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**STANDING COMMITTEE
ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(2007-2008)**

FOURTEENTH LOK SABHA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

**DEMANDS FOR GRANTS
(2008-2009)**

TWENTIETH REPORT



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

April, 2008/Chaitra, 1930 (Saka)

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(2007-2008)

(FOURTEENTH LOK SABHA)

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
DEMANDS FOR GRANTS
(2008-2009)

Presented to Lok Sabha on 16th April, 2008
Laid in Rajya Sabha on 15th April, 2008



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

April, 2008/Chaitra, 1930 (Saka)

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE (2007-2008)	(ii)
INTRODUCTION.....	(iii)

PART-I

BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

I. Implementation of the Committee's Recommendations....	1
II. Budgetary Allocation.....	2
III. Establishment Strength.....	9
IV. Technical & Economic Cooperation.....	13
A. Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project.....	13
B. Tamu-Kalemyo-Kalewa Road.....	15
C. Tala Hydro Electric Project.....	15
D. Projects in Nepal.....	18
E. ITEC, SAARC and SCAAP Programme.....	18
F. Delivery and Evaluation of Projects/Schemes.....	20
V. Cooperation with neighbouring countries.....	23
VI. Passport and Visa Services.....	26
A. Re-issue of Passports.....	26
B. Working of Passport Offices.....	32
C. Passport Office Website.....	35
D. Unauthorized Collection of Fees.....	36
E. Passport Seva Project.....	39
F. Visa Services.....	42
G. Acquisition/construction of Passport Office Buildings..	44
VII. Other Matters.....	45
A. SAARC University.....	45
B. Prisoners in Pakistan Jails.....	47
C. Management Information System (MIS).....	49
D. Propagation of Hindi Abroad.....	50
E. UN Democracy Fund.....	50

PART II

RECOMMENDATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE	53
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APPENDICES

I. Minutes of the sitting of the Committee held..... on 03.04.2008	60
II. Minutes of the sitting of the Committee held..... on 11.04.2008	62
III. Passport Office-wise statement showing re-issue of passports during 2007	64
IV. Circular issued to all Missions/Posts abroad by MEA on Visa Services	65

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2007-2008)

LOK SABHA

Chairman

Dr. Laxminarayan Pandey

MEMBERS

2. Shri Yogi Aditya Nath
3. Prof. S.P. Singh Baghel
4. Shri A.V. Bellarmin
5. Shri Narayan Chandra Borkatakya
6. Shri Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa
7. Shri P.C.Gaddigoudar
8. Shri Syed Shahnawaz Hussain
9. Shri S.K. Kharventhan
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13. Dr. Sebastian Paul
14. Dr. (Col) Dhani Ram Shandil
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16. Shri Damodar Barku Shingada
17. Shri M. Shivanna
18. Shri Vanlalzawma
19. Shri Madhu Goud Yashki
20. Vacant @
21. Vacant #

RAJYA SABHA

22. Smt. Jaya Bachchan
23. Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi
24. Dr. Mahendra Prasad
25. Shri Arjun Kumar Sengupta
26. Dr. Karan Singh
27. Dr. (Smt.) Kapila Vatsyayan
28. Vacant*
29. Vacant*
30. Vacant*
31. Vacant

SECRETARIAT

1. Shri A. Louis Martin - Joint Secretary
2. Shri T.K. Mukherjee - Director
3. Shri P.V.L.N. Murthy- Deputy Secretary
4. Shri Lalkithang - Under Secretary

@ Change of Nomination of Shri Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu to Committee on Finance
w.e.f. 24.3.2008

Shri P.A. Sangma ceased to be a Member of the Committee w.e.f. 20.3.2008 consequent on his resignation as M.P.

* Shri S.M. Laljan Basha, Dr. Ram Prakash and Smt. Prema Cariappa ceased to be Members of the Committee on retirement w.e.f. 9.4.2008

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairman of the Standing Committee on External Affairs, having been authorized by the Committee to present the Report on their behalf, present this Twentieth Report of the Standing Committee on External Affairs (2007-2008) on Demands for Grants (2008-2009) of the Ministry of External Affairs.

2. The Committee took oral evidence of the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs on 3rd April, 2007.

3. The Committee considered and adopted this report at their sitting held on 11th April, 2008. Minutes of the sittings of the Committee held on 3rd and 11th April, 2008 are given in Annexure I and II to the Report.

4. The Committee wish to express their thanks to the Ministry of External Affairs for placing before them the material and information which they desired in connection with examination of the Demands for Grants (2008-2009). The Committee also wish to express their thanks in particular to the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs for appearing before the Committee and placing their considered views before them.

NEW DELHI
11 April, 2008

22 Chaitra, 1930 (Saka)

DR. LAXMINARAYAN PANDEY,
Chairman,
Standing Committee on External Affairs

CHAPTER I

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The 15th Report of the Standing Committee on External Affairs on Demands for Grants of Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2007-2008 was presented on 26th April, 2007. The Report contained 18 recommendations/ observations.

1.2 In compliance of Direction 73-A of the Directions by the Speaker, the Minister of State for External Affairs made a statement in Lok Sabha on 30th November, 2007 giving the status of implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee in their 15th Report (14th L.S.). An analysis of the Ministry's statement showed that the Government had accepted all the 18 recommendations. Out of these, 5 recommendations were implemented by the Government, 12 recommendations were under process of implementation and the Committee did not pursue one recommendation.

1.3 On the basis of Action Taken replies received from the Ministry of External Affairs on the above mentioned Report, the Committee presented their 18th Action Taken Report to the Houses on 20th November, 2007. The Committee in their 18th Action Taken Report have commented on the Action Taken reply furnished by the Ministry in respect of recommendation No. 11 contained in the 15th Report. The final reply in respect of recommendation no. 2 is still awaited. Final Action Taken Statement on the comments contained in the 18th Action Taken Report is yet to be received from the Ministry.

1.4 As regards the status of implementation of the Committee's recommendations is concerned, the Foreign Secretary informed the Committee, during the course of evidence on Demands for Grants (2008-2009) as follows:

“.....We have taken note of all the recommendations and observations and we have taken steps to implement most of them....”

CHAPTER II

BUDGETARY ALLOCATION

The Ministry of External Affairs is mandated to look after all aspects of external relations with other countries. In the performance of this role, the Ministry pursues India's national interests and the interests of its citizens abroad in the political, economic, commercial, cultural, consular and other areas through bilateral, regional and international interactions at the headquarters in New Delhi and through 168 Missions, Posts and specialized offices and centres across the world and representative offices in different parts of the country.

2.2 The budget of the Ministry has traditionally been Non-Plan in nature with a small Plan component.

2.3. The total Demand for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2008-2009 are for Rs. 5062 crore which is 14.17% more than BE 2007-08 and 5.83% more than RE 2007-08. Out of the BE of Rs. 5062 crore, Rs. 4483 crore is under Non-Plan and Rs. 579 crore under Plan.

2.4 The Non-plan component of the BE 2008-09 is same as the Non-Plan of RE 2007-08. There are no extra funds allocated for non-plan projects in BE 2008-09. The allocation under the Plan Head of BE 2008-09 is however Rs. 579 crore, which is Rs. 279 crore more than the RE of 2007-08 (which is Rs. 300 crore). Owing to this increased allocation under Plan Head, the total BE 2008-09 is Rs. 279 crore more than the RE of 2007-08.

2.5 Outlining the overall budgetary proposals of the Ministry for 2008-2009, the Foreign Secretary stated during evidence as follows:

“.....Overall, there are really three questions which one could ask of this Budget. One whether we have estimated the budget properly or not; whether we have actually spent it properly in 2007. I think, we have done better than we have ever done before. I do not say we are perfect yet. But, I think, we are progressing well as we systemise our work with the help of the Committee. The next question is: Is this the best way of using the resources? I would say

that given our resource constraints, etc., yes. If you notice, about the establishment expenditure, what we really deliver is quite improving.....only 3 per cent of our entire Budget is what is really spent on the Secretariat. That proportion has really shrunk over time. But the big question is: Does this Budget serve our larger foreign policy goals? Frankly speaking, the answer is “yes”. We think we could do better. But given the amount of money, yes, we have tried to prioritise it in the areas where our major priorities are. “

2.6 The total budgetary allocation for the Ministry of External Affairs year-wise since 2004-05 along with Revised Estimated (RE) for the respective years including Actual & shortfall in utilization of RE is as follows:

(Rs. in crore)

Year	BE	RE	Actual	Increase at RE Stage	Shortfall in Utilization of RE
2004-05	3641	3885	3756	244	129
2005-06	3928	4182	4089	254	93
2006-07	3695	4095	3949	400	146
2007-08	4433	4783	-	350	-
2008-09	5062	-	-	-	-

2.7 It may be seen from the table above that the initial budgetary allocations during the last 4 budget years were raised at RE stage. The actual utilization were, however, less than the increased allocation made at RE stage resulting in shortfall in utilization of funds every year. When asked if there was any shortfall in utilization of the revised allocation made during 2007-08, the Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“The total expenditure as on 31.01.2008 for the year 2007-08 was Rs. 3026.77 crore, which was 63.28% of RE 2007-08. As on 29.2.2008, this was Rs. 3687.70 crore, which was 77.10% of the RE 2007-08. The complete picture on the actual utilization of RE 2007-08 will be known once all the expenditure has been booked by the Office of the Principal Chief Controller of Accounts, MEA. Considering

the trend, however it is expected that the funds allocated under RE 2007-08 will be fully utilized.”

2.8 According to the Outcome Budget, the utilization of funds was only 57.44% up to 31 December, 2007. When asked the reasons for low utilization in the first three quarters of the year, the Ministry in their written reply stated as under:

“An important feature of the major chunk of the Ministry's BE 2007-08 is in designing and implementation of projects and programmes abroad. Progress of such projects is thus dependent on the internal political and security developments in the recipient countries. This makes it necessary for this Ministry to have regular consultation with a sovereign government in order to conclude a mutually acceptable agreement on project conception, design, terms of financing and technical assistance, management, implementation and its monitoring. It often takes time to identify the projects and conclude an agreement with the recipient country. It has been observed that by the time such projects have been identified and the implementation process started, seven-eight months of the FY has elapsed. As a result, most of the expenditure on such projects have been incurred during the last four-five months of the FY. Contribution to International Organizations are paid during January-March of the year. Under Capital Section also, the pace of expenditure is slow as the acquisition of a number of properties did not take place as anticipated.”

2.9 In this context, the Foreign Secretary said during evidence that:

“.....we find that in our case there are so many Drawing and Disbursing Officers scattered around the world. We do take slightly longer to book expenditures. We are working with our Pay and Accounts Officers to try and computerise that process and make sure that it becomes much quicker and more efficient. But we are confident that we will improve in terms of expenditure of our allotted Budget and the implementation of recommendations of the Committee is one big reason for that.”

2.10 Taking into account the trend of under-utilization of funds sought by the Ministry during the past 4 years, the Ministry was asked as to what it propose to do to arrest this trend, in a written response it submitted as follows:

“An Expenditure Monitoring Committee (EMC) under the Chairmanship of the Foreign Secretary has been set-up for regular monitoring of expenditure and utilisation of the budget allocation of the Ministry. The EMC reviews expenditure plans of all concerned Divisions of the Ministry each quarter on regular basis for all the ongoing Plan and Non-Plan schemes / programmes to examine the expenditure pattern of the Ministry at the end of each quarter to oversee whether targets set in percentage for each quarter was being utilized as planned. During the year 2007-08, the Expenditure Monitoring committee has regularly reviewed the expenditure pattern of the Ministry. Spending Units found lagging behind in the utilisation of their budget allocation were requested to increase their pace of expenditure.”

2.11 The total proposed outlay under Plan Head for the year 2008-09 was Rs. 768.54 crore but only Rs. 579 crore has reportedly been approved. On being asked about the areas that will be affected due to non-allocation of proposed outlay and possible fallout on its commitments with lesser allocation, the Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“Budget allocation has been approved by the Planning commission as proposed by the Ministry for most of the projects/schemes except for one scheme (development of road infrastructure in the *Terai* region in Nepal) for which budget allocation of Rs. 200 crore was proposed but Rs. 40 crore has been approved by the Planning Commission for preparation DPRs (Detailed Project Reports) for all schemes/programmes in Nepal. As of now, it appears that the Ministry will be able to fulfil its commitments with the Plan Head with the funds allocated at BE 2008-09. In case it is felt that additional funds would be required, the Planning Commission would be approached at the RE stage for higher allocation.”

