

25

**STANDING COMMITTEE
ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(2013-2014)**

FIFTEENTH LOK SABHA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

**PASSPORT SEVA PROJECT-
TARGETS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

TWENTY FIFTH REPORT



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

FEBRUARY, 2014/MAGHA, 1935 (Saka)

TWENTY FIFTH REPORT

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(2013-2014)**

(FIFTEENTH LOK SABHA)

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

**PASSPORT SEVA PROJECT-
TARGETS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

Presented to Lok Sabha on 20th February, 2014

Laid in Rajya Sabha on 20th February, 2014



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

FEBRAURY, 2014/MAGHA, 1935 (Saka)

COEA NO. 111

Price : Rs.

© **2014 by Lok Sabha Secretariat**

Published under Rule 382 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha (_____Edition) and Printed by

CONTENTS

	PAGE
COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE (2011-2012)	(iii)
COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE (2012-2013)	(v)
COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE (2013-2014)	(vii)
INTRODUCTION.....	(ix)
Chapter-I Passport Seva Project	1
A. Introductory.....	1
B. Procedure for obtaining Passport under the new system.....	3
C. Aims and Objectives of the Project	4
D. Establishment of Passport Seva Kendras and Achievements of the Passport Seva Project:.....	5
E. Rollout of Passport Seva Project	6
F. Financial Implications of Passport Seva Project	7
G. Location of Passport Seva Kendras.....	10
H. Role of various agencies and inter agency coordination.....	13
Chapter-II Procedure of seeking online Appointment, Verification Procedure at PSK and status checking system	22
A. Problems in seeking online appointment.....	22
B. Verification Process at PSK and referring applications from PSKs to RPOs	26
Chapter-III. Issues Related to Police Verification	32
Chapter-IV. Passport Issuance System	43
Chapter-V. General Issues Related to the Passport.....	48
A. Centralization of delivery of Passport Services-Historical Aspect..	48
B. Passport Melas organized by RPOs	54
C. Role of Authorized Agents/Agencies	56
D. Grievances Redressal Mechanism ...	58
E. Malpractices and Role of Touts in the Passport System.....	63

Chapter-VI. MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES.....	67
A. Manpower Management under Passport Seva Project.....	67
B. Integration of Indian Missions/Posts with Passport Seva Project with Passport Seva Project	70
C. Quality of Passport Booklets	73

APPENDICES

I. Minutes of the Ninth sitting of the Committee (2011-12) held on 27.01.2012.....	75
II. Minutes of the Twelfth sitting of the Committee (2012-13) held on 16.01.2013.....	78
III. Minutes of the Eighth sitting of the Committee (2013-14) held on 17.12.2013.....	80
IV. Minutes of the Tenth sitting of the Committee (2013-14) held on 18.02.2014.....	83

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2011-2012)

- | Sl.No. | Name |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. | Shri Ananth Kumar – Chairman |

MEMBERS (LOK SABHA)

- | | |
|-----|----------------------------|
| 2. | Shri Anandrao Adsul |
| 3. | Shri S. Alagiri |
| 4. | Shri Anto Antony |
| 5. | Dr. Shafiqur Rahman Barq |
| 6. | Shri Bhudeo Choudhary |
| 7. | Shri T.K.S. Elangovan |
| 8. | Shri P. Karunakaran |
| 9. | Shri Pradeep Majhi |
| 10. | Shri Inder Singh Namdhari |
| 11. | Shri Zafar Ali Naqvi |
| 12. | Shri Rajendrasinh Rana |
| 13. | Shri K. Chandrasekhar Rao* |
| 14. | Shri Takam Sanjoy |
| 15. | Dr. Bholu Singh |
| 16. | Shri Janardhana Swamy |
| 17. | Dr. Shashi Tharoor |
| 18. | Vacant# |
| 19. | Vacant |
| 20. | Vacant |
| 21. | Vacant |

* Shri K. Chandrasekhar Rao nominated to the Committee on External Affairs w.e.f. 25.11.2011.

Smt. Sushila Saroj ceased to be the Member of the Committee on External Affairs due to change of her nomination to Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment w.e.f. 13.7.12.

MEMBERS (RAJYA SABHA)

22. Shri Birendra Prasad Baishya
23. Shri A.W. Rabi Bernard
24. Shri Murli Deora
25. Shri H.K. Dua
26. Dr. Najma A. Heptulla @
27. Dr. K.P. Ramalingam
28. Dr. Bharatkumar Raut
29. Dr. Karan Singh \$
30. Shri Shivanand Tiwari
31. Shri Tarun Vijay

SECRETARIAT

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------|
| 1. Shri U. S. Saxena | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. Shri K.D.Muley | - | Director |
| 3. Dr. Ram Raj Rai | - | Additional Director |
| 4. Shri Rakesh Bharadwaj | - | Under Secretary |

\$ Ceased to be the Member of the Committee due to expiry of term of Dr. Karan Singh, Member Rajya Sabha w.e.f. 27.01.12 and re-nominated to the Committee w.e.f. 02.02.2012.

@ Ceased to be the Member of the Committee due to expiry of term of Shri Shreegopal Vyas, Member Rajya Sabha w.e.f. 02.04.12 and Dr. Najma A. Heptulla nominated to the Committee on External Affairs w.e.f. 04.05.2012.

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2012-2013)

Sl.No.	Name of Member
1.	Shri Ananth Kumar - Chairman
	Lok Sabha
2.	Shri Anto Antony
3.	Shri Sansuma Khunggur Bwiswmuthiary
4.	Shri Bhudeo Choudhary
5.	Shri Bhakta Charan Das
6.	Shri Suresh Kalmadi
7.	Shri Pradeep Kumar Majhi
8.	Shri Jose K. Mani
9.	Shri Gobinda Chandra Naskar
10.	Shri Rakesh Pandey
11.	Shri J. Ramesh
12.	Shri Rajendrasinh Rana
13.	Shri Elangovan T.K.S.
14.	Shri Francisco Sardinha
15.	Dr. Bhola Singh
16.	Shri Janardhana Swamy
17.	Shri Sultan Ahmed *
18.	Shri Inder Singh Namdhari @
19.	Vacant \$
20.	Vacant **
21.	Vacant @@

* Shri Manish Tewari ceased to be Member of the Committee consequent upon his appointment as Minister of State w.e.f. 28.10.2012 and Shri Sultan Ahmed is nominated w.e.f. 13.12.2012.

@ Dr. Shashi Tharoor ceased to be Member of the Committee consequent upon his appointment as Minister of State w.e.f. 28.10.2012 and Shri Inder Singh Namdhari is nominated w.e.f. 13.12.2012 .

\$ Shri Nama Nageswara Rao ceased to be Member of the Committee consequent upon change of nomination to Committee on Commerce w.e.f. 13.12.2012.

** Dr. Girija Vyas ceased to be Member of the Committee consequent upon her appointment as Minister w.e.f. 17.06.2013

@@ Shri M.B. Rajesh ceased to be Member of the Committee consequent upon change of nomination to Committee on Science & Technology, Environment & Forests w.e.f. 27.6.2013.

Rajya Sabha

22. Smt. Jaya Bachchan
23. Shri A.W. Rabi Bernard
24. Shri Murlı Deora
25. Dr. Najma A. Heptulla
26. Shri Balbir Punj
27. Dr. K.P. Ramalingam
28. Dr. Karan Singh
29. Shri N.K. Singh
30. Shri D. P. Tripathi
- 31 Smt. Ambika Soni#

SECRETARIAT

1. Shri U. S. Saxena - Joint Secretary
2. Dr. Ram Raj Rai - Director
3. Shri A. Shivanandam - Under Secretary

Smt. Ambika Soni has been nominated to the Committee *vice* Dr. M. S. Gill who has been nominated to the Committee on Urban Development w.e.f. 27.12.2012.

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2013-2014)

- Sl. No.** **Name of Member**
1. **Shri Ananth Kumar - Chairman**

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Sultan Ahmed
3. Shri Anto Antony
4. Shri Sansuma Khunggur Bwiswmuthiary
5. Shri Bhudeo Choudhary
6 Shri Bhakta Charan Das
7. Dr. C.P. Joshi#
8. Shri Suresh Kalmadi
9. Shri Pradeep Kumar Majhi
10. Shri Jose K. Mani
11. Shri Inder Singh Namdhari
12. Shri Gobinda Chandra Naskar
13. Shri Rakesh Pandey
14. Shri J. Ramesh
15. Shri Rajendrasinh Rana
16. Shri Elangovan T.K.S.
17. Shri Francisco Sardinha
18. Dr. Bholu Singh
19. Shri Janardhana Swamy
20. Vacant
21. Vacant

Rajya Sabha

22. Smt. Jaya Bachchan
23. Shri Murli Deora
24. Shri H.K. Dua
25. Dr. Najma A. Heptulla
26. Shri Balbir Punj
27. Dr. K.P. Ramalingam
28. Dr. Karan Singh
29. Shri N.K. Singh
30. Smt. Ambika Soni
31 Shri D. P. Tripathi

SECRETARIAT

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 1. Shri U. S. Saxena | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. Dr. Ram Raj Rai | - | Director |
| 3. Ms. Kiran Bhargava | - | Sr. Executive Assistant |

Dr. C.P. Joshi has been nominated to the Committee on External Affairs w.e.f. 06.01.2014.

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 Twenty Fifth Report of the Standing Committee on External Affairs (2013-2014) on the subject "Passport Seva Project- Targets and Achievements".

2. The Committee selected the subject "Passport Seva Project- Targets and Achievements" for detailed examination during the year 2011-12. The Committee were briefed by the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs on 27.01.2012. The Committee decided to continue with the subject during the next term i.e. 2012-13 for examination. The Committee held further discussion with the representatives of Ministry of External Affairs on 16.01.2013. The discussion remained inconclusive so, the Committee decided to continue further with the subject during their next term i.e. 2013-14 for detailed examination. The Committee took oral evidence by the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs on 17.12.2013.

3. Meanwhile the Committee also undertook the on-the -spot study visit in February/March, 2012 to Passport Seva Kendras in Bengaluru, Mumbai and Ahmedabad and held discussion with representatives of Ministry of External Affairs, Regional Passport Office, Department of Police, Department of Post and Department of Home Affairs. Further, in July, 2013 the Committee also undertook on-the- spot study visit to Passport Seva Kendras in Bengaluru, Bhopal, Ghaziabad, Gurgaon and Delhi and held discussions with the representatives of Ministry of External Affairs, Regional Passport Office, Department of Police and Department of Post.

4. The Report was considered and adopted by the Committee at their sitting held on 18th February, 2014. The Minutes of the sittings of the Committee are appended to the report.

5. The Committee wish to express their thanks to the Ministry of External Affairs for placing before them the material and information as well as tendering evidence and placing their considered views before the Committee.

6. For facility of reference, the observations/recommendations of the Committee have been printed in bold letters in the Report.

NEW DELHI
18 February, 2014

29 Magha, 1935 (Saka)

ANANTH KUMAR,
Chairman,
Standing Committee on External Affairs

CHAPTER I
PASSPORT SEVA PROJECT

A. Introductory

Passport is an essential travel document for any Indian citizen who wants to proceed abroad. Globalization and growing economy have led to an increased demand for Passport and Passport related services in the country and this trend is expected to continue with increasing intensity in the foreseeable future. As per the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, the function of the Ministry of External Affairs also includes Passports and Visa excluding the grant of Visas or endorsements for entry into India.

1.2 Over the last five decades, there has been considerable expansion in the number of services rendered by Passport Offices. During the year 1979-80, 8.51 lakhs Passports were issued, the number had increased significantly to 52.5 lakhs in 2010 and during the year 2011, 58.69 lakhs passports were issued. During January-November 2013 about 67.27 lakh passport service-related applications have been received and 65.49 lakh passport and related documents have been issued. The Committee were informed that the passport services rendered in India during 2013 is likely to cross 72 lakh as compared to 64 lakh in 2012, which is an increase of over 12 per cent. If passport services overseas are also included then the figures are expected to reach some 85 lakh passport services.

1.3 In the erstwhile system, the passports were issued by a network of 37 Passport Offices and 15 Passport Collection Centres in India. Paper applications were submitted by the applicants and the entire process for granting of passport was manual, including the interface with other stakeholders involved in the process. Though, all Passport Offices were computerized and they issued machine-printed and machine readable passports as per the guidelines laid down by the International Civil Aviation Organization and passport application were scanned and stored electronically, the digitization was done post-facto mainly for record purposes. The system was decentralized with variations across passport offices and little visibility of data across these offices.

1.4 Though, the Ministry has been taking a number of measures to make the passport issuance system simpler and speedier, yet, despite extensive computerization, opening of New Passport Office and Reforms in the Central Passport Organization, a need was felt for change in the existing system due to speedily growing volume of Passport Seekers. The fast rising demand for passport related services necessitated a new system for wider reach and availability of more service delivery points.

1.5 After a study by the National Institute for Smart Government (NISG) and with the approval of the Union Cabinet in September 2007, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) embarked on Passport Seva Project (PSP), an ambitious Mission Mode Project undertaken on Public-Private Partnership basis as part of the National e-Governance Plan. Following a two bid process, M/s. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) was selected as Service Provider in May 2008 for implementation of Passport Seva Project. A Master Service Agreement (MSA) was signed by the MEA with M/s TCS in October 2008. The Project runs on the Built- Own- Transfer model wherein the initial investments are by the Private Partner. There is minimal investment from the Government.

1.6 As informed by the Ministry, the Mission Mode Project (MMP) on Passports namely, Passport Seva Project aims "to deliver all Passport-related services to the citizens in a timely, transparent, more accessible, reliable manner & in a comfortable environment through streamlined processes and committed, trained & motivated workforce. The Project aims to bring a radical shift in the way passport services are delivered to the citizens of India. The new system is centralized with standardized processes implemented across the country. The system is also available to 180 missions and posts abroad, immigration checkpoints, police and intelligence departments providing them access to real-time passport data. At present, the passport services are provided through Central Passport Organization (CPO) and its network of 38 Passport Offices (including the Passport Issuing Authority in Andaman and Nicobar Islands) across the country and Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) and consular, visa and passport services to overseas Indian/Foreign nationals through the 180 Indian Mission and Posts abroad.

1.7 The Project is supported by the state-of-the-art technology infrastructure which enables end-to-end passport services to be delivered with enhanced security, comparable to the best in the world. A complex algorithm has been built in to highlight cases of possible duplication and

suppression of information by the applicant. A comprehensive change management process ensure the success of the program as it is rolled out across the passport offices along with the concerned state police departments. Under the Passport Seva Project, the entire process is online and streamlined including interface with the Indian police for verification of personal particulars of applicants and with India Post for tracking delivery of passports. The website of the CPV Division <http://passport.gov.in>, which was established in 1999, has been phased out after the operationalization of PSP.

B. Procedure for obtaining Passport under the new system

1.8 Under new Passport Issuance System the applicants need to log on to the website www.passportindia.gov.in; create their user ID and assign a password; fill & submit the application form online, make payment of passport fee through debit/credit card and State Bank of India net-banking or through SBI challans, (*applicants may scan and upload supporting documents, if they so desire*) and to note the Application Reference Number (ARN). The system allots first available appointment and along with print-out of Appointment Slip, original documents and photocopies, citizens need to visit the PSK for submission of application. Applicants' presence in person at the PSK enables the Passport Issuing Authority to capture their photograph and fingerprints to prevent the incidence of impersonation. The applicants also get full opportunity to see and affirm their personal particulars to be entered in the passport to avoid unnecessary correspondence later. Status of applications can be tracked through website. For assistance one can call toll-free helpline 1800-258-1800.

1.9 The Ministry further informed that the Passport Portal provides comprehensive and latest information on passport services as well as status of an application, thus enabling anytime-anywhere access. An e-mail based helpdesk facility and a 24x7 National Call Centre has been set up to provide requisite information to citizens in 17 vernacular languages. A mobile based 'mPassport Seva' was launched in June 2013 to offer a wide variety of services to smartphone/iphone users such as Passport Application status tracking, locating the PSKs and general information on various steps involved in obtaining passport services.

