adopted by the Standing Committee on External Affairs (1996-97) at their sitting held on 31 March, 1997. Minutes of the Sitting of the Committee have been reproduced as Appendix—I to the Report.

4. An Analysis of Action Taken by Government on the Recommendations contained in the First Report of the Standing Committee on External Affairs (Eleventh Lok Sabha) is given in Appendix—II.

5. For facility of reference and convenience, the observations and recommendations of the Committee have been printed in thick type in the body of the Report and have also been reproduced in consolidated form in Appendix—III.

NEW DELHI;
4 April, 1997

Chaitra 14, 1919 (Saka)

ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE,
Chairman,
Standing Committee on External Affairs.

CHAPTER I

REPORT

The Report of the Committee deals with the Action Taken by Government on the observations/recommendations contained in the First Report (11th Lok Sabha) of the Standing Committee on External Affairs on the Demands for Grants for the year 1996-97 in respect of Ministry of External Affairs. First Report of the Committee was presented to Lok Sabha on 6 September, 1996.

2. Action Taken Notes have been received from the Ministry of External Affairs on all the observations/recommendations contained in the Report. These have been categorised as follows :

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

Para Nos. 11, 12, 16, 25, 26, 27, 28, 32, 33, 42, 43, 45, 51, 57, 58, 65, 72

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

Para No. 44

- (iii) Observations/Recommendations in respect of which replies of Government have not been accepted and which require reiteration.

Para No. 41

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

Para No. Nil

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

*Advertising and Publicity (Missions/Posts)***(Paras 32 & 33)**

4. The Committee were given to understand that constant assessment by the Ministry of External Affairs of their publicity activities had revealed that they could not use more funds effectively at the Headquarters level whereas it was possible to use more funds fruitfully at the Missions level. Yet, there was not perceptible increase of funds for advertising & publicity for Missions/Posts (Rs. 11.73 crores) as compared to that for Headquarters (Rs. 11 crores) in BE 1996-97. Some steps were stated to have been initiated to project a favourable perception of India abroad. However, much more needed to be done. The Committee had desired the Ministry to strive to obtain more funds for the purpose, especially for Missions for stepping up their public relations, advertising, publicity activities and to counter adverse propaganda.

5. The Ministry in their reply have stated that to project a favourable perception of India and build up a greater awareness of and an understanding for its values and policies, and also to counter adverse propaganda being carried out by one of our immediate neighbour certain measures that require sufficient funds especially for Missions are needed. Requests for acquisition of modern equipment have been made by our Missions and some Missions were selected for allotment of additional funds to step up public relations, advertising and other publicity activities. However, the Ministry of Finance has not been able to allocate additional funds and it was therefore not found possible to expand or substantially qualify our external publicity efforts.

6. It is quite obvious that our efforts in this field have not borne fruit. The large number of anti-India articles in the foreign media, particularly with reference to Kashmir and alleged human rights abuse are a reflection of this. It is, therefore, necessary that utmost priority is to be given to present a correct picture of our stand and of the factual position so that the impact of 'planted' anti-India stories is lessened. Our democratic credentials and openness as contrasted with other players, should come out clearly.

7. The Ministry have admitted that a lot needs to be done to project a favourable perception of India and to counter adverse

propaganda being carried out by one of our immediate neighbours. For this, acquisition and use of most modern equipment, upgradation of communication system, stepping up of our lobbying efforts, production of more effective publicity material and distribution etc. are essential. All these measures require sufficient funds and according to the Ministry more funds can be fruitfully utilised at the missions level. In this connection some Missions were stated to have been selected by the Ministry for grant of additional funds to step up public relations, advertising and publicity activities. The Committee are informed that as the Ministry of Finance were unable to provide additional funds for this purpose it was not found possible to expand or substantially qualify the external publicity efforts. The Committee observe with regret that adequate funds for external publicity by Missions abroad were not provided by the Government. The Committee would like the Ministry to pursue vigorously with the Ministry of Finance for additional funds atleast for some selected Missions and to expand the efforts subsequently in respect of other Missions after studying the impact created by more funds at the selected Missions. The Committee are of the considered view that Ministry of Finance should appreciate the necessity of more funds for publicity activities, particularly for Missions. To begin, with additional funds may be provided as asked for by the Ministry of External Affairs for some selected Missions for this purpose.

Separately, the Missions should be constantly emphasised the need for optimum utilisation of the available resources to carry out the assigned task. The Ministry may ensure that atleast minimum modern communication facilities are provided in all the Missions.

Passport and Emigration

(Para No. 41)

8. The Committee had observed that the total pendency in Passport Offices which was 2.8 lakh at the end of 1994 had increased to 2.94 lakh at the end of 30th June, 1996. However, the number of passports issued during 1995 had decreased to 17.55 lakh as compared to 20.11 lakh passports issued in 1994. Thus, as compared to 1994 figures less number of passports were issued while more applications were pending at the end of the year 1995. The Committee did not agree with the explanation given by the

Ministry that it was difficult to reduce the pendency further. Since the maximum time limit for issue of a passport as per the Ministry was 4 weeks, the Committee had observed that the pendency at a time in Passport Offices should not increase the total average applications received in 4 weeks time.

9. The Ministry in their reply have stated that while every effort has been made to reduce the pendency and bring it down to the level of the average number of applications received in 4 weeks, it has not been possible to achieve this objective due to certain inbuilt constraints. Police verification reports usually take 3-4 weeks. Thereafter, granting of passport takes a few days. Another significant factor which contributes to delay is that a number of applications received in the Passport Offices particularly those received by post are incomplete in many respects. To obviate this, instructions have been issued to Passport Offices to ensure thorough scrutiny of applications at the time of deposit. Furthermore, the working of each office is reviewed frequently. Whenever any exceptional increase in pendency is noticed, temporary additional staff is sanctioned for disposing off applications.

10. Further, according to the Ministry a Complaints and Grievances Cell has been established in the CPV Division to deal with complaints and grievances of members of the public in passport matter. A decision has already been taken to open new Passport Offices at Ghaziabad, Pune, Thane and vishakhapatnam and collection centres at Gurgaon, Madurai, Surat, Vijaywada as well as in the six north eastern States *i.e.* Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.

11. The Ministry have further stated that they proposed to further simplify and reduce the size of the application form. To generate greater accountability in the Passport Office, a Special Vigilance Cell is functioning in the CPV Division of the Ministry. In addition, the public grievance redressal mechanism in the CPV Division has been supplemented with a Public Relations Officer monitoring every complaint coming to the office of the Chief Passport Officer.