2.12 The Committee had in their 15th Report on Demands for Grants noted the discrepancies in the figures shown in Outcome Budget (2007-2008) under the Head Technical and Economic Cooperation and cautioned the Ministry that extreme care should be exercised in future to ensure that documents/information presented to Parliament are flawless. It has been observed again that as in last year discrepancies have crept into the figures shown under the same head i.e. Technical and Economic Cooperation in the Outcome Budget and Demands for Grants documents. Asked the reasons for the discrepancies in the figures shown in the budget documents, the Ministry stated:

“The reason for discrepancy between the figures of allocation for 2008-09 pertaining to the Head ‘Technical and Economic Cooperation’ as shown in the Outcome Budget (Rs. 2070.48 crore) and the Demands for Grants (Rs. 1880.94 crore) is due to an inadvertent error during the preparation of the ‘Outcome Budget’ document and the same is rregretted. This error occurred due to the inclusion of the demand for Plan Grants projected under ‘3605’ instead of the amount approved by the Planning Commission. While the Outcome Budget document included the projected Plan requirement of Rs. 633.94 crore proposed to the Planning Commission, the Planning Commission actually approved the reduced allocation of Rs. 444.40 crore, which, inadvertently, was not taken into account in the Outcome Budget. The error is explained below:

Amount projected to the Planning Commission under Head '3605'	Rs. 633.94 crore
Amount approved by the Planning Commission under the Head '3605'	Rs. 444.40 crore
Amount shown under the Head '3605' inadvertently in the Outcome Budget	Rs. 1880.94 crore + (Rs. 633.94 crore - Rs. 444.40 crore) = Rs. 2070.48 crore

In the Outcome Budget, the estimated cost of individual projects proposed to be undertaken during the financial year in various countries has been indicated against them although the funds available for meeting the same are presently not fully available. In the case of Bangladesh, only the major projects along with the cost thereof (totaling Rs. 14 crore) have been included in the Outcome Budget against the allocation of Rs. 16 crore mentioned in the Demands For Grants. Apart from the said projects, some more projects requiring smaller amount of funds are also to be taken up during the next financial year. In Bhutan, the cost of projects listed in the Outcome Budget is more than the approved allocation indicated in Demands for Grants. The additional funds required, therefore, would be sought at the Revised Estimates (RE) stage, depending upon the expenditure incurred until that time.

The figure in respect of 'Others' mentioned in the Outcome Budget (Chapter I) are the remaining Heads against which funds have been sought in BE 2008-09. It is, thus, indicative of the funds available for undertaking the remaining activities. 'Other Expenditure' indicated in the Demands for Grants is a distinct Minor Head which caters to Schemes such as Demarcation of Boundaries, Special Delegations, Expenditure on Haj, etc. The discrepancy in the figure appearing in the Outcome Budget has already been corrected."

2.13 The Committee in their 15th Report had also regretted the absence of relevant project details such as original and anticipated dates of completion, factor-wise analysis of cost escalation, impact of cost over-run on viability of projects and have, therefore, recommended that such details should be disclosed in the Outcome Budget. The Ministry in its Action Taken Reply have assured that recommendation of the Committee will be implemented during the exercise for next Outcome Budget. It has, however, been observed that the assurance made to the Committee has not been fulfilled in the Outcome Budget (2008-2009) of the Ministry. When asked about the reasons for not implementing the recommendation of the Committee, particularly when an assurance to this effect was made, the Ministry in their written reply stated as follow:

“It is true that precise project details such as original and anticipated dates of completion, factor-wise analysis of cost escalation, impact of cost over-run on viability of project etc., could not be incorporated in the Outcome Budget for 2008-09. Unlike other Ministries which execute projects in India, the projects implemented by the Ministry of External Affairs are outside the country. Political and security developments in the countries where the projects are being implemented have a significant effect on the pace and costs of implementation. Every aspect of the project right from the stage of conception has to be negotiated with the sovereign Government of the country for mutually acceptable arrangements. Though these projects have a detailed implementation schedule and a monitoring process drawn up by us, it would be appropriate to project anticipated date of completion, etc., only after an agreement is reached with the recipient Government. Still the Ministry is making efforts to collect up-to-date information on such projects to be incorporated into a separate corrigendum to the Outcome Budget for 2008-09.”

CHAPTER III

ESTABLISHMENT STRENGTH

The Committee had in their 15th Report (2006-07) observed that there was an urgent need to raise the manpower strength of the MEA to cope with its expanding role and had suggested that an assessment of additional manpower requirements over the period of next five years, with due regard to the proposed outsourcing of certain peripheral jobs, be made expeditiously and action taken to ensure that the projected level of personnel are in place at the earliest.


3.2 In response to the recommendation made in their 15th Report of the Committee, the Ministry stated that, a draft note for Cabinet on the proposed expansion of the Ministry has been submitted to Deptt. of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance for their comments and the note was to be subsequently placed before the Cabinet for approval. The Ministry had further submitted that once the proposal was approved, MEA will expeditiously undertake the recruitment of personnel. Various studies were also reported to have been undertaken by the Ministry to outsource peripheral jobs including issuance of visa, protocol work etc.

3.3 In this regard the Foreign Secretary stated during evidence that:

“.....Last time, the Committee had also spoken of the need to expand the size of the Ministry. We are still working on that. Within the Government, I think, there is a decision at the highest level that there should be an increase in the size but we are still working on how we can do that.....”

3.4 Dwelling upon the issue of the shortage of manpower in the Ministry, the Foreign Secretary stated during evidence for Demands for Grants (2008-2009) as follows:

“.....Our staff strength has shrunk over the last ten years, but our functions have increased much more. If you look at the figures that we have either for the visits from abroad or the number of passports or visas issued, they have all gone up. We issued last year about 50 lakh passports for the first time with no

increase in staff strength. The number of visas that we have issued has crossed 37 lakhs last year. Our revenues have gone up, but our non-plan allocation is exactly the same as last year's Revised Estimate. If you add the other workload, in terms of foreign investment or foreign trade, I think, we can claim that we are more productive than we have been in the past.  with the same resources we are delivering much more in terms of work. However, we are still not perfect and there is still a lot that we feel we have to do.....”

3.5 It is observed from the Detailed Demands for Grants 2008-2009 of MEA that the total number of employees in position as on 1st March, 2008 was 6400 as against the sanctioned strength of 7250. The shortfall was as much as 850. Asked about the reasons for huge number of posts remaining vacant in different grades, the Ministry in a written submission stated as under:

“Posts shown as presently vacant in the Ministry's statement are spread across different grades and scales, and include posts within the Ministry as well as in subordinate offices like the Central Passport Organisation. Some of these posts are meant to be filled through direct recruitment and some through promotion of personnel from subordinate ranks. The vacancies at the levels meant to be filled through direct recruitment arise because the selection process for these posts is usually through UPSC/SSC and it often takes a long time to complete the selection formalities. Moreover, due to various reasons including some court cases, SSC and UPSC have not been able to hold examinations or declare results in some of the recent years. Even after results are declared, there is a time-lag before the selected personnel, some of whom are already employed in other Government departments, are able to actually join the Ministry. As for the vacancies that are to be filled through promotion of officials, the vacant posts have arisen because at this moment there are no officials who have completed the minimum qualifying service in the lower grade, to become eligible for promotion.”

3.6 The number of posts, and their levels, that were proposed to be created as per the Cabinet Note submitted by Ministry of External Affairs are as follows:

“The proposal on expansion of the Ministry of External Affairs examines the Human Resource needs in a ten year perspective, taking into account India’s evolving international profile, increased global engagement, deepening linkages with bilateral and multilateral partners and increasing exposure to global commerce and finance. Ministry of Finance was consulted on the proposal. MEA’s Cabinet Note was not aimed just at seeking approval for expansion of the cadre strength of MEA, but sought Cabinet approval for its long term organizational and Human Resource plan to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. The proposal on expansion has three major components: (a) Opening of 12 new Missions and 8 new Posts; (b) Upgradation of some existing posts to levels of Secretary and Additional Secretary; and (c) creation of new posts at Headquarters and Missions/Posts to augment human resource at middle and junior levels (85 posts at Directors level, 229 posts at US/DS level and 200 supporting staff). Cabinet was presented a holistic view on the proposal, keeping in mind the expansion of MEA’s roles and responsibilities brought about by India’s increasing international engagements. The Ministry is continuing to pursue the proposal appropriately for an early decision.”

3.7 On being asked about the present status of the proposal for expansion of its cadre strength, the Ministry in a written reply submitted as follows:

“..... A Cabinet Note detailing the proposal on expansion of the cadre strength of MEA was prepared and forwarded to Ministry of Finance for comments. Ministry of Finance had raised a number of objections. These issues were clarified in the Cabinet Note, which was forwarded to Cabinet Secretariat for securing approval of the Cabinet. Cabinet Secretariat, however, returned the Cabinet Note with the following comments, *“the note has been examined in the light of the Rules of Procedure in regard to proceedings of the Cabinet and the standing instructions on the procedural requirement and it is noticed that since posts below*

the level of Joints Secretary can be created with the approval of the Ministry of Finance, it is advised that the matter may be sorted out in consultation with the Ministry of Finance.” The matter will be pursued further appropriately. “

3.8 When asked if the Ministry was not aware of the procedure with regard to the creation of posts below the level of Joint Secretary on which a Cabinet note was moved/returned, the Foreign Secretary stated during evidence that the issue in the Cabinet note was not merely about vacancies in the Ministry but it included expansion of our functions, our institutions like ICCR or ICWA revival etc. It also included creation of IIDCA. The reply of the Cabinet Secretariat was more bureaucratic. The proposal of the Ministry was for expansion and therefore, the matter will again be taken up with the Cabinet.

3.9 When asked about the number and level of posts that were proposed to be created as per the Cabinet note, the Ministry furnished the following details:

“The Cabinet Note was aimed not just at seeking approval for expansion of the cadre strength of MEA, but was meant to keep the Cabinet apprised about the Ministry's planned strategy on how to augment and refine its capacities and functioning in light of the changing international context and increasing diplomatic requirements. The proposal on expansion has three major components: (a) Opening of 12 new Missions and 8 new Posts; (b) Upgradation of some existing posts to levels of Secretary and Additional Secretary; and (c) creation of new posts at Headquarters and Missions/Posts to augment human resources at middle and junior level. Cabinet was presented a holistic view on the proposal, keeping in mind the expansion of MEA's roles and responsibilities brought about by India's increasing international engagements. The Ministry is continuing to pursue the proposal appropriately, and it is hoped that approval for the proposed expansion would be secured expeditiously. “

3.10 Elaborating further on the staff strength of the Ministry, the Foreign Secretary stated during evidence as under:

“.....We have gone to the Ministry of Finance with a note on our cadre strength. To some extent, the Sixth Pay Commission will solve our problem by offering running pay grades. This problem of stagnation at certain grades, to a very great extent, will be met. But our problem of vacancies because of the UPSC and SSC, I am afraid, will remain.....”

CHAPTER IV

TECHNICAL & ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Promoting economic and technical cooperation with other developing countries is said to have acquired a new dimension in India's promotion of relationship with other countries and regional groupings. Sizeable chunk of the Ministry's outlay in 2008-2009 are allocated to implementation of projects and programmes in other countries. The Ministry's mega-projects are located in Bhutan and Afghanistan and are budgeted out of plan allocations. The Ministry has also now embarked on setting up mega-projects in Africa and Myanmar.

4.2 The allocation for technical assistance to neighbouring countries and other developing countries for the year 2008-09 is around Rs. 2011.34 crore which accounts for 35 % of the total budget of the Ministry. The principal beneficiaries of the aid and loan programmes as per the revised estimates of 2007-08 (RE) and Budget Estimates of 2008-2009 as per Outcome Budget of the Ministry is as follows:

Country/Region	<i>Allocation (in Rs .in Crore)</i>	
	RE 2007-08	BE 2008-09 (Proposed)
Bangladesh	60.00	16.00
Bhutan	731.00	953.00
Nepal	100.00	140.00
Sri Lanka	28.00	34.00
Maldives	19.50	17.77
Myanmar	20.00	56.00
Other developing countries	180.08	176.57
ITEC	60.00	65.00
African countries	50.00	80.00
Central Asia	20.00	28.00
Afghanistan	434.00	445.00
Total Aid Budget	1702.58	2011.34

A. Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project

4.3 The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project envisage connectivity between Indian Ports on the eastern seaboard and North Eastern Region of India via Myanmar. Once implemented, this will assure better connectivity with the North Eastern States of India reducing distance, saving

fuel and time. Budgetary allocation of Rs. 40.41 crore was made for this project during 2007-2008 but negotiations concluded only in December, 2007 after a mutually acceptable text was arrived at.