C. Aims and objectives of the Project

1.10 Highlighting the set of objectives to be achieved through Passport Seva Project, the Ministry stated as under:

- Establish a secure & error-free Passport issuance system that compares with the best in the world
- Issue Passports (fresh and re-issue) in 3 working days (for 'No' or 'Post'-police-verification cases)
- Issue Passports (fresh and re-issue) in 3 working days plus the time taken for Police Verification (for 'Pre'-police-verification cases)
- Issue Passports under Tatkaal scheme next working day excluding the day of submission
- Render miscellaneous Passport services (change in address and other personal particulars) on the date of application itself
- Render the services through simplified procedures and in conditions of comfort for the Passport-seeking public
- Provide a portfolio of Online services to the citizens.

1.11 The key features of the Passport Seva Project includes establishment of 77 Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) for delivering all front-end citizen services, creation of on-line Passport Portal for offering Passport services, providing links to designated points in Police department, establishment of a Central Passport Printing Facility (CPPF) for handling extra load of printing, introduction of a multi-modal Information and Grievance handling system, creating a centralized IT system linking all PSK's, Passport Offices, Police and Postal Departments, introducing productivity linked incentive scheme for Government employees and establishment of a proper Program Governance Structure for managing the implementation and operation of all the above

1.12 As informed by the Ministry, the desired outcomes for the Applicants/Citizens of the Passport Seva Project includes delivery of all Passport-related services within defined service levels, closer access points for services, ease of availability of all Passport-related information online and Portfolio of online services with certainty and speed and with a real- time status tracking and enquiry facility. Availability of good public facilities at the Passport Facilitation Centres, multiple service delivery channels, ease of payment of fees for the services received and an effective Grievance Redressal Mechanism and transparency in availing the services is also expected.

D. Establishment of Passport Seva Kendras and Achievements of the Passport Seva Project

1.13 The pilot projects under the Passport Seva Project were launched in Bengaluru and Chandigarh in May 2010 and August 2010 respectively. After certification of the Project by the Standardisation, Testing & Quality Certification (STQC), the Third Party Audit Agency under the Deptt of IT, in January 2011, the Passport Seva Project was cleared for launch across the country. By 14th June 2012, all the planned 77 PSKs were set up and operationalised in the country. After certification by the STQC in mid-June 2012, the Project has entered Operation and Maintenance Phase for the next six years. The Ministry is also in process of establishing Passport Seva Laghu Kendras (PSLK). More than 1.18 crore passport applications have been processed under the new system as on 30th September, 2013.

1.14 The Ministry of External Affairs is engaged in comprehensive overhaul of passport delivery system through the Passport Seva Project. As informed by the Ministry, in December, 2012, the Computer Society of India (CSI) in association with Nihilent Technologies, adjudged Passport Seva Project as the most significant e-Governance initiative of the Govt. of India undertaken during 2011-12 and recognised the successful efforts in application of ICT for good governance. The PSP has also won 'eIndia Award 2013' in July 2013, which recognized the enhanced usage of ICT as envisioned in the PSP and has brought about transformation in the functioning of Passport Offices. This high-impact IT driven transformational initiative of Passport Seva is immensely contributing to NeGP's objective of making Government services accessible

to common man ensuring efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs.

E. Rollout of Passport Seva Project

1.15 Passport Seva Project is an innovative high impact e-governance initiative. The Committee have keenly followed the implementation of the project. As per the Annual Report of the Ministry of External Affairs 2008-09, the pilot project was expected to begin at Chandigarh and Bengaluru by July-August 2009. On the issue of delay in rollout of Passport Seva Project, the Ministry submitted in the following written reply as under:

"The Agreement was signed by the Ministry with TCS on 13th October 2008. The original timeline for completion of Project was April 2010. However, due to technical, operational and other infrastructural problems, the project was delayed. The pilot phase was commenced at 4 PSKs under RPO Bangalore in May 2010 at 3 PSKs under RPO Chandigarh in August 2010. The penalty as per terms of the Agreement has been imposed on TCS. The certification of all the processes involved in the new passport issuance system by the STQC, an agency under DIT, Govt of India was done in January 2011. Only after that, the roll-out plan was firmed up. "

1.16 The Ministry has informed that the tender is valid for TCS for six years from June 2012 onwards and opening of new PSKs need fresh process or appointment by nomination. In this context, the Committee desired to know the rationale for the period of tendering and the model being followed by other Government Departments under public-private partnership with service providers. The Ministry submitted the following details in a written reply:

“RFP was finalised in 2007 in consultation with NISG and therefore at this stage, it is not possible to comment on the period of tendering of PSP. However, the Agreement with TCS contains a clause permitting the Ministry to extend the Agreement by further two years on the same terms and conditions, implying that the Agreement could be extended up to 12th June 2020.

Ministry does not have any information on the models being followed by other Govt Ministry/Deptts.”

F. Financial Implications of Passport Seva Project

1.17 When the Committee desired to know about the financial implications on the Government in connection with the Passport Seva Project, the Ministry furnished a statement showing the expenditure of Rs.172,31,22,280/- incurred by the Ministry in connection with PSP from 1-4-2006 to 31-12-2013.

1.18 On the total amount of service fee paid to TCS since the onset of Passport Seva Project, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply submitted as under:

"The total amount of Service Fee paid to TCS from the Go-live date of PSP i.e. 12th June, 2012 to 31st December, 2013 is Rs. 109,93,07,085/- . (Rupees one hundred nine crore ninety three lakh seven thousand eighty five)."

1.19 The Committee noted that 'as per the Master Service Agreement (MSA), the SP is liable to be penalized wherever service levels are not adhered to'. In this context, the Committee desired to know whether there has been any instance wherein the service provider has been penalized. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"During the pre-pilot phase of the Project, the Service Provider (SP) was levied penalty of Rs. 48 Lakhs due to delay in start of the pilot and Rs. 34.20 Lakhs penalty was levied during roll-out phase. At the pre-pilot stage the major delay was due to Passport Application related issues, however at roll-out stage the penalty was due to delay in setting up of PSKs."

1.20 On being asked about the financial implications on account of opening of PSKs. The Ministry clarified that they have not spent any sum on setting up PSKs, however, Rs.1.53 crore approximately per annum is being paid as rental for additional space for co-located PSKs in Srinagar, Shimla, Dehradun, Raipur and Ranchi. In this context, the Committee desired to know about the rationale of co-located PSKs. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"A total of 68 locations were recommended in the Report which were placed before the Union Cabinet for approval. However, the Note to Cabinet contained a stipulation that more locations could be added during implementation phase. Subsequently, 9 more locations were added while publishing the RFP in 2007 and minor changes were also made in the locations. It was also stipulated in the

RFP that 68 PSKs were to be located in premises to be leased by the Service Provider and 9 to be co-located with the existing passport offices i.e. only the bare space to be provided by the Ministry. It was also mentioned in the RFP that *'the cities/locations where PFCs (PSKs) have to be set up are indicated in Annexure I though there may be few changes in it (the locations) by the time SP starts the project''*

1.21 The Committee further desired to know about the financial implication of opening of Passport Seva Laghu Kendras and revenue model for these PSLKs. The Ministry furnished the list of places where Passport Seva Laghu Kendras/Mini Passport Seva Kendras are to be established and stated as under:

“As the decision on setting up PSLKs was taken up much later than publishing of the RFP relating to PSP in October, 2007, there is no provision in the PSP for setting up PSLKs and therefore full responsibility for their setting up rests with the Ministry, which is required to provide all financial, manpower, infrastructural and technical support. Setting up of PSLKs involves broadly leasing/purchase of space, liaising with State PWD for civil and electrical works at the selected site or alternatively appointment of Consultant for preparation of bid documents for carrying out civil and electrical works, furnishing of interiors, office furniture, counters, work-stations, computer hardware, cameras, fingerprint scanners, linkage/networking with PO, Data Centre/Disaster Recovery Centre, telephones, fax, photocopier, water coolers, air-conditioning, generator, UPS, Queue Management System, VOIP system, CCTV cameras, LCD Display, TV, fire fighting equipment, provision of security and cleaning. Adequately trained manpower including Central Passport Organisation (CPO) officials or officials on deputation from concerned State Govt., Citizen Service Executives (CSEs) / Data Entry Operators (DEOs) and Resident Engineers would also need to be provided at each PSLK. It also needs to be ensured that IT hardware/software is fully compatible with PSP and responsibility for its maintenance, operation, licensing, connectivity and replacement is also entrusted to a vendor/supplier to ensure a single point of accountability and sustainability of the PSLKs in the long run. It is also to be kept in view that as per MSA, TCS has been entrusted to render front-end services on all India basis and a particular Service Charge has been fixed for those services. As the additional PSLKs are beyond the purview of PSP/MSA, a new revenue model would be required. It is also a moot question whether work relating to additional PSLKs, even restricted to IT infrastructure, should be awarded only after fresh tenders are invited or on Nomination Basis. Either way it affects the present revenue model. All these challenges need to be addressed in order

to set up additional PSLKs. All these multiplicity of factors have resulted in delay in opening PSLKs.”

1.22 On the issue of financial implications of opening of PSLKs, the Ministry in post-evidence reply clarified that the PSLKs are beyond the scope of PSP and all the responsibility to set up and operationalise the PSLKS, has to be borne by the Ministry and the Service Provider may, however, be asked to provide IT support and integrate the systems with Passport Seva. In this context, the Committee desired to know about the revenue model for the PSLKs. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"The Ministry has not taken any decision on the revenue model for the PSLKs. The NISG had been requested to indicate revenue model in the feasibility study on PSLKs but on the advice of Finance Division, the scope of work given to NISG has been curtailed to only a 'Quick Study'. The NISG is expected to provide its recommendations by end of February 2014."

1.23 In this context, the Committee desired to know the reasons for delay in submission of Report by the National Institute for Smart Government (NISG) on phase II of the Passport Seva Project and whether the matter has been pursued with NISG. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"There has been some divergence of views within the Ministry on the scope of feasibility study being carried out by NISG ... A final view has since been taken and the Ministry has been constantly pursuing the matter with NISG."

1.24 When the Committee desired to know the amount for various category of services provided and amount paid per unit to each agency for various activities, including TCS, Indian Security Press, Nashik, Service Provider, Department of Police and Department of Post, the Ministry in a post-evidence stated as under:

"The fee for Normal category Fresh/Reissue passport is Rs.1500/- for 36 page booklet and Rs.2000/- for 60 page booklet; for Tatkaal category, additional Rs.2000/- have to be paid ; for re-issue of passport in case of damaged /lost /stolen passport cases, the fee is Rs.3000/- for 36 page booklet and Rs.3500/- for 60 page booklet.

Following are the current rates at which Travel Documents are being supplied by ISP, Nashik:

Sl. No.	Particulars	Unit	Approved rate in Rs.
1	India International Ordinary/Official/Diplomatic Passport	Per Booklet	284/-
2	India International Ordinary Jumbo & Diplomatic Passport Booklets	Per Booklet	445/-
3	Emergency Certificates (PCO-7)	Per piece	246/-
4	Identity Certificate	Per piece	221/-
5	MRV Stickers International variety (old & new)	Per Sticker	61/-
6	India-China Border Trade Pass	Per Book	301/-
7	Person of Indian Origin Cards (4 pages)	Per Book	336/-

Payment to State / UT Govts for Police Verification is being made in the following manner:

(a) If Police Verification Report (PVR) is received within 21 days: Rs. 100/- and (b) if PVR is received after 21 days: Rs. 25/-

India Post is paid Rs.100/- per passport application accepted at Speed Post Centres.

Payment to TCS is made as per Schedule VI of the MSA at the following rate:

I. (New Booklet Service)

Quarterly Volume	<= 15 lakhs	>15 & <= 20 lakhs	>20 & <= 25 lakhs	>25 lakhs
Service charge rate (Rs.)	199.00	195.00	190.00	171.87

II. (Miscellaneous Service)

Quarterly Volume	<= 3 lakhs	>3 & <= 4 lakhs	>4 & <= 5 lakhs	>5 lakhs
Service charge rate (Rs.)	108.23	88.49	82.15	77.61

G. Location of Passport Seva Kendras

1.25 Under the Passport Seva Project 77 Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) have been established. There has been concern over the location of PSKs as well as constant demands for increasing the number of PSKs. While furnishing rationale and justifying the criteria for selection of location and the proposal for future, the Ministry in a written submission stated as under:

“The Union Cabinet mandated Passport Seva Project envisaged setting up and operationalisation of 77 PSKs in the country on PPP basis. This was accomplished by June 2012. The location of PSKs was based on a study by the National Institute for Smart Government (NISG) in 2006-07 which took into account the number of passport applications received by the Passport Offices during 2001-2005 from areas under their jurisdiction. Over the last two years, the Ministry has received several proposals and recommendations from representatives of the public and other forums for establishing more PSKs in the country. As these proposals are beyond the scope of work of PSP, the Ministry has requested the NISG to carry out a feasibility study in this regard. The Ministry has not set any population-wise target for setting up Passport Offices/PSKs.”

1.26 The Ministry further clarified that the NISG in connection with preparing concept paper on PSP in 2006 had conducted a sample study of select Passport Offices viz. Bangalore, Hyderabad, Delhi, Mumbai, Chandigarh, Ghaziabad and Lucknow, taking into account data for 2005.

1.27 During the course of examination, the Ministry furnished the statewise list of PSKs. The Committee observed that the state of Kerala has 13 PSKs, Maharashtra has 7 PSKs, Delhi NCT has 3 PSK while the States like Bihar, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha have only one PSK each. The Committee noted that in the original Project, for the entire North-Eastern Region there was only one PSK at Guwahati which covered other 6 North-Eastern States also. Furthermore, the Committee drew the attention of the Ministry to the fact that there have been instances of few districts having more than one PSK while other places have been left out. On further query by the Committee, the Ministry admitted that most of the North-Eastern States (except Assam) and some other interior areas remained uncovered by Passport Seva Project. During the evidence before the Committee, the Foreign Secretary submitted the following clarification regarding PSKs/PSLKs in North Eastern States as under:

“Apart from adding the 77 PSKs, the Ministry is working on setting up of what are called Mini-PSKs in North Eastern States and some other parts of the country... in addition to the Guwahati Passport Seva Kendra, we will be setting up a mini Seva Kendra in Aizawl”

1.28 In view of the opening of Mini PSKs/PSLKs in North-Eastern Region, the Committee desired to know about the basis for identification of their location and sought Ministry’s

justification for the delays in opening the Mini PSKs in North-Eastern Region. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“As follow-up of one of the Action Points that emerged during Chief Secretaries Conference on 1-2 February 2010, it was decided to upgrade facilities for passport services in the North Eastern States. Accordingly, establishing of 14 mini-PSKs now known as PSLKs, including those in the North East and other locations across the country besides 77 PSKs was notified by the Ministry vide GSR 371(E) dated 28th April 2010...” .”

1.29 The Ministry also informed the Committee that apart from these 14 Mini-PSKs, Karimnagar and Bhimavaram were also added, following an announcement by the former External Affairs Minister.

1.30 The Committee underscored the need for expediting the process of establishing mini-PSKs in various States of North Eastern Region in their 20th and 22nd Report. During the evidence, the Foreign Secretary assured the Committee as under:

“We are committed to setting up 16 Passport Seva Lagu kendras across the country including the North Eastern States. A PSLK is already functional in Aizwal since July, 2012. The Civil and Electrical works undertaken by Meghalaya State PWD for PS LK Shillong is nearing completion and MEA team has visited Agartala.”