12. Some measures are stated to have been taken by the passport authorities to expedite the issue of passports such as decision regarding opening up of new Passport Offices/Collection Centres, computerisation and modernisation of Passport Offices, expansion of list of officers authorised to issue verification certificates,

introduction of simpler application forms, functioning of Special Vigilance Cell etc. However, the fact remains that the applicants are not getting passports within the expected time limit of 4 weeks after submission of application forms. The Ministry have themselves admitted that it has not been possible to reduce the pendency of applications and bring it down to the level of the average number of applications received in 4 weeks due to some inherent delays such as time taken in police verification, receipt of incomplete application forms particularly by post etc. The Committee take a serious view of the fact that applicants are not only being denied passports within the stipulated time but are also not attended to properly when they visit the Passport Offices. The question of delay on account of the time taken in police verification and receipt of incomplete application forms etc. were examined by the Committee when they discussed the subject of "Passport Facilities" in 1994 and the Committee were assured that the necessary corrective measures would be taken at the earliest. The Committee in their 3rd and 7th Report on Passport Facilities had emphasised the need for maintaining close coordination at appropriate level with Home Ministry/Police Authorities to reduce the verification period which was described to be the main cause for delay in issue of passports. It seems that this problem has not so far been given the urgency that it deserved. Further, the Committee feel that acceptance of application forms only after thorough scrutiny at the time of the submission of forms, despatch of applications straightway to applicants if forms received by post are found incomplete, surprise checking by the staff of the Special Vigilance Cell in the Passport Offices and their frequent inter-action with the waiting applicants there to find out the nature of grievances/complaints, special incentive to sincere and honest workers, further simplification of application forms are some of the steps that the Central Passport Organisation should immediately take to ensure that the applicants are delivered passports within the stipulated time and are not subject to various hardships in this connection. The miscellaneous services required by the applicant such as renewal of passports, issue of duplicate passports etc. should also be addressed to without any delay. The Committee also expect the Ministry to ensure that decision regarding opening of new Passport Offices/Collection Centres would be implemented at the earliest. The Committee would like to be informed of the precise steps taken in this regard and also about

the figures regarding total applications received, passports issued during the years 1995 and 1996 and the pendency of applications in Passport Offices (office-wise) at the end of the years 1995 and 1996.

Technical and Economic Co-operation with other Countries

(Para No. 57)

13. The Committee had observed that the grants-in-aid for technical and economic co-operation with other countries had increased rather steeply from Rs. 129.72 crores in 1994-95 to Rs. 293.42 crores at BE 1996-97 level. The Committee had desired to be apprised of the criteria adopted in distributing the total amount under the Aid programme to different countries. Since substantial amount was being spent by India on various India aided projects in different countries, the Ministry were asked to make an evaluation of the impact the Aid programmes were creating in strengthening mutual bilateral relations and the positions taken by these countries on important issues of common interest at various international forums *vis-a-vis* stand taken by India.

14. The Ministry in their reply have stated that the general criteria adopted for distributing grants-in-aid is that it should promote India's economic, commercial and strategic interests; support the export of Indian expertise, technology and manpower to third countries and help in creating goodwill and projecting a favourable image of India.

15. According to the Ministry, an evaluation of the impact of Aid programme was conducted in 1993. Based on the Evaluation Report a number of steps including revision of terms and conditions for training in India under Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation (ITEC) have already been taken. Other recommendations like gearing India's assistance to promote Indian political influence etc. are being actively implemented. The Ministry have further stated that the response of the recipient country of ITEC assistance on issues of interest to India and the strengthening of bilateral relations is always taken into consideration for continuing such assistance or offering new Aid proposals.

16. The Committee are informed that the response of the recipient country of Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) assistance on issues of interest to India is always taken into consideration for continuing such assistance or offering new Aid proposals. An evaluation of the impact of such an aid programme is stated to have been conducted last in 1993. However, the Committee

feel that a fresh study is called for to make a realistic assessment of the amount of support received from these countries by us in respect of our stand on CTBT, our recent defeat for the non-permanent seat from Asian region in Security Council and for our claim for a permanent seat in Security Council. The Committee feel that in view of the large amount of expenditure incurred by India on Aid programmes, a more practical approach should be adopted and due consideration ought to be given to the countries who stand in our support in international fora.

Construction/Purchase of Properties

(Para No. 65)

17. The Committee had noted that the Department of Expenditure had agreed to increase the capital outlay budget of the Ministry from 57 crores under BE 1996-97 to Rs. 100 crores at the RE stage to enable the Ministry to implement the 10 year comprehensive plan drawn up by them for purchase/construction of properties. The Committee also note that the Ministry have estimated the demand for funds for the next 4 years in this regard to the tune of Rs. 1050 crores. The Committee had desired the Ministry to judiciously utilise the available funds to be provided by Ministry of Finance, while strictly following the priorities for purchase and construction of the property.

18. The Ministry in their reply have stated that during discussions the Department of Expenditure had given an assurance for providing Rs. 100 crores at the RE stage but later due to budgetary constraints they decided to freeze the Capital Outlay Budget for RE 1996-97 at Rs. 52 crores and enhanced the BE 1997-98 to Rs. 75 crores. Available funds had been utilised judiciously but due to the limited funds available the Property Acquisition plan could be implemented only in a limited manner. The Ministry will continue to request the Ministry of Finance for enhanced allocation of funds in BE 1997-98 to enable early implementation of the Property Plan.

19. **To begin the 10 year comprehensive plan drawn up by the Ministry of External Affairs for purchase/construction of properties, the Department of Expenditure had agreed to increase the capital outlay budget of the Ministry from 57 crores under BE 96-97 to Rs. 100 crores at the BE stage. The Committee however regret to observe that inspite of their assurance, the Department of Expenditure decided to cut down the funds Rs. 100 crores to Rs. 52 crores. The**

restricted budgetary allocation in the very first year is stated to have hampered the implementation of the plan. The very purpose of drawing up such plans is defeated if necessary allocation is not made therefor and the plans are not completed on time. Needless to say that non-allocation of requisite funds result in avoidable cost and time overrun. The Committee desire that their displeasure be conveyed to Department of Expenditure for the going back on their assurance to provide Rs. 100 crores for the comprehensive plans at RE 96-97 stage. Since Ministry of External Affairs have estimated their demand to the tune of Rs. 1050 crores in next 4 years for this purpose, the Committee desire that the matter needs to be pursued with Department of Expenditure for timely and adequate funds in subsequent years so that the plan is completed as per laid down schedule.