4.4 An outlay of Rs. 41 crore has now been allocated in 2008-2009 for this project. The Planning Commission and, subsequently, the Cabinet have approved the project and the stated time-line for completion as per the Outcome Budget 2008-2009 is 5 years. Asked the details of the new proposals received from the Myanmar Government, the Ministry stated the following:

“All proposals from both sides were negotiated in an ongoing process including the seven Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) between India and Myanmar. During the seventh SOM held in December 2007 in Yangon, all outstanding issues were resolved and draft Framework Agreement and draft Protocols were finalized and initialled. A Cabinet Note seeking cabinet approval was placed before Cabinet for its consideration. During the meeting held on 27 March 2008, Cabinet has approved the project at a total cost of Rs. 535.91 crore. The Framework Agreement and Protocols are proposed to be signed on 2 April 2008, during the visit of H.E. Vice Senior General Maung Aye, Vice Chairman, SPDC to India.”

4.5 When asked about the revised target if any, that has been fixed for completion of the project, the Ministry in a written submission stated as follows:

“.....The revised cost estimate and the target for completion of the project is as follows:

(Rs. in crore)					
Project Activity	Total	1st Year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year
Total (Ports + Roads)	535.91	8.50	119	207	201.41

The project will be executed by Inland Waterways Authority of India. Since the DPR has been prepared approximately 5 years back, a reconnaissance survey will be required initially to assess the present ground situation in the project area

before the various components of the project are designed and tendered. Approximately one month will be required for reconnaissance survey. Reconnaissance survey will essentially involve making a realistic estimate of the sea dredging, river dredging (both soft and hard) quantity/requirements. The design and tendering process will take approximately 1 year. Thereafter, approximately 2 months will be needed by the contractor for mobilization of men and machineries. Thereafter, actual work on various components of the project will commence which is expected to take around 48 months.”

B. Tamu-Kalemyo-Kalewa Road

4.6 Funds totaling Rs. 17.14 crore were provided to Border Roads Organization (BRO) in 2006-2007 for construction/maintenance of the 160 km. Long Tamu-Klemyo-Kalewa Road, with the projected outcome of promoting cross-border trade and tourism, facilitating control of insurgency, arrest arms smuggling and drug trafficking. An outlay of Rs. 26.66 crore has now been made in 2008-2009 for this project. The timeline for completing this project is stated to be within 2008-2009.

4.7 The Committee has been informed that the projected target date for completion of this project was March 2008. The Ministry has also informed that Border Roads Organization has sought an extension upto March 2009 for the completion of the project.

C. Tala Hydro Electric Project

4.8 An allocation of Rs. 141.6 crore was made in BE 2007-2008 towards setting up of the 1020 MW Tala Hydro Electric Project in Bhutan from which India will receive hydro power to address its demand/supply gap. As per the Outcome Budget this plant was to be fully commissioned by 31 March 2007 and handed over to Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) in 2009. All turbines are reported to have been commissioned and surplus electricity is being supplied to India. A sum of Rs. 50.50 crore has again been allocated for this project in BE 2008-2009. When asked the reasons for allocating Rs. 50.50 crore again despite all the turbines having been commissioned and surplus electricity already supplied to India, the Ministry in a written reply stated as follows:

“The original cost to completion for the Tala Hydroelectric project was Rs 4327 Crore. By 2007 an amount of Rs 4185.4 Crore had been released for the project. The balance of Rs 141.6 Crore was earmarked for release in Financial Year 2007-08. In 2007, the Tala management informed that there would be savings in the project on account of early commencement of sale of electricity and due to recoveries from arbitration cases and sale of surplus machineries amounting to Rs. 91 Crore. Tala management also indicated that the fund reserves available with the project would be sufficient to meet the requirements for the Financial Year 2007-08. Therefore no funds were released to Tala Project in the Financial Year 2007-08. However Tala management had projected that the balance amount of Rs. 50 Crore, after discounting the savings of Rs. 91 Crore, would be required in the Financial Year 2008-09. Hence the appropriation has been made.”

4.9 Speaking of the hydro electric project, the Foreign Secretary stated during the evidence that:

“.....in the Bhutanese case on the hydro power project, actually it was just completed. There was no cost escalation whatsoever. There was some trouble in balancing the turbine. They kept on testing it and that problem was solved by the end of last year and they will be commissioning it. The project was completed at a cost of Rs. 4,327 crore which was the estimated cost. In fact, we had made a savings of Rs. 90 crore on that.....”

4.10 On being asked the reasons for delay in handing over the power project to the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB), the Ministry in a written submission stated as under:

“As per the requirement of the Intergovernmental Agreement between India and Bhutan on the execution of the Tala hydroelectric project, the project is to be handed over the Royal Government of Bhutan 2 years after it is fully commissioned. This is to ensure the stability of the project and to solve any teething problems associated with the project. The Tala project was commissioned fully in April 2007- therefore it is to be handed over to Royal Government of Bhutan by April 2009. Some balance/finishing work is also required to be completed in this period. This includes the following;

- Construction of the Plunge Pool downstream of the Dam and Diversion Tunnel which started only after closure of the diversion tunnel in April 2006.
- Balance and finishing works of the Headrace Tunnel adits and Power House Complex.
- Finishing works of Power House Colony at Sinchekha/Arekha, construction of which was started only after the site was taken over from the contractors, who, due to paucity of land in the steep hilly terrain, had been allotted the area to set-up their temporary facilities.
- Balance works of Sub-Station colony at Malbase (although sanctioned earlier) construction of which got delayed due to late availability of land.
- Finishing works of fire fighting, ventilation/air-conditioning, lifts, modification of radial gates, etc.
- Establishment charges including terminal benefits like gratuity, leave encashment, etc. and Audit & Accounts charges.
- Payment of contractors' final bills and settlement of claims.
- Framing of O&M Manuals & Completion Reports.”

4.11 When asked about the extent to which the surplus electricity from the Tala Hydroelectric Project would help India tide over its demand/supply gap in power, the Ministry in their written supply stated as follows:

“The allocation of power imported from Tala to various units within India is made by Ministry of Power. The allocated MW of electricity from Tala project is as follows for the entire capacity:-

State SEB/PSU	Electricity (in MW)
WEST BENGAL	390.15
ORISSA	43.35
BIHAR	260.10
JHARKHAND	116.90
DELHI	30
RAJASTHAN	15
PUNJAB	30
HARYANA	15
JAMMU & KASHMIR	18
UTTAR PRADESH	45
DVC	56.50

D. Projects in Nepal

4.12 Budgetary proposal of Rs. 200 crore for projects in Nepal has reportedly been reduced to Rs. 40 crore by the Planning Commission, when asked if there was any specific reasons for the Planning Commission to reduce the allocation so drastically, the Ministry in a written reply stated as follows:

“The budgetary allocation of Rs. 40 crore for the initial stages of preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPR) under the 11th Five Year Plan should be adequate. Should the political situation in Nepal improve after the Constituent Assembly Elections, making faster implementation of the projects possible, additional funds would be sought at RE state.”

E. ITEC, SAARC and SCAAP Scholarships Programme

4.13 The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and its sister programme, the Special Commonwealth Assistance for Africa Programme (SCAAP), centered on the sharing of experiences, transfer of technology and capacity building is said to have formed an important component of India’s interaction with the developing world.

4.14 An outlay of Rs. 65 crore for ITEC, Rs. 20 crore for SAARC and Rs. 8 crore for SCAAP programmes have been made this year.

4.15 On examination of the details regarding the number of scholarships available and actual utilization during the last two years under Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Special Commonwealth Assistance for Africa Programme (SCAAP), it has been observed that as many as 1210 slots remained unutilised during 2007-2008 under ITEC/SCAAP. Likewise, utilization of scholarship slots under SAARC during the last two years was only 26%. When asked about the reasons for the gross under-utilization of the scholarship slots and the measures proposed to be taken to ensure full utilization, the Ministry in a written reply submitted as follows:

“The under-utilization arose because of the streamlining/improvement of the overall delivery introduced during the year both in terms of course content, logistics and facilities. The guidelines were also more clearly defined to avoid mismatches and to

ensure quality of participation. A new dedicated on-line system was introduced mid-year. The change-over resulted in delays and more rejections. There is an overall pattern that the quality of the participants has improved considerably. Despite the higher rejection rate, overall utilization in 2007-08 is still higher as compared to the previous year. The on-line submission of applications has reduced delays considerably. Applications can now be cleared in 24 hours whereas under the old system, it used to take 6-8 weeks. The system has become paperless and we are confident that full utilisation will be realized in 2008-09.”

4.16 The Ministry of External Affairs, Human Resource Development and Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (which offers 100 scholarships under the Know India Programme), offer scholarships and conduct their own examination in various countries without any coordination among them. Asked if upgradation of standards would be possible by coordinating the activities of the various Ministries offering scholarships, the Foreign Secretary responded during evidence as under:

“You mentioned about scholarships. Certainly, we will start this exercise. In fact, we have been asked to do an exercise about foreign students in India. We have done one study along with ICCR, but we will add this also about scholarships that we are giving abroad. We do have certain standardised tests for students who come to India. Ed. CIL has been running them for us at other places. Maybe, we will work with ICCR, with MOIA, with each of them and say that these are the criteria for foreign students coming to India and this is what we lay down. We will try and systematise it in a better way. “

4.17 It has been stated that outcomes of the training programmes conducted under ITEC Programme are assessed on the basis of the feedback report from the participants. Asked if the feedback received from participants is objective and sufficient to assess the outcome of efficacy of the programmes, the Ministry in reply to the query stated that efforts are to ensure that the feedback reports are objective. In addition to the reports from the participants, we also get feedback from the Governments deputing participants. Our Missions/Posts in ITEC/SCAAP countries also host ITEC Days where we get longer-term perspective on the

usefulness of the course conducted under ITEC/SCAAP. There is feedback that the participants, after training, get promoted or are able to get better job opportunities.

F. Delivery and Evaluation of Projects/Schemes

4.18 The Ministry in their Outcome Budget (2007-2008) have stated that an agency to be named India-International Development Cooperation Agency (IIDCA) was proposed to be set up to provide better management of aid and technical assistance to other countries. During the examination of Demands for Grants (2007-2008), the Ministry in their written submission to the Committee had stated that IIDCA was pursued with an objective of concluding it in about 3 months. However, the Ministry has now submitted that cabinet approval is being sought for establishing IIDCA and the Agency should start functioning in 5-6 months time. When asked about the reason for not establishing the IIDCA during the previous financial year, the Ministry in a written reply submitted as under:

“Following the announcement regarding setting up of IIDCA by the Hon'ble FM in his Budget Speech for the FY 2007-08, MEA, in March 2007, constituted a Task Force, chaired by the then AS(ER), to give recommendations on the structure, mandate etc of IIDCA. The Task Force held three meetings in April 2007 and submitted a Concept Paper with its recommendations on IIDCA.

A Draft Cabinet Note was prepared on the basis of the Concept Paper in May 2007 and circulated to Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Planning Commission and PMO for their comments.

An inter-ministerial meeting was held on 29th May 2007 for consultations on the Draft Cabinet Note. The meeting decided that the proposal regarding setting up of IIDCA should be considered in the Committee of Secretaries.

A consultation meeting of Foreign Secretary, Finance Secretary and Commerce Secretary was held on 28th July 2007. Finance Secretary observed in the meeting that the Draft Cabinet Note should be redrafted specifying objectives, lessons of experience etc. These comments were formally received on 28th November 2007. Accordingly, the Draft Cabinet Note was redrafted to incorporate views of the

Ministry of Finance. Views of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry were sought on the revised Note and were incorporated in the revised Note. Due to long drawn process of inter-ministerial consultations, IIDCA could not be established during the previous financial year. The revised Draft Cabinet Note taking on board the views of Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on setting up IIDCA has been submitted for Cabinet's approval on 7th March 2008.”

4.19 According to the Outcome Budget (2008-2009) in order to further improve the system of project evaluation and monitoring the Ministry proposed to introduce the following additional measures:

- In the case of large projects, with an outlay of over Rs. 150 crore, it is proposed to conduct a detailed evaluation through an independent professional organization.
- In the case of projects of a technical nature (e.g. Pan-African e-network), it is proposed to evaluate implementation against Service Level Agreements, have a technically competent Project Monitoring Unit and organize peer reviews.
- A post-completion evaluation is proposed to be obtained from the local authorities and the Embassy to assess if the desired outcomes of the project have been achieved. Wherever possible, it is proposed that feedback will also be obtained from the beneficiary community.
- For training programmes under ITEC and for cultural activities under ICCR, feedback is proposed to be obtained from trainees/participants.