1.31 On the issue of delay in establishment of PSLKs in North-East, in the post-evidence reply the Ministry informed that in Aizwal, it is functioning as PACC since July 2012 as IT infrastructure is to be upgraded so as to integrate with Passport Seva Project. In Shillong, civil and electronic work is concluded and office furniture and IT infrastructure needs to be arranged. Site is finalized in Agartala, site is identified in Imphal and site is being located at Itanagar as well as Nagaland. On the reasons for delay, the Ministry stated that in Aizwal feasibility of cost etc. involved is under examination in consultation with NISG, in Agartala, financial approval for lease is awaited, in Sikkim work is in progress and correspondence is going on with State Government for Imphal. There is non-availability of suitable site at present in Itanagar and Kohima, The Ministry has further cited 'non-availability of suitable site at present' as the reason for delay at Bhimavaram (AP), Darbhanga (Bihar), Kharagpur (WB), Leh (J&K) and Siliguri (WB).

1.32 On Committee's query about incorporation of provision for opening Mini PSKs/PSLKS in Phase-I or they are proposed to be covered under Phase-II, the Ministry in a

written reply stated that these will be deemed to have been covered under Phase –II. On request being received for opening of new PSKs, the Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

"Over the last two years, recommendations have been received from a number of representatives of public, dignitaries and forums for setting up more PSKs/PSLKs across the country....This number has been increasing by the week. The Ministry has envisaged setting up PSLKs in the areas not covered so far so that benefits of better passport services could be made available to people residing there."

1.33 Regarding the establishment of additional PSKs/PSLKs, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply categorically stated that the Ministry will be able to take a view only after the receipt of/ recommendation of the NISG which is expected in end of February 2014. Further, the Ministry also furnished list of 85 proposals received as on 31st December, 2013 for the establishment of new PSKs.

H. Role of various agencies and inter agency coordination

1.34 In view of the involvement of multiple agencies in the process of Passport Issuance, the Committee desired to be furnished with details of the work carried out by various agencies in the new system. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"The main role-players in the Passport Seva system are the Ministry, Passport Offices, PSKs, CPPF, Police, India Security Press (ISP) Nashik, India Post and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) being the Service Provider (SP) for PSP. Their roles are summarised below:--

- i. **Ministry (Hqs-CPV Division)** : Administration of Passport Act, 1967 and Passport Rules, 1980 and performance of all functions laid down thereunder ; all Policy matters; administration/control of PSP; overseeing of working of Passport Offices/PSKs ; administration of CPO cadre and PLIS ; financial management of CPV; issuance of diplomatic/official passports at Hqs. ; redressal of grievances ; appeal cases; RTI; court cases; procurement of passport stationery/travel documents from ISP Nashik; interaction/coordination with concerned Ministries/Depts/State & UT Govts/Police; Public outreach measures.
- ii. **Passport Offices** : Implementation of Policy laid down by the Hqs; Administration and control of PSKs under their respective jurisdiction; issue/printing/revocation/impounding of passports; all complex passport cases escalated by PSKs or received directly; accounting of passport revenue ; redressal of grievances; RTI, court cases.

- iii. **PSKs** : Front-end passport services such as token issuance, initial scrutiny of passport service related application forms and supporting documents, acceptance of fee where applicable, scanning of documents, taking photos and biometrics, verification of documents, granting of passport, issuance of PCCs, escalation of complex cases to Passport Office.
- iv. **Central Passport Printing Facility (CPPF)**: Printing and dispatch of passports based on data received from various Passport Offices. Set up to take care of spill-over of passport printing workload of Passport Offices.
- v. **Police**: Verification of personal particulars and antecedents of passport applicants and dispatch of reports to Passport Offices.
- vi. **ISP Nashik** : Printing of all travel documents and supply thereof to Passport Offices/Ministry.
- vii. **India Post**: Dispatch of passports to applicants by Speed Post.
- viii. **TCS**:
 - a. All hardware, software, networking & PCs of the entire Passport system.
 - b. Physical Infrastructure for all PSKs including interiors thereof.
 - c. Data Centre (DC), Disaster Recovery Centre (DRC) and CPPF setup.
 - d. Maintenance and operations of all the above.
 - e. Staff for all SP counters at PSKs.
 - f. Technical staff for supporting PSK, PO, DC, DRC and CPPF.
 - g. Training on the application software, training on general computer skills, soft skills, and customer service & delivery.
 - h. Change management and communication strategy & implementation.
 - i. Call Centre & grievance handling."

1.35 Elaborating upon the administrative structure of the Passport Seva Project, the Ministry in a written submission stated as under:

“The administrative structure of Passport Seva Project has been devised to establish and maintain the formal and informal processes for managing the relationship between MEA and the Service Provider. The Program Governance Structure of Passport Seva Project put in place by MEA comprises of the following units:

- a. Empowered Committee headed by Foreign Secretary.
- b. Program Management Committee headed by Additional Secretary (CPV).
- c. Program Management Unit headed by Joint Secretary (PSP).
- d. Project Team at each Regional Passport Office /Passport Office headed by concerned Regional Passport Officer/Passport Officer.”

1.36 As informed by the Ministry, Passport Seva is an IT driven program with over 2,500 persons deployed from the private service provider and 2,400 officials from the Ministry of External Affairs. While clarifying the exact role and functions of the officials of the Ministry of External Affairs at the PSKs, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"The PSKs are headed by Asstt. Passport Officers or Passport Granting Officers who are assisted by Granting Officers (GOs) of the rank of Superintendents and Verification Officers (VOs) who could be Assistants/UDCs/LDCs. The APO/PGO supervises the working of entire PSK – administrative, accounts and operational and liaises with the Passport Office concerned. The Head of PSK also deals with applicants to address their difficulties and attends to the cases escalated by GOs/VOs. He also acts as Granting Officer, whenever needed."

1.37 The Committee note that Police has to play a vital role in the existing passport issuance system. However, as per the Seventh schedule 'Police' is a State subject. In this context, the Committee desired to know whether the Ministry has any mechanism to engage with the different/all state Governments on various issues including online connectivity, delays and speeding up the process of verification and the response of various state governments to the new system as well as whether the Ministry has tried to identify the reasons for delay in police verification. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

"The Passport Officers keep in touch with State Police on passport service related matters to expedite verification reports. Senior officials from the Ministry also interact with Police at appropriate level. A Verification Pendency Report is being sent regularly to all the District Police Hqs for monitoring and taking remedial action.

While most state governments are receptive to the new system, broadband connectivity, lack of trained manpower and IT infrastructure is a challenge in certain states.

It appears that the Police does not accord due priority to verification process. The Ministry, nevertheless, has been impressing upon the Police to expedite PV process. a letter is being sent by Foreign Secretary to all the Chief Secretaries of States/UTs in the country."

1.38 During the on- the - spot study visits of the Committee, the Committee were informed that tripartite meeting are held regularly between the officials from local Passport Office, Deptt. of Police and Postal Department to ensure coordination.

1.39 The Committee are happy to note that as a part of the national e-governance plan of the Government, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has embarked on the ambitious mission Passport Seva Project to make the passport issuance system more efficient. The Committee, however, take note of the undue delay in execution of the Project in the

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

(Recommendation No.1)

1.40 The Committee take a note of payment made to each agency on the basis of per passport and find that charges paid to TCS for conducting front-end activity in regard to issue of new passport range from Rs. 171.87 to Rs.199.00 while for miscellaneous services, it ranges from Rs. 77.61 to Rs. 103.23 and Rs. 100.00 per passport application was paid to India Post for accepting and forwarding the application to the concerned RPO. The Committee further observe that the payment made to Department of Police for Police

Verification (PV) is only Rs.100.00 in cases where it is received within 21 days, while it is only Rs. 25 .00, if Police Verification Report (PVR) is received after 21 days. The Committee are of the opinion that in view of the tedious nature of the job and the time taken by the police officials in actually visiting residences of applicants, verifying documents and also visiting references in case it is required and involvement of CID in carrying out verification in certain case, the Ministry should enhance the rates paid to police for carrying out verification.

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

(Recommendation No.2)

1.41 The Committee observe that based on the feasibility study conducted by National Institute for Smart Government (NISG), the Government had approved to set up 77 PSKs across the country on the Public Private Partnership (PPP) basis. The Committee also observe that the only criteria to decide the location of PSKs was the number of applications received by the Passport Offices during 2001-2005 from the areas under their jurisdiction. Thereafter, it has been decided to open 16 Passport Seva Kendras because many of the areas including most of the North Eastern States remained uncovered. Even after that there

is a huge demand from various other places for opening of PSKs or PSLKs in view of difficulties being faced by people in the interior areas in the country. Due to such demands the Ministry has again asked NISG to conduct another study to decide the places for opening of more PSKs/PSLKs during the phase II of the Project. The Committee strongly criticize the approach of the Ministry in deciding the places for opening of PSKs and keeping no provision for identifying other places which require such facilities which was evident due to closure of multiple channels of submission, particularly in the rural and interior areas. Simultaneously, the Committee also do not approve the policy of opening of more than one Kendra in same districts and ignoring other places particularly, the far off districts and the North Eastern States.

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

The Committee observe that Andaman and Nicobar Islands is not yet included in the Passport Seva Project. The Committee note that one of the objectives of the Passport Seva

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

(Recommendation No.3)

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

in North-Eastern States and complete them in the shortest possible time in association with respective State Governments .

(Recommendation No.4)

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

(Recommendation No. 5)

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

(Recommendation No.6)

CHAPTER II

PROCEDURE OF SEEKING ONLINE APPOINTMENT, VERIFICATION PROCEDURE AT PSK AND STATUS CHECKING SYSTEM

A. Problems in seeking online appointment

Obtaining appointments is a very important process after which citizens have to visit the PSK for submission of application and verification of documents. The appointment system ensures avoiding congestion at the PSK and cutting down waiting time for the applicants. However, the Committee noted that inspite of introduction of online payment of fee, there have been instances of delay in getting appointment. In this context, the Committee desired to be furnished with data and status note on the PSKs wherein the appointment is available only after a period of more than 10 days. The Ministry accepted and informed the Committee that a sample data for 18th December, 2013 shows that out of the total 77 PSKs in the country, in 31 PSKs appointments were available after 10 days from date of application under Normal (Fresh/Reissue) category passports. The Committee noted that online appointments are available in 8 PSKs after a gap of forty days or more which includes PSKs in Patna, Pune, Bareilly, Ghaziabad, Varanasi, Vijayawada II, Vishakhapatnam and Gorakhpur. The Committee observe that pilot project under Passport Seva Project was launched in Bengaluru yet, in both the PSKs at Bengaluru the appointments are available after twenty days. The Committee further note that though the time taken in police verification in Andhra Pradesh is minimum in the entire country i.e seventeen days but it takes more than forty days to seek online appointment in two of the PSKs in Andhra Pradesh.

2.2 The Committee noted that the applicants have been facing problems at various stages of the new system including seeking online appointments. In response to the specific query about the difficulties in getting appointments and steps taken by the Ministry to ease the situation, the Ministry submitted as under:

“The Ministry having come to know of various instances of blocking of appointments by vested interests and to address the challenges posed by digital divide in the country, has allowed walk-in facility to citizens having Application Registration Number (ARN) to enable them to apply for Tatkaal services ; issue of PCC ; deletion of

Emigration Check Required (ECR) status ; inclusion of name of spouse in passport and new booklets where pages have been exhausted. Senior citizens (above 60 years) ; minors below 15 whose parents hold valid passports; differently-abled persons ; central/state govt servants and their spouse/dependent minor children having ARN No., have also been permitted walk-facility. Family Tokens for up to 4 members are issued to avoid giving different dates to members of the same family. Besides this, where applicants are not able to obtain online appointments, they are advised to visit concerned Regional Passport Office (RPO) in their area. Such applicants should fill-up the application online, generate 'Application Reference Number' (ARN) and visit RPO along with printed 'ARN Sheet'. RPO will consider such cases and will give staggered appointments keeping in view the load/capacity at the respective PSK under their jurisdiction.”

2.3 On the recent measures undertaken by the Ministry to further streamline the passport issuance system, the Foreign Secretary during evidence stated that the number of public dealing counters has been increased from the erstwhile 350 to 1610 in the new system and public dealing hours have gone up from four hours to seven hours a day and further submitted as under:

“The Ministry has taken a number of steps in the recent past in response to the suggestions made by this august Committee and to make the passport issuance system easier and more accessible. So, amongst the steps I might mention:

That the passport website has been upgraded just two months back, in September, to make it more user friendly and it is kept updated with advisories and press releases relating to passport service developments;

To address concerns regarding difficulty in obtaining appointments, the Ministry introduced online payment system in July this year. There has been a noticeable improvement in availability of appointments since then. There are certain categories of applicants and services for which walk-in facility is available. However, to meet increased demand for passport services, 81 Passport Melas were organized from time to time in weekends by 27 Passport Offices from 1st January to 30th November, 2013. During these Melas, 35,525 passport applications were processed;

The M Passport Seva App., which was launched on Android platform in March, 2013 is now available on Windows and Apple IOS platforms also. The M Passport Seva App., provides passport related information including TSP locator, applicable fee, mode of submission, and tracking of passport application status;

A premium optional SMS service has been introduced to enable citizens to receive alerts and updates regarding progress of their passport applications and pending actions;

As part of expanding its outreach, the Ministry is bringing out a Passport Patrika in association with service provider for dissemination of passport related information.”

2.4 On being asked by the Committee about the factors responsible for release of appointments, the Ministry informed that it is for the Passport Officers to release appointments based on the handling capacity of respective PSKs and that at present, nearly 35,000 appointments are being released of which as many as 30% sometimes are not availed of by the applicants. The Committee desired to know whether in such a scenario, can the Ministry not release larger number of slots taking into account the ‘no show cases’ so as to ensure optimal utilisation. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“The Passport Officers are under instructions to release additional appointments to take care of ‘no show cases’. However, this has to be done with caution. The Passport Officer is no position to know in advance the extent of cancellations/no shows. These numbers are known only by hindsight. There could be every possibility that there are very few cancellations/no shows on certain days. In that event, there would be chaos at PSKs which are designed to handle certain number of applicants every day. Provision also has to be kept for Walk-in categories which again is unknown number and has to be entertained only within certain timings at each PSK. The Passport Officer therefore has to take a calculated risk in releasing additional appointments.”

2.5 The Committee also took note of Ministry’s observation that in some PSKs up to 30% ‘No Show Cases’ occur due to booking of slots by Agents/Touts. In Committee’s view, the Ministry’s statement is very crucial as it forms the very basis of Ministry’s understanding of the problems in the present system. The Committee desired to be acquainted with the material evidence with the Ministry to draw such conclusions or is it mere assumption. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“On the analysis of the appointment data for the six months period October 2012 – March 2013, it was found that more than 20 appointments were booked through 6981 different internet protocol addresses. In some cases the number of appointments booked through an IP address was even between 100 to 160. Considering that not more than 3 appointments can be booked at a time through an IP address, it safely follows that these IP addresses belong not to individual applicants but to internet café owners/agents/touts”.

2.6 When the Committee desired to know about the measures undertaken by the Ministry to address the problem, the Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“The main challenge faced in the deposition of forms is difficulty in certain regions in obtaining appointment. It is Ministry’s view that once appointment is confirmed and availed, the citizen experience at PSK is very satisfactory. The difficulty in obtaining appointments is being addressed through advance payment of passport fees to cut down on blocking of appointments by vested interests. The modality is being developed with the approval of the Controller General of Accounts, Ministry of Finance and in association with the IT Deptt of State Bank of India, Mumbai. Citizens would be able to make payment through SBI Challans, debit/credit cards and e-banking...”

2.7 On the impact of introduction of online payment of fee, the Ministry submitted the following facts in a written reply:

“At present, nearly 30,000 passport related applications are being processed per working day. The impact of online payment system is evident in the fact that out of 6, 56,050 appointments country wide in November, 2013, the number of ‘no-shows’ was 7,996 i.e. 1.2 % only, down from 20-30% earlier.”