CHAPTER II

OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT

Recommendations

The Revised Estimates for 1995-96 works out to Rs. 1245.36 crores against the BE for Rs. 997.95 crores, thus reflecting an increase of Rs. 247.71 crores. The Committee have been concerned over the continuous trend of excess expenditure despite their off-repeated recommendation to contain the excess expenditure to the barest minimum and for which the Parliament is later presented with a *fait accompli*. What has surprised the Committee is the extent of the increase at RE 1995-96 level over BE 1995-96 which is nearly 25 percent. Bulk of this increase has been in three spheres *i.e.* Missions and posts abroad, special diplomatic expenditure and Aid programmes for foreign Governments. Some excess expenditure, like that due to depreciation of rupee value, is of course unavoidable. However, the entire excess of nearly 72 crores in case of Mission and Posts abroad, Rs. 71 crores in case of Special Diplomatic expenditure and nearly Rs. 69 crores increase in case of Aid Programmes for Foreign Governments were perhaps not such which could not have been anticipated. The Ministry have admitted during evidence that the general tendency is to keep the budget as low as possible. The Committee are thus inclined to conclude that the Budget Estimates are not prepared after proper planning and that there is lack of effective mechanism to impart financial discipline which leads to huge increase at RE level. The Committee, therefore, can not but emphasise once again the need for more comprehensive and realistic planning at estimate stage so that the huge excess over voted Grants could be avoided. The Committee have been assured that efforts would be made by the Ministry to make the estimates as realistic as possible. The Committee hope that there would not be steep increase in Demands for Grants next year at RE stage. (Para No. 11)

Government's Reply

The Ministry makes every effort to peg the budgetary requirements realistically and closely monitor expenditure so as to remain within allocated funds. In compliance with the recommendation of the Committee, the Ministry would redouble its efforts so as to ensure

that the excess over the sanctioned grant at the Revised Estimates stage is kept to the bare minimum reflecting only the inescapable requirements of funds. This view point would be brought out in the various communications that would be sent to spending units both abroad and at headquarters while inviting proposals for allocation of funds at Revised Estimates stage. There are however occasions where it is difficult for the Ministry to anticipate additional fund requirements while preparing the budget Estimates such additionality can only be reflected at the Revised Estimates stage and while this would entail an upward session of the budgetary allocations beyond the Budget Estimates. This is done only when it is felt that Non-Provision of the funds could seriously jeopardise the functioning of the Ministry.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

It is evident from the Demands for Grants of the Ministry that there has been increase to the tune of Rs. 48 crores in Budget Estimates 1996-97 over RE 1995-96 for salaries of the staff whereas there has been decrease of 52 crores on Special Diplomatic Expenditure and 23 crores decrease in respect of Rents, Rates and Taxes. Further, there has been only marginal increase of Rs. 3.6 crores in the BE 1996-97 for advertising and publicity. No increase has been made in the grant for ICCR and Passport & Emigration. The Committee are of the view that there ought to be certain rational relationship between the expenditure incurred on the administration and on the activities which the Ministry is supposed to perform. The Committee hope that the funds allotted to the ICCR, publicity and passport organisations are commensurate to level of activities expected from them and that their performance would not suffer due to lack of funds. The Committee further hope that Ministry of External Affairs would keep the above observation in view while framing the forthcoming Budgets. (Para No. 12)

Government's Reply

The Ministry is grateful to the Committee for their valued comments and recommendations and assures the Committee that this Ministry would project fund requirements to the Ministry of Finance so that the work of the ICCR, Publicity and Passport Organisation would not be jeopardised for want of funds.

It is however relevant to mention that budgetary allocations are made to the different spending units on the basis of a realistic assessment of likely expenditure so as to avoid over-budgeting or under-budgeting.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The Committee find that the arrears of higher rent have not been paid so far by the Ministry of External Affairs as the repairs of Akbar Bhawan are yet to be completed. As the provisions made during last year in this regard could not be utilised, the same have again been made this year in the Budget Estimates. The Committee regret to observe the delay in getting the Akbar Bhawan repaired although discussions with the NDMC have been continuing since March 1994 when the Administrator NDMC met Ministry officials. What has surprised the Committee is the fact that the issue has not been sorted out so far despite the matter having been discussed at length last year during the examination of Demands for Grants and commented upon by the Committee in their 6th Report. The Committee are apprehensive that the condition of the building might deteriorate if necessary repairs are not carried out immediately. The Committee desire that the matter may be taken up with the Ministry of Urban Development at higher level so as to get the building repaired immediately. The Committee also desire that an agreement should be reached between MEA & NDMC to ensure timely and regular repairs/maintenance of Akbar Bhawan premises and in no case repairs should be allowed to be left unattended for considerable period of time. The Ministry may examine the feasibility of purchasing Akbar Bhawan from NDMC. Repairs/maintenance of buildings occupied by the Ministry on rent or otherwise should be a continuous process. The Ministry should also develop suitable supervisory mechanism to monitor general maintenance and repairs of their buildings. (Para No. 16)

Government's Reply

After the observations of the Standing Committee, the contact was re-established with NDMC at the highest level with the Administrator. Remarks of the Standing Committee were also brought to the attention of NDMC and efforts have been continuing in an attempt to resolve the matter.

There has been some progress after the last meeting with the Administrator in August 1996. A joint inspection of the Akbar Bhawan premises was carried out by representatives of MEA, NDMC & CPWD. Certain items of repair work on these is expected to commence shortly. Other items are still under discussion between MEA, NDMC & CPWD. Meanwhile, it has also been agreed that some maintenance such as AC Plant and Diesel Generator Set are carried out by CPWD on cost sharing basis with NDMC. NDMC is of the opinion that they would be in a better position to undertake some of the repairs if some arrears were paid by MEA to augment their resources for maintenance. An agreement on these between MEA and NDMC is under discussion with Administrator/NDMC.

The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation have already desired this Ministry to vacate the premises to enable them to cater to the tourism industry. The MEA has been allotted a plot of land for construction of Videsh Bhawan to house its offices. Preparatory work on the construction is underway.

Observations of the Standing Committee are under implementation. Nodal officers have been identified for repair & maintenance of each of the buildings occupied by the Ministry and continuous interaction is being maintained with agencies like CPWD to ensure timely repairs & maintenance of buildings with MEA.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The RE 1995-96 in respect of Embassies and Missions exceeded BE 1995-96 by nearly Rs. 72 crores. Out of this, Rs. 36 crores accounted for the increase in foreign allowances in Missions as well as pay and allowances of local staff as a result of recommendation of Foreign Service Inspectors. The Committee are of the view that as it would have taken considerable time to process these recommendations, the enhanced requirement of fund for increase in foreign allowance etc. could have been anticipated at the 1995-96 BE level. The Committee would like to be informed about usual procedure followed for increase of allowances of the staff to the Foreign Missions and how often these allowances are reviewed and revised. (Para No. 25)

Government's Reply

The existing Foreign Allowance structure for Ministry of External Affairs/Government officers and officials posted in Missions abroad, is based on 1954 Formula which provides for compensation for cost of living based on expenditure on commodities and services which include food, clothing, servants, transport, miscellaneous household requirements, laundry, electricity, water and fuel. The allowances are fixed on the basis of periodic inspection undertaken by the Foreign Service Inspectors (FSI) who visit the Mission for scrutinising the functioning of Missions and have the mandate of fixing, as well as reviewing Foreign Allowance of that Mission. The Inspectors collect price data of all components referred to above and fix FA for all categories of officers/officials posted in the Missions abroad. In the interim, if there is an exceptional increase in prices in any country where our Mission/Post, is established, an *ad hoc* increase is given based on increase in United Nations Cost of Living (UN-COL) index published for most countries every month. However due to increase in number of Missions/Posts it became difficult to maintain desired level of frequency of visits which led to a distortion in Foreign Allowance structure.