4.20 Asked when these additional measures will be introduced, the Ministry in a written reply stated as follows:

“(i) As has been mentioned earlier, consultations are held with the concerned sovereign Government about their readiness to have a project carried out in their country by India. Thereafter, a bilateral agreement is signed between India and the beneficiary Government on the execution of the project. The agreement also

stipulates the project concept, design, implementation, and its monitoring, management, and terms of financing/assistance. MEA also enters into an agreement with the company (ies) involved in the execution of the projects abroad.

(ii) Most projects have a mechanism of setting up a Project Monitoring Committee (PMC) to take stock of their implementation. These are generally bilateral mechanisms to monitor the progress of a project and meet at intervals to appraise the execution of the projects. The PMC for the Project tied Assistance of the Government of India to Bhutan meets twice every year. The agreement on establishing the Pan-African e-network has the mechanism of setting-up a technically competent Project Monitoring Unit.

(iii) Evaluation of projects by an independent professional organization from India would require approval of the beneficiary Government. We are holding consultations with some beneficiary Governments about such evaluation of projects by an independent outside agency with an outlay of over Rs. 100 crore. The Ministry is aiming at engagement of independent evaluators before December 2008.

(iv) All institutes that are imparting training under ITEC and SCAAP Programmes have been advised to obtain an evaluation/ assessment report at the conclusion of the training programme from each participant attending the course conducted by them. Indian Missions also interact with the participants upon their return to their country. These feedbacks on the programmes from the participants, who have attended under ITEC and SCAAP programmes, are useful for any course corrections.”

CHAPTER V

CO-OPERATION WITH NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

India's foreign policy seeks to promote an environment of peace and stability in the region and in the world so as to enable India's accelerated socio-economic development and safeguard national security. To this end, vigorous efforts have been made to develop friendly and cooperative relations with all its neighbours and to strengthen engagement with the major powers of the world.

A. Nepal

5.2 Regarding the need for having an agreement with Nepal to generate electricity, the Foreign Secretary during his deposition before the Committee stated that the position of the Nepalese Government has been very fragile during the last two years and they are apprehensive about starting hydro-power projects with India. Foreign Secretary also stated that once Nepal has a stable Government in place all the big projects will be started. The Foreign Secretary also assured the Committee that all efforts will be made to start projects on roads, railways etc. in the Terai region.

5.3 On being asked whether there was any nexus between the Maoist in Nepal and their ideological counterparts in India and the strategy of the Government to deal with the situation, the Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“There are reports of ideological linkages between the Maoists and the Left Wing Extremists groups. However, there is no conclusive evidence of operational linkages. In view of the open border between the two countries, any deterioration in law and order situation in Nepal could have adverse implications for India particularly in our border states. Sashastra Seema Bal, deployed all along the India-Nepal border, remains on high alert. Measures have been taken to enhance co-operation with Nepal for effective border management and intelligence sharing.”

B. China

5.4 In response to a parliamentary question, the Ministry had stated that China disputes the international boundary between India and China. Since 1993, the two Governments is said to have agreed to maintain peace and tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) as well as the boundary question. It was also stated that, in the meantime, pending final settlement, both sides have agreed to clarify the LAC and to take up perceived violations through established mechanisms including the Joint Working Group, the Expert Group, border personnel, flag meetings and diplomatic channel. Regarding the boundary issue, the Foreign Secretary stated that:


“Both sides are committed to maintaining the *status quo* and the *status quo* means the Line of Actual Control. But we have the differences on where the line is also in some areas. That is one exercise - peace and tranquillity, maintaining the *status quo* and the LAC. The other exercise which the special representatives do is to try and see whether they can find a settlement of the boundary - a common understanding of where the boundary is, they have not done so yet. They will continue their efforts.”

5.5 The Foreign Secretary stated that India also have an accelerated programme of road building and other infrastructure works including the ones announced by the Prime Minister when he visited Arunachal Pradesh.

C. Iran-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline

5.6 In connection with the Iran-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline, four bilateral Joint Working Group Meetings with Iran, six bilateral with Pakistan and six trilateral meetings with Iran and Pakistan are reported to have been held so far. It is stated that in the trilateral meeting held in January, 2007, a pricing formula was agreed between Pakistan and Iran which we agreed to consider subject to the transit fee and transportation tariff issue being concluded with Pakistan. It is further stated that India's position is to bilaterally conclude with Pakistan the issue of transit fee and transportation tariff on the basis of which a decision on the gas price issue could be taken.

5.7 When enquired about the present status of the gas pipeline project, the Foreign Secretary stated during evidence as follows:

“On the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, India has been always very keen that we do this, but we do it in a way where it has a real chance of it taking place and where the risks are mitigated, where we are not left, at the end of \$ 6 billion pipeline and making an investment of \$ 30 billion in plant, but being dependent on somebody else who can turn the tap on or off..... is is one of the items very high on our agenda. We will start the talks. The challenge here is to find a way of doing this project where everybody has an equal stake in making it work. The Iranians must have an equal stake in continuing supplies, and Pakistanis in permitting it to go on. There are different ways of structuring it. So, one needs to, I think, still do a fair amount of work on this. I am being very honest among ourselves. It is a wonderful idea. Yes, it will link us all and so on, but we need to do it in a way where we are not one-sidedly dependent on somebody else. So, we will try and find a way, if we could.”

CHAPTER VI

PASSPORT AND VISA SERVICES

Central Passport and Emigration Organization (CPO) was created in 1959 as a subordinate office under the Ministry of External Affairs. The CPO is currently composed of 34 Passport Offices, 15 Passport Application Collection Centres and 463 DPCs. All Passport Offices are computerized and they issue Machine-printed and machine readable passports as per the guidelines laid down by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

6.2 On the functioning of the Passport Offices, the Foreign Secretary stated during evidence that:

“.....the central passport organization, with no increase in staff increased its output by over 13 per cent and issued about 50 lakh passports. This demand will continue to grow. The earnings from passport services have also grown to Rs. 567 crore. We have taken three significant steps within the last year to try and improve passport services. These are to really change the way in which we are working because to keep trying to make incremental improvement on the existing system cannot cope with an increase of 18 per cent every year in the demand for passports. Physically it is just not possible.....”

A. Re-issue of Passports

6.3 According to the information furnished by the Ministry, employees in Government services and Public Sector Undertakings and their immediate family members, whose identity is certified by the Head of Department will be issued passport without police verification. When the Committee desired to know as to when this practice was introduced and if any time limit was fixed for issue of passports in such cases, the Ministry in a written reply stated that:

“The practice of issuing passport without police verification to employees in Government services and Public Sector Undertakings and their immediate family members, whose identity is certified by the Head of the Department was

introduced w.e.f. 23.12.2006. Time target for issue of passports in such police verification exempt cases is 30 days from date of application. Passports can be obtained during 1-14 days under Tatkal Scheme on payment Tatkal fees.”

6.4 When asked to indicate the total number applications received (complete in all respects) region-wise, under this category during each of the last two years and the number of applications disposed of within 15 days, 16 to 30 days and after 30 days, the Ministry submitted as under:

“Passports under this category are normally issued within the time target of 30 days. However, detailed data on specific time taken for issue of these passports is not available, as applications of Government servants are not captured as a separate category.

6.5 The Committee have been informed that under the new rules, in the absence of any negative information concerning an applicant, no police verification will be necessary for re-issuance cases either before or after issue of passports. On being asked when this new rule was made and if any time limit has been fixed for re-issue of passports, the Ministry in a written reply stated as follows:

“The rule for exempting police verification in respect of re-issue cases came into effect from 09.11.2001. However, police verification is sought in cases where the system does not indicate receipt of clear police report in respect of the old passport. There are specific stipulations for re-issue of passports for applications from J&K and Nagaland. Time target for re-issue of passports at present is 15 days. Applicant can also apply under Tatkal scheme for re-issue of passport in 3 working days.”

6.6 The details of applications received (without negative information) region-wise, under this category after implementation of the new rule and the number of passports re-issued within 15 days, 16 to 21 days, 22 to 30 days and after 30 days are given in Appendix-III.

6.7 When asked to explain the reasons for taking over 15 days for re-issue of passports in cases where there was no negative information, the Ministry in a written submission stated:

“Passports under this category are normally issued within the time target of 15 days. However, this time target is exceeded in a number of cases where the system does not indicate receipt of clear police report in respect of old passport.”

6.8 The data received in regard to re-issue of passports reveal that RPOs have taken more than 15 days for re-issue of passports in as many as more than 50% of the cases. The position is observed to be worse in passport offices at Bhopal (61.36%), Guwahati (62.64%), Lucknow (60%), Pune (62%), Nagpur (71%), Surat (81%) and Visakhapatnam (83%). Asked about the reasons for such delay in issuance of passports in re-issue cases, the Ministry submitted that:

“For reissue of a passport, the Passport Office is required to check Passport Information System On Net (PISON) which started functioning from 2003 with data pertaining to passports issued from 1994 onwards by Passport Offices. Police verification is not required for re-issue, provided there is no negative information about the applicant in PISON. Since the PISON contains old data scanned from records prior to 2003, when the Passport Offices were not fully computerized prior to introduction of Machine Readable Passports in 2003, in many cases data is either not available or is incomplete on PISON. Such of these cases, where there is no negative information, are required to be sent for police verification or reference to the original Passport Issuing Authorities which results in issue of passports beyond the stipulated 15 days. However, after introduction of Machine Readable Passports in 2003, automatic updation of PISON was started. Rapidly growing workload of the Passport Offices is also contributing to delays.”

6.9 In the case of issue of passports to Government employees and their immediate family members, whose identity is certified by the Head of the Department, the applicants are required to file an affidavit attested by a Notary Public. The Committee desired to know if it was a fact that even in re-issue cases, the Government employees are required to file

affidavit attested by Notary Public. The Committee further desired to know the justification for placing unnecessary hassle on Government employees requiring them to file affidavit attested by Notary Public, since in re-issue cases, in the absence of negative information, no police verification is required. In response to the queries of the Committee, the Ministry in a written submission stated as under:

“No. In re-issue cases involving Government employees, neither Identity Certificate nor affidavit is required. However, defence personnel, officials in the Defence Ministry and officials in the sensitive departments such as Atomic Energy Commission, Indian Space Research Organization etc. need fresh ID certificate and affidavit, for re-issue of passports”

6.10 When asked if affidavit are required to be filed by all applicants for re-issue of passports or only by Government employees, the Ministry responded as under:

“No affidavit is required for re-issue of passport for the general public as well as for the Government employees subject to the exempt categories mentioned above.”

6.11 It has been stated that in the case of re-issue of passports involving Government employees, neither identity certificate nor affidavit is required except in certain specified cases. Police verification is also exempted and time target for issue of police verification exempt cases is stated to be 30 days. It is learnt that in spite of this rule, affidavits are being demanded and applicants are being harassed in various passport offices. Asked about the reasons for this state of affairs and the remedial steps taken for the strict compliance of these rules uniformly in all passport offices across the country, the Ministry responded as under:

“In cases where records relating to initial application for passports are not available on PISON to check whether or not the NOC was initially furnished by the passport applicant or the applicant was not a Government servant when the earlier passport was issued, the RPOs are advising the applicants to furnish identity certificate and affidavit. The instructions relating to non-requirement of identity certificate and affidavit have been reiterated recently for strict compliance.”

6.12 When asked to justify the prescribed 30 days time in police verification exempt cases, the Ministry in their written submission said:

“The time target for issue of fresh passports to Government servants is 30 days and for re-issue it is 15 days, and no distinction has been made between Government servants and the general public. This time frame has been fixed taking into account the overall workload and resources available in Passport Offices. However, the time will be reduced to three working days under the Passport Seva Project, which is currently under implementation.”

6.13 The Committee desired to have the total number of applications received during 2007 passport office-wise, showing details relating to:

- i) The number of cases, passport office-wise, where PVR has been received within 21 days, within 30 days and after 30 days.
- ii) The number of cases where passport has been issued, after receipt of PVR within 7 days, 15 days and after 15 days. The Ministry in their reply stated that the information is being collected.

6.14 Government employees applying for passports are required to furnish identity certificate from their office and also an affidavit. When asked to justify the requirement for Government employees to furnish affidavit attested by notary public and if furnishing only self-attested certificate by Government employees will not serve the purpose, the Ministry responded to the queries of the Committee as under:

“Whenever the Government servants require passports for official purposes, official/diplomatic passports are issued to them without any affidavit or any Identity Certificate. However, in cases where Government servants are requesting for ordinary passports for private reasons, Identity Certificate and affidavit are required from them for issue of fresh passport. While the passport is issued without police verification, as such no distinction is made between the Government servants and general public in this regard. The Identity Certificate (in lieu of earlier NOC) and the affidavit were prescribed only from 23.12.2006.