2.8 In context of the online payment of fee when the Committee desired to know about the options available with the general public especially in rural areas, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply submitted as under:

"The Ministry is in consultation with India Post and DeitY for co-opting Speed Post Centres (SPCs) and Common Service Centres (CSCs) in Passport Seva. This will greatly enhance the outreach of Passport Seva as there are over 1500 Speed Post Centres and 90,000 Common Service Centres in the country. The citizens can utilize these Centres to file Passport applications online and obtain appointments."

2.9 The Ministry in a post-evidence reply further stated that appointments can be made available early provided more PSKs are set up and sufficient manpower within the CPO cadre is available to man the PSKs. The number of PSKs under PSP is frozen at 77 and there are shortages at certain levels in CPO cadre.

B. Verification Process at PSK and referring applications from PSKs to RPOs

2.10 The Committee have come across several instances where during the process of verification of document and granting, a large number of applicants are referred from PSKs to RPOs on various grounds creating unnecessary delays and harassment. The Committee sought Ministry's justification for making this arrangement wherein the officials sitting at PSKs are unable to resolve the queries and desired to know whether these queries can be resolved by the officials sitting in PSKs in consultation with RPOs telephonically or through hotline with concerned sections in the RPO/PO. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“To the extent possible, efforts are made to resolve the issues by the Heads of PSKs who are Govt officials. However, in the event of any shortcoming in the supporting documents or where these are not perceived to be genuine, reference is made to concerned Passport Office to ascertain the authenticity from the issuing authorities. Policy cases such as lost /damaged passports, adoption and change of date/place of birth also need to be referred to Passport Offices for decision. Since May 2010, 1,09,623 cases were referred to Passport Offices as on 3rd August 2012, which comes to 212 cases per day for all the 77 PSKs (Less than 3 cases a day per PSK).”

2.11 In view of involvement of more than one agency in Passport Seva Project and particularly within the PSK, the Committee was informed that a detailed instruction booklet was under preparation to clearly delineate the function of each category of personnel manning the PSKs. In this context, the Ministry in a written submission stated as under:

“PSKs act as extended arms of Passport Offices. PSKs are headed by a Government officers, generally by Assistant Passport Officers (APOs) or Passport Granting Officers (PGOs). Complex cases or where the line of action is not clear or the ones where there is need for further verification are escalated by PSK Heads to respective Passport Offices for seeking solution. An instruction booklet containing instructions in the steps and documents involved in processing various passport services has been sent to all the Passport Offices, which would help in reducing such referrals.”

2.12 The Committee noted that applicants face a great deal of difficulty if there is certain system based wrong formatting/wrong printing of personal details or there are certain minor errors on the appointment sheet etc. The Committee sought Ministry's view on their suggestion that such problems be dealt at a separate counter rather than asking the applicant to go the process all over again. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“In the new system, the applicant gets full opportunity to see the personal details that would be printed on the passport and the chances of error are few. In case of wrong printing of personal details, a new booklet has to be issued and previous booklet has to be cancelled. It also needs to be checked whether the error is on the part of applicant or the system. In the case of latter, the replacement booklet is provided gratis. As per the design of the PSP, capturing of photograph and biometrics, payment of passport fee, verification of documents and granting is done at PSK while the printing, lamination, signing and dispatch of passport is done at the RPO. The applicant can approach the Head of PSK/RPO for rectification of any error.”

2.13 The Committee during the transitory phase have come across several cases, wherein the newly established PSKs or the PSKs that have been established for more than six months are unable to even maintain proper filing system, files were untraceable in many cases, with the applicant running from pillar to post in different offices with no idea of location of his/her file. The Committee note that in several cases the applicants are unable to know the status of their applications under the new system. The Committee desired to know the basic reasons for such lackluster arrangements at the PSKs and the reason for not regularly updating the status of application on the website. The Ministry in a written reply submitted as under:

“All the files in the new system bear a unique number which can be tracked through system 24x7 by indicating the number and date of birth. There is no manual intervention in the process. The Call Centre facility is also available 24x7. As soon as passport is dispatched, a SMS/e-mail alert is also sent to the applicant informing the Passport Dispatch status. However, there could be some cases where data may not have been migrated from the old to new system resulting difficulties in tracking. It would be helpful to indicate specific cases to address this issue.”

2.14 The entire passport issuance system has come under criticism due to delays at various ends. In view of the fact that TCS conducts only front end job but all other functions are performed by government agencies either MEA/MHA or security press. In this context, the Committee desired to know about the time taken by TCS for forwarding an application to RPO and from RPO to designated Police Stations as well as the steps that have been taken to reduce the time period in handling and disposal of files in passport offices as well as Police Stations. The Ministry in a written reply furnished as under:

“The applications are forwarded by TCS to Passport Office within 24 working hours and from the RPO to Police stations, it takes up to 3 - 7 working days.

Passport Officers are under instruction to dispose of the files without delay. They are also under instructions to keep in touch with concerned Police officers to speed up PV

process. A Police Verification Pendency Report is electronically sent through PSP System to DPHQs twice a week for monitoring pendency and taking remedial action.”

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

(Recommendation No.7)

2.16 The Committee note that as a measure to curb the tendency of 'No Show Cases', the Ministry has introduced provision of online payment of fee through SBI chalans, debit/credit cards etc. and this step has shown welcome results and such cases have come

down to 1.2 percent from 30 percent. However, the Committee may not deny the fact that a large section of the population is not electronically connected to the Banks or are not in possession of debit/credit cards of State Bank of India. They are also facing difficulty in deposition of fee through their SBI cards. The Committee, therefore, desire that initiatives should be taken to incorporate the credit/debit cards of more popular nationalized/private banks for the purpose of online payment of passport fee to facilitate the applicants.

(Recommendation No.8)

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

(Recommendation No.9)

2.18 The Committee note that in each PSK, officials from RPO are present as Passport Issuing Authority (PIA) as well as the employees of TCS to conduct the front end activities. However, the Committee have often come across instances that a large number of cases are

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

(Recommendation No.10)

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

(Recommendation No.11)

CHAPTER III
ISSUES RELATED TO POLICE VERIFICATION

The Police Verification is a key process in the entire passport issuance system. On being enquired by the Committee, the Ministry furnished RPO-wise data regarding average time taken for police verification as on 31 December 2013. The Committee noted that there is huge disparity between average numbers of days taken for Police Verification. It was as high as 238 days in case of Arunachal Pradesh, 217 days for Manipur, 195 days for Assam and 189 days for Tripura. In States like West Bengal, it is 107 days, it is 93 days for Madhya Pradesh and it is 67 days for Uttar Pradesh. In respect of Union Territories, it is 89 days for Dadra and Nagar Haveli and 85 days for Lakshwadeep. However, police verification process seems to have considerably improved wherein the process has been fast tracked. In Delhi the average number of days taken for Police Verification is 13 days, 17 days for Andhra Pradesh and 19 days for Haryana.

3.2 When the Committee desired to know average time taken/being taken for Police Verification in the earlier system and new system in each state and the steps that are being taken to reduce the time for PVR. The Ministry stated in a written reply as under:

“There is no data of average time taken for police verification in the old system. Ordinarily the PVR should be received in 21 days. The average time for PV on all-India basis was 49 days during April 2012 - March 2013. However, the percentage of PVRs on all India basis, received within 21 days has improved from 25 in September 2012 to 34 in April, 2013. The concerned Chief Secretaries have been requested to take necessary steps to switch over to DPHQ system for speeding up PV process.”

3.3 During the evidence, the Foreign Secretary enlightened the Committee on the issue of delay in police verification as under:

“We are aware that police verifications plays a very important role in the timely dispatch of passports. So, our project team is monitoring as to how it would take. We find that an all India average for the number of days for completing the police verification is 50 days, putting the public to great difficulty. Only about 36 per cent actually get within the desired limit of 21 days. Some States and Union Territories have got very good and low police verification processing time. Like Delhi Police

completes in 13 days; Andhra in 16 days; Haryana in 18 days; Kerala in 28 days; Chandigarh in 29 days..."

3.4 The Committee desired to know whether the Ministry/ RPOs have been able to identify the regions/districts where Police Verification Reports are taking very long time and sought information about these States/regions/districts. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"the average time taken for police verification during 2013, 6 states/UTs take less than one month, 9 states/UTs take from 1 to 2 months, 9 others take from 2 to 3 months, 3 states take 3 to 4 months, 2 states take 4 to 5 months, one takes 5 to 6 months and 5 take more than 6 months. The ones that take more than three months are Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Odisha, Sikkim, Tripura & West Bengal."

3.5 While furnishing data regarding uploading of Police Verification Report status electronically by the police authorities in various States/UTs and highlighting the problems being faced by RPOs in various State/UTs with regard to the above, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"The total number of PV initiated by the Passport Offices was 63,07,889 in 2013 and taking into account disposals and previous outstanding reports, the balance as on 31st December, 2013 was 8,35,363. It has been noticed from certain states/regions especially where manual model is still in vogue, that PV Reports are received in bulk in one go rather than transmitting these as soon as PVRs are received. Moreover, being not in the system, it is difficult to track their status."

3.6 The Committee desired to know whether the Police network of all the States has been integrated online with the Passport Portal as aimed by the Passport Seva Project and desired to have state-wise status and reasons for delay. The Committee also desired to know whether the issue of delay has been taken up with the Ministry of Home Affairs or the State Governments at appropriate level. The Ministry submitted the following facts in a written reply:

"The Passport Seva System has provision for all the States/UTs to electronically receive and update the PVRs. The procedures followed for PVRs in the different models viz. RPO (Manual), SPHQ, DPHQ-I and DPHQ..... SPHQ model is followed in Delhi, Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Kolkata and Mumbai ; DPHQ-1 model is followed in

Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu ; DPHQ model is followed in Chandigarh, Punjab, Karnataka, Jharkhand and Haryana. The states of Bihar, UP, Maharashtra other than Mumbai, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal other than Kolkata, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim follow RPO (manual) model for PVRs due to infrastructural challenges. Even though, MEA pays to State Govts Rs.100/- per passport application for PVR, some of the State Govts have not invested in the infrastructure required by the police for speedy PVR process. The matter is being taken up by the Foreign Secretary with Chief Secretaries of State/UT Governments to impress upon them to attach due importance and attention to this aspect of governance.”

3.7 The Committee desired to be acquainted with the difference between SPHQ model and DPHQ model of police verification and desire to know which system is more efficient. The Committee further desired to know about the States that have already implemented DPHQ model of police verification and the steps being taken by the CPV Division for implementation of DPHQ model in all the States. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"In the SPHQ model, the particulars are sent electronically by Passport Seva System to the SPHQ, the one and only centre in the state, which sends these to DPHQs and from there to Thana level. In the DPHQ model, the particulars are sent electronically directly to DPHQ and from there to Thana level. The DPHQ model is more efficient as it eliminates the step involving SPHQ which has to deal with the passport applications received from the entire state. Out of 35 states/UTs, barring Andaman & Nicobar which is not integrated with Passport Seva as yet, 12 states/UTs are following DPHQ model, one is following SPHQ model, 12 are following manual model and 9 are in mixed models i.e. some districts are in DPHQ and the rest in manual/SPHQ model. Out of 724 Police districts in the country, 410 are in DPHQ mode, 23 in SPHQ mode and 291 in manual mode. As mentioned above, there is no feedback from the states/UTs police deptts regarding difficulties in adoption of SPHQ/DPHQ models. Only Tamil Nadu state police had indicated that it is not possible for them to bear expenses on computers, printers, cartridges and paper. They instead desired TCS to bear expenses for each DPHQ on this account. It is felt that broadband connectivity, lack of trained manpower and IT infrastructure could be the possible challenges in other states as well."

3.8 In this context, the Committee desired to be furnished with the status report on establishing e-connectivity between RPOs and designated police points in Police Department. The

Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated that the Passport Seva system is already connectivity-ready and connected to SPHQs and DPHQs, wherever connectivity and IT infrastructure is available. The Committee desire to know whether any initiative is being taken by the Ministry of External Affairs to engage with the Department of Police in various States/UTs regarding training of the police officials for expediting police verification process in the new system. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated that necessary training has already been imparted to police personnel in the States/UTs by the Ministry through TCS.

3.9 While elucidating the mechanism to track/monitor movement of files from PSKs to RPOs to Department of Police and back, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"The flow of movement of files from PSKs to RPOs to Police and back is as follows :--

PSK : At the time of Granting stage, the system automatically generates the proforma for PV to SPHQ/DPHQ for Police Verification in case Police Verification is required.

SPHQ/Passport Office (in case of absence of SPHQ model) : Downloading and printing of Personal particulars Form and dispatch to respective DPHQ.

Police : (SPHQ/DPHQ/Police Station) : Verification of antecedents and personal particulars of applicant. Data entry and approval of PVRs electronically. Uploading of PV reports to Passport Office. Dispatch of physical PVRs to Passport Office to enable decision on issue of passports."

3.10 The Committee desired to know whether the Ministry has issued any guidelines/ specific instructions regarding the procedure to be followed for Police Verification Reports. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“The procedure for PVRs conveyed to the State Police is as follows :--

- i. In the new Passport Application Form, there is no personal particulars (PP) form. Personal particulars of the passport applicant are generated through the System. On the generation of the PV request from the PSKs, one electronic copy is sent to SPHQ and another copy is sent to respective District Police Hqs (DPHQ) wherever feasible, depending on the availability of connectivity and computers. The TCS personnel stationed at the SPHQ download and print PP Forms and attachments in duplicate, and send these to the respective DPHQ which in turn forwards copies to the respective police station and CID.
- ii. On receipt of PVRs from police stations including report from the CID, the police personnel at the DPHQ do the data entry and accord approval of PVR electronically with

Digital Signatures. In case where the electronic facility (computer and internet) is not available at the DPHQ, the TCS staff at the SPHQ make data entry of PVRs in the system, scan and upload these PVRs (which are already signed by the respective police stations). The approval of the PVRs whose data entry is done by TCS personnel, is done by the SPHQ designated police officer. Multiple applications entered by TCS staff are approved in bulk by the designated Police Officers.

iii. The physical PVRs are dispatched by the designated SPHQ Officer to the Passport Office in due course.

iv. The designated SPHQ Officers are expected to ensure that the PV Forms are dispatched /collected to/from police stations without delay.”

3.11 The Committee specifically desired to know whether there are any guidelines for the procedure to be followed for police verification process so as to maintain uniformity in the system. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated that the police being a state subject, it is for the respective Home Depts of the states/UTs to establish verification procedure depending on the security scenario.

3.12 The Committee sought Ministry’s views on reasons for delay in Police Verification process even in the new system. The Ministry in a written submission stated as under:

“Delay in receipt of police verification reports is a major cause of delay in issuance of passports. The Ministry has instructed the Passport Officers to keep in touch with local police officials to avoid delays in police verification of passport applications. The criticality of police verification is impressed upon the Chief Secretaries and DGPs from time to time. During interactions of senior officers of CPV Division with DGPs /Police Commissioners, the urgency in police verification is impressed upon. It is, however, seen that verification of personal particulars and antecedents does not have the same priority for the police as for the Ministry/RPOs. In the new system, PV (Police Verification) Form is triggered electronically up to State/District level (wherever such connectivity is available in the state). The State Police Hqs (SPHqs)/District Police Headquarters (DPHq) are expected to be connected to the PSP System through broadband connectivity. Digital Signature Certificates (DSCs) have been provided to PV approver at SPHQ/DPHQ to directly upload the PVR (Police Verification Report) electronically with no compromise on data security and non-repudiation. The success of networking of PSP with Police Stations in Hyderabad on pilot basis recently is visible as PVRs are now being received in 3 weeks. In Delhi too, PVRs are being issued quickly. As the infrastructure, e-connectivity and awareness about the benefits of e-governance in the states grows, the delay on this

account will be greatly reduced. The issuance of passports on the basis of electronic PVRs will become a reality only when the Crime & Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS), an e-Governance project undertaken by Ministry of Home Affairs is completed.”