Ministry has now proposed scheme for revising the FA structure by linking it to the United Nations Retail Price Index (UN RPI). This index provides relativity of cost of living in most countries abroad with reference to New York as base. The revised structure will eliminate the dependency of fixation/revision of FA on FSI visits and will make it adaptable to revision periodically according to changes in UN RPI.

This proposal was scheduled to be implemented in early 1996-97 financial year. It was anticipated to involve an additional expenditure of Rs. 35.12 crores per annum, which had been provided to the Ministry at RE stage. The proposal is still under discussion with Department of Expenditure/Ministry of Finance. In the event it is implemented with effect from December salaries, the budgetary impact would be Rs. 4.42 crores only, during the current financial year.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The Committee are constrained to point out that inspection of 12 Missions during 1995-96 by the Foreign Service Inspectors reveal certain

shortcomings in their working which were also noticed during the inspection of some Missions in 1994-95. The Committee are informed that shortcomings noticed are of procedural nature. Obviously effective steps do not seem to have been taken to ensure that shortcoming notices in one Mission do not be repeated in other. The Committee take a serious view of the failure on the part of the Ministry to take the corrective action. The Committee expect the Ministry to issue the necessary directions and guidelines immediately so that these mistakes do not recur. They would also like the Ministry to periodically monitor the compliance of the instructions issued in this regard. (Para No. 26)

Government's Reply

Shortcomings noticed by the Foreign Service Inspectors were of procedural nature like proper maintenance of registers etc. Concerned Missions were asked to immediately rectify these shortcomings. Where the issues were of a more general nature like on accounting procedures, circular letters were also sent to all Missions for guidelines. However, as the FSIs visit a different set of countries in succeeding years and period of records scrutinised by the FSIs is generally 3 years or more some similar lapses are noticed in inspections referred to by the Standing Committee. Instructions are reiterated as and when such lapses are noticed and follow up action is taken by concerned Divisions for avoiding future recurrence.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The Committee note with satisfaction that steps are being taken by the Ministry to improve the functioning of the Missions by using modern office equipment and communication system. They hope that constraint of funds will not be allowed to hamper the progress being made in this regard. The Committee hope that the installation of modern equipment would help Missions in better discharge of their functions (Para No. 27)

Government's Reply

The Ministry assures the Committee that it is the Ministry's constant endeavour to see that the Missions/Posts abroad and Headquarters are well-equipped with the latest technology available

so as to keep themselves abreast in relation to Missions/Posts of other countries. The Ministry would make adequate Provision so that constraint of funds will not hamper progress made in this regard.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

It is pertinent to note that in reply to a recommendation made in their 6th report on Demands for Grants for the year 1995-96 the Ministry have informed the Committee that a comprehensive exercise to review the manpower requirements of the economic and commercial wings of our Missions/Posts abroad is currently underway in consultation with the Ministry of Commerce. Proposals concerning as many as 38 Missions/Posts are under active consideration and further suitable action would be taken in this regard. The Committee would like to be informed of the progress made in this direction. The Committee expect that with the strengthening of the economic and commercial wings it would be feasible for Missions to attract sizeable foreign investment from the overseas investors. For achieving this it is necessary to boost the commercial publicity, remove whatever constraints being experienced by the foreign investors, organise Seminars and Conferences especially in countries abroad with the cooperation of FICCI and CII and overcome administrative bottlenecks in coordination with other concerned Ministries. (Para No. 28)

Government's Reply

Strengthening of the Economic and Commercial Wings in the Missions has been engaging the attention of the Ministry for some time and is being accorded due priority. In consultation with M/o Commerce a comprehensive exercise was undertaken to review the manpower requirements of the Missions. Additional local marketing assistants and expertise have been made available wherever considered necessary. In consultation with the Ministry of Commerce personnel requirement modules have been developed and efforts are being made to redeploy/restructure the commercial wings in the target Missions by providing requisite suitable manpower. Financial Powers have been delegated to our HOMs/HOPs to procure necessary computer hardware and software to enable them to have the online connectivity as well as access to various databases. More and more Missions are using the modern communication and data processing facilities which have substantially enhanced their effectiveness in handling economic and

commercial work. In fact a large number of Missions are presently using E-mail facility, Internet resource base and Websites. Similarly, the nodal officers in the Ministry dealing with trade and economic work have corresponding facilities at Hqrs. Regular interaction and exchanges with apex Chambers of Commerce and Industry are undertaken to introduce effective market entry strategies and their advice and suggestions are duly considered for implementing the export and investment targets.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The Committee have been given to understand that constant assessment by the Ministry of their publicity activities reveals that they cannot use more funds effectively at the Headquarters level whereas it is possible to use more funds fruitfully at the Missions level. Yet, there is no perceptible increase of funds for advertising and publicity for Missions/Posts (Rs. 11.73 crores) as compared to that for headquarters (Rs. 11 crores) in the BE 1996-97. Some steps are stated to have initiated to expand, interpret and project India's Foreign Policy objectives. However, still much more needs to be done to project a favourable perception of India and build up a greater awareness of and an understanding for its values and policies, and also to counter adverse propaganda being carried out by one of our immediate neighbours. For this, acquisition and use of most modern equipment, upgradation of communication system, stepping up of our lobbying efforts, production of more effective publicity material and distribution thereof by Missions/Posts to NRIs, NGOs, opinion makers and decision takers are essential and efforts being made in this direction need to be augmented. The Committee also feel that closer and more purposeful interaction by our Foreign Missions with NRIs in this regard would go a long way to achieve the objectives. Needless to say that these measures require sufficient funds, especially for Missions, and Ministry ought to strive to achieve the same. (Para No. 32)

Government's Reply

Requests for acquisition of modern equipment have been made by our Missions and are being processed in the Ministry. However, as the Committee has rightly noted, to project a favourable perception of India and build up a greater awareness of and an understanding for its values and policies, and also to counter adverse propaganda being

carried out by one of our immediate neighbours certain measures that require sufficient funds especially for Missions, are needed. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Finance has not been able to allocate additional funds for external publicity purposes. Missions are nevertheless trying to optimally utilise resources available to implement these measures.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The Committee agree with the Ministry that it would be more practical and feasible to begin by allotting additional funds to selected Missions and to expand this effort subsequently in respect of more Missions. The Committee find that some of the Missions have submitted proposals for stepping up their public relations, advertising, and other publicity activities. The Committee would like the Ministry to scrutinise such proposals with a view to providing the requisite funds and study the impact made by them in due course. (Para No. 33)

Government's Reply

In line with Committees' recommendation, some Missions were selected for allotment of additional funds *inter alia* to step up public relations, advertising and other publicity activities. The Ministry of Finance was unable to provide additional funding and it was therefore not found possible to expand or substantially qualify our external publicity efforts.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

From time to time suggestions have come to the Committee for opening of more Passport offices in the country especially in the North Eastern Sector. The Committee desire that till the work relating to opening/relocation of Passport Offices based on the re-assessed demands is completed as recommended by the Committee in their 3rd and 7th reports, the Ministry should ensure that all State Capitals have either a Passport Office or a Sub-Passport Office or Collection Centre for the benefit of the applicants. In this connection, the representative of the Ministry assured that Collection Centres can be

opened in North Eastern Region in the State Capitals. The Committee desire that expeditious action may be taken in this regard under intimation to them. (Para No. 42)