In the light of the experience gained during the last one year, Ministry is in the process of reviewing these provisions.”

6.15 The Ministry have stated that in the re-issue cases involving Government employees, neither identity certificate nor affidavit is required subject to certain exempt categories. When asked if this clarification has been given in the instructions governing passport applications, the Ministry submitted that, the instructions relating to non-requirement of identity certificate and affidavit have been reiterated recently for strict compliance.

6.16 In the absence of specific definitions in passport rules/instructions, various terms are interpreted differently by different passport offices. For instance, the term ‘dependent of Government employee’ is interpreted to mean only persons below 18 years of age in some RPOs, while some other RPOs keep 25 years as upper limit for the purpose. Asked, is it not desirable to define various terms used in connection with issue of passport and make them available to the public for their information, in response, the Ministry stated that:

“Instructions specifying that “dependent children of Government employee” mean only children up to 21 years of age have been reiterated to all Passport Offices. These clarifications will be suitably incorporated in the revised passport application form/information booklet and will be updated on the web.”

6.17 The Ministry in a written submission to the Committee made an unqualified assertion that under the new rules, in the absence of any negative information concerning an applicant, no police verification will be necessary for re-issuance cases either before or after issue of passports. However, the Ministry in its reply dated 13 March 2008 have shifted its stand, stating that in re-issue cases, police verification is sought in certain cases. Asked why the partial and misleading information was furnished to the Committee and the same be construed as misleading statement before the Committee, the Ministry submitted as follows:

“In the presentation (and the related written submission) on ‘Issue of Passports – modernizing and upgrading the passport issuance system’ that was made on 6th February 2008 to the Hon’ble Standing Committee on External Affairs, the focus

was on broad policy measures that were taken by the Ministry in modernizing and upgrading the passport issuance system. On the efforts to reduce crowds at Passport Offices and simplify the system, the presentation included the policy measures announced by the Ministry to the media on 21.12.2006 which inter alia included ‘in the absence of a negative information with the Passport Issuing Authority, no police verification will be necessary in the case of re-issuance of passport’. However, in responding to a written question, specifically on the re-issue of passports without police verification, on 13.3.2008, the Ministry gave detailed information including the fact that there are specific stipulations for re-issue of passports for applicants from J&K and Nagaland. Therefore, there was no attempt by the Ministry to furnish partial and misleading information or to shift its stand.”

B. Working of Passport Offices

6.18 During the course of their visit to various Regional Passport Offices (RPOs), the Committee have observed that there have been long queues of public waiting in front of the counters. It was learnt in almost all cases, the applicants have to waste the whole day for getting clarification on miscellaneous issues regarding their passport. When asked how these problems are proposed to be addressed, the Ministry responded as under;

“While the Ministry has been addressing these problems on a continuous basis through decentralization of application collection, simplification of procedures, facility of submission of on-line application, setting-up of special desks manned by ex-servicemen, widows and physically challenged persons to facilitate filling up of the forms, introduction of token system, etc., Passport Offices are finding it difficult to manage with the available manpower to meet the increase in demand, which has resulted in long queues and crowded conditions at Passport Offices. To address this issue, under the Passport Seva Project, 68 Passport Seva Kendras will be established all over the country. This number can be expanded further in the light of growing demand. The number of public dealing counters countrywide will go up from 345 to 1250 and public dealing hours per working day from the present 4 to 7. It is also

proposed that the average time taken for submission of application by an applicant should not exceed 45 minutes.”

6.19 C&AG in their Performance Audit Report (Para 7.1.2, 2007) have mentioned that there were significant delays in the issue of Passport. In the 12 selected RPOs/POs, only 19% of passports were issued within the prescribed time limit. In 9 of selected RPOs/POs only 12% passports were issued on time after receipt of Police Verification Reports (PVRs). In 10 of these RPOs/POs even where police verification was waived, only 38% of the passports were issued within the prescribed time. When asked to explain such poor performance by RPOs and the kind of supervision undertaken by the Ministry to ensure that stipulated time limits are adhered to by the RPOs, the Ministry made the following submission:

“There are several reasons for delays in the issue of passports. These include: delays in receipt of Police Verification Reports (PVRs) (C&AG in their Performance Audit Report have also mentioned that PVRs are not received in time in 75% of the cases), receipt of adverse/incomplete PVRs; delay in receipt of applications from District Passport Cells (DPCs), and furnishing of incomplete information and/or documents by the applicants. Rapidly growing workload of the Passport Offices is also contributing to pendencies.

The Ministry has instructed all Passport Offices to submit weekly pendency reports which are reviewed by it. Strict instructions are given to Passport Offices whenever there is delay in processing of applications. During the inspection of Passport Offices by various officers of the Ministry, special emphasis is given to the issue of pendency. Pendency clearance drives are also undertaken from time to time including regular Passport Adalats. The Passport Offices have been asked to have close liaison with the police authorities and to have periodic meetings to expedite police verification. As for incomplete applications received mostly through DPCs, efforts are being made to eliminate the same, through training of DPC personnel.”

6.20 When asked to suggest how the performances of RPOs can be improved, the Ministry replied as under:

“While all efforts are being made to improve the performance of Passport Offices, rapidly growing demand (from about 22 lakh passports in 2000 to about 50 lakh

passports in 2007) has put considerable strain on manpower and infrastructure leading to delays in issuance of passports and crowded conditions in Passport Offices. Further, while all our Passport Offices are fully computerized, considerable scope exists to introduce latest Information Technology to improve issuance system. Moreover, to cater to the fast growing demand for passports, phenomenal increase in Government manpower and office space will be needed, which is simply unsustainable. Therefore, the Ministry commissioned the National Institute of Smart Government (NISG), Hyderabad, to undertake a study for a comprehensive reform of the passport issuance system to improve the performance levels. The Cabinet approved implementation of the Passport Seva Project, based on the NISG report, in September 2007. The project is expected to be completed in a time frame of 19 months and we expect to award the contract during this month. All services involving issuance of a new passport booklet will be rendered in three working days in cases not requiring police verification or requiring post-service police verification. In cases requiring pre-police verification, the service level will be three working days plus the time taken for police verification. There will also be a Tatkal or emergency passport service rendered on the day of the application itself on the basis of payment of a prescribed higher fee. Cases such as change of address, requiring endorsements on the existing passport booklet, will be disposed of on the day of the application itself. It is also proposed that the average time taken for submission of application by an applicant should not exceed 45 minutes.”

6.21 C&AG in its Performance Audit Report (Para 7.1.9.1, 2007) has mentioned that in RPO, Delhi, in 114 cases of revoked/impounded passports, entries regarding their revocation/impounding were not made in system. These passports could go unnoticed by PIAs, immigration officers and other security agencies. Asked if responsibility for such lapses was fixed and the action taken against those found guilty including measures to ensure such lapses do not recur in future, the Ministry made the following submission:

“C&AG in its Performance Audit Report (Para 7.1.9.1, 2007) has mentioned that

‘In RPO, Delhi, during test check of records for the period from April 2000 to June 2005, it was noticed that in 114 cases, entries regarding revocation/impounding of passports were not made in the system’. The Performance Audit Report has also mentioned that RPO Delhi has stated that circulars in respect of the cited cases were issued to the concerned authorities (as per the then existing instructions). It may be noted that Ministry’s instructions to make entries on impounded/revoked passports in the computer system were issued in December 2005 to all Passport Offices.

During the inspection of Passport Offices by various officers of the Division, special emphasis is given to timely impounding/revocation of passports.

Passport Seva Project, when implemented, would automatically enter the data on impounded/revoked passports on the computer system and would also notify all nodal points.”

C. Passport Office Website

6.22 A number of instances have been brought to the notice of the Committee pertaining to the status of applications given on the website of the passport office. After the Police Verification Report (PVR) is received, the status in the website shows that ‘Passport will be dispatched within a week’. Apparently, the passports are never dispatched within the time as given on the website. When asked, if this indicates ineffective control or monitoring of the functions of passport offices, the Ministry replied as under:

“When a passport is not issued as per the date indicated on the website, the system automatically shows that the passport will be dispatched within a week. Due to shortage of manpower combined with rapidly increasing workload, there have been delays in the issue of passports within the indicated period.

However, it may be noted that there has been significant growth in passport demand particularly in the last few years. The number of passports processed has doubled since 2000, when about 22 lakh passports were issued. Despite constraints, the Central Passport Organization increased its output by over 13% on the previous year and issued about 50 lakh passports in 2007. The number of passports issued per employee per annum of the Central Passport Organization increased from about 1300 in 2000 to about 2100 in 2007. In 2007, while the passport applications received were 48,95,855, the number of passports issued was 49,41,560. This has been possible due to constant monitoring of the issuance of passports.”

6.23 When asked about the mechanism in the RPOs to ensure that the general information on the website is updated regularly and is made more accurate and user friendly, the Ministry submitted that, website of all passport offices have been made uniform and linked to the Ministry's website. The Ministry also stated that the websites are being updated regularly.

6.24 The Committee pointed out that the Passport Rules available on the website are not downloadable, when asked by when such shortcomings will be rectified, the Ministry stated as under:

“The Passport Rules, available on the website were scanned in the image-mode and therefore, will have to be downloaded page by page. However, this is being rectified to make it more user-friendly.”

6.25 When the Committee desired to have Passport Rules with up to date amendments, the Ministry could only furnish a photocopy of 9 March 2004 March publication. Asked why the Ministry does not have an authentic version of upto date Passport Rules, the Ministry responded as follows:

“In response to the request received from the Hon'ble Standing Committee on 25 March 2008, five copies of Passport Act, 1967, along with the Passports Rules, 1980 (as amended in 2006 and issued in 2008), and copies of Gazette Notifications amending the Passport Rules since then were furnished to the Committee on 26 March 2008. The Ministry has the authenticated copy of Passport Rules, 1980, which forms part of a file. However, with a view to provide all subsequent amendments in a user-friendly manner at a single place, copies of the printed publication was provided to the Hon'ble Standing Committee. It may be noted that the Publisher of this publication has been authorized by the Government and is being given copies of the amendments officially. “

D. Unauthorized Collection of Fees

6.26 Article 265 of the Constitution has laid down that no tax shall be levied or collected except by authority of law. In this context, the Committee on Subordinate Legislation of Lok Sabha have time and again emphasized that no charges or fee can be levied by Government,

unless there is an express authorization therefor by Parliament. Section 5 of the Passports Act, 1967 has delegated powers to the executive to levy fee for (i) Issue of passport in order to meet the expenses incurred on special security paper, printing, lamination; and (ii) other connected miscellaneous services in issuing passports and other travel documents. It appears that the fee (Rs. 1000) prescribed for issue of ordinary passport and lesser fees ranging from Rs. 100 to Rs. 700 prescribed for miscellaneous services are covered by Section 5 of the Passports Act. The same is not the case as regards additional fees (Rs. 1500) charged by MEA for issue of passport under 'Tatkaal Scheme'. There appears to be no express authorization by Parliament to charge additional fee for out-of-turn issue of passport under Tatkaal Scheme which is neither a miscellaneous service nor the additional fees charged are to meet the expenses incurred on special security paper and printing. Additional fees prescribed by the Ministry of External Affairs under the Passport Rules obviously are outside the scope of the powers delegated by the Parliament under Section 5 of the Passports Act. The Committee desired to know that by prescribing additional fees for issue of passport under Tatkaal Scheme, if the Ministry have exceeded the powers delegated by the Parliament under Section 5 of the Passport Act. In response to a query, the MEA have stated that the Ministry has acted within the powers delegated by the Parliament in prescribing the additional fees for issue of passport under Tatkaal scheme and has not violated the Constitution. Issue of passports on out-of-turn basis under the Tatkaal scheme was reportedly introduced in 2000.

6.27 Section 5 of the Passports Act, 1967 provides "such fee as may be prescribed to meet the expenses incurred on special security paper, printing, lamination and other connected miscellaneous services in issuing passports and other travel documents." Thus, the Act has authorized the Ministry to prescribe fee only on two counts:-

- (a) *to meet the expenses on special security paper, printing and lamination. (Fee of Rs. 1,000 prescribed for issue of ordinary passport apparently meets this purpose) and*
- (b) *to meet the expenses in other connected miscellaneous services in issuing passports. For miscellaneous services, the Ministry of*

External Affairs has prescribed fees ranging from Rs. 100 to Rs. 700.