3.13 While further justifying their position in regard to expediting the process of Police Verification, the Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“As of now, there is no alternative but to depend on State Police for carrying out verification of personal particulars and antecedents of passport applicants as that is the only agency possessing records of unlawful activities of individuals or groups. The Ministry feels that with the improvement of overall governance, attitudes would undergo change for the better. Completion and integration of other e-governance initiatives such as CCTNS, IVFRT, e-Migrate and Aadhar with Passport Seva System would also reduce the need for physical enquiry leading to a transparent and efficient service delivery.”

3.14 The Committee desired to know whether particular reasons have been identified by the respective Police Departments for delay in adopting the new system and sending of Police Verification Reports. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"There is no feedback from any state/UT police on the reasons of delay. Only Tamil Nadu state police had indicated that it is not possible for them to bear expenses on computers, printers, cartridges and paper. They instead desired TCS to bear expenses for each DPHQ on this account. It is felt that broadband connectivity, lack of trained manpower and IT infrastructure could be the possible challenges in other states as well."

3.15 The Ministry informed the Committee about the success of networking of PSP with Police Stations in Hyderabad on pilot basis recently which is visible as PVRs are now being received in 3 weeks. The Committee desired to know Ministry's view on the measures that can be adopted to streamline the system of police verification and steps that have been taken to decrease the time taken in police verification. The Ministry in written replies stated as under:

“The police verification can be expedited only when the entire verification system is computerized and manual intervention is minimal. The MHA is in the process of

implementing Crime & Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS) which would immensely help in obtaining clearances quickly. The state govts also need to expedite connectivity to Police Station level for fast verification."

3.16 During the Committee's study visit to Bengaluru in March 2012 to examine the implementation of the Passport Seva Project, the Committee had suggested for establishment for Police Passport Seva Kendras (PPSK) at Bangluru as Pilot Project with appellate authority. While furnishing a status note, the Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

"Two hundred and forty police personnel have been imparted training in electronic verification processing by TCS. The Commissioner of Police Bangalore has been requested on 30th July 2012 to operationalise the PPSK in pilot mode at the earliest."

3.17 While furnishing current status as well as the results of the Pilot Project and whether the Government plans to implement it on a larger scale, the Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

"The PPSK (Thana level PV Model) commenced functioning in Bangalore on 29th August, 2012. Since then more than 1,61,000 PVs were initiated out of which more than 1,50,000 reports have been received as on 24th May, 2013. The Thana level official can download, print and perform data entry of particulars of the passport applicant. However, PVR has to be approved only by the designated DPHQ officer. PVRs are sent manually to RPO Bangalore. However, police report is visible at RPO as soon as it is digitally signed and approved by DPHQ officer. It is for the Police/Home Deptt of the state to decide on extending the same to other DPHQs."

3.18 When the Committee desired to know whether instances of incomplete Police Verification Reports have increased in the recent past and whether the issue has been taken up with concerned state police authorities to overcome this problem, the Ministry has submitted the following reply:

"Instances of increase in incomplete PVRs have not come to Ministry's notice. However, the matter has been taken up with Chief Secretaries to impress upon them the need for providing complete PVRs speedily."

3.19 The Committee observed that in several States including Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the applicants are being called at Police Stations for police verification alongwith photographs and original of the documents which were already deposited with the application and the police officials do not visit at the address for inspection/verification. The Committee sought clarification

from the Ministry whether this practice is part of defined procedure or otherwise. The Committee particularly desired to know about the steps taken by the Government to implement a uniform police verification procedure for issuance of passports in all the States. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“Ministry has also learnt that applicants are sometimes called to the Police Stations along with photographs for verification of documents and that the policemen do not visit the residence of applicants for requisite verification of address etc. In order to have an effective and reliable verification, it is expected of the policemen to visit the residence of applicants to cross-check with them the entries in personal particulars form regarding identity and residence etc. This point has been included in the letter being addressed by Foreign Secretary to all the Chief Secretaries.”

3.20 In the reply to a query by the Committee, the Ministry further added as under:

"The Ministry agrees with Hon'ble Committee that the police are not expected to call the citizens to police stations. However, this needs more sensitization of police by the concerned State Govt Home Departments as MEA has no control over law enforcement agencies.”

3.21 The Committee noted that Ministry in a reply have submitted that a large number of categories are exempted from Police Verification Reports (PVRs). In this context, the Committee desired to know whether these stipulated norms are being followed by each RPO and sought clarification and desired to be furnished with a status note in that regard. The Committee further desired to know whether there is any rule regarding non-requirement of police verification for re-issue of passport within 3 years of expiry is being followed by each RPO. The Ministry in written reply submitted as under:

“Information on compliance with the norms stipulated for exemption from PVRs for certain categories is being obtained. Ministry keeps advising the RPOs to circulate passport issuance related instructions amongst the staff.

Information is being sought from all the RPOs on compliance with the said instruction.”

3.22 The Committee sought clarification regarding Police Verification for minors and desired to know whether there is any stated guideline in this regard. The Committee further desired to know about the measures that are taken by the Ministry to ensure that uniform norms are followed in the regard. The Ministry in a written reply submitted as under:

“The PVR requirement for minors are as follows:--

- a. If both or either parent holds a valid passport, the passport can be issued without PVR. Photocopies of parents’ passport should be attached with the application and at least one passport should contain spouse name
- b. If neither parent holds a passport, passport to minor may be issued on pre-PV basis. Basically, parents’ nationality and consequently eligibility of a child to be Indian citizen is verified by the Police. Simply by birth in India, a child does not acquire Indian citizenship automatically.
- c. Both parents are required to provide a declaration in the form Annexure H appended to Passport Application Instructions. These are available on the Passport Portal.
- d. Legal guardian can also apply for the passport of a minor child subject to production of a certified copy of the court orders appointing him/her as Legal Guardian.”

3.23 In this context, the Committee particularly wanted to know the policy regarding police verification of children below five years of age. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"General guidelines regarding police verification of minors, including children below five years of age are as under:

Where both or either parent of the minor holds a valid passport with spouse name endorsed in at least one parent’s passport, police verification is not required for issue of Passport to minor. In all other cases, Passport is issued only after receipt of clear police verification report.

These are indicative, since as per the Passport Act 1967 and Passport Rules 1980, passport authority may conduct all such enquiry as deemed fit in respect of any Passport application."

3.24 Further, in context of crimes by juveniles the Committee desired to know whether any changes have been promulgated. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"As the Government of India has not taken any view so far on redefining the age of juveniles in the context of crimes/offences committed, no need has been felt for any change in police verification requirement for issue of passports to minors."

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

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

(Recommendation No.12)

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

(Recommendation No.13)

CHAPTER IV
PASSPORT ISSUANCE SYSTEM

When asked about the volume of passport services rendered during 2013, Foreign Secretary submitted during the evidence as under:

“During January-November 2013 about 67.27 lakh passport service-related applications have been received against 65.49 lakh passport and related documents have been issued. So, the number of passport services rendered in India during 2013 is likely to cross 72 lakh as compared to 64 lakh in 2012, which is an increase of over 12 per cent. If we include passport services overseas, then we expect to have rendered some 85 lakh passport services.”

4.2 The Committee specifically desired to know about the prescribed timelimit set by the Ministry of External Affairs with regard to issue of fresh passport and for rendering miscellaneous services to applicants and whether any change has been done after launching of Passport Seva Project. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“There was no time limit for issue of fresh passports or miscellaneous services in the earlier system but usually the RPOs/POS were expected to issue passports in 45 days and miscellaneous services were rendered within a week. The desired service levels aimed under PSP is 3 working days in case of fresh passports in No or Post-Police verification cases; 3 working days + time taken for police verification in fresh passport cases requiring pre-police verification and in case of miscellaneous services like Police Clearance Certificate the same day.”

4.3 In response to query of the Committee whether there is any monitoring system to oversee that the PSKs and the RPOs are able to adhere to the prescribed timelimit for issuance of any kind of passports, the Ministry submitted the following written reply:

“The system automatically generates reports on the number of passport services related applications processed, passports printed and dispatched including delays in receiving police verification reports.”

4.4 While furnishing the current status of delivery of passport services, the Foreign Secretary submitted during the evidence as under:

“.. it is a matter of great satisfaction to the Ministry of External Affairs that country-wide 68 per cent of normal passports are despatched within seven days and 90 per cent are despatched within 15 days, excluding the time taken for police verification. In the case of Tatkal Passports, 73 per cent are despatched within three days, and 96 per cent are despatched within seven days.”

4.5 The Committee noted that the stated objective of the Ministry is issuance of passport in 3 working days plus the time taken for police verification and sought data from the Ministry regarding the passports issued within 7 days/15 days. The Ministry submitted the following details in a post-evidence reply:

"Out of 66,36,356 passport applications received from 1st January, 2013 to 15th December, 2013, 12,99,737 passports were issued within seven days and 5,72,046 passports were issued from 8 – 15 days, excluding the date of submission of application."

4.6 While furnishing the data regarding number of passport applications pending for more than one year, six months to one year and three months to six months respectively, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"During the period from 1st July 2012 to 31st December 2012, 27,75,425 passport applications were processed in the new system. Out of these, 22,27,285 passports were issued within 90 days of receipt of application, 3,03,002 were issued within 180 days and 1,33,148 within one year, including time taken for police verification. 93,318 applications were pending disposal. During the period from 1st January, 2013 to 30th June 2013, 32,56,520 passport applications were processed. Out of these, 27,53,002 passports were issued within 90 days of receipt of application, 2,87,581 were issued within 180 days and 68,418 were issued within one year, including the time taken for police verification; 1,47,519 applications were pending as on 1st January, 2014."

4.7 When the Committee desired to know about the steps taken by various RPOs to reduce the delay in issuance of passport/rendering of miscellaneous services and achieving 'Zero Pendency', the Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"Special drives are undertaken by RPOs to clear pendencies. There is no delay, however, in rendering Miscellaneous Services which now constitute issuance of

PCCs, provided clear Police report is available. RPOs also keep in touch with State/UT Police to speed up verification of personal particulars."

4.8 The Committee noted that as per the information furnished by the Committee, the target under Passport Seva Project is to issue Passport next working day excluding the day of submission under Tatkaal Scheme. On being enquired about the data regarding average time taken in issuance of Tatkaal Passport, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"In the case of Tatkaal passports, 73% are dispatched within 3 days and 96% are dispatched within 7 days, excluding verification of supporting documents like Verification Certificate." .

4.9. The Committee noted that under the Passport Seva Project, the aim is to render miscellaneous passport services (change in address and other personal particulars) on the date of application itself. On being enquired about the average time taken in rendering of miscellaneous passport services, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under

"The average taken time taken in rendering of Miscellaneous Services is four days excluding the time taken for requisite verification." .

4.10 According to the Ministry, the average time taken for issuance of passport is 15 days, plus the days taken for police verification, while the stated objective of the Ministry is issuance of passport in 3 working days plus the time taken for police verification. When asked about the reasons for such delays in issuance of passport by the RPOs, the Ministry stated as under in a post-evidence reply:

"The shortage of personnel, productivity, paucity of printers and shortage of passport booklets at times are the causes for not meeting the desired objective"

4.11 When the Committee specifically desired to know that when passport issuing criteria remains the same throughout all the PSKs and Passport Offices in the country, why is it that PSKs and Passport Offices of certain States are doing excellent and efficient job and the other States are putting up a poor performance. The Ministry clarified the position in a written reply as under:

"The workload of passport related services and demands of applicants differ from place to place as does the work culture of officials manning the PSKs/Passport Offices. The ability and handling capacity of officials even in the same office, vastly

differ and some officials despite training and offer of incentives, remain a challenge as far as service delivery is concerned.”

4.12 On the main problems being faced by the Ministry in implementation of Passport Seva Project, the Ministry stated as under:

“As it is, the main problems faced by the Ministry in passport issuance are delay in receiving verification reports from police, infrastructural inadequacies, lack of skills and inadequate and less than eager staff. Other shortcomings are lack of synergies between Govt and TCS staff. Lack of clear instructions and arbitrary interpretation of rules at some levels also lead to difficulties in smooth operations and service delivery”

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

may be able to reduce the time taken and proceed in the direction of achieving the desired target of service delivery.

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

(Recommendation No.14)

CHAPTER V

GENERAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PASSPORT

A. Centralization of delivery of Passport Services-Historical aspect

Prior to onset of Passport Seva Project, in the earlier system passport applications were collected manually through various agencies like posts, collections centers, authorized passport agents etc. and District Passport Cell (DPC)/ Speed Post Centre (SPC) served an important role in the process of deposition of forms. The Committee during examination of Demands for Grants of Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2011-12 desired to know the fate of District Passport Cells and various Passport Collection Centers after opening of PSKs. The Ministry in a written submission had stated as under:

“As per Cabinet Note, the existing Passport offices will be converted into Passport Back Offices for handling of applications received through the DPCs and designated SPCs. However in view of functional requirement i.e. capturing of photograph and prescribed bio-metrics of the applicant need is being felt to revisit this matter.”

5.2 However, in the Action Taken Replies on the abovesaid Report, the Ministry had categorically stated that:

“..It may be ideal to close down the DPCs and other application form collection channels such as SPCs where PSKs are operational because of reasons i.e. i) in the DPC applications, biometric fingerprints are not taken resulting in risk of duplicate issuance of passports and ii) the DPC/SPC applications take longer time to process because of lack of proper documents and insufficient data provided by applicants in the physical (hard) copy of forms, Moreover, these applications require digitisation, once received at the Passport Office and further actions like verification and granting amounting to additional staff needs.

However, till the PSP system is operational throughout the country with sufficient number of PSKs, it is prudent to have DPCs in place as part of the existing application collection channel. A clearer picture could emerge on the full roll-out of 77 PSKs across the country when a final decision on continuance of DPCs and PACCs and on opening of more PSKs could be taken.”

5.3 During the examination, when the Committee desired to know about alternative methods of deposition of applications by the applicants and particularly desired to know about the position of DPC and SPC in the Passport Seva Project particularly in States like Gujarat, wherein more

than 70% of applicants in the past came through these alternate routes. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“In view of the requirement of the applicant’s presence at PSK to give his/her photograph and biometrics, the continuance of DPC or SPC where even a third person may deposit applications, would be anachronistic. It would not be appropriate to continue two systems. Moreover, DPCs/SPCs are authorized to accept only fresh passport applications and those seeking re-issue or miscellaneous service even in the old system, were required to apply to the nearest Passport Office. ..

However, in order to address the difficulties of citizens residing far away from PSKs, the Ministry is working on a plan to redefine the role of DPCs/SPCs in the new system. A uniform system will have to be introduced for all states, including Gujarat for integration of DPCs/SPCs with PSP. Ministry may have to consult state govts and India Post in this regard.”

5.4 In view of the chaotic conditions prevailing in the process of passport issuance, the Committee in their various meeting with the Representatives of Ministry of External Affairs have strongly recommended for the need of decentralization in passport issuance system and have repeatedly recommended to work towards inclusion of District Passport Cells (DPCs)/ Speed Post Centres (SPCs) in the process of deposition of forms and capturing bio-metric data of the applicants due to their vast network and availability of infrastructure and skilled manpower with the Postal Department. During sitting of the Committee, the Representative of the Ministry of External clarified the position regarding engagement of SPCs and e-Seva Kendras and submitted as under:

“The recognition of Speed Post Centre and e-Seva Kendra will create a benchmark because they will charge only Rs. 100. So, no cyber café will be able to charge Rs. 5,000 because there will be competition in the market. I think that we will be in a position to start this in 2-3 months. We have already received a concrete proposal from the Department of IT on Common Service Centre, and there are 60,000 of them all over India. We have DPCs and then some 1,000 Speed Post Centres. If they take Rs. 100 and provide online facility and that too assisted online facility, then those people who are taking advantage of those situations will be out because Rs. 100 will become the benchmark.