Government's Reply

The Ministry is opening five Passport Collection Centres at Gurgaon, Madurai, Shillong, Surat, and Vijayawada. In addition, the opening of Collection Centres in each of the six north-eastern States *i.e.* Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland (all covered now by RPO, Guwahati) and Tripura (covered by P.O., Calcutta) has been taken up with the Governments of those States with the request that they should allocate office space and nominate officials to man the Collection Centres on behalf of the Ministry of Extnal Affairs. All these Collection Centres will supply application forms, scrutinise the applications being submitted, accept fees and forward them to the Passport Office Guwahati/Calcutta for grant of passports. This will ensure that the applicants from all those States do not have to travel to Guwahati/Calcutta for filing their applications.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The Committee find that Revenue to the tune of Rs. 71.15 crores was earned by the Passport Offices during 1995 whereas the expenditure incurred amounted to Rs. 47.46 crores. Although the revenue earned by the Passport Office go directly to the Consolidated Fund of India, the Ministry ought to ensure larger allocation for passport and emigration service taking into consideration the amount of revenue being earned by the Passport Offices so as to utilise the same for augmenting and improving the passport facilities *i.e.* by opening new offices, improvement in customer amenities, better facilities to the staff etc. (Para No. 43)

Government's Reply

The Ministry is taking action to improve passport facilities by opening new offices, upgrading infrastructure in the offices, both by purchasing and renting new premises where necessary to make them more user friendly. Also being introduced are State of the art modern communication systems and machine printing of passports to make the documents more secure and error free.

New Passport Offices are being opened at Ghaziabad, Thane, Pune and Vishakhapatnam. Efforts are also underway to link Passport Offices, ensuring transfer of data between them and the Headquarters for speedy verification of particulars. This would obviate delays which are now caused due to multiple cross references between the Passport Offices, as well as Indian Missions abroad and Passport Offices, particularly in the case of damaged and lost passports.

Steps are also being taken to improve the functioning of Consular Sections in Indian Missions abroad, so that grant of passports to Indian nationals abroad is also expedited. For this purpose, inspection teams are in the process of visiting key countries abroad to review the facilities from the point of view of personnel, equipment and availability of public utilities and space in those sections.

It is anticipated that the expenditure on these innovations would be met either from the sanctioned budget or if necessary from additional allocations. Thus paucity of resources is not expected to constrain this modernisation and upgradation.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The Committee expect that with the computerisation of Passport Offices, more funds to the organisation for augmenting their facilities, increased incentives to the staff like the promotion prospects etc., it should be possible to increase efficiency of Passport offices in such a way that passports are delivered to the applicants positively within 4 weeks. Also, there should be no harassment to the applicants at the Passport Office and their grievances, if any, including that of miscellaneous services should be promptly addressed to. It is also necessary that the mechanism of surprise inspections at the Passport Offices is strengthened and prompt punitive action is taken in cases of negligence of duty leading to delay, harassment and corruption. (Para No. 45)

Government's Reply

The Ministry has adopted a well-coordinated approach to the issue of Passports which involves not only augmenting of facilities in the Passport Offices but also simplification of procedures and motivation of the staff by introduction of better promotion prospects. The staff in Passport Offices are being sensitised to taking prompt action on

grievances of applicants and the necessity to provide polite service to the public. In the Ministry a Cell is being set up with additional telephone and fax lines to provide on-line facility for the public to register their complaints. Passport Offices are being inspected on an on-going basis and prompt action is taken in cases of dereliction of duty or nefarious activities. In so far as miscellaneous services are concerned, there is already a provision for same day service *via* special counters in thirteen Passport Offices.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The Committee have been impressing upon Ministry of External Affairs the need for stepping up the allocation for ICCR so that the Council is better equipped to improve its functioning with a view to projecting India in its true perspective abroad. In this connection it is pertinent to note that the increase in the allocation to the ICCR in RE 1995-96 as well as BE 1996-97 is principally on account of increase in grant-in-aid by Rs. 5 crores to cater to enhanced tuition fees and house rent to Scholars. That means that the marginal increase that has been made is not for enhanced activities of ICCR. In its 9th Report the Committee had urged upon the ICCR to act as one of India's premier institutions for fostering cultural exchanges and mutual understanding with the countries of the World. Need was also emphasised to project the image of India's rich and varied culture not only to better the environment of relationship between India and various countries but also to defeat concerted attempts by unfriendly quarters at image distortion. In the light of such suggestions, the committee hardly need to re-emphasise the significance attached to various activities of ICCR. For better projection of India's image it is also necessary that a fair, attractive and equitable scheme about remuneration for artists at various levels and of different categories is imaginatively devised so as to avoid needless discontent and the ICCR should in spirit recognise that they are indeed the cultural representatives of India and project the best of the Indian art and culture to foreign audiences. The Committee, therefore, desire that the allocation to ICCR should be stepped up considerably so that it is in a position to achieve its desired objectives. Till that is done the ICCR should endeavour to make optimum use of the allocation in upgrading the quality of facilities, in order to fostering better understanding and strengthening our cultural relations with other countries. (Para No. 51)

Government's Reply

The Ministry fully agrees with the observations of the Committee on the need to increase the budget grant of ICCR in order to enable it to expand its activities. The Ministry would continue to impress upon the Finance Ministry the need for enhancement of MEA's budget so that the grant-in-aid for ICCR could be increased substantially.

The recommendations of the Committee concerning a fair attractive and equitable scheme of remuneration to artists have been noted. Necessary action is being taken to revise the norms of payment of honourarium to artists at various levels and different categories. The new rates will be put into effect once the approval of the statutory bodies of the Council have been obtained.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The Committee note the grants-in-aid for technical and economic cooperation with other countries have increased rather steeply from Rs. 129.72 crores in 1994-95 to Rs. 293.42 crores at BE 1996-97 level. The Committee would like to be appraised of the criteria adopted in distributing the total amount under the Aid programme to different countries of Asia, Africa, neighbouring countries, etc. Since substantial amount is being spent as aid programme on the various India aided projects in countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Cambodia, Myanmar, etc., it would be necessary if an evaluation is made as to the impact it is creating in strengthening mutual bilateral relations with these countries. It would also be pertinent to study the positions taken by these countries on important issues of common interest at various international forums *vis-a-vis* stands taken by India. The Committee would like to be informed of the results of such a study. The Committee are of the view that selection of projects should have sharp focus on the impact it would have on the strengthening of the bilateral relations with these countries. (Para No. 57).

Government's Reply

The general criteria adopted for distributing grants-in-aid is (a) it should serve India's overall political interests in terms of the recipient country's response to issues of core interest to India, (b) it should promote India's overall economic and commercial efforts, (c) it should support the export of Indian expertise, technology and man-power to

third countries, and (d) it should help create goodwill and project a favourable image of India. In case of neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, there are strategic and security related concerns as also commercial considerations like import of electric power by setting up hydro-power projects, etc. which determine the grant of project aid.