6.28 Asked whether according to MEA the tatkal scheme constitutes a miscellaneous service, MEA has clarified that:

“Tatkal Scheme does not constitute a miscellaneous service. The rationale for charging higher fees for Tatkal reportedly includes expenditure related to:

- additional staff deployment required to ensure that Tatkal applications are processed in a time bound manner within the Tatkal period.
- verifying the Verification Certificate with issuing authority by fax and phone.
- dedicated counters for Tatkal applicants. Tatkal applications are accepted directly from applicants and reissue passports are also delivered under Tatkal across the counter, additional physical infrastructure in terms of counters and public area in the Passport Office is required.”

6.29 When asked if by prescribing additional fees under Tatkal Scheme, the Ministry of External Affairs has exceeded the powers delegated by the Parliament under Section 5 of the Passport Act, the Ministry responded as under:

“The Tatkal scheme was introduced in 2000 with the concurrence of the Ministry of Law which had observed in June 1999 that extra fee for Tatkal Passport would relate to the services referred to in Section 5, and would also be commensurate with the expenses incurred in providing these services and as such there may not be any legal objection to the charging of such additional fee for processing and issuing a Tatkal Passport.”

6.30 MEA, however, stated in a written reply that the Ministry would make a reference to the Ministry of Law on the issue of tatkal fee.

6.31 The Foreign Secretary stated in this regard during evidence as under:
“.....we will consult the Law Ministry about whether or not an amendment is required. After all, we have changed the fee. We have laid it on the Table of the House. We have gone through the whole process already. We will consult the Law Ministry specifically on this.”

6.32 The Foreign Secretary also added that:
“For us to stop issuing Tatkal passports now would be a public relations disaster.”

E. Passport Seva Project

6.33 The Foreign Secretary informed the Committee during evidence that the Ministry has taken three significant steps within the last year to improve passport services, these three steps includes the Passport Seva Project, Issue of e-passports and Centralized Printing of Passports for about 140 Missions.

6.34 Elaborating further on the Passport Seva Project, the Foreign Secretary said:
“.....The Passport Seva Project is really a Public Private Partnership and the idea is to establish a series of passport seva kendras which collect applications from the applicants. The service levels which we have laid down are very high. No applicant should take more than 45 minutes to submit his application in any of these kendras and he should be able to fix an appointment before hand, go in at the time that suits him, submit it and be out of there. The issuance and printing of passports is something that government will do as a back office function. The service level that we have promised to the public is that new passports not requiring police verification will be issued in three days. There will also be Tatkal Passports which will be issued on the same day. We will open 68 such centres; we will also increase the number of counters dealing with the public from 345 at present to about 1250 which will be a quantum increase. We will increase the working hours from 4 to 7 hours a day, because today they deal with the public

only for four hours as the same staff then goes and does other functions. In fact, it is our hope that by using IT, by keeping government's functions separate from the facilitation to the public, that we will be able to guarantee first in first out. So nobody will jump the queue. There will be a *tatkal* service on the same day and we will be able to track the process and the data on passports applications much better than we have been able to so far. Should we need to expand the service even more than that, we hope to be able to do that also in the second stage. I must make it clear that these service centres and outsourcing will take place only for non-sensitive functions. The approval and actual issue of passports will still be the government's job and our staff will therefore concentrate on those aspects.....”

6.35 With private players coming in all the RPOs, the Ministry was asked, how will it be ensured that confidential information are not compromised with including the checks and balances proposed to monitor the working of private players, the Ministry in their written submission stated as follows:

“.....In the Passport Seva Project, which has been elaborated in consultation with all concerned Government departments and agencies, only front-end non-sensitive activities such as applications collection, data entry, acceptance of fee and capturing of photo etc. will be performed by the service provider selected through an open bidding process. All sensitive aspects of passport issuance, including verification of documents, check-lists, the decision to grant a passport and the handling of blank passport booklets will remain with Government employees as hitherto. The project will not compromise national security in any manner whatsoever. The new system will be introduced only after a comprehensive third party security audit by a Government agency. Such audit will thereafter be repeated every year. The data of passport holders will remain in the Government domain with strict access control. The ownership and strategic control of the core and critical assets of the project i.e. application software,

system software and data centres will remain with the Ministry of External Affairs. Data coming to the possession of the service provider when the application is submitted will only be used by him to feed the Government database and the service provider will be held strictly accountable for any misuse of data.”

6.36 Under the new passport rules of December 2006, an applicant submitting 3 out of the list of 14 stipulated documents, can get a passport on the basis of post-issuance police verification.

6.37 When the Committee drew the attention of the Foreign Secretary on media reports wherein the Intelligence Bureau (IB) is reported to have said that the Passport Seva Project represents a major security risk, the Foreign Secretary submitted as follows:

“The whole system has been designed along with IB and MHA. They are on board on this because it helps them also to have a much clearer record of what we have done. We do not broadcast this, but unless we can manage our own data of our own individuals and unless we know what kinds of applications we have and where they have come from, it becomes much harder for us to see about the ones that are really dangerous. Otherwise, for dealing with these numbers, 50 lakh or so, we need the ability to sort out and deal with this properly. That is why, we devised the Passport Seva System along with IB and MHA as a means of tightening it up. But for obvious reasons, we do not go around saying this that it would be possible for us to know immediately whether somebody who claims to be an Indian abroad is or is not an Indian. We will get all these advantages.

6.38 The Foreign Secretary elaborated on the Passport Seva Project as under:

“We are also adding another whole layer of security. In the new Passport Seva Project, we will be taking fingerprints. So, we will be putting biometrics into the system. Frankly speaking, today in India, without an ID-card system, we rely on people’s word. If not the person himself, then somebody else signs an affidavit on

his behalf. Today, we are a very trusting system. What we need to do is to increase the levels of security and the confidence in the data that we deal with. I would assure you that once we will do with this Passport Seva System with biometrics, with computerised records and centralised records with the Government, then we will be able to do much better. I am sure that there are many people who get worried about how it will work in future. I do not want to say this, but there are many interests in inefficiency.....”

F. Visa Services

6.39 The Annual Report (2007-2008) of the Ministry states that forty Indian Missions and Posts abroad have been authorised to outsource visa application collection work. The Committee drew the attention of the Ministry towards a report carried in San Francisco Chronicle on 2 February 2007 which reported the irresponsible dumping of sensitive data at recycling centre by the Indian Consulate. Asked how the Ministry would ensure that security aspects are taken care of and confidential information is handled responsibly, the Ministry responded as under:

“The proposal for outsourcing of visa services envisages outsourcing of only non-sensitive aspects, such as collection and collation of visa applications. All security related aspects are to be handled by the Embassies/Consulates. The Contract with the service provider specifically provides that he shall ensure complete confidentiality of the information provided by visa seekers and will further ensure that it is used for no purpose other than processing of visa. In addition, the service provider shall indemnify the Embassy/Consulates in the event of any leakage of such information and a consequential claim made by visa applicant/applicants.

With regard to the reference to a report in San Francisco Chronicle on 2nd February 2007, as per information available, there was an incident in which some old application forms were found lying at the premises of the recycling company, prior to their destruction. The Consulate in San Francisco took immediate

corrective measures and put into place systems, which would ensure that the confidentiality of the personal data in visa/passport and other forms is fully safeguarded. It should be noted that the outsourcing of visa services in San Francisco started from 1 October 2007. With a view to avoid recurrence of such incidents, a circular was issued to all our Missions/Posts abroad which is reproduced at Appendix-IV.

6.40 On the problems faced by Passport/Visa applicants in the Missions abroad the Foreign Secretary stated during evidence that:

“.....On passports and visas in Missions, it is true there is a problem, especially in renewal of old passports. And the reason, as I said, is before 2003, those records were not fully computerized.”

6.41 Elaborating further on the problems faced by passport and visa applicants in Missions abroad, the Foreign Secretary stated as under:

“The trouble is they will have a passport which was issued by an RPO in India ten or twenty years ago. Some passports are even twenty years old. Now, they will come with this old passport and say I want a new passport. Now they have to verify with the issuing authority under the present system. Now, if the issuing authority is an RPO in India, they send a message. This can take for ever. In fact, when the C&AG looked at delays in passport issuance, 75 per cent of it was because of police verification. Now, what we need to do is to create a system where we know which passports have been issued. You check immediately online and you issue.”

6.42 When asked about the backlog of the old, pre-computerized passports, the Foreign Secretary stated that:

“That is what we need to bring into the system. We will have to work on that to bring those in. The other problem is many people who have either lost their passport or have overstayed and then they want to regularize. Then, we have an impossible situation. At one stage, we had 7,000 people in Lisbon; they had heard a rumour that they were going to be legalized if they had a passport. Now, these are people who had been there for ten, twelve, fifteen years. Now, it is a humanitarian problem, frankly. The only ultimate answer is to make sure that our

database includes all these old passports that we have issued. It may not be a perfect data, but at least some data that we have. Then, we can take a decision that yes, we can give him a passport, if he ever had a passport before. This we will work on. But this will take a little longer for bringing them into the system. What we will do is lay down service levels for Missions which are the same as the ones that we will have here under the Passport Seva Project. In other words, new passports will be issued in much less time; others will be given in three days; and other services in a day. But the answer really is technology. If we do not do that communication and that technology, then this will always go on. They will complain rightly. It is a real problem. We will try and do our best. I think there has been an improvement in visas. Now, all Missions tell us that they issue visas in 24 hours to people who come to the window. But the problem is with the passport.”

6.43 When asked why someone who visited India several times earlier could be denied visa later, the Foreign Secretary stated:

“In fact, this is the other thing. What we need to do is issue much more long-term tourist visas multiple entry. People should not have to keep coming back for a visa every time. If he has been here once, twice, you know that he is reasonable. Then, the onus should not be on him each time to get a clearance. The onus should be on us to stop somebody who has done something wrong. We have to issue longer term visas so that he does not have to come back for a visa. That is what we hope to do.”

G. Acquisition/Construction of Passport Office Buildings

6.44 During evidence, the Committee observed that several passport offices do not have building of their own and, therefore, felt that in States where the Ministry have offices to provide passport services, it should try to acquire land from the concerned State Government. The Foreign Secretary concurred with the view of the Committee and said initial effort is to talk to State Governments to provide land or building. He also said that in 17 places we own the Passport Office buildings. There are few States where it is difficult to secure land/building.

CHAPTER VII

OTHER MATTERS

A. SAARC University

Setting up of a South Asian University is stated to be one of the important initiatives of MEA. The update on the progress made so far in setting up and operationalization of SAARC University is stated to be as follows:

- (a) India, Bangladesh and Nepal have ratified the Intergovernmental Agreement signed during the 14th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit (April 3-4, 2007).
- (b) The first Intergovernmental Steering Committee Meeting (May 29-30, 2007, New Delhi) approved India's proposal to set up a Project Office for the South Asian University in New Delhi. The Project Office, headed by an Interim CEO from India, will be established for the period of two years inter alia, to acquire land of the University, oversee construction, draw up its Charter, Bye-Laws, Business Plan, Governance Structure, Course Curricula etc. The Interim CEO will be assisted by three experts or senior academics from the region.
- (c) A Search-cum-Selection Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. M.S. Swaminathan is in the process of finalizing the name of the interim CEO and two alternate candidates. The inter-governmental Steering Committee is meeting on April 16-17, 2008 to formalize the appointment of the interim-CEO.
- (d) Discussions are going on with Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and Haryana Government for acquisition of land for the University. DDA has identified 100 acres of land in Narela.
- (e) Legislative bill & Headquarters Agreement for the University incorporating the views of Ministry of Finance and Protocol Division have been prepared.
- (f) Internal approvals of total anticipated expenditure of Rs. 6.9 crore are being sought for the establishment of the Project Office.

The University is likely to start its first academic session from July 2009.”

7.2 Elaborating further on the setting up of the SAARC university, the Foreign Secretary submitted, during evidence, as follows:

“.....about the position on the SAARC University, the South Asia University. Land has been identified in Delhi – a hundred acres next to the Indira Gandhi National Open University. We have a Search and Selection Committee which has three people who could be the project directors to start up this project. We will hold a meeting of the inter-governmental Steering Committee on which all the SAARC countries are represented later next month in Delhi where they will make the selection of somebody to start up the project office and we also have suggestions to make. Ultimately, decisions have to be taken by the inter-governmental body and we have suggestions to them for setting up separate academic Committee, separate business Committee and a separate Committee for the sheer logistics of it, the land, the construction and all that. We hope that all that activity will start within the next two months.