...we have already got the concrete proposal from the Ministry of IT. We have done this on trial basis in Hyderabad, and we are reasonably assured that we should move forward. I think that within this financial year we are hopeful to launch this.”

5.5 In this context, the Committee further desired to be enlightened about the progress that has been made in the last six months. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“The Ministry is working on a proposal to co-opt the services DPCs and SPCs across the country to facilitate filing of passport applications online, make payment of passport fees and obtain appointment. The DPCs/SPCs would need to be adequately equipped with IT hardware and broadband internet connectivity. This would also greatly address the challenge of digital divide in the country. However, the citizen, in the interest of security, transparency, avoiding misrepresentation and for error-free issuance of passports, will be required to appear at the PSK on the appointed day for biometrics and photographs and submission of supporting documents. It is emphasised here that applicants at PSK are given the opportunity to check their personal data and also to make corrections therein, if necessary, that would go into their passports and confirm the same by appending their signatures in the passport file.”

5.6 However, the Ministry in another reply further stated that:

“.... the DPCs and SPCs can be used to file applications online after integration of their system with Passport Seva. The functions of biometrics and photographs can, however, be performed only at PSK which is an extended arm of the Passport Office and acts as a Passport Issuing Authority (PIA). The functions of PIAs cannot be delegated to any other entity.”

5.7 On the efforts that have been made by the Ministry to decentralize passport application collection process and collection of biometric data of applicants, the Ministry stated as under:

“.... the Ministry is working on a proposal to co-opt the services of DPCs, SPCs and Common Service Centres across the country to facilitate filing of passport applications online, make payment of passport fees and obtain appointment. This would greatly address the challenge of digital divide in the country.”

5.8 Though the Ministry clarified that the Ministry plans to co-opt DPCs/SPCs/CSCs for filing applications online. However, at present there is no plan to collect biometric data of applicants. On the outcome of the consultation done by the Ministry with India Post for providing facility of online filling of application at Speed Post Centres (SPCs), the Ministry in a written reply submitted as under:

“The India Post authorities have been advised to ensure that adequate IT infrastructure is in place so that their services can be utilised for online filing of Passport application etc.”

5.9 However, later when the Committee desired to specifically know about outsourcing of front-end passport services to Postal Network, the Ministry in a written reply submitted as under:

“As per the Cabinet approval and the Ministry’s Agreement with Service Provider (SP), it is obligatory for the Service Provider to render front-end services Passport Service like initial scrutiny of the application forms, token issuance, acceptance of fee, scanning and uploading of documents and taking photos and biometrics of applicants. The Service Charge payable to SP includes these services. These services cannot be performed by any other entity. At the most Postal network can be utilized by applicants for filing passport applications online, payment of passport fees and obtaining appointment.”

5.10 The Committee further suggested to the Ministry of External Affairs to incorporate the services of Indian Postal Network in conducting various front-end activities. On the steps that have been taken by the Ministry of External Affairs to comply with the Committee's suggestions and the discussion on the proposal with Department of Posts, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"The Ministry is in touch with India Post. As per Ministry’s proposal, the Speed Post Centres (SPCs) may continue to be utilised as “online application filing centres” as part of Passport Seva. In a recent meeting, India Post officials expressed their keenness in utilising India Post network as part of Passport Seva."

5.11 While elaborating upon the blueprint, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"As per the Ministry’s plan, the procedure that may be followed in the SPCs and District Head Post Offices (HPOs) is stated as under:--

- a. All the SPCs/HPOs would be required to equip themselves with computer system (PC/Desktop) having broadband internet connectivity and low -end printer. The India Post officials have affirmed that most of the SPCs/HPOs already have requisite computer system in place.
- b. The concerned SPC/HPO official will access the Passport Seva Portal www.passportindia.gov.in, fill up the applicant’s data and book appointment after acceptance of requisite fee, on behalf of the applicant. The appointments

may be booked from the normal pool of appointments released for each PSK under the jurisdiction of the respective RPOs across the country. The applicant will carry this appointment slip to the PSK along with requisite original documents on the appointment day.

- c. For self-sustainability of the SPC/HPO and to recover the running cost, SPC/HPO will charge an amount of Rs. 100/- from the applicant for online filing of applicants' data, generate ARN and print ARN receipt including payment of passport fee and scheduling of appointment.
- d. The SPC/HPO network would greatly help the citizens residing in remote and rural areas and having poor availability of data communication network and lesser coverage of broadband internet bandwidth.

Present status: The proposal is awaiting internal approvals."

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

forms online as well as for capturing of biometric data so that passport services are made accessible to those in distant areas as well as in rural hinterland.

(Recommendation No. 15)

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

hardware, broadband connectivity and personnel and it is not proved as another adhoc step by the Ministry.

(Recommendation No.16)

B. Passport Melas organized by RPOs

5.14 The Committee are informed that the Ministry has also directed the RPOs to conduct Passport Melas during the weekends from time to time to enable submission of passport applications. During 2012, Passport Melas were conducted by 24 RPOs at 62 locations and 33,584 passport applications were received for processing.

5.15 Furnishing the status of Passport Melas organized in the year 2013, during the evidence, the Foreign Secretary submitted as under:

“to meet increased demand for passport services, 81 Passport Melas were organized from time to time in weekends by 27 Passport Offices from 1st January to 30th November, 2013. During these Melas, 35,525 passport applications were processed”

5.16 On the Committee’s suggestion to conduct Passport Melas in each district under RPOs as well as number of applications received during such Melas, the Ministry in a written reply submitted as under:

“It is not practicable at this stage to organize Passport Melas in districts due to manpower and technology constraints. Paradoxically, the number of applications (33584) received during Passport Melas conducted during 2012 did not indicate high demand for passports.”

5.17 The Committee further pursued the issue of conducting Passport Melas at other districts. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"Organising Passport Melas or Passport Seva Camps at sites other than PSKs, involves additional expenditure on transportation of IT equipment, Govt officials as well as TCS personnel and arranging accommodation for holding the Seva Camp. Moreover, the Camps also can be organised only on weekends as the personnel are needed for manning PSKs. There are locations which are far away from PSKs/

Passports Offices and travelling frequently would stretch scarce human resources available at Passport Offices/PSKs. A beginning has, however, been made with the launch of a first ever Passport Seva Camp on 14th December 2013 at Fatehgarh (U.P.), for two days, for the benefit of passport applicants residing in the districts of Farrukhabad, Auraiya, Etawah, Hardoi and Kannauj."

5.18 The Committee were informed that from 1st January, 2013 to 31st December, 2013, 26 Passport Offices organised 83 Passport Melas at 46 PSKs under them and 36,167 passport applications were received. Elaborating upon the process of appointment and for processing of application received at Passport Mela, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply as under:

"The Mela is conducted at the PSK itself. Sufficient advance notice is given by Passport Offices at the Passport Portal about holding the Mela. The process followed at the Melas is same as the one at PSKs i.e. the applicants are required to log on to the website www.passportindia.gov.in; create their user ID and assign a password ; fill & submit the application form online, make payment of passport fees online through debit/credit card or internet banking of State Bank of India. Applicants can also use the challan option provided on the portal and deposit the fees in SBI branch after generating challan online. The System allots appointment for the Mela Day held on the weekends. On the appointed time slot on the Mela Day, the applicants, along with print-out of Appointment Slip, original documents and photocopies, visit the PSK for submission of application."

5.19 The Committee take note of the Ministry's initiative to redress the grievances of the applicants and welcome initiatives like organization of Passport Melas by various RPOs.

The Committee were informed that during the year 2012, Passport Melas were conducted by 24 RPOs at 62 locations and 83 Passport Melas were conducted by 26 Passport Offices during the year 2013. The Committee note that such Passport Melas are random and are held only at few places. Moreover, the Committee observe that there is no clear cut policy for organizing Passport Melas, the Committee, therefore, recommend that Ministry should

pronounce a policy basically giving a priority to the Passport Offices where citizens are facing the problem of very long appointment dates.

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

(Recommendation No. 17)

C. Role of Authorized Agents/Agencies

5.20 The Committee have noted that authorized agents/agencies were a major part in earlier system of deposition of applications/submission of documents. The Committee desired to know the reasons for immediate removal of all agents and sought Ministry's view on Committee's suggestion of permitting the authorized persons/agencies by RPOs to continue as centres to provide assistance to customers on a prescribed nominal fee. The Ministry in a written reply submitted as under:

“It is submitted that Passport Act 1967 (as amended) does not provide for recognition of travel agents. The registration /recognition of travel agents was to afford an alternative to the citizens which was regulated by administrative orders only. These orders have no statutory status and thus liable to be amended, modified or withdrawn as per policy of the Govt from time to time. The registered travel agents were free to deposit passport application forms in the passport offices like any other individual, but with authorization letter from the applicant subject to guidelines applicable earlier. A travel agency's role was thus limited to mere deposit of a limited number of application forms in the Passport Office on behalf of applicants, insofar as fresh and reissue of passports were concerned. Log-in IDs had been provided to access the earlier system operated by National Informatics Centre (NIC). The role of the travel agents in the Passport Seva System has been re-defined as it is now mandatory for the

applicant to present himself/herself for fingerprints and photograph etc. The travel agents still play a role to the extent that an applicant who has difficulty in filling up/online filling up of passport application, obtaining appointments and ascertaining status enquiry of application may seek assistance from Travel Agents in the new system. The citizen is also free to obtain these services from any internet café or anyone else familiar with computer operation/internet. However, such applicant has to come to the Passport Seva Kendra for submission of application, fingerprint and digitization of photograph requirements and the Travel Agents will have no role in that process. Since the portal is web-based and any one can access it for applying online, authorizing only certain agencies would serve no purpose. As of now all travel agencies are alike – whether ‘recognized’ or not and a level field is in place.”

5.21 Further in a written submission, the Ministry further added as under:

"It is also submitted that the whole philosophy of e-Governance is that there has to be direct interface with citizens minimising the role of middlemen. Presence of applicants at PSKs and capture of their biometrics and photographs and entry of their particulars in a centralised database, ensures that the passport is being issued to genuine applicants avoiding the possibility of issue of multiple passports, leading to an error-free and secure System. ‘Legalising’ the agents will be contrary to the philosophy of e-Governance. At the same time, Ministry has an open mind to re-look at the role travel agents could play in the new system."

5.22 The Committee observe that in the earlier system registered and reputed travel agents/agencies were recognized/authorized to assist in filling the form, depositing the form and fee on behalf of the applicants and for that they were taking a nominal charge prescribed by the RPOs. They were regulated by administrative orders and were also liable for any mistake or mischief done by them but in the new system their role has been redefined treating them as middlemen. They are now free like other cybercafé owners to charge any amount from the applicants seeking their assistance in filing applications or getting appointments without any control of passport authorities. The Committee also

observe that when Government is in search of multiple channels to facilitate the applicants on payment of nominal charge, the Ministry should relook at the role of these reputed agencies who may work as authorized centers on payment of nominal fee fixed by the authorities. The Committee do not find anything contrary to the philosophy of e-governance in legalizing these agencies for their limited regulated role to prevent the exploitation of applicants by anyone. Therefore, the Ministry should think to define the role of agents to facilitate the prospective applicants alongwith incorporating the SPC/DPC/citizen service centers in the passport network.

(Recommendation No. 18)

D. Grievances Redressal Mechanism

5.23 The Ministry has informed that one of the desired outcomes of the Passport Seva Project is effective Grievance Redressal Mechanism and transparency in availing the services. The Committee note that there are two methods of redressal of grievances i.e. Passport Adalats (PAs) and appeal at the level of Chief Passport Officer (CPO).

5.24 The Ministry has informed that Passport Offices hold Passport Adalats to redress the grievance of Passport applicants. These Adalats are particularly useful in disposing old cases. On being asked, the Ministry furnished the details of Passport Adalats held during the two year 2012-13 and 2013-14 wherein information was furnished about Passport Adalats held at 15 stations. The Committee noted that only at Trichy, adalats were conducted on weekly-basis on every Tuesday and cases relate to issues of suppression of EC details/previous passport/double/multiple passports details and adverse PVR cases. The Committee noted that apart from Trichy, maximum number of Adalats i.e 25 were held in Patna, wherein 5191 application/complaints were received. The Committee noted that seven adalats were held in Jalandhar wherein 8350 applications or

complaints were received and most of the cases were pending due to non-receipt of reply from Missions/Posts. The Committee noted that in Chandigarh, eleven Adalats were held wherein 5500 applications/complaints were received and cases mostly dealt with incomplete documentation. In Bhopal, in the year 2012, 504 applications/complaints were received and maximum number of complaints were due to court cases and cases on hold due to incomplete document.

5.25 The Committee were informed that the Central Passport Organization was created in 1959 as a subordinate office of the Ministry and is headed by Joint Secretary and Chief Passport officer, who also acts as appellate authority under the Passports Act, 1967 and the Head Department under the Delegation of Financial Power Rules 1978. The Committee have come across instance where the applicants' case go for appeal at CPO level, if they are not given the passport due to their passports being revoked/impounded under the Passport Act. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"Yes, Passport Issuing Authorities have powers to revoke/impound passports under the Passports Act, 1967. As per Section 10 (3) the Passport Act, Passport Issuing Authorities may revoke/impound passport on the following grounds:

- (a) if the passport authority is satisfied that the holder of the passport or travel document is in wrongful possession thereof;
- (b) if the passport or travel document was obtained by the suppression of material information or on the basis of wrong information provided by the holder of the passport or travel document or any other person on his behalf; Provided that if the holder of such passport obtains another passport the passport authority shall also impound or cause to be impounded or revoke such other passport
- (c) if the passport authority deems it necessary so to do in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of India, friendly relations of India with any foreign country, or in the interests of the general public;
- (d) if the holder of the passport or travel document has, at any time after the issue of the passport or travel document, been convicted by a court in India for any offence involving moral turpitude and sentenced in respect thereof to imprisonment for not less than two years;
- (e) if proceedings in respect of an offence alleged to have been committed by the holder of the passport or travel document are pending before a criminal court in India.
- (f) if any of the conditions of the passport or travel document has been contravened;
- (g) if the holder of the passport or travel document has failed to comply with the notice sent by Passport authority requiring him to return back the Passport;

- (h) if it is brought to the notice of the passport authority that a warrant or summons for the appearance, or a warrant for the arrest, of the holder of the passport or travel document has been issued by a court under any law for the time being in force or if an order prohibiting the departure from India of the holder of the passport or other travel document has been made by any such court and the passport authority is satisfied that a warrant or summons has been so issued or an order has been so made.

Further as per Section 10(4) the Act - The passport authority may also revoke a passport or travel document on the application of the holder thereof."

5.26 The Committee desired to know whether any guidelines have been issued to decide the cases where passports are impounded under section 10 (3) (b) in the name of suppression of information or on the basis of wrong information provided by the holder of the passport. In this context, the Committee also desired to know from the Ministry whether the information and details of a lapsed/ lost passports issued long back to a minor are also considered as wrong or suppressed information under this category particularly when the passport holder never had in possession of two passports at a time. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"Under the Passports Act, 1967 and the Passports Rules, 1980, the Passport Issuing Authorities (PIAs) are vested with quasi-judicial authority. This implies that the PIAs should independently apply their mind to each case and arrive at a decision of their own on the merits of each case. Thus all the PIAs deal with the cases as per the guidelines provided in the Passports Act, 1967 and the Passport Rules, 1980. However, the Ministry of External Affairs being the nodal Ministry for Passport matters provides clarifications and guidance as and when sought by PIAs. Depending upon the common requirement of the PIAs, general instructions/circulars are issued from time to time. There may not be any specific guideline for all the PIAs to decide the cases under section 10(3)(b) of the Passport Act. The instructions on similar issues including dealing with double/multiple Passports are contained in Ministry's circular No. VI/401/61/2001 dated 13th March, 2008.

While applying for reissue of Passport, a number of information are sought from the application, one among that is the details of old/earlier Passports. This includes even lapsed (expired)/lost passports. The applicant has to provide all the information correctly and has to specifically certify regarding this at the last part of the application form. Thus, if the information has not been provided in the application form for reissue of passport, it will treated as wrong or suppression of information, irrespective of the date of issue of earlier passport as well as the minor status of the applicant earlier."

5.27 In this context, the Committee desired to know about the number of cases of appeal that have been filed to the Chief Passport Officer related to RPO situated in the four Metropolitan cities during the last three years. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"The number of appeals filed with the Chief Passport Officer related to the RPOs situated in the four Metropolitan cities are as follows :

Sl. No.	Metropolitan City	2011	2012	2013
1	DELHI	NIL	04	03
2	MUMBAI	26	26	22
3	KOLKATA	10	06	05
4	CHENNAI	01	NIL	02

5.28 The Committee further sought clarification from the Ministry and desired to know whether the Passport Issuing Authority has powers to revoke/impound the passport under the Passports Act and whether RPOs are also authorized to resolve the cases under section 10 (3) (b) by imposing penalties in terms of money or time. The Committee further desired to know the reasons for sending these cases to CPO in a large number. The Ministry in post-evidence reply stated as under:

"The appeal cases are disposed off as per the prescribed guidelines as contained in the Passport Manual. On receipt of an appeal, the Ministry always acknowledges it and requests the PIA who passed the order for detailed summary/comments of the case. The summary, along with copies of the Show Cause Notice, explanation and final order, etc., is sent to the Ministry by the PIA as expeditiously as possible. The PIAs abroad, in addition, furnish whether the appellant travelled illegally out of India, current visa status, whether the appellant sought asylum, likelihood of legalization of visa/stay abroad, details of Police Verification Report, if received from the State concerned etc. In all cases of appeal, the Chief Passport Officer (CPO) passes a Speaking Order with copies to the appellant and the PIA concerned who takes further action as necessary. The average time taken in disposal of such cases is three to six months. Delay may be caused due to many factors from the time of filing of such appeals till issuance of Speaking Orders, such as, non-remittance of the prescribed appeal fee at the time of filing the appeal or remittance of fees in some other manner, incomplete documentation, etc. There may be some cases where Passport Offices are required to be approached for additional details. The Passport Rules prescribe amount of penalties to be imposed. In certain cases, a defaulter's name may be placed under Prior Approval Category (PAC) for a specific period.

5.29 The Committee sought the complete guidelines for issue of 'show cause notices' to the applicants as well as the average time taken in disposal of such appeals at Headquarters and the nature of punishments/penalties given in these cases in terms of money or time. The Ministry in post-evidence reply stated as under:

"Yes, as mentioned above, as per the Passports Act, 1967 and the Passports Rules, 1980, PIAs are vested independent authority. PIAs are expected to deal with the cases as per the guidelines provided in the Passports Act, 1967 and the Passport Rules, 1980. However, depending upon the facts and circumstances of any case having certain complexities, the PIAs seek clarification/guidance from the Ministry of External Affairs, addressing their communication to the Chief Passport Officer (CPO). These exclude appeal cases, since under the appeal after refusal of passport by the Passport authority/Passport Officer, the applicant appeals to the higher authority i.e. the CPO under Section 11 of the Passports Act.

Show Cause Notice (SCN) is a communication issued by Passport authority for seeking any kind of explanation, information, etc., from the Passport applicant for taking decision in that particular case. There are no consolidated guidelines for issue of 'Show Cause Notice (SCN)' as it has to be decided by the passport authority depending upon the facts and circumstances of each case.

5.30 The Committee observe that under the Passport Seva Project there is no effective Grievance Redressal Mechanism. Now the Passport Adalats are not being organized on regular basis and more cases are being referred for appeal at Chief Passport Officer's level. The Committee, therefore, are of the view that the Ministry should work upon establishing responsive and effective Grievance Redressal Mechanism at RPO/PO level. Moreover, the Committee desire that the grievance of applicants are heard and resolved within the normal procedure of working of the RPO/PO. The Committee also note that the cases have been referred to the Passport Issuing Authority (PIA) for appeal. The Committee have been informed that PIA are vested with quasi-judicial authority and has power to revoke/impound passport and the appeal cases are disposed off as per prescribed guidelines. The Committee have noted that the average time taken for disposal of cases for appeal is three months to six months. The Committee are of the opinion that the cases where

information has not been consciously hidden by the applicant or the criminality is not involved, such cases should be dealt at the level of the Passport Officer only and should not be referred at CPO level as Regional Passport Officers/Passport Officers are empowered to deal with such cases. The Committee further suggest that in cases of non-criminality or unintentionally non-furnishing of information is there, in such cases applicant should be imposed a minimum monetary penalty or if time penalty is imposed, it should include time since the filling of application at RPO because the passport issuance has already been delayed due to delay in considering the case.

(Recommendation no 19)

E. Malpractices and Role of Touts in the Passport System

5.31 There have often been reports of malpractices by employees of various agencies involved in the process of Passport Issuance. The Committee enquired whether cases of corruption have been detected against any Passport Office staff/PSK staff/employee of TCS since the onset of Passport Seva Project and the action taken in this regard. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"From May, 2010, the pilot stage of PSP, to 31st December 2013, 25 officials of the CPO cadre were proceeded against on corruption related charges. Of these 10 were APO/PGO/Supdt level officials and 15 were Assistant/UDC/LDC/Office Asstt. level officials. Ten cases were filed by CBI, 5 by State Police, 7 were Departmental cases and 3 were by CBI and Department both. In one CBI case, a UDC was acquitted, in two Departmental cases penalty was imposed, one official was removed and the rest 21 are at various stages of process by CBI/CVC/Department.

Five TCS staff were alleged to be involved in corrupt practice. Out of these five, four were suspended pending enquiry and subsequently left on expiry of their employment contract with TCS and one was transferred out. All the five have been charged by State Police. The case is *sub judice*."

5.32 The Committee have often come across the news of instances of malpractices by Police officials during the process of police verification as well as malpractices by Postmen during the delivery of passport. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“The Ministry is aware of acts of wrongdoing by those who are entrusted with police verification but through they are part of the passport issuance system, they are beyond the domain of the Ministry. However, with the increasing adoption of Citizen Charter by Govt Ministries and Departments and State Govts besides increasing awareness about e-governance, such instances are likely to come down. The Ministry takes serious note of corrupt practices indulged by its officials and would appreciate if specific instances and details of the officials of Passport Offices are provided to enable it to proceed ahead.”

5.33 However, when specifically asked, the Ministry in a written reply further stated as under:

“The Ministry is not in possession of any details regarding malpractices by police officials during PV process or by postmen while delivering passports. The police and India Post employees are beyond the domain of the Ministry. At best, in the event of any specific complaint, the same can be forwarded to the concerned authorities for such action as may be deemed fit by them.”

“In the absence of any specific complaint or conclusive proof of malpractices or demanding money for clear reports, it is not possible for the Ministry to write to the State Govt imputing motives to police.”

5.34 When the Committee sought MEA’s justification and desired to know about the efforts being made by the Ministry to reduce the role of touts/agents in the process of issuance of passport, the Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“...Passport Portal is web-based and open for access by any one. The Ministry’s is taking steps to co-opt Common Service Centres, e-Seva facilities in the states/UTs, DPCs and SPCs to provide more access points to citizens for filing passport applications online and payment of fees through e-modes. The appointments will be released by the System itself over a 2-3 weeks period. Opening of appointment window at a certain time, as is being done at present, will be discontinued. This will minimise the role of middlemen. ..”

5.35 Regarding the harassment of public by agents/touts/public, the Ministry in a written reply had submitted that Ministry has not received any complaints. In this context, the Committee observed that the presence of agents/touts is commonly seen around every PSK/RPO and desired to know whether the Ministry has taken any action suo-motu to keep check on areas in the vicinity of PSK/RPO or conducted any raid. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“There are clear signages displayed at the Passport Offices/PSKs advising the public to desist from dealing with touts. An advisory to this effect is also posted on the Passport Portal. It is submitted that it is not possible for the Ministry by itself to control movement of people outside the premises of Passport Office/PSK nor it is empowered to conduct any raid. However, Passport Officers have been instructed to approach the concerned police officers to conduct the raid around Passport Offices/PSKs to curb the activities of touts.”

5.36 The Committee also noted that often advertisements are found in newspapers and other media regarding agents promising assistance for faster passport issuance. The Committee desired to know whether the Ministry has enquired about their role in the new system and the role of officials of MEA/Passport Organization/TCS/PSK in such practices and the action taken if any, in this regard. The Ministry in a written reply stated as under:

“The Ministry is aware of advertisements in various newspapers etc as well as sign-boards and stickers on vehicles besides SMS on mobiles claiming to arrange passports quickly. The Ministry does not have the resources to go after each person making such claims. Appropriate action as per Govt rules is taken against any CPO employee if found indulging in any malpractice.”

5.37 On being asked about the action taken by the Ministry about fraudulent advertisement, the Ministry has stated that "the Ministry does not have the resources to go after each person making such claims". The Committee desired to know whether the Ministry has brought this to the notice of the Police. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"It is not possible for the Ministry to utilise its scarce resources to pursue such matters with Police. Advisories are posted on the Passport website prominently, cautioning citizens against dealing with touts and agents promising early issuance of passports. Such notices are also displayed at all Passport Offices/Passport Seva Kendra."

5.38 The Committee observe that unauthorized touts/agents are still active in the new system and are taking the advantage of difficulties being faced by the applicants at each stage of the process. This includes charging very high amount for submission of applications online, taking dates and clearance of PVR. Under the new system, there are more opportunities for such elements to harass the applicants. The Committee have also come across advertisements in media as well as reports of exploitation by touts who act as

facilitations and charge exorbitant sum from the applicants. The Committee are not satisfied with the information furnished by the Ministry about the measures undertaken to mitigate the situation. The Committee would like to urge the Ministry to pursue the matter with concerned police officers and conduct surprise raids to curb the mushrooming of agents/touts around the PSKs/RPO. Furthermore, the Committee are also aware of the malpractice by few officials of Department of Police and Postal Departments during the process of police verification and delivery of passports respectively. In this context, the Committee would like to urge the Ministry to take up the matter with concerned authorities. At the same time, the Committee would like to stress upon the need for verification of the antecedents of the employees of the Service Provider that are attached with the Passport Seva Project and conduct regular checks to ensure that these officials and officials from the Ministry of External Affairs/RPO are not involved in nefarious activities.

(Recommendation No. 20)

CHAPTER VI

MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

A. Manpower Management under Passport Seva Project

As informed by the Ministry, the total strength of the Central Passport Organization Cadre was 2697 as on 31 December, 2012. The Ministry has taken several steps to improve the service conditions of the CPO personnel by re-structuring of the cadre, faster promotion and introduction of productivity-linked incentive scheme. During their study visits, the Committee have looked into the concern raised by the officers/staff of the Central Passport Organization and have continuously highlighted the issue of shortage of staff in various RPOs. The Committee were particularly concerned over the issue of security and responsibility in the Passport Seva Project.

According to the Ministry, steps undertaken included performance based incentive, re-structuring and expanding of the CPO Cadre with introduction of 320 posts of Passport Granting Officers (PGOs), fast tracking promotion prospects by revision and relaxation of Recruitment Rules, uniform and well-defined work procedures, Centralized Application and Database ensuring better availability and uniformity, Improved performance due to state of the art infrastructure and system deployment, Skill enhancement through training and Audit trail that ensures the legality of the task being performed by the user.

6.2 On the issue of staff welfare measures, the Ministry informed as under:

“MEA has put in place a Consultative Mechanism to address the genuine grievances of the employees. This mechanism aims to promote harmonious relations and secure greater measure of cooperation between the Ministry and its employees in matters of common concern. While designing the Project, the interests of employees have been kept in careful consideration. Among the beneficial steps taken are the expansion and restructuring of CPO cadres. Thanks to PSP, the cadre has been restructured and expanded. This Ministry is taking all efforts to fill up vacancies through fast track promotion, deputation and recruitment by Staff Selection Commission.”

6.3 On the issue of shortage of staff and resources, the Foreign Secretary during the sitting submitted as under:

“I think, one issue which was raised by many hon. Members of the Committee is of staff, infrastructure and expanding the available resources. This is something which we will keep pressing for. All I can say is that the Ministry as a whole is facing one of its worst financial crises now because of the budgetary cuts and the pressures that there will be no additionality of funds given to us. But that kept in mind, I must mention that in all our interactions with the Ministry of Finance, we have repeatedly pointed out that in fact, passport services pay for themselves.... So, we keep on emphasizing this to the Ministry of Finance, but anything we earn goes into the Consolidated Fund of India and the MEA does not see it whereas anything we spend comes out of the Ministry of Finance and therefore, has to be negotiated. This is a permanent problem”

6.4 The Committee noted that it is reported that most of the Passport Offices are facing staff crunch. For instance, the Committee noted that currently appointments are released as per handling capacity of a PSK which depends on the number of counters provided at the PSK and manning position. The Ministry had further stated that appointments can be made available early provided more PSKs are set up and sufficient manpower within the CPO cadre is available to man the PSKs. In this regard, the Committee sought the details of sanctioned staff strength of each Passport Office and actual staff strength as on date. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"The sanctioned strength of the Central Passport Organization was 2349 up to year 2007. Since 2007 and with the introduction of Passport Seva Project, whereby 77 Passport Seva Kendras were established all over India and keeping in view the new functional requirement of the staff, the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance had approved creation and abolition of some posts at different levels in the Central Passport Organization of Ministry of External Affairs. In effect, 348 new posts were added to the strength as in 2007 in different grades. Thus the present sanctioned staff strength in the Central Passport Organization is 2697."

6.5 When the Committee desired to know whether this staff crunch has affected the implementation of Passport Seva Project, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under

"Following the implementation of Passport Seva Project (PSP) and consequent and steep increase in workload of Passport Offices the requirement of additional staff is being worked out. The earlier SIU study of Passport Offices and the staff strength approved in the past is no longer relevant in view of re-engineered passport issuance process."

6.6 The Committee desired to know about the initiatives and remedial measures taken in this regard. The Ministry in post-evidence reply stated as under:

"The increase in staff strength has not kept pace with high demand of Passports across the country. The following measures have been taken to make up the shortages

(a) As part of the restructuring and with a view to strengthening and upgrading the manpower capacity at the middle level, Recruitment Rules have been amended to envisage direct recruitment of 25 percent of the vacancies at the level of Assistant through the Combined Graduate Level Examination being conducted by SSC. An indent has been sent to SSC and nominations are being received. Six new Assistants have already joined.

(b) Steps have been taken to fill up the existing vacancies at the Passport Offices through fast track promotion, deputation and recruitment by Staff Selection Commission and wherever necessary with the relaxation of norms and with the approval of DoPT and UPSC. From September 2008 to 12th December, 2013, 2914 officials have been promoted in various grades.

(c) The number of officers at Superintendent level has been increased by downgrading the existing posts of Passport Granting Officer to provide sufficient manpower for smoother operation of the Passport Seva Kendras/ Passport Office.

(d) The additional staff requirement of the Passport Offices (where there is continuous or seasonal increase in workload), is met by transfer/temporary duty of some staff from the neighbouring offices.

(e) As a temporary measure, the Ministry has approved engagement of 450 Data Entry Operators (DEO in lieu of Group "B" (Non-Gazetted) and Group "C" posts. There are at present 316 DEOs working in Passport offices.

(f) The Ministry has implemented Productivity Linked Incentive Scheme (PLIS) on 21st March, 2013, having retrospective effect, to financially incentivise individual performance measured against pre-set and mutually agreed upon parameters. The essence of PLIS is that differential performance would be differentially rewarded."