An evaluation was conducted in 1993 by a three-member team consisting of two former ambassadors and the current High Commissioner in Ghana. Based on the Evaluation Report, a number of steps have already been taken. The revision of terms and conditions for training in India under ITEC have been finalised. Other major recommendations like gearing India's assistance to promoting Indian political influence as well as Indian products and services through exposure to Indian capabilities and capacities by means of training in India, sending Indian experts abroad and assisting in strategic economic sectors where we have demonstrated successes such as food production, small scale industries, computer software, etc. are being actively implemented.

On the Committee's recommendations that a study should be made on the positions taken by these countries on important issues of common interest at various international fora *vis-a-vis* stands taken by India, it is submitted that this is an on-going process and response of the recipient country of ITEC assistance on issues of interest to India is always taken into consideration for continuing such assistance or offering new aid proposals. The Ministry is in total agreement with the Committee's view that selection of projects should have sharp focus on strengthening bilateral relations and in fact this is the overall guiding criteria for offering ITEC assistance and project aid.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The Committee are constrained to point out that there was increase of Rs. 69 crores under the Aid Programme at RE 1995-96 level over BE 1995-96 level which amounts to nearly 37%. The extent of this increase indicate that these projects are not adequately pre-planned and taken up on ad-hoc considerations. In the absence of proper and prior planning it is obvious that only token amount is released at BE stage and then there is sudden rush for increase at RE stage. The Committee feel that there ought to be horizontal as well as vertical

coordination within the Government itself as to what has to be done in a particular country and which project is to be taken up. The Committee feel that all the projects to be carried out in aided countries should be well planned and should be completed under a time bound programme to avoid time and cost escalation. Proper monitoring is necessary for overseeing the execution of these projects. The Committee hope that these facts would be given due consideration while unertaking and executing such projects in aided countries. (Para No. 58)

Governments Reply

Out of the total increase of Rs. 69 crore under the aid programme at RE 1995-96 level over BE 1995-96 level, it may be clarified that Rs. 50 crore was on account of finalization of Kurichu Hydro-electric Project in September, 1995. This has been a long delayed project and until the agreement was finalised and signed, it was not possible to anticipate this expenditure at BE stage.

As part of India's geo-strategic moves, particularly on our becoming a dialogue partner of ASEAN and involvement in the Indian Ocean Rim countries' grouping, additional cooperation projects amounting to Rs. 53 lakhs were identified. It may also be mentioned that aid for disaster relief, which was to the tune of Rs. 6.75 crore during 1995-96, was an expenditure which, by its very nature, could not be forecast earlier. It has also to be appreciated that at times, developmental assistance has to be rushed at short notice to derive maximum political mileage out of it and in such cases, it is not always possible to anticipate request for such assistance from friendly foreign Governments to be included in budget estimates.

However, the Committee's recommendations for implementing projects in a well planned and time bound manner as also horizontal as well as vertical coordination within the Government are unexceptionable and are being adhered to as far as possible.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

The Committee note that the Department of Expenditure have agreed to increase capital outlay Budget of the Ministry from 57 crores under BE 1996-97 to Rs. 100 crores at the RE stage. This will enable the Ministry to begin the 10 year comprehensive plan

drawn up by them for purchase/construction of properties. The Committee also note that the Ministry have estimated the demand for funds for the next 4 years in this regard to the tune of Rs. 1050 crores. The Ministry is stated to have identified the priorities for purchase and construction of our own properties abroad. The Committee do hope that the funds asked for by the Ministry would be provided for by the Ministry of Finance in the next few years so that the comprehensive plan drawn up by the Ministry is completed according to a time bound programme. The Committee also feel that priorities laid down by the Ministry in this regard would be strictly followed and available funds utilised judiciously as planned. (Para No. 65).

Government's Reply

The Department of Expenditure, during discussion on enhancing funds under Capital Outlay Budget of the Ministry, had given an assurance for providing Rs. 100 crores at the RE stage, which information was communicated to the Standing Committee. However, due to budgetary constraints and related difficulties, the Department of Expenditure decided to freeze the Capital Outlay Budget for RE 1996-97 at Rs. 52 crores and enhanced the BE 1997-98 to Rs. 75 crores. Because of the restricted budgetary allocation, Ministry has been able to implement the Property Acquisition Plan in a limited manner. Available funds have been judiciously utilised. Efforts will continue to be made to request Ministry of Finance for enhanced allocation of funds in BE 1997-98 to enable early implementation of the Property Plan.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

Recommendation

In the difficult situation arising because of the unseemly haste of the nuclear powers to get the CTBT passed in its present form, completely ignoring the concerns and the view point of India, there was no alternative left for India but to veto the CTBT. The recent action taken by India at Geneva reflects the national consensus on the issue. The Committee desire that India must continue to adhere to its principled and articulated stand on CTBT without being swayed by any international pressure and every effort should be made to counter the misinformation/disinformation being spread about our stand on nuclear disarmament. To achieve this, the Committee desire that the

Ministry must make all efforts to explain our view point within the country and abroad. (Para No. 72)

Government's Reply

India has continued to adhere to its principled and consistent stand on CTBT without being swayed by any international pressure. Following the failure of Ad-hoc Committee to reach a consensus and India's steadfast stand opposing transmittal of non-consensus draft treaty text along with CD report to UNGA, Australia moved a Resolution on CTBT seeking adoption of a draft treaty text. This draft treaty text was identical to the non-consensus draft treaty text being negotiated in Geneva. India circulated a document explaining the non-consensual nature of this draft treaty text and reiterated India's principled stand on CTBT. In the voting on the Australian resolution India, along with Bhutan and Libya, voted against the Resolution, while Cuba, Tanzania, Lebanon, Syria and Mauritius abstained. 158 countries voted in favour of the resolution. The vote in the UNGA was preceded by a general debate where a large number of countries addressed the issue of nuclear disarmament. Several NAM countries stressed the need for elimination of nuclear weapons within a timebound framework.

Soon after the vote the External Affairs, Minister, in a *suo moto* statement made in Parliament on 11.9.96, said that India "will continue to take initiatives in the United Nations and other fora in keeping with our consistent and principled policy for achieving progress towards our shared goal of a nuclear weapon free world which will enhance India's security and also global security."