So, we have made considerable progress in the planning and in the preparation. But it now needs to be endorsed by the eight member countries of SAARC formally and then they will appoint somebody to actually run the project. Unlike other Universities this is an international body to which we are offering a home in India. So, we are performing this as an international obligation and we will also do a privileges and immunities agreement with them.”

7.3 When it was suggested about setting up of an Advisory Committee consisting of the SAARC Members including people who may be interested so that the university comes up as an institution of excellence, the Foreign Secretary stated during evidence as under:

“I thank you for the idea of having an Advisory Committee for South Asia University. I think, this is an idea we would recommend very strongly. As you said, it is an opportunity to build something different, something unique and something excellent at the same time.”

B. Prisoners in Pakistan Jails

7.4 An estimated 199 Indian prisoners are said to be in Pakistan Jails. Of these nationality status in respect of 13 is confirmed. Confirmation of nationality status in respect of 26 others is reportedly being done by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Indian High Commission in Islamabad is also said to have been repeatedly seeking Consular Access to the remaining 160 prisoners. The Ministry has also informed that the Pakistani side is yet to respond to the repeated requests made by the Indian High Commission. The Ministry further informed that precise number and details of prisoners can only be confirmed after provision of consular access.

7.5 In addition to the above, 372 Indian fishermen are reportedly in Pakistani jails. Out of these, only 97 of them are said to have been provided Consular access and Consular access to the remaining fishermen has reportedly been sought by Indian High Commission. Some more fishermen have reportedly been taken into custody over the past few weeks.

7.6 When asked about the steps taken by the Government of India to ensure the release of Indian prisoners in Pakistani jails, the Ministry in a written reply stated that, the matter has been raised at different forums of the Composite dialogue. There has been a detailed discussion at EAM, FS and Home Secretary levels. Prime Minister had also raised the matter with the Pakistan counterpart during the SAARC summit in Delhi in April 2007.

7.7 Elaborating further on the steps taken by the Government to ensure release of Indian prisoners in Pakistan, the Ministry in a written submission stated that, a judicial Committee comprising 4 retired judges each from India and Pakistan has been formed to speed up the repatriation of all prisoners who have completed their tenure. The Ministry further submitted that, during the first joint meeting of the Committee, certain measures were recommended to both the Government including exchange of consolidated list with full particulars in each others' jails by 31.3.2008. It was also reportedly agreed that fishermen in custody whose nationality status is confirmed be released and in remaining cases, consular access be provided by 31.3.2008.

7.8 Asked if the consolidated list of prisoners were exchanged and consular access was provided to the remaining fishermen as recommended by the Judicial Committee, the Ministry in a written reply submitted as under:

“The consolidated list of prisoners in each other’s jails were exchanged on 31-3-2008 as recommended by the Judicial Committee. Details in respect of 147 Pakistani prisoners were handed over to Pakistan High Commission. This includes a list of 28 prisoners to whom Travel Documents have been provided, 62 Gohar Shahis who are awaiting repatriation after nationality status is confirmed by Pakistan for all of them, 43 Internees in Amritsar Jail whose nationality status is yet to be confirmed by Pakistan and 14 fishermen who have been granted Consular Access and confirmation of nationality status is awaited. Pakistan had given the list of only 53 civil prisoners – 14 to whom Consular Access is awaited, 26 for whom nationality status is awaited from India and 12 for whom nationality status has been confirmed by us. The Committee had recommended that by 31st March 2008, all those fishermen whose nationality status has been confirmed would be released and Consular Access would be granted to the others. There are no Pakistani fishermen in India whose nationality status has been confirmed. However, as recommended, Consular Access was granted to all the 14 Pakistani fishermen at Jamnagar to the Pakistan High Commission authorities on 5th March 2008. We are aware that there are a total of 436 Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails. Out of these 436 Indian fishermen, 97 were provided with Consular Access and their nationality status has been confirmed by India, while we have been repeatedly requesting for Consular Access for the remaining 339.

It is disappointing to note that Pakistan had not released the 97 Indian fishermen whose nationality status has been confirmed. Neither have they given Consular Access to the remaining 339 Indian fishermen as per our records. This was conveyed to the Pakistan High Commission on 31st March 2008, when the list of Pakistani prisoners was handed over to them.”

C. Management Information System(MIS)

7.9 In order to have quantitative evaluation of outcome of activities, the Foreign Secretary during the course of evidence for Demands for Grants (2007-2008) stated that an outside agency would be engaged to go into the issue and that a MIS within the Ministry will be put into place. When asked about the current status of the MIS and the expected time for its implementation, the Ministry in a written reply submitted as under:

“The contract pertaining to the development of an Information Management System (IMS) to support a few critical business functions of MEA has been already awarded. The proposed IMS is expected to bring about increased efficiency and effectiveness of the management control over these functional areas. The system would address the requirements related to the following business functions of the MEA:

- Budget and expenditure
- Database of personnel
- Foreign Visits information
- Parliamentary questions

The designing and implementation of the IMS is expected to be completed by June 2008.”

7.10 During the course of evidence for Demands for Grants 2008-2009 of the Ministry, the Foreign Secretary added:

“.....In order to make our own work more efficient, we have also worked on an Information Management System within the Ministry which would computerise our management of the Budget and expenditure data, personnel data, information on foreign visits and so on, and on Parliament Questions. We hope to begin implementing this by the end of June, 2008.....”

D. Propagation of Hindi Abroad

7.11 According to the Annual Report (2007-2008) of the Ministry, the Ministry of External Affairs has a well formulated scheme for propagation of Hindi Abroad and extends support to various Universities and other educational institutions through Indian Missions abroad for Hindi related activities.

7.12 During the course of evidence, the Committee stressed upon the importance of getting recognition for Hindi at the international level as there are many People of Indian Origin abroad who speak Hindi, particularly in Mauritius. Ignoring this would alienate the next generation of People of Indian Origin from India.

7.13 Responding to the observation made by the Committee, the Foreign Secretary stated during evidence that the Ministry organized the World Hindi Conference last year in New York, two regional Hindi Conference meetings were held at Budapest and Seoul. The Foreign Secretary, went on to state that, in order to spread information about Hindi and to promote foreigners who are interested in Hindi, the Ministry need to make much more efforts. The Foreign Secretary also stated that Indian Universities should work with universities abroad by providing scholarships to students for propagating Hindi

E. UN Democracy Fund

7.14 On perusal of the statement of contributions made by different countries to the UN Democracy Fund, it has been seen that India is the second highest contributor after USA. The contribution made by other developed countries are relatively less than India. When asked if there was any specific reasons for the high contribution made by India, the Ministry in a written reply submitted as under:

“As a founding member of the United Nations, India has consistently and significantly contributed to various areas of its functioning. As the world’s largest democracy, it was natural for India to be among the first countries to support the initiative for the establishment of the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF).

Hon'ble Prime Minister was a Guest of Honour at the international launch of the Fund at the UN Hqs. in New York on 14 September 2005 during the World Summit 2005.

2. The primary purpose of UNDEF is to promote democracy around the world by providing assistance for projects that consolidate and strengthen democratic institutions and facilitate democratic governance in new or restored democracies. The Fund would strengthen the UN's capacity to respond to requests for assistance.

3. Contributions by member states to UNDEF are on voluntary basis, to be made by them as and when they wish to do so. Given our universally acclaimed democratic credentials and our strong support for the objectives of UNDEF, GoI had decided to make an initial contribution of US \$ 10 million to the Fund. As the Fund's recipients would mainly comprise project proponents in developing countries, our contribution is also in line with our policy of providing assistance to other developing countries.

4. India is a member of UNDEF's Advisory Board since its inception, and continues its constructive engagement in implementing the Fund's activities. GoI's decision to make a further pledge of US \$ 10 million, as announced by Hon'ble External Affairs Minister in his speech at the General Debate of the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly on 1 October 2007, is a reaffirmation of our commitment to this multilateral initiative. Out of the pledge announced by EAM, an amount of US \$ 5 million was released during Financial Year 2007-08."

7.15 Justifying further on the contribution made to UN democracy fund, the Foreign Secretary stated during evidence that:

"On the UN Democracy Fund, we found that quite frankly, as the world's largest democracy, we have an interest in democracy and we have seen that even in our own neighbourhood, whether it is Nepal or whether it is Pakistan, we have seen that their movement towards democracy actually coincides with the policy

outcomes that we desire. But we have found that the UN is a useful vehicle. Many countries find it easier to do the kind of work that we do. For instance, we bring parliamentarians here for training courses, or we assist them with their parliamentary procedures or when the Election Commission does a lot of work with the new Election Commissions in Bhutan or Nepal etc. We find that a lot of it is much easier if you do it with a UN flag. People find it easier to accept because this is a sovereign function and this is an internal affair where a foreigner is interfering. That is one reason why we work through the UNDEF. It is true, our contributions are large. But, I think, our commitment to democracy is also large and we have the largest democracy in the world.”

7.16 The Foreign Secretary further informed that:

“.....this is a voluntary contribution and it is not a regular feature. It does not have to happen before.....”

PART - II

RECOMMENDATIONS/ OBSERVATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

1. The Committee observe that as against the projection of Rs. 768 crore under plan head, the Ministry of External Affairs has been provided only Rs. 579 crore during the year 2008-09. The shortfall is to the extent of Rs. 189 crore. MEA has stated that in case additional funds are required, the Planning Commission would be approached at the RE stage for higher allocation. Considering the healthy utilization of funds by Ministry of External Affairs, the Committee suggest adequate additional allocation be made to MEA.

2. The Committee in their 15th Report had pointed out discrepancies in the budget documents and cautioned the Ministry to take extreme care and ensure that documents/information presented to Parliament are flawless. Unfortunately, the Ministry of External Affairs does not seem to have taken care of this aspect. It is observed that this year too there are discrepancies in the figures shown under Technical and Economic Cooperation in the Outcome Budget and the Demands for Grants documents for 2008-2009. The Committee view this lapse seriously. The Committee hope that the matter will be looked into at senior level and responsibility fixed.

3. The Committee had desired (15th Report) that all relevant project details such as original and anticipated dates of completion, factor-wise analysis of cost escalation, impact of cost over-run on viability of projects should be disclosed in the Outcome

Budget. The Ministry of External Affairs assured in the Action Taken Reply that this suggestion will be implemented during the exercise for next Outcome Budget. The Committee are disappointed to see that the desired information has not been shown in the Outcome Budget of 2008-09. The Committee have been informed that Ministry of External Affairs is making efforts to collect up-to-date information to be incorporated into a separate corrigendum in the Outcome Budget for 2008-09. The Committee would await the corrigendum for Outcome Budget of 2008-09.

4. The Committee had commented upon in their 15th Report (2007-08) the need to raise the manpower strength of the Ministry of External Affairs to cope with the expanding role of the Ministry. The Committee are of the view that cadre strength of Ministry of External Affairs is grossly inadequate and needs to be substantially increased. The Ministry of External Affairs has since made a proposal to create 514 posts out of which 314 posts are at middle and junior level. The Committee have been informed that Cabinet Secretariat has advised Ministry of External Affairs to sort out creation of these posts in consultation with the Ministry of Finance. The Committee urge that there should be no further delay in deciding the proposed expansion of the cadre strength, keeping in view MEA's enlarged roles and responsibilities brought about by India's increasing international engagements.

5. It is heartening to note that the Tala Hydro Electric Project in Bhutan has already commenced sale of surplus electricity to India and that the project has reportedly made savings to the tune of Rs. 90 crore. The Committee hope that the

surplus electricity from the project will help India tide over its demand/supply gap in power to some extent.

6. The Committee note that the framework agreement and protocols for the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project were expected to be signed on 2 April 2008. The project envisages connectivity between Indian ports on eastern seaboard and North Eastern Region of India via Myanmar. This project will assure better connectivity with North Eastern States reducing distance, saving fuel and time. The project is expected to cost Rs. 536 crore and time line for completion is 5 years. The Committee desire that there should be periodical monitoring of the project to ensure that the project is completed in time and without cost escalation.

7. The Committee note there has been hardly any progress, regarding the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project. Four bilateral Joint Working Group meetings with Iran and Pakistan and six trilateral meetings with Iran & Pakistan have reportedly been held so far on the project. It has been stated that a pricing formula was agreed to be considered subject to the transit fee and transportation tariff issue being concluded with Pakistan. The Committee have been informed that talks on the gas pipeline will be resumed shortly. The Committee hope that the matter will be taken up on priority basis to arrive at an acceptable agreement on issues involved, keeping in view our concerns on energy front.

8. Regarding cooperation with Nepal, the Committee desire that once the popular government is in place in Nepal, the question of starting hydro electric projects, road

projects, railways etc. be taken up on priority basis which will benefit both countries mutually.