6.7 The Committee observe that Passport Offices have been facing continuous staff crunch. The Committee also find that under the new system of passport issuance, the Passport Offices have to play a back office role and the staff available with the Passport Offices is to be posted at PSKs as well as RPOs. The Committee, however, have observed

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

(Recommendation No.21)

B. Integration of Indian Missions/Posts with Passport Seva Project

6.8 The Committee desired to know about the process for obtaining new passport/renew passport abroad and sought information about the agencies involved and conduct of inspection to ascertain the level of services provided by them. The Ministry in a written reply submitted as under:

“There are 180 Indian Missions/Posts abroad. The passport cases abroad are mostly re-issue (renewal) cases as Indian nationals arrive there on the passport initially from the country of origin. The new passport cases are only of children born of Indian parents. In either case, there is no police verification involved though the Passport database (PRIDE) is checked for antecedents or any adverse entry. The applicants fill in the form, pay the fees and receive the passports speedily. Our Missions/Posts in 22 countries have passport printing facility there itself. The other Missions/Posts transmit the data digitally to the Central Indian Passport Printing System (CIPPS) Unit, CPV Division for printing of passports. Passports after printing are dispatched by courier to the originating Missions/Posts for signatures and return to applicants generally within a week. In a few Missions/Posts abroad. There is no regular system of inspections of level of services provided by the Missions/Posts. However, working of Consular, Passport and Visa Wing is examined at the time of periodical audits or by Foreign Service Inspectors Team’s inspections of Missions/Posts abroad.”

6.9 In order to integrate and streamline the entire passport issuance system, the Committee have emphasized on the need for integration of Passport Seva Portal with Indian Missions/Posts abroad. The Ministry in a written submission stated as under:

“The Passport service related data received from Indian Missions/Posts abroad is migrated to Passport Seva system. Requisite steps are under way to integrate the Missions/Posts with PSP. Technical study is likely to be completed by 31st March 2014 and actual integration is likely to be achieved by December 2014.”

6.10 The Committee during their sittings have highlighted the problems being faced by the individuals who have got passport re-issued from Indian Posts/Missions abroad. In its justification, the Ministry submitted as under:

“In case the particulars of applicant are available in the Passport database (PRIDE), there is no need to make any reference. However, if the data is incomplete or not available or the photograph is not clear, a reference is necessary. Since complete data-check/confirmation of photograph is crucial, it is not advisable to issue passport on the basis of affidavit or within a fixed timeframe in the absence of requisite confirmation.”

6.11 The Committee sought clarification whether the data regarding passport services rendered by Indian Missions/Posts abroad are being integrated in PSP and the steps undertaken by the Ministry to incorporate these Missions/Posts in the PSP and timeline fixed for completion of work. The Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"As of now, Missions/Posts are still working under the old application/system maintained by NIC. The data of such applicants/passports are first received through NIC and then it is migrated into PSP system as part of Central Database (PRIDE). In order to integrate Missions/Posts into Passport Seva, the Ministry would adopt following approach so that unified globalised view of the entire Passport Issuance System is available to all the stakeholders including management :--

- i. Submission of approach note regarding taking over of Missions/Posts into PSP system and approval of competent authority,
- ii. Once approved, study of at-least 2 small and 2 large Missions/Posts for preparation of detailed SRS document,
- iii. Submission of detailed SRS including requirement of Hardware/Software/Licenses etc. to competent authority for approval including commercials,
- iv. Readiness of application/hardware/software,
- v. Pilot implementation at 2 CIPPS location and 2 Large Missions,
- vi. Running of Pilot for at least a month and

- vii. Roll out across CIPPS locations and Large Missions.

As far as printing of Passports is concerned, certain large Missions would continue to have printing facility locally and for CIPPS, the printing would be taken care of at the Central Passport Printing Facility (CPPF), New Delhi, which is connected to PSP network. It is felt that the best way forward for replacing current printers should be a long term strategy for moving into new generation printing technology which would also protect the existing investment. The time-line for integration into PSP system is based upon approval of point no. i, ii, & iii. After the approval, it would take at least 8-12 months from development to roll-out approximately."

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

already been issued his /her passport from Indian Mission abroad and has further requirement for reissue his/her Indian passport in any other country.

(Recommendation No. 22)

C. Quality of Passport Booklets

6.13 During the sittings, the Committee have often raised the issue of quality of passport booklets. On being enquired by the Members upon the issue, the Ministry in a written submission stated as under:

“The Ministry has been urging the General Manager, India Security Press, Nashik to improve the quality of passports of all the categories.”

6.14 The Ministry further reiterated that the Ministry is in constant dialogue with the India Security Press Nashik, the manufacturers and suppliers of passport booklets for improving quality. Elaborating upon the steps taken to improve the quality of passport booklet, the Ministry in a post-evidence reply stated as under:

"The issue of improving the quality and security of the Indian passport booklets is a constant process and the Ministry of External Affairs has been periodically taking up this matter with Indian Security Press(ISP), Nashik, at the MEA-ISP Coordination Committee meetings. Improvements such as shifting of data-page to third page, space for LSI Ghost image etc. were introduced during the year 2013. Further improvements to the quality and security of the passport booklets, in conformity with International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) regulations, are being taken up with ISP."

6.15 The Committee in their Report in the past have taken up the issue of quality of passport booklets. The Committee are informed that the Ministry has taken up the issue of improving the quality and enhancing security features in Indian Passport Booklets with Indian Security Press (ISP), Nasik. The Committee, however, feel that not much has been done by ISP, Nasik in terms of improving the physical quality of the Passport booklets particularly, binding which has led to problems during immigration check for Indian citizen abroad. The Committee, therefore, recommend that Ministry must pursue the matter with ISP, Nasik to improve the binding of the booklets. The Committee have also come across the

news reports about short supply of passport booklets in various RPOs. The Committee therefore, suggest the Ministry to take up the matter with ISP, Nasik for regular supply of desired quantity of Passport Booklets so that the printing of passport is not delayed due to non-availability of passport booklets.

(Recommendation No.23)

NEW DELHI
18 February, 2014
29 Magha, 1935 (Saka)

ANANTH KUMAR,
Chairman,
Standing Committee on External Affairs

**MINUTES OF THE TENTH SITTING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS HELD ON 27th JANUARY, 2012**

The Committee sat from 1500 hrs. to 1630 hrs. in Committee Room '63', Parliament House, New Delhi.

Present

Shri H.K. Dua – In the Chair

**Members
Lok Sabha**

2. Shri Anandrao Adsul
3. Shri Anto Antony
4. Dr. Shafiqur Rahman Barq
5. Shri Bhudeo Choudhary
6. Shri P. Karunakaran
7. Shri Inder Singh Namdhari
8. Dr. Bholu Singh

Rajya Sabha

9. Shri Birendra Prasad Baishya
10. Shri A.W. Rabi Bernard
11. Dr. K.P. Ramalingam
12. Shri Shivanand Tiwari
13. Shri Tarun Vijay
14. Shri Shreegopal Vyas

Secretariat

1. Shri K.D. Muley - Director
2. Dr. Ram Raj Rai - Additional Director
3. Shri Rakesh Bhardwaj - Under Secretary

Representatives of Ministry of External Affairs

1.	Shri Ranjan Mathai	-	Foreign Secretary
2.	Shri Basant K. Gupta	-	Additional Secretary (CPV)
3.	Shri Amarendra Khatua	-	Joint Secretary (PV)
4.	Shri P.M. Meena	-	Joint Secretary (Consular)
5.	Shri Muktesh K. Pardeshi	-	Joint Secretary (PSP) & CPO
6.	Dr. B.M. Vinod Kumar	-	Joint Secretary (Parl. &VIP)
7.	Shri A.K. Sobti	-	Director (PSP) & PVA
8.	Shri Sanjeev Kumar	-	Director (FSO)
9.	Shri A.K. Bhatnagar	-	Consultant (PSP)

2. Hon'ble Chairman (Shri Ananth Kumar) could not attend the sitting of the Committee due to unforeseen engagement. The Committee therefore, chose Shri H.K. Dua to act as Chairperson for the sitting in terms of Rule 258(3) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha.

3. At the outset, the Hon'ble Chairperson welcomed the Members of the Committee, Foreign Secretary and other officers of the Ministry of External Affairs and drew their attention to Direction 55 (1) of the Directions by the Speaker, Lok Sabha.

4. The Foreign Secretary, then briefed the Committee on the subject "Passport Seva Project-targets and achievements". He dwelt upon the idea behind Passport Seva Project and discussed its various aspects and highlighted various initiatives taken by the Ministry to streamline the Passport issuance system.

5. The Foreign Secretary also replied to various queries raised by the Members. During discussions, the Members of the Committee *inter-alia* raised various issues relating to the subject including the role of service provider and safety of data, improvement in rendering of services, reasons for long wait for seeking appointments, reasons for delays in new system and pendency of passport applications submitted under old system, roles of other agencies authorized to collect and submit applications, presence of middlemen and touts, poor quality of passport and the issues related to police verification etc. Members further stressed upon the need to open new Passport

Seva Kendras (PSKs) at various important places in all the States in the Country and also opening of mini PSKs particularly in North Eastern States.

6. A verbatim proceeding of the sitting has been kept on record.

The Committee then adjourned.

**MINUTES OF THE SITTING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL
AFFAIRS HELD ON 16th JANUARY, 2013**

The Committee sat on 16th January, 2013 1600 hrs. to 1800 hrs. in Committee Room No. 62, PH, New Delhi.

Present

Shri Ananth Kumar – In the Chair

Members

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Jose K. Mani
3. Shri Gobinda Chandra Naskar
4. Shri M.B. Rajesh
5. Shri J. Ramesh
6. Shri Francisco Sardinha
7. Dr. Bhola Singh
8. Dr. Girija Vyas
9. Shri Sultan Ahmed
10. Shri Inder Singh Namdhari

Rajya Sabha

11. Dr. Najma Heptulla
12. Shri Balbir Punj
13. Smt. Ambika Soni

Witnesses

Sl. No.	Name	Designation
1.	Shri Ranjan Mathai	- Foreign Secretary
2.	Shri B. K. Gupta	- Additional Secretary (CPV)
3.	Shri Muktesh K. Pardeshi	- JS (PSP) & CPO
4.	Shri Mridul Kumar	- Joint Secretary, (Parl. & Coord)\
5.	Shri A.K. Sobti	- Director (PSP) & PVA

Secretariat

1. Dr. Ram Raj Rai - Director
2. Shri A. Sivanandam - Under Secretary

At the outset Hon. Chairman welcomed the Members of the Committee and the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs for further discussion on the subject 'Passport Seva Project – Targets and Achievements'.

2. While initiating the discussion, the Chairman enunciated various problems being faced by the applicants even after more than two and half years since the operationalisation of the Passport Seva Project (PSP) especially delays in getting Police Verification Reports.

3. Thereafter, the Foreign Secretary elaborated upon the salient features of Passport Seva Project and mentioned the initiatives being taken or being considered for smooth functioning and delivery of passports.

4. The Committee deliberated on various issues related to the subject, viz. problems related to touts and agents, need for regulating the system of on-line appointments, delays in police verification, lack of passport services in the backward regions of the country, outsourcing of visa services by the Indian consulates etc. The Chairman reiterated Committee's earlier recommendation and desired to know about the action taken by the Ministry for inclusion of District Passport Cells (DPCs), Speed Post Centres and Post offices in the process of deposition of forms and capturing of bio-metric data of the applicants to utilize the existing network.

5. The representatives of the Ministry replied to the queries of the Committee and informed them about its plan to utilize the existing network of Common Service Centres, Speed Post Centres and District Passport Cells in extending Passport related services.

The Committee then adjourned

A verbatim record of the proceeding has been kept.

**MINUTES OF THE EIGHTH SITTING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2013-14) HELD ON 17TH DECEMBER, 2013**

The Committee sat on 17th December, 2013 from 1600 hrs. to 1715 hrs. in Committee Room 'B' Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

Present

Shri Francisco Sardinha - In the Chair

Members

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Anto Antony
3. Shri Bhudeo Choudhary
4. Shri Bhakta Charan Das
5. Shri Suresh Kalmadi
6. Shri Gobinda Chandra Naskar
7. Shri. Rajendrasinh Rana

Rajya Sabha

8. Shri Balbir Punj

Secretariat

1. Dr. Ram Raj Rai - Director
2. Smt. Rita Jaikhani - Additional Director

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

1. Smt. Sujatha Singh - Foreign Secretary
2. Shri A.R. Ghanashyam - Additional Secretary (CPV & Hajj)

3. Shri Muktesh K. Pardeshi - Joint Secretary (PSP) & CPO
4. Shri A.K. Sobti - Director (PSP & PV)
5. Shri A.K. Bhatnagar - Consultant (PSP)
6. Shri Golok Kumar Simli - Principal Consultant (Tech-PSP)

2. Hon'ble Chairman (Shri Ananth Kumar) could not attend the sitting of the Committee due to some urgent engagement. The Committee, therefore, chose Shri Francisco Sardinha, Member of Parliament to act as Chairman for the sitting in terms of Rule 258(3) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha.

3. At the outset, the Chair welcomed the Members of the Committee and representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs to the sitting of the Committee to take oral evidence on the subject 'Passport Seva Project- Targets and Achievements'. The Chair outlined all the major issues relating to the passport seva project and wanted to listen the views of the Ministry particularly about the impact of recent initiatives taken by the Ministry for the benefit of applicants in all parts of the country including rural areas.

4. Thereafter, the Foreign Secretary elaborated upon the status of Passport Seva Project and various initiatives undertaken by the Ministry to ensure delivery of Passport Services in a serious and reliable manner. She further informed the Committee about the steps taken by the Ministry in response to their suggestion to make the passport issuance system easier and more accessible. The representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs also replied to various queries raised by the Members of the Committee.

5. The Committee further discussed various issues such as involvement of postal network in the passport services, plight of applicants from rural areas, disposal of applications received

during passport melas, delay in opening of Passport Seva Laghu Kendra's in the North East region and Union Territories, quality of passport booklets including diplomatic passports, delay in feasibility study being prepared by National Institute of Smart Governance (NSIG) and opening of Lagu Passport Seva Kendras and particular passport related problems being faced by residents of Goa, Rajkot (Gujarat) and District Pathanamthitta (Kerala) etc.

6. The Foreign Secretary brought to the notice of the Committee, the problem of delay in receiving police verification reports in the timely dispatch of passports.. Thereafter, the Chairman directed the Ministry to furnish written replies to the points raised by the Committee, to which the data was not readily available.

The Committee then adjourned.

A verbatim record of the proceeding has been kept.

**MINUTES OF THE TENTH SITTING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2013-14) HELD ON 18TH FEBRUARY, 2014**

The Committee sat on 18th February, 2014 from 1500 hrs. to 1530 hrs. in Committee Room No.67, Parliament House, New Delhi.

PRESENT

Dr. Najma A. Heptulla - In the Chair

MEMBERS

LOK SABHA

2. Shri Anto Antony
3. Shri Sansuma Khunggur Bwiswmuthiary
4. Shri Bhakta Charan Das
5. Shri Inder Singh Namdhari
6. Shri Gobinda Chandra Naskar
7. Shri Francisco Sardinha
8. Dr. Bholu Singh

RAJYA SABHA

9. Smt. Jaya Bachchan
10. Shri Murli Deora
11. Shri H.K. Dua
12. Dr. K.P. Ramalingam
13. Shri N.K. Singh
14. Shri D.P. Tripathi

SECRETARIAT

Dr. Ram Raj Rai

-

Director

2. Hon'ble Chairman (Shri Ananth Kumar) could not attend the sitting of the Committee due to some urgent engagement. The Committee therefore, chose Dr. Najma A. Heptulla to act as the Chairperson for the sitting in terms of Rule 258(3) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha.

3. At the outset, the Chair welcomed the Members to the sitting of the Committee.

4. The Committee then took up for consideration the Draft Report on the subject 'Passport Seva Project- Targets and Achievements'. The Chair invited the Members to offer their suggestions, if any, for incorporation in the draft Report. The Members suggested some minor modifications. The Committee adopted the draft Report with minor modifications.

5. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

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

The Committee then adjourned.