The treaty was opened for signatures on 24.9.96. So far, 125 countries have signed it including the five Nuclear weapon states. Meanwhile India continued to articulate its stand on the CTBT at various international fora and its bilateral dialogues with several countries. In the UNGA India co-sponsored the resolution of Nuclear disarmament (L. 39) which calls for elimination of nuclear weapons within a timebound framework.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

CHAPTER III

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

Recommendation

The Committee have been given to understand that the Cadre Review of the Central Passport Organisation has been carried out which is being considered by the Ministry of Finance. This is stated to be the first ever Cadre Review of the Organisation and it aims at rationalising the cadre structure to motivate the staff into maximising the output by providing them better opportunities for career advancement and having a more streamlined administrative structure. The Committee hope that a decision regarding this Cadre Review will be taken early so that the dissatisfaction prevailing in the staff particularly at lower level would be removed. (Para No. 44)

Government's Reply

The cadre review proposals of the Central Passport Organisation were referred to the Ministry of Finance for their approval and were under consideration at the time of the meeting of the Standing Committee. Subsequently, the Ministry's proposal has been returned by the Ministry of Finance with the observation :

"As per the extent parameters for considering proposals for cadre review/restructuring, the proposals should, *inter alia*, be budget neutral i.e. the additional expenditure on creation of posts at certain levels should be completely offset by the abolition of posts at other levels. The cadre restructuring proposals in the subject case envisage keeping overall strength at the existing level of 1873. It is necessary for MEA to effect suitable reductions in the overall strength in such a way that the additional expenditure involved in the creation of posts at certain levels is completely offset. MEA may therefore, recast the proposals accordingly indicating also the

revised financial effect in order to enable this Ministry to process the matter further.”

Cadre Review proposals are being re-submitted to the Ministry of Finance for reconsideration and approval, emphasizing that the Central Passport Organisation is revenue surplus and engaged in rendering vital service to the public, exempting it from the specified norms.

[MEA O.M. No. AA/125/Parl./27/96 dated 16th January, 1997]

CHAPTER IV

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

Recommendation

The Committee note that the total pendency in Passport Offices which was 2.8 lakh at the end of 1994 has increased to 2.94 lakh at the end of 30th June 1996. However, the number of passports issued during 1995 has decreased to 17.55 lakh as compared to 20.11 lakh passports issued in 1994. Thus, as compared to 1994 figures less number of passports were issued while more applications have been pending during 1995. The Ministry have advanced various reasons due to which it is difficult to reduce the pendency further. The Committee however do not agree with the explanation given by the Ministry. They are of the view that the maximum time limit for issue of a passport as per the Ministry is 4 weeks and therefore the pendency at a time in Passport Offices should not increase the total average applications received in 4 weeks time. To achieve this, the Passport Organisation ought to have close coordination with Ministry of Home Affairs for getting early verification reports, simpler passport application forms so as to reduce the number of incomplete applications and accountability of the passport officers in the Passport Offices. (Para No. 41)

Government's Reply

While every effort has been made to reduce the pendency and bring it down to the level of the average number of applications received in 4 weeks, it has not been possible to achieve this objective due to certain inbuilt constraints. Police verification reports usually take 3-4 weeks. Thereafter, granting of passport takes a few days. Another significant factor which contributes to delay is that a number of applications received in the Pasport Offices particularly those received by post are incomplete in many respects. Passport applicants are advised by post to furnish necessary documentation before the passport can be issued, resulting in delays. To obviate this, instructions have been issued to Passport Offices to ensure thorough scrutiny of applications at the time of deposit. Furthermore, the working of each office is reviewed frequently. Whenever any exceptional increase in pendency is noticed, temporary additional staff is sanctioned for disposing off the applications. Also, new offices are being created to ensure that in the bigger states, particularly in areas from where a large number of postal applications are received, a sub-regional passport

office is opened so that the applicants can go to the office and get their applications scrutinised before submission. All these steps are expected to expedite the issue of the passports. In any case, the Committee's advice on consulting the Ministry of Home Affairs for reducing the verification period is noted.

Several other measures have also been taken to provide more efficient and effective services to the public in the matter of issue of passports. Applicants have the option of applying for a 10 year or a 20 year validity passport on payment of a fee of Rs. 300/- or Rs. 600/- as the case may be. Passports submitted after expiry of the 10 year validity period are re-issued without police verification. The list of officers authorized to issue Verification Certificates has been expanded to include officers of the rank of General manager and above in Public Sector Undertakings of the Government of India and the officers of the rank of Colonel and above in the Army and their equivalents in the Navy and Air Force. A Complaints and Grievances Cell has been established in the CPV Division to deal with complaints and grievances of members of the public in passport matters. In any case, there are designated officers in all Passport Offices, who now meet the public on all working days. Directions have also been issued to Passport Offices to accept photocopies of application forms in addition to the printed forms. A decision has already been taken to open new Passport Offices at Ghaziabad, Pune, Thane and Vishakhapatnam and Collection Centres at Gurgaon, Madurai, Surat, Vijaywada, as well as in the six north eastern states i.e. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.

Although a simpler passport form was introduced last year following extensive inter-ministerial consultations, with the computerisation now planned, it is proposed to further simplify and reduce the size of the application form. This is being done to make it possible to pick up the information from an application form through Optical Computer Reading Technology.

To generate greater accountability in the Passport Offices, a special Vigilance Cell has been functioning in the CPV Division of the Ministry of External Affairs, manned by officials taken on loan from Central Vigilance Commissioner's organisation. In addition, the Public Grievance Redressal Mechanism in the CPV Division has been supplemented with a Public Relations Officer (Public Grievances) monitoring every complaint coming to the office of the Chief Passport Officer, entering them in a computerised format made available by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances and effective follow up done directly under the supervision of the Chief Passport Officer.

CHAPTER V

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

—NIL—

NEW DELHI;
4 April, 1997

14 Chaitra, 1919 (Saka)

ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE,
Chairman,
Standing Committee on External Affairs.

APPENDIX I

MINUTES OF THE SITTING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS HELD ON 31 MARCH, 1997

The Committee sat from 1200 hrs. to 1245 hrs.

PRESENT

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee — *Chairman*

MEMBERS

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Manabendra Shah
3. Col. Rao Ram Singh
4. Dr. Gunawant Sarode
5. Shri Vijay A. Mude
6. Shri Bijoy K. Handique
7. Smt. Meira Kumar
8. Begum Noorbano
9. Dr. Hari Singh
10. Shri Anil Kumar Yadav
11. Shri Rupchand Pal
12. Shri George Fernandes
13. Shri Pramotes Mukherjee
14. Shri G.G. Swell

Rajya Sabha

15. Smt. Chandresh Kumari
16. Smt. Vyjayantimala Bali
17. Shri V.N. Gadgil
18. Shri Bhuvnesh Chaturvedi

19. Shri Sikander Bakht
20. Shri Triloki Nath Chaturvedi
21. Prof. Vijay Kumar Malhotra
22. Shri M.A. Baby

SECRETARIAT

1. Dr. Ashok Kumar Pandey — *Additional Secretary*
2. Shri V.N. Gaur — *Director*
3. Shri Ashok Sarin — *Deputy Secretary*
4. Shri R.K. Saxena — *Under Secretary*

At the outset the Chairman welcomed the members to the sitting of the Committee. The Committee then took up for consideration the following draft Report :

3rd Report on Action Taken on the recommendations contained in the 1st Report of the Committee on Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for 1996-97.

2. The Chairman invited Members to offer their comments/suggestions on the draft Report. The Members made certain suggestions and desired that those might be suitably incorporated into the body of the Report.

3. The draft Action Taken Report was then adopted.

4. The Committee authorised the Chairman to finalise the Action Taken Report for presentation to the House.

The Committee then adjourned.

APPENDIX II

(Vide Introduction of Report)

Analysis of Action Taken by Government on the 1st Report of standing Committee on External Affairs (11th lok Sabha)

I. Total Number of Recommendations	19
II. Observations/Recommendations which have been accepted by Government	
Para Nos. 11, 12, 16, 25, 26, 27, 28, 32, 33, 42, 43, 45, 51, 57, 58, 65, 72.	
Total	17
Percentage	89.47%
III. Observations/Recommendations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the Government's replies.	
Para No. 44	
Total	1
Percentage	5.26%
IV. Observations/Recommendations in respect of which replies of Government have not been accepted and which require reiteration.	
Para No. 41	
Total	1
Percentage	5.26%
V. Observations/Recommendations in respect of which final replies of Government are still awaited.	

NIL

APPENDIX III

Statement of Observations and Recommendations

Sl. No.	Para No.	Ministry	Observations/ Recommendations
1	2	3	4
1.	6	External Affairs	It is quite obvious that our efforts in this field have not borne fruit. The large number of anti-India articles in the foreign media, particularly with reference to Kashmir and alleged human rights abuse are a reflection of this. It is, therefore, necessary that utmost priority is to be given to present a correct picture of our stand and of the factual position so that the impact of 'planted' anti-India stories is lessened. Our democratic credentials and openness as contrasted with other players, should come out clearly.
2.	7	-do-	The Ministry have admitted that a lot needs to be done to project a favourable perception of India and to counter adverse propaganda being carried out by one of our immediate neighbours. For this, acquisition and use of most modern equipment, upgradation of communication system, stepping up of our lobbying efforts, production of more effective publicity material and distribution etc. are essential. All these measures require sufficient funds

1**2****3****4**

and according to the Ministry more funds can be fruitfully utilised at the missions level In this connection some Missions were stated to have been selected by the Ministry for grant of additional funds to step up public relations, advertising and publicity activities. The Committee are informed that as the Ministry of Finance were unable to provide additional funds for this purpose it was not found possible to expand or substantially qualify the external publicity efforts. The Committee observe with regret that adequate funds for external publicity by Missions abroad were not provided by the Government. The Committee would like the Ministry to pursue vigorously with the Ministry of Finance for additional funds atleast for some selected Missions and to expand the efforts subsequently in respect of other Missions after studying the impact created by more funds at the selected Missions. The Committee are of the considered view that Ministry of Finance should appreciate the necessity of more funds for publicity activities particularly for Missions. To begin, with additional funds may be provided as asked for by the Ministry of External Affairs for some selected Missions for this purpose.

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			<p>Separately, the Missions should be constantly emphasised the need for optimum utilisation of the available resources to carry out the assigned task. The Ministry may ensure that atleast minimum modern communication facilities are provided in all the Missions.</p>
3.	12	External Affairs	<p>Some measures are stated to have been taken by the passport authorities to expedite the issue of passports such as decision regarding opening up of new passport offices/collection centres, computerisation and modernisation of passport offices, expansion of list of officers authorised to issue verification certificates, introduction of simpler application forms, functioning of Special Vigilance Cell etc. However, the fact remains that the applicants are not getting passports within the expected time limit of 4 weeks after submission of application forms. The Ministry have themselves admitted that it has not been possible to reduce the pendency of applications and bring it down to the level of the average number of applications received in 4 weeks due to some inherent delays such as time taken in police verification, receipt of incomplete application forms particularly by post etc. The Committee take a serious view of the fact that applicants</p>

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are not only being denied passports within the stipulated time but are also not attended to properly when they visit the passport offices. The question of delay on account of the time taken in police verification and receipt of incomplete application forms etc. were examined by the Committee when they discussed the subject of "Passport facilities" in 1994 and the Committee were assured that the necessary corrective measures would be taken at the earliest. The Committee in their 3rd and 7th Report on Passport Facilities had emphasised the need for maintaining close coordination at appropriate level with Home Ministry/Policy Authorities to reduce the verification period which was described to be the main cause for delay in issue of passports. It seems that this problem has not so far been given the urgency that it deserved. Further, the Committee feel that acceptance of application forms only after thorough scrutiny at the time of the submission of forms, despatch of applications straightway to applicants if forms received by post are found incomplete, surprise checking by the staff of the Special Vigilance Cell in the passport offices and their frequent inter-action with the waiting applicants there to

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find out the nature of grievances/complaints, special incentive to sincere and honest workers, further simplification of application forms are some of the steps that the Central Passport Organisation should immediately take to ensure that the applicants are delivered passports within the stipulated time and are not subject to various hardships in this connection. The miscellaneous services required by the applicant such as renewal of passports, issue of duplicate passports etc. should also be addressed to without any delay. The Committee also expect the Ministry to ensure that decision regarding opening of new passport offices/collection centres would be implemented at the earliest. The Committee would like to be informed of the precise steps taken in this regard and also about the figures regarding total applications received, passports issued during the years 1995 and 1996 and the pendency of applications in Passport Offices (office wise) at the end of the years 1995 and 1996.

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External Affairs

The Committee are informed that the response of the recipient country of Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) assistance on issues of interest to India is always taken into

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consideration for continuing such assistance or offering new aid proposals. An evaluation of the impact of such an aid programme is stated to have been conducted last in 1993. However, the Committee feel that a fresh study is called for to make a realistic assessment of the amount of support received from these countries by us in respect of our stand on CTBT, our recent defeat for the non-permanent seat from Asian region in Security Council and for our claim for a permanent seat in Security Council. The Committee feel that in view of the large amount of expenditure incurred by India on aid programmes, a more practical approach should be adopted and due consideration ought to be given to the countries who stand in our support in international fora.

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External Affairs

To begin the 10 year comprehensive plan drawn up by the Ministry of External Affairs for purchase/construction of proper-ties, the Department of Expenditure had agreed to increase the capital outlay budget of the Ministry from 57 crores under BE 96-97 to Rs. 100 crores at the BE stage. The Committee however regret to observe that inspite of their assurance, the Department of Expenditure decided to cut down the funds from Rs. 100

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crores to Rs. 52 crores. The restricted budgetary allocation in the very first year is stated to have hampered the implementation of the plan. The very purpose of drawing up such plans is defeated if necessary allocation is not made therefor and the plans are not completed on time. Needless to say that non-allocation of requisite funds result in avoidable cost and time overrun. The Committee desire that their displeasure be conveyed to Department of Expenditure for the going back on their assurance to provide Rs. 100 crores for the comprehensive plans at RE 96-97 stage. Since Ministry of External Affairs have estimated their demand to the tune of Rs. 1050 crores in next 4 years for this purpose, the Committee desire that the matter needs to be pursued with Department of Expenditure for timely and adequate funds in subsequent years so that the plan is completed as per laid down schedule.