9. In order to have an organized set up of project delivery, an agency by name 'India-International Development Cooperation Agency (IIDCA)' was proposed to be set up during 2007-08. Regrettably, the proposal has suffered delay and is now expected to start functioning in 5-6 months time. The delay is attributed to the long drawn process of inter-ministerial consultations. The Committee feel that delay in such consultations could have been avoided, had there been inter-ministerial meeting to discuss and decide such issues. The Committee expect the Ministry of External Affairs to take necessary steps to ensure that there is no further delay in implementation of the proposal.

10. There were as many as 1210 slots of scholarship under ITEC, SAARC and SCAAP that remained unutilised during 2007-08. The under utilisation is attributed to change-over on account of streamlining of the overall delivery system, introduction of dedicated on-line system, etc. The Committee in this connection find that scholarship schemes are administered by different agencies within the Government, each holding separate examination for grant of scholarship. The Committee feel that there is a need for holistic look at the whole issue with a view to bringing about proper co-ordination among the agencies in all aspects of administering scholarship schemes to ensure better standard and delivery.

11. There has been a great deal of confusion and resultant delay in Passport Offices due to lack of clarity regarding rules/instructions, norms, etc. which necessitates applicants to undertake several visits to passport authorities and leads to harassment of public as illustrated in Chapter VI of this Report. The issues *inter-alia* relate to absence of precise definition of terms used in passport related matters, ambiguity in instructions leading to different interpretations by different Passport Offices, non-display of norms of time limit prescribed for issue of ordinary passport and re-issue of passport, lack of public accessibility to rules, instructions and clarifications issued by the Chief Passport Officer. All this calls for a fresh look at the entire gamut of rules/instructions/clarifications and the public display system regarding passport matters with a view to making the functioning of passport offices more effective and people friendly and see that prevailing state of confusion is not shifted to the proposed Passport Seva Project under Public Private Partnership. The Committee hope that action will be taken accordingly.

12. The Committee have been informed that the system of post-issuance police verification on submission of stipulated documents has been designed by MEA with a view to bringing down the time lag in issue of passports. The Committee desire that it should be ensured that the system does not pose any security risk.

13. The Committee observe that Section 5 of the Passport Act, 1967 has delegated powers to the Executive to prescribe fee on two counts: (i) to meet the expenses on special security paper, printing and lamination (ii) to meet the expenses on other

connected miscellaneous services. Under these provisions, the MEA has prescribed a fee of Rs. 1,000 for ordinary passport apparently to meet the expenses on printing, etc. and fee ranging from Rs. 100 to Rs. 700 for rendering miscellaneous services. In addition to above, the Ministry of External Affairs has prescribed additional fee for issue of passport under tatkal scheme, which admittedly does not constitute a miscellaneous service. The additional fee is reportedly to meet the expenses in providing tatkal service. This is obviously outside the scope of Section 5 of the Passports Act. According to Foreign Secretary, to stop issuing tatkal passports now would be a public relations disaster. He has promised that Law Ministry will be consulted as to whether or not an amendment is required in the Passports Act. Irrespective of whatever opinion that might be given by the Ministry of Law, the Committee hold that powers delegated by the Parliament under Section 5 of the Passports Act have clearly been exceeded and the Committee have been presented with a *fait accompli*. Nevertheless, the Committee would await the opinion of the Ministry of Law on the need for Amendment of the Act to legitimise the collection of tatkal fees.

14. The Committee are of the view that the proposed SAARC University to be set up in India would provide a tremendous opportunity to establish an institution of excellence without replicating the universities that exist today. The University could be designed to particularly highlight the inter-connectedness of the politics, the economics, the sociology, the literature and the culture of the SAARC countries. The Committee feel that these issues can be better addressed, if there is an Advisory Committee

consisting of the SAARC Members and a few eminent and interested people. The Committee suggest that the idea of setting up an Advisory Committee in this regard could be recommended to SAARC for their consideration.

15. An estimated 199 Indian prisoners and 436 Indian Fishermen are reportedly in Pakistan jails and the nationality status of 39 prisoners and 97 fishermen has been confirmed by India. MEA has informed that Consular Access to the remaining 160 prisoners and 339 fishermen has been repeatedly sought by the Indian High Commission in Islamabad. It has been stated that the Judicial Committee (comprising 4 retired judges each from India and Pakistan) which had been formed to speed up the repatriation of all prisoners who had completed their tenure had recommended that by 31st March 2008 all those fishermen whose nationality status had been confirmed would be released and Consular access provided to the others. The Committee regret to learn that this has not happened. The Committee hope that the matter will be taken up vigorously with Pakistan to ensure safe and quick release of the 97 fishermen and Consular Access to the remaining 339 fishermen and the 160 prisoners.

NEW DELHI
11 April, 2008
22 Chaitra, 1930 (Saka)

DR. LAXMINARAYAN PANDEY,
Chairman,
Standing Committee on External Affairs

**MINUTES OF THE TWELFTH SITTING OF THE STANDING
COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS HELD ON 3 APRIL, 2008**

The Committee sat from 1130 hrs. to 1400 hrs. in Room No. 62,
Parliament House.

Present

Dr. Laxminarayan Pandey – Chairman

Members

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Narayan Chandra Borkataky
3. Shri Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa
4. Shri Somabhai G. Patel
5. Dr. Sebastian Paul
6. Dr. (Col.) Dhani Ram Shandil

Rajya Sabha

7. Dr. Ram Prakash
8. Dr. Karan Singh

Secretariat

1. Shri A. Louis Martin - Joint Secretary
2. Shri T.K. Mukherjee - Director
3. Shri P.V.L.N. Murthy - Deputy Secretary

Representatives of Ministry of External Affairs

- | | | |
|-----|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. | Shri Shivshankar Menon | - Foreign Secretary |
| 2. | Shri Sharat Sabharwal | - AS (AD) |
| 3. | Shri Vivek Katju | - AS (Pol) |
| 4. | Dr. J. Bhagwati | - AS (ER) |
| 5. | Dr. Pavan K. Varma | - DG (ICCR) |
| 6. | Shri Ashok Kumar | - ADG (ICWA) |
| 7. | Shri N. Bala Baskar | - AS (FA) |
| 8. | Mrs. Primrose Sharma | - JS (TC) |
| 9. | Shri Malay Mishra | - JS (MER) |
| 10. | Shri V.P. Haran | - JS (AD) |
| 11. | Shri R. Swaminathan | - JS (CPV) |

2. At the outset, the Chairman welcomed the Members of the Committee and the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs to the sitting of the Committee. The Chairman then drew attention of the witnesses to Direction 55(I) of the Directions by the Speaker, Lok Sabha.

3. The Committee then took evidence of the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs in connection with examination of the Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2008-2009.

4. A verbatim record of the proceedings has been kept.

The Committee then adjourned.

**MINUTES OF THE THIRTEENTH SITTING OF THE STANDING
COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS HELD ON 11TH APRIL, 2008**

**The Committee sat from 1500 hrs. to 1600 hrs. in Committee Room No. 53,
Parliament House.**

PRESENT

Dr. Laxminarayan Pandey – Chairman

MEMBERS

Lok Sabha

2. Prof. S.P. Singh Baghel
3. Shri Narayan Chandra Borkataky
4. Shri Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa
5. Shri Somabhai G. Patel
6. Shri Madhu Goud Yashki

Rajya Sabha

7. Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi
8. Shri Arjun Kumar Sengupta
9. Dr. Karan Singh

Secretariat

1. Shri A. Louis Martin - Joint Secretary
2. Shri T.K. Mukherjee - Director
3. Shri P.V.L.N. Murthy - Deputy Secretary

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

3. The Committee then took up for consideration the draft Report on Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2008-2009. The Committee adopted the same, subject to the following additions/modifications:

(i) In Recommendation No. 6, the following to be deleted:

“...and will also boost bilateral trade..”

(ii) In the first sentence of Recommendation No. 7, the words “not much of....”

to be substituted by the words: “...hardly any....”

(iii) In Recommendation No. 12, the words “..... along with the Intelligence

Bureau and the Ministry of Home Affairs.....” and “.....such steps as may

be necessary should be taken to ensure.....” to be replaced by the words

“.....by MEA with a view to bringing down the time lag in issue of

passports.....” and “.....it should be ensured.....” respectively.

4. XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX XXXX

5. The Committee then authorized the Chairman to finalize the Report after factual verification from the concerned Ministry and present the same to Parliament.

The Committee then adjourned.

**Passport Office-wise statement showing re-issue of passports during 2007
(Vide Para No. 6.6 of the Report)**

S. No.	PASSPORT OFFICE	RE-ISSUE CASES				
		15 days	16-21 days	22-30 days	After 30 days	Total
1.	Ahmedabad	15512	6241	4295	4185	30233
2.	Bangalore	22461	7754	7035	16336	55116
3.	Bareilly (Breakup Data not available)	-	-	-	-	4721
4.	Bhopal	2897	1473	1572	1555	7915
5.	Bhubaneswar	2125	506	377	788	3840
6.	Chanigarh	1133	804	411	1178	3526
7.	Chennai	24028	3556	3625	13019	45869
8.	Cochin	15002	4216	2701	5963	28907
9.	Delhi	6534	674	541	1322	9071
10.	Ghaziabad	1233	1307	1469	1665	5674
11.	Guwahati	1025	333	328	1058	2972
12.	Hyderabad	15448	7087	4604	3098	30327
13.	Jaipur	9986	645	494	2313	13438
14.	Jalandhar	3396	89	56	197	3829
15.	Jammu*	-	-	-	-	-
16.	Kolkata	17637	4552	2678	1091	25958
17.	Kozhikode	8846	2170	2455	3990	17534
18.	Lucknow	8011	3828	4120	3938	19897
19.	Madurai (Functioning w.e.f. 17.12.2007)	-	-	-	-	-
20.	Malappuram(Functioning w.e.f.28.8.2006)	12739	3991	-	17199	33929
21.	Mumbai	17093	4960	5228	10590	38150
22.	Nagpur	1049	277	436	1844	3695
23.	Panaji	4292	90	105	225	4753
24.	Patna	3445	1971	476	659	6570
25.	Pune	6356	7170	2439	865	16433
26.	Raipur (Functioning w.e.f.(17.12.2007)	6	-	-	-	6
27.	Ranchi	3341	135	493	4018	7987
28.	Shimla(Functioning w.e.f. 16.03.2007)	1970	-	-	-	1970
29.	Srinagar*	-	-	-	-	-
30.	Surat	2188	1422	3057	4524	11294
31.	Thane	8946	1535	2009	14133	26623
32.	Tiruchirappalli	16430	6252	7594	17859	48135
33.	Thiruvananthapuram	20352	2267	1813	1922	26649
34.	Vishapatnam	951	46	228	4503	6316
	Total	254432	75351	60639	140037	535267

* In case of J&K residents passports are re-issued after police verification.

Circular issued to all Missions/Posts abroad by MEA on Visa Services

Vide Para 6.39 of the Report

Quote

Dear HOM/HOP,

It has come to our notice that an Indian Post abroad, which does not have shredding or incineration facilities of its own was handing over old visa applications meant for destruction to a re-cycling company from time to time. It would appear that there was a time gap between the handing over of these applications to the company concerned and their destruction through re-cycling. During the intervening period, the applications in question were stored in an unguarded yard accessible to public. This matter came to the attention of a local newspaper and has also attracted serious objections from the persons whose applications were found lying in the open.

2. *It will be appreciated that the information given by applicants in their visa applications (such as name, address, profession, purpose of visit, etc) is meant for the specific purpose of issuance of a visa. Its appearance in the public domain can invite serious objections of breach of trust and careless handling of privileged information. Further, lobbies in the West, opposed to outsourcing of business information processing to Indian companies, often use the argument that our handling of privileged information leaves much to be desired. Therefore, incidents, such as the above, can also provide an added argument to those opposing our BPO sector.*

3. *In view of the foregoing, it may be noted that any document, such as visa or passport application, containing privileged information, should not leave the premises of a Mission/Post without being destroyed either through cross-shredding or incineration. Further, the destruction of such documents should be done in the presence of a responsible officer not below the level of an Attaché who should certify in writing the period for which the visa/passport applications have been destroyed.*

4. *We have separately asked some of our Missions/Posts to outsource visa applications collection to service providers. The agreement with the selected service providers should contain, inter alia, a guarantee that the service provider will ensure complete confidentiality of the information provided by visa seekers in their applications.*

5. *The above instructions may please be noted for strict compliance and also brought to the notice of all concerned officials”*

Additional Secretary (AD& CPV)

February 6, 2007

Unquote