

COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

(THIRTEENTH LOK SABHA)

EIGHTEENTH REPORT



सत्यमेव जयते

(Presented to Speaker on 26 August, 2002)
(Presented to Lok Sabha on 2002)

LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

August, 2002/Śravana, 1924 (Saka)

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CONTENTS

	PAGES
COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS.....	(iii)
I. INTRODUCTION.....	(v)
II. REPORT.....	1
(i) Implementation of recommendation made by Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Eighth Report on the Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations of the Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Fourth Report on the representation requesting for upgradation of post of Assistant Naval Store Officer to Assistant Naval Store Officer-I of Civilian Officer working in Navy and Implementation of other recommendations of the Vth Pay Commission.	1
(ii) Action taken by the Government on the recommendations of the Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Twelfth Report on petition regarding grievances of the rural people of the State of Meghalaya due to blanket restriction on movement of cut trees.....	8
(iii) Action taken by the Government on the recommendations made by the Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Ninth Report on the petition regarding conversion of Aurihar-Jaunpur meter gauge line into broad gauge...	13

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

Shri Basudeb Acharia — *Chairman*

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4. Shri Ambati Brahmaniah
5. Shri Anant Gangaram Geete
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2. Shri C.S. Joon — *Deputy Secretary*
3. Shri J.S. Chauhan — *Under Secretary*
4. Smt. Neera Singh — *Assistant Director*

*Nominated *w.e.f.* 27 March, 2002 *vide* para No. 2778 of Bulletin—Part II dated 27 March, 2000 *vice* Dr. K. Malaisamy, M.P. who resigned.

**EIGHTEENTH REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS
(THIRTEENTH LOK SABHA)**

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairman, Committee on Petitions, having been authorised by the Committee to present the Report on their behalf, present this Eighteenth Report of the Committee to the House on the following matters:—

- (i) Implementation of recommendation made by Committee on Petitions (Thirteen Lok Sabha) in their Eighth Report on the Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations of the Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Fourth Report on the representation requesting for upgradation of post of Assistant Naval Store Officer to Assistant Naval Store Officer-I of Civilian Officer working in Navy and implementation of other recommendations of the Vth Pay Commission.
- (ii) Action taken by the Government on the recommendations of the Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Twelfth Report on petition regarding grievances of the rural people of the State of Meghalaya due to blanket restriction on movement of cut trees.
- (iii) Action taken by the Government on the recommendations made by the Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Ninth Report on the petition regarding conversion of Aurihar-Jaunpur meter gauge line into broad gauge.

2. The Committee considered and adopted the Eighteenth Report at their sitting held on 8th August, 2002.

3. The observations/recommendations of the Committee on the above matters have been included in the Report.

NEW DELHI;
8 August, 2002

17 Sravana, 1924(Saka)

BASUDEB ACHARIA,
Chairman,
Committee on Petitions.

CHAPTER I

IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS (13TH LOK SABHA) IN THEIR EIGHTH REPORT ON THE ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS (13th LOK SABHA) IN THEIR 4TH REPORT ON THE REPRESENTATION REQUESTING FOR UPGRADATION OF POST OF ASSISTANT NAVAL STORE OFFICER TO ASSISTANT NAVAL STORE OFFICER-I OF CIVILIAN OFFICERS WORKING IN NAVY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VTH PAY COMMISSION

The Committee on Petitions (13th Lok Sabha) in their Eighth Report presented to Lok Sabha on 24 July, 2001 had dealt with Action Taken by the Government on the recommendations of the Committee on Petitions (13th Lok Sabha) in their fourth report on the representation requesting for upgradation of post of Assistant Naval Store Officer to Assistant Naval Store Officer-I of Civilian Officers working in Navy and implementation of other recommendations of the Vth Pay Commission.

1.2. The Ministry of Defence was requested to implement the recommendations made by the Committee for their consideration. The Action Taken replies of the Ministry of Defence have been received. The recommendations made by the Committee and the replies thereto furnished by the Ministry of Defence are discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

1.3 The main observations/recommendations of the Committee were contained in paragraph Nos. 3.5 and 3.10 of the Eighth Report (13th Lok Sabha) which are reproduced below:

“The Committee had observed in their earlier Report that the main grievances of the petitioners (Indian Navy Civilian Officers Association) were regarding non-implementation of the recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission in regard to upgradation of the post of ANSO to ANSO-I; creation/upgradation of the post of Sr. Director/Director and formation of Indian Naval Engineering service. In regard to ANSO, the Ministry of Defence had redistributed the 94 existing posts of ANSO in two revised grades of Rs. 8000-13500 and Rs. 6500-10500 in the ratio of 2:1 with the designation ANSO-I and ANSO-II respectively. The Committee were informed that the existing incumbents of the post of ANSO in the scale of Rs. 6500-10500 having rendered the prescribed service of 5 years would be placed in the scale of Rs. 8000-13500

prospectively subject to their being found fit for promotion to the Group 'A' post. However, the petitioners had contended that placing the existing incumbents of the post ANSO to ANSO-I was a case of upgradation and not promotion. The Committee had, therefore, recommended that the plea of the petitioners should be examined in the light of the practices followed by other Ministries/Departments of Government of India. The Ministry of Defence in their action taken reply have stated that the incumbents have been promoted as ANSO-I, after following the prescribed procedures and DPC held under the aegis of CPSC. Although, the Committee trust that application of rules would have been adhered to while upgradation/promotion of the incumbents in the post of ANSO they recommend that the implementation of the recommendation of the V CPC regarding upgradation of ANSO post may be made in the right earnest so that the existing incumbents ANSOs are given their claims judiciously and the main intention behind the recommendation of V CPC does not get diluted.

(Para 3.5)

The Committee regret to note that inspite of the recommendation of the Committee, the Ministry of Defence, have not made any fresh examination of the matter relating to making the Naval Store Organisation an organised service. The Committee reiterate that the feasibility of formation of Naval Store Organisation as an organised service may be worked out by the Government at the earliest keeping in view the functional requirements. The Committee desire that the required recruitment rules for the civilian cadre including the post of Senior Director/Director may be finalised soon.

(Para 3.10)

1.4 The Ministry in their Action Taken on Action Taken replies stated as follows:—

“The proposal regarding restructuring of the ANSO Cadre in accordance with recommendations of the VCPC as contained in para 63.75 of the Report and placement of the post of ANSO Grade-I in the higher pay scale of Rs. 8000-13500 (pre-revised Rs. 2200-4000) *w.e.f.* 1.1.1996 had been reconsidered by the Ministry of Finance. The proposal has not been approved.”

1.5 In their Action Taken on Action Taken Replies, since the Ministry of Defence had not given effect to the recommendations made by the Committee in paras 29 and 30 of the Fourth Report and reiterated in their Action Taken Report in paras 3.5 and 3.10 of the Eighth Report of Committee on Petitions (13th Lok Sabha), the Committee after considering the views of the Ministry in the matter under Rule 15 of the Internal Working Rules of the Committee on Petitions decided to further examine the matter and Report the same.

1.6 The Committee on Petitions, thereafter, took oral evidence of representatives of the Ministries of Defence and Finance on 17.7.2002.

1.7 The Committee pointed out to the witnesses that a proposal for formation of a separate cadre for Naval Store Officers was referred to DOP&T in 1994 for their approval but it was withdrawn, subsequently. The Committee then desired to know as to why any cadre review has not been done by the Ministry of Defence for Naval Store Officers for the past 30 years. To this, the Secretary, Ministry of Defence stated as follows:—

“Sir, it is a fact that the Pay Commission had recommended the creation of the post of Assistant Naval Store Officer-I and Assistant Naval Store Officer-II from the earlier prevailing grade of Assistant Naval Store Officer. The Assistant Naval Store Officer-I would have been in the higher grade. The action taken that has been reported to the Committee is that this has been done. Sixty three posts have been placed in the higher pay scale and as of now all the people who were eligible have been posted in these posts. It is a fact. The Pay Commission did not specify in which day this higher pay scale would be given effect to. It is a fact that this has been given effect to from 1.1.1996.

So far as the separate cadre is concerned, what the Pay Commission had recommended was that these people be placed along with the other officers of similar nature of the Navy in a separate engineering cadre. This was by the Fifth Central Pay Commission. What we had intimated in terms of what we had analysed ourselves is that there are three groups in the Navy—Naval Armament group, civilian technical officers and the Naval Store Officers. In consultation with the navy we had earlier been of the view that it would be difficult and not feasible to combine these three groups as a combined engineering service for various reasons, largely because these three groups perform totally different functions. This, I think, was also accepted by the Committee which had thereafter recommended that we look at the question of having a separate cadre for these Assistant Naval Store Officers only.

Now, you said that in 1994 we had set a proposal to DOP&T which was withdrawn. But, it is a fact that it is this cadre which had been stagnating for many years which was one of the reasons why the pay Commission had made its recommendations and we have effectively implemented all the recommendations except two. The first one is relating to the effect of placement of the ANSOs in ANSO-I and II cadre. They have been placed with effect from 1.1.1996. As I stated, this is a point which I will expand further.

So far as the separate cadre is concerned, it is an engineering service. It is difficult to have a separate cadre for Navy. What we have been exploring is the possibility, as recommended in its Report by the Committee on Petitions, of having a separate cadre as an organised Service of the Naval Stores Organisation. We have had preliminary

discussions between us and with the concerned agencies outside the Ministry and it appears to us, at present, feasible.

Sir, as you are aware, the attributes of Group 'A' Service are determined by the DOP&T. It lays down certain parameters. What we propose to do now is to try to see if we can have a separate organised Service declared for the Naval Stores Organisation. It will require consultation with Ministry of Finance, DOP&T and finally the UPSC, and probably the Cabinet also. We will be viewing it positively and taking up the issue. This is in relation to the cadre, declaring it an organised service.

When this cadre gets into an organised Service, it gets certain benefits which follow automatically from the fact that they have been declared an organised Service. In this way, we expect that whatever was not done in the past will get rectified in future. But this process of declaring a Service an organised Service requires a series of steps in consultation with various agencies. If you permit, we shall, as I stated, take it up in the right earnest. I think, we should be in a position to make some concrete, demonstrable progress in about three to four months from now. We shall send an interim reply to the Committee, let us say, in four months from now as to the status of our attempt at declaring this as an organised Service."

1.8 On a query regarding the placing of the services of ANSOs to ANSOs-I and II retrospectively *w.e.f.* 1.1.1996; the Secretary, Ministry of Defence stated as follows:—

"Reverting back to some other unimplemented suggestions of the Committee, that is with respect to the date of giving effect to the pay-scale of ANSO-I. To us, the ANSOs are our officers. We, therefore, had taken, as I said, probably the narrower view, the smaller view and not the wider view and said to the Ministry of Finance to give it to them from 1.1.1996. This was a recommendation which we had suggested to the Finance Ministry. But the Finance Ministry has to take a much broader view of the matter. They are not concerned with only the Defence Ministry; I presume that they are concerned with the entire Government of India. It was the Finance Ministry's decision that it could only be granted with prospective date."

1.9 Referring to a proposal of the Ministry of Home Affairs for the Technical and Executive Cadres of IB, the Committee pointed out that the Ministry of Finance had upgraded all the 121 (instead of 30 only as recommended by V CPC) and that to retrospectively *w.e.f.* 1.1.1996. The Committee then desired to know the reasons behind denying the ANSOs under the Ministry of Defence the benefit of availing the benefits

retrospectively *w.e.f.* 1.1.1996 with the same analogy as followed in the case of the ATOs. To this, the Secretary of Ministry of Finance (Department of Expenditure) explained as follows:—

“On the basic issue as to the date from which the pay scales have to become effective, there is a Government of India decision that in respect of pay scales which have been recommended by the Fifth Pay Commission, they will be effective from 1.1.1996, the only exception being where the Pay Commission has itself stated that certain conditions or prerequisites for a particular scale of pay have to be met or where it involves restructuring of the cadre or where redistribution of forces is involved. While notifying the new pay scales, we have ourselves said that in respect of these cases, the pay scale will become effective only prospectively and not from 1.1.1996. This is a policy that we have consistently adopted and implemented in respect of pay scales where redistribution or restructuring is involved. That is the basic principle. If the scale is accepted as it is, there is no problem. Where there is redistribution, it has to be only prospectively.

The second issue that you have raised is whether this is comparable to ATOs in the IB. Sir, in the case of IB, we have two parallel structures. One is the executive cadre, and the other is the technical cadre. In view of their recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission, certain distortions have crept into the parties that existed between the executive cadre and the technical cadre. This issue was taken up by the Ministry of Home Affairs with the Finance Ministry and after detailed examination, this kind of distortion that had crept in between these two within the same organisation has been looked into, and that has been rectified. Once the old parity have been established, then they were also entitled to the application of the revised pay scales from 1.1.1996. The particular case that you are mentioning is in respect of the ATOs. A parity existed between the Assistant Technical Officer of the IB and the Deputy Central Intelligence Officer in the executive cadre of the IB. The Deputy Central Intelligence Officer of the executive cadre was given a higher pay scale by the Pay Commission. In the case of the ATOs, it was given a lower pay scale. Then, they introduced the Grade I, as in the case of the ANSOs, but because this was creating a distortion between the executive cadre and the technical cadre, the Home Ministry took up the case with us. Then, we did realise that the parity had been disturbed. So, we restored the parity. Once the parity has been restored, when all people are getting the same scale of pay without any restructuring, then they were entitled to the revised pay scale from 1.1.1996. That we have clarified in our written submission. Whereas in the case of ANSOs, it is not the case because the parity has not been disturbed or no restructuring is

involved. If it is accepted that there is restructuring, then only some of the posts will go on to a higher pay scale, and the others will remain in a lower pay scale. Once that is accepted, the higher pay scale will be available only after the restructuring is done or reprioritisation is done, and the higher scale will be available from the date when it is done. That is how it has been made prospective.”

1.10 The Committee asked about the clarifications as regards the view of the Ministry of Finance that the VCPC had not recommended en-block upgradation of the ANSO Cadre post and on certain number of posts to be defined by the Ministry of Defence were to be placed in the upgraded pay scale. To this, the Secretary of Ministry of Finance (Department of Expenditure) stated as follows:—

“Sir, in case of the Naval Store Office, there would be two scales of ANSO-I and II. They mentioned that new grades to be introduced for gradual promotion and the number of posts to be decided by the Ministry of Defence. That is what the Fifth Pay Commission has said. There is a re-distribution involved. The Pay Commission itself has said that there would be two scales of Grade-I and II and the number of posts in each one of these grades would be decided by the Ministry of Defence. This automatically implies that there is no en-block promotion or application of a higher pay scale contemplated by the Fifth Pay Commission.”

Observation / Recommendation

1.11 The Committee in their Action Taken Report had reiterated that the feasibility of formation of Naval Store Organisation as an organised service may be worked out by the Government at the earliest keeping in view the functional requirements.

1.12 The Committee are satisfied to note from the submission made by the Secretary, Ministry of Defence, during their oral evidence that after having preliminary discussions with the concerned agencies outside the Ministry, it appears to be feasible to the Ministry to have a separate cadre as an organised service of the Naval Stores Organisation.

1.13 While agreeing with the Ministry that this will require consultation with Ministry of Finance, DOP&T and finally the UPSC, etc., the Committee appreciate the positive approach of the Ministry of Defence on the issue. The Committee, therefore, expect that the Ministry of Defence should take some concrete, demonstrable progress within three months to form the Naval Store Organisation as an organised service as assured by the Ministry during oral evidence.

1.14 The Committee in their Action Taken Report had also recommended that the required recruitment rules for the civilian cadre

including the post of Senior Director/Director may be finalised soon. The Committee regret to note that in spite of the recommendation of the Committee, the Ministry of Defence, have not yet finalised the required recruitment rules. The Committee reiterate that the recruitment rules for the civilian cadre including the post of Senior Director/Director should be finalised, expeditiously. The Committee would like to be apprised of the action taken in the matter within two months after presentation of this Report.

1.15. The Committee are informed that the Ministry of Home Affairs in the case of Technical and Executive Cadres of IB had upgraded all the officials as recommended by Fifth Central Pay Commission. However, the ANSOs under the Ministry of Defence have been denied the benefits of upgraded pay-scale, retrospectively *w.e.f* 1.1.1996. The Committee are of the firm view that had concerted efforts been made by the Government to implement the recommendation of the Fifth Central Pay Commission in regard to Naval Store Services in letter and spirit, the ANSOs could be given the benefit of upgraded scales with the same analogy as in the case of the Technical and Executive Cadres of IB. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Government may examine the matter afresh so as to give the ANSOs working in Naval Stores their rightful benefits of higher pay scales retrospectively *i.e. w.e.f.* 1.1.1996.

CHAPTER II

ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS (THIRTEENTH LOK SABHA) IN THEIR TWELFTH REPORT ON PETITION REGARDING GRIEVANCES OF THE RURAL PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF MEGHALAYA DUE TO BLANKET RESTRICTION ON MOVEMENT OF CUT TREES

The Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Twelfth Report presented to Lok Sabha on 19th December, 2001 had dealt with a petition presented by Shri P.R. Kyndiah, MP and signed by Shri Treling Marwein of Nonglami, Shillong, Meghalaya and 1, 228 others regarding grievances of the rural people of the State of Meghalaya due to blanket restriction on movement of cut trees.

2.2. The Committee has made certain observations/recommendations in the Report and the Ministry of Environment & Forests were requested to implement those recommendations and furnish their action taken notes for the consideration of the Committee.

2.3. Action taken notes have been received from the Ministry of Environment & Forests in respect of all the recommendations/observations contained in the Report.

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

2.5. In paragraph No. 1.61 of the Report, the Committee observed as follows:—

“In respect of the management of forests under the “United Khasi, Jaintia Hills. (Autonomous District) Management of Forest Act” and the Rules made thereunder in 1960, the Committee observe that the primary requirement of this Act was that the lands possessed by the communities, persons, clan lands and private holdings were to be registered in the name of the owners defining the forests and their boundaries. The Committee, however, deeply regret to note that there is complete absence of registration under the United Khasi-Jaintia Management of Forest Rules, 1960 except in very rare cases. This is despite the fact that had these Rules been followed, then as per Supreme Court judgement, there would not have been any mandatory requirement of working plan for private plantations. While the Committee agree that as per the Act the rules were to be framed by the District Council, because these are

the executive and legislative bodies of the State, the Committee would urge the Government to take up the issue with the State Government to frame the rules without any further loss of time. They also recommend that a cadastral survey may be done in the State, which would identify the forest boundaries enabling their management an easy task and stopping encroachment of forests and giving them the status of private properties. This may be done expeditiously.

2.6 In their action taken reply, the Ministry of Environment & Forests have stated that the issue pertaining to exemption of plantations from the purview of working plans/schemes is pending before Hon'ble Supreme Court. After the issue is decided by Supreme Court, necessary follow up action in this regard would be taken.

Observation/Recommendation

2.7 The Committee note that the issue pertaining to exemption of plantations from the purview of working plans/schemes is pending before Hon'ble Supreme Court and the matter is *sub-judice*. The Committee, however, are of the firm opinion that private plantation including the forests in the Khasi-jaintia Hills should be exempted from the mandatory requirement of working plans. The Committee urge that the State Government of Meghalaya should be persuaded to frame appropriate rules under the United Khasi Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Management and Control of Forests) Act so as to demarcate and register the boundaries of the private plantations in these hills and have better forest management. The Committee also desire to be apprised about the position of raising, regulation and control of forest plantations in the State in accordance with the provisions contained in the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Management and Control of Forest) Act, 1958 and the Garo Hills District (Forest) Act, 1958.

2.8 In paragraph No. 1.62 of the Report, the Committee observed as follows:—

“The Committee are contended to note that in this year there is 10 percent of Rs.800 crore of budget allocation specially earmarked for forests of North-East. Special schemes have been made for Meghalaya and the funds are being released directly to the agencies, FDAs and others so that they are not misused and would reach actually to the implementing agency. The Committee desire that the schemes may now be implemented without any further delay under strict vigil of the Centre and expect that the funds should not be misused.”

2.9 In their action taken reply, the Ministry of Environment & Forests have stated that regular monitoring of the progress under the Centrally Sponsored Schemes is carried out to ensure that the funds released are properly utilised.

Observation / Recommendation

2.10 While the Committee note that regular monitoring of the progress under the Centrally sponsored schemes is being carried out by the Government, they are of the firm opinion that sufficient steps are taken to obviate mis-utilisation of funds.

2.11 In paragraphs No. 1.63 of the Report, the Committee observed as follows:

“Another aspect which was brought to the notice of the Committee was about fake fire in the forest. The Committee are of the firm opinion that appropriate measures including action to get the appropriate number of Range Officers appointed, should be taken expeditiously to stop the incidents of fake fire in the forest. The Committee desire that suitable measures are taken in co-ordination with State Government of Meghalaya to curb the incidents of fake forest fire.”

2.12 In their action taken reply, the Ministry of Environment & Forests have stated that a detailed report in this regard has been asked from Regional Chief Conservator of Forests, Shillong, Suitable follow up action on the report would be taken.

Observation / Recommendation

2.13 The Committee recommend that the report from the Regional Chief Conservator of Forests, Shillong should be finalised expeditiously. The Committee also desire that appropriate action should be taken to curb the incidence of fake forest fire within a specific time frame.

2.14 In paragraph No. 1.64 of the Report, the Committee observed as follows:

“The Committee are deeply perturbed to learn that many forest officials, railway officers and others were actively involved in illegal felling and movement of trees. Between October, 1999 and May, 2000, the Ministry seized 202 railway wagons all of which contained large quantities of illegally obtained timber. The Committee have been informed that, concerned with this, the Supreme Court *vide* its order dated 13.1.2000 constituted a Special Investigating Team (SIT). On examination of Report submitted by SIT, the Supreme Court again banned movement of timber asking Chief Secretary of the Concerned State Government to give Report to Supreme Court as to what action had been taken by them against the officials found guilty within 60 days in illegal felling and movement of timber.”

2.15 In paragraph No. 1.65 of the Report, the Committee observed as follows:

“The Committee were further informed that on examination of SIT Report the Court issued further orders on 12.5.2001 by which movement of timber was followed thereby reiterating that stringent action to be taken against those responsible for illegalities, requirement of working plan/schemes for felling the forests on sustainable basis whenever forest is felled, it should be felled, sufficient financial provisions must be made for regeneration of the forest, framing of guidelines for felling of trees and plantations raised in non-forest areas by respective State Government, periodic reconciliation of records of timber harvesting, processing and disposal, and use of special water marked transit passes to avoid counterfeiting.”

2.16 In paragraph No. 1.66 of the Report, the Committee recommended as follows:

“While notifying the orders of Supreme Court, the Committee take a serious view of the issue and reiterate that stringent action against all the officials, including the Railway Board be taken and the Committee be apprised of the action taken within 60 days. The Committee also strongly recommend that the Supreme Court orders dated 12.5.2001 may strictly be implemented without further delay, and the Committee apprised of the same within 3 months.”

2.17 In their action taken reply, the Ministry of Environment & Forests have stated that effective steps have been taken for strict implementation of Supreme Court orders dated 12.5.2001. Maximum number of wagons that can be loaded from various approved loading stations are regularly being prescribed by the Special Investigating Team. Funds have been released for printing of Transit Passes on Water Marked Papers. Model guidelines for felling of trees from non forests areas have been sent to the concerned State Governments. Detailed guidelines to reconcile receipt, conversion and disposal of timber and timber products by the wood based units have been prescribed. After necessary investigation, issue of show cause notices and personal hearings, decisions in respect of railway wagons containing illegal timber loaded from North Eastern States have been taken by the Special Investigating Team. The licence of the erring wood based units have been cancelled. The State Governments and the Railway Board have been asked to take strong action against concerned guilty officials.

Observation/Recommendation

2.18 The Committee note with satisfaction that steps have been taken for strict implementation of Supreme Court orders dated 12.5.2001 by the Special Investigating Team. They, however, firmly recommend that

appropriate disciplinary action should be taken against the Railway officials involved in the illegal felling and movement of trees within a specific time frame. The Committee also desire that regular and timely checks are carried out by the Special Investigating Team in order to prevent any kind of unauthorised cutting of wood and transit of wood products in the State of Meghalaya.

CHAPTER III

ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS (THIRTEENTH LOK SABHA) IN THEIR NINTH REPORT ON THE PETITION REGARDING CONVERSION OF AURIHAR-JAUNPUR METER GAUGE LINE INTO BROAD GAUGE

The Committee on Petitions in their Ninth Report (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) presented to Lok Sabha on 24 July, 2001 had dealt with a petition regarding conversion of Aurihar-Jaunpur meter gauge line into broad gauge.

3.2 The Committee had made certain observations/recommendations in the matter and the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) were requested on 24.7.2001 to furnish their action taken notes for the consideration of the Committee.

3.3 Action taken notes had been received on 17 January, 2002 from the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) in respect of the recommendations contained in the report.

3.4 After perusal of the Action taken notes on the recommendations contained in the Ninth Report (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) on the matter, the Committee desired to examine the question of redressal of the grievances of the petitioners in detail with the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board).

3.5 The Committee dealt with the Action taken by Government on the recommendation of the Committee on the matter as given in the succeeding paragraphs.

3.6 In their action taken notes, the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) have not furnished their views on Para 1.15 of the Report in which the assurance was given by the Ministry during the course of evidence which *inter alia* stated that:—

“Yes, we understand that priority should be given to isolated section is the view of the Committee. So, we will definitely take a view on it and inform the hon'ble Minister of Railways about it.”

3.7 The Ministry of Railways (Railway Board), therefore, were requested to furnish their considered views on the assurance given by them during the course of evidence (Para 1.15 of the Ninth Report).

3.8 The Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) *vide* their communication dated 26 March, 2002 furnished their comments as under:—

“Aurihar-Jaunpur is an isolated Meter Gauge section on North Eastern Railway. A Preliminary Engineering Cum Traffic Survey (PETS) for Gauge Conversion of Aurihar-Jaunpur section was conducted in 1986. The Survey Report revealed that the cost of the 58.66 Kms. long line would be Rs. 16.31 Crores with a Rate of Return (RoR) of 1.33%.

In view of the grossly unremunerative nature of the line and acute constraint of resources, it has not been possible to consider taking up this work.

However, based on persistent demands, an updating survey was ordered in 1998. The survey was completed in June, 1999. The report revealed that the cost of the project would be Rs. 66.61 Crores with an RoR of 6.10%. In view of the low RoR and heavy throw-forward of works in progress under Gauge Conversion Plan-Head, this project was not taken up.

Consequent upon the Gauge Conversion of the adjoining lines, conventional train services on Aurihar-Jaunpur section were discontinued *w.e.f.* 05.12.1996. Taking into consideration the requirement of travelling public and the availability of all weather motorable roads in the area, diesel Rail Bus services were introduced on the line. At present, 3 pairs of Rail Buses are run daily on the section.

It has now been decided that introduction of DMUs instead of Rail Bus will be considered once rolling stock becomes available in near future and increase in services from 3 pairs a day or 4 pairs a day will also be considered. Each DMU set has a carrying capacity of 588 passengers as against 75 passengers in a Rail Bus. With the introduction of DMUs, the demand of the travelling public will be met adequately.

Keeping in view the large shelf of on going Gauge Conversion works, which will take several years to be completed at the present rate of funding, it will be possible to consider taking up Gauge Conversion of Aurihar-Jaunpur section after completion of some of the ongoing works depending upon availability of resources.”

3.9 The Committee, thereafter, took oral evidence of the representatives of the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) on 17.7.2000. During the evidence, the Committee pointed out to the witnesses that more than 6,000 or 7,000 kilometres of railway track have been converted from meter gauge

and narrow gauge to broad gauge but the Aurihar-Jaunpur section had not been considered for gauge conversion. At this, the member (Engineering) Railway Board stated as under:—

“What you are saying is absolutely right that with the conversion of the two lines on either side into broad gauge, this line has become isolated. We went in a big way for gauge conversion during the 9th Plan. In the 9th Plan we converted about 6,000 kilometres into broad gauge. Thereafter, the funds were becoming constrained and somehow this work could not be included. The last survey that we got carried out, the updated survey, was in 1999 which gave a rate of return of six per cent. But because we have a throw-forward of more than Rs. 10,000 crore, and our annual allocation of gauge conversion is of the order of Rs. 900 crore, it will take about 15 years to complete the work which has already been sanctioned. Of course, this work will cost Rs. 66 crore and odd. But then the thing is that we already have a very large number of sanctioned works. What we can do now is that we can get the survey updated again and go to the Planning Commission for inclusion in the next year. Now, no work can be carried out without the clearance of the Planning Commission.

3.10 The Committee pointed out to the witnesses that till the Aurihar-Jaunpur is not converted into broad-gauge section, the number of trains on this section could be increased. At this, the witness stated as under:—

“This is a 62 kilometres long section. In 1966, the meter-gauge conversion were disrupted. Today, the position is that we are running only a rail bus which is carrying about 75 people, 50 sitting and 25 standing. The average speed of the bus is 50 km. per hour. It is taking roughly one hour and 15 minutes.

The hon'ble member was mentioning about the running of the ordinary trains. We have gone into the details. In fact, during the last oral evidence before this hon'ble Committee, a mention was made that by June this year, a DMU would be introduced which would be able to carry about 588 people. But unfortunately, because of some problems in getting the materials for manufacturing of the DMU, it would not be commissioned by June this year. Now, it is expected that by the end of September or beginning of October this year, it should be possible for us to have a DMU.

As far as running of a conventional train is concerned, the work has not been attended to for the last six to seven years after the running of the train was stopped in 1996. The section is laid on the wooden sleepers. As the hon'ble Committee is aware that there is a ban by the Supreme Court on the procurement of wooden sleepers because of environmental problems. So, in the absence of the wooden sleepers we have to go in for cast-iron sleepers. But for

converting the meter-gauge into the broad-gauge, these cast-iron sleepers are not available. It is going to cost more than Rs. 1.5 crore if we want to introduce one conventional train. If we go ahead with this expenditure, that also will take another five to six months. But by the end of September or the beginning of October, we would be able to introduce a DMU. Meanwhile, we will upgrade the section also.”

The Witness further added:

“The most important problem which has come to our notice is that because there is lack of other means of transport, the rail bus is not able to carry the people. There is very heavy overcrowding. With the introduction of DMU, it will be possible for us to carry the passengers at least comfortably.

As far as the trips are concerned, presently we are having six trips—three trips up and three trips down. Even with the DMU, we will be able to run equal number of trips. But in the meanwhile, whatever is best possible, we will try to do, to upgrade the section and we will try to make them good.

As far as the conventional trains are concerned, I would like to run them. But because of the particular handicap, that is, because of the expenditure, which will ultimately be a wasteful expenditure, we are thinking about it. I would like to submit to this august Committee that this would be a wasteful expenditure. I believe that in 3-4 month's time the DMU would be introduced and it will be able to carry about 600 persons.”

3.11 In paragraph 1.17 of the Ninth Report, the Committee observed as follows:—

“The Committee note that conventional trains running on the Aurihar-Jaunpur railway junctions have been the main means of transport since the pre-independence days of the country. However, these conventional trains have been suddenly stopped in the Aurihar-Jaunpur section since December, 1996. After discontinuance of the conventional long trains on the Aurihar-Jaunpur section about 32 lakh population residing in the adjoining areas of this section are facing a lot of inconvenience for want of adequate rail transport facilities. According to the petitioners, even the road which is running parallel to this line is not adequate to meet the transport requirements of the people. The private buses/tempo operating on this route are charging exorbitant fare from the poor passengers. According to the information furnished to the Committee by the Ministry of Railways, against the second class ordinary fare/rail bus fare of Rs. 11/- between Aurihar-Jaunpur the Private Bus/Tempo fare was Rs. 30/-.

3.12 In their action taken note, the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) have further stated that consequent upon the Gauge Conversion of the adjoining lines, conventional train services on Aurihar-Jaunpur section were discontinued *w.e.f.* 5.12.1996. Taking into consideration the requirement of travelling public and the availability of all weather motorable roads in the area, diesel Rail Bus services were introduced on the line. At present, 3 pairs of Rail Buses are running daily on the section. In order to meet the increased demands of traffic, introduction of Diesel Multiple Units (DMUs) on the section, which will increase the carrying capacity of the trains as well as possibilities of rationalisation of time table of trains are being examined.

3.13 In paragraph 1.18 of the Ninth Report, the Committee observed as under:—

“One of the main contention of the petitioners is that by the conversion of the Metre Gauge (MG) rail line between Aurihar Railway Junction and Jaunpur Railway Junction into Broad Gauge line about 1000 villages around the area and about 5 lakh people would be benefited. Both these junctions should be converted into Broad Gauge (BG) as there are five major stations and a number of Halt Stations on this route. The railway lines beyond Aurihar and Jaunpur have already been converted into Broad Gauge.”

3.14 In their action taken note, the Ministry of Railways have stated that both Aurihar and Jaunpur are already Broad Gauge stations. For the local transportation needs of the population of the area Rail Bus services exist on the Metre Gauge line between Aurihar and Jaunpur. For passengers wanting to travel beyond Aurihar and Jaunpur, transshipment at these points will be required.

3.15 In paragraph 1.19 of the Ninth Report, the Committee observed as under:—

“The Committee are informed by the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) that gauge conversions had been going on slowly ever since independence of the country but the Railways decided in consultation with the Planning Commission that *w.e.f.* 01.04.1992 a thrust be given to gauge conversion by taking up Project Uni-Gauge (MG)Narrow Gauge (NG) lines to Broad Gauge (BG) over three Five Year Plan periods. About 8582 Kms. of MGNG lines had been converted to BG in the last 8 years. However, the Aurihar-Jaunpur section has not been selected for gauge conversion.”

3.16 In their action taken note, the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) have stated that a financial appraisal of the Gauge Conversion project conducted in 1998 revealed a Rate-of-Return of only 6.1% on the investment. In view of low returns and heavy throw forward of works in progress under Gauge Conversion Plan-Head, it has not been possible to consider the project for the present.

3.17 In paragraph 1.20 of Ninth Report, the Committee recommended as under:—

“The Committee note with dismay that the conventional trains services in the Aurihar-Jaunpur section had been discontinued *w.e.f.* 05.12.1996. The Section was isolated as a result of conversion of adjoining sections. The Committee feel that the gauge conversion of MGNG to BG lines have not been carried out in a section where optimum utilisation of railway facilities cannot be reached. In place of the conventional trains, a Rail Bus with a frequency of three pairs daily has been introduced at Aurihar-Jaunpur section. The Committee, however, are not at all convinced that a Rail Bus with a capacity of 75 passengers could provide identical Railway passenger benefits as were being provided by conventional trains with larger passenger capacity. As agreed to before the Committee by the Member Traffic (Railway Board), in the absence of the conventional trains on this section lot of discomfort and inconvenience is being faced by people particularly those who have to go beyond Jaunpur or Aurihar since they have to get off the Rail Bus and catch another train.”

3.18 In their action taken note, the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) have stated that three pairs of Rail Buses run daily between Aurihar and Jaunpur. In order to meet the increased demand of traffic, introduction of DMUs to increase the carrying capacity of trains as well as possibilities of rationalisation of time table of trains are being examined.

Observations/Recommendations

3.19 The Committee recommend that the work regarding introduction of DMUs as well as examination of the possibilities of rationalisation of time table of trains on Aurihar-Jaunpur section may be started at an early date. The Committee would like to be apprised about completion of the above works within 3 months of the presentation of this report to the Parliament.

3.20 In paragraph 1.21 of the Ninth Report, the Committee recommended as under:—

“The Committee wish to point out that the updating survey for conversion of this section completed in 1999 estimated a rate of return of 6.10% against a rate of return of 1.33% estimated in 1986. This is the increasing trend in the rate of return to the Railways. Besides, rate of return has admittedly not been taken up taking into account the social requirements. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommend that the conversion of Aurihar-Jaunpur section into broad gauge should be given top priority by making appropriate railway budgetary allocations to surmount the miseries and discomfort of the poor passengers of this section. The Committee also recommend that the gauge conversion of this section should be

undertaken without loss of time. The Committee desire to be apprised of the probable date of undertaking the work and its completion within a period of three months from the date of presentation of this report to Lok Sabha. The Committee also desire that in future at the time of survey for gauge conversion the local MLAs or MPs may be consulted by the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board).”

3.21 In their action taken note, the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) have stated that at present, Indian Railways has 71 ongoing Gauge Conversion projects with a total fund requirement of Rs. 10.500 crores. At the present rate of funding it will take 15 years (not taking inflation into account) to complete the sanctioned works. Considering the low Rate-of-Return and lack of justification from traffic point of view, taking up the Gauge Conversion of Aurihar and Jaunpur section is not being considered at present.

Gauge conversion works are taken up after a detailed survey at the field level. During the survey work consultations are held with the local administration, Chamber of Commerce and the people’s representatives.

Observations/Recommendations

3.22 The Committee note from the reply of the representative of the Ministry of Railways given at the time of tendering oral evidence, that they could get the survey work updated again at Aurihar-Jaunpur section and they will go to Planning Commission for inclusion of this work in next year’s plan. Therefore, the Committee recommend that updating of survey work may be completed at the earliest possible so that Ministry of Railways may submit the proposal to the Planning Commission to include this section for gauge conversion in the plan period of year 2003-2004.

3.23 The Committee also note that running of trains was discontinued in 1996 on Aurihar-Jaunpur in 1996 and since then work regarding upgradation of this section has not been taken up due to non-availability of cast-iron sleepers. The Committee recommend that this section may be upgraded within 3 months of the presentation of this report to the Parliament. The Committee also recommend that pending gauge conversion from metre gauge to broad gauge, as promised by the witness, D.M.U. should be introduced latest by October, 2002 to meet the pressing need of the people of the area.

NEW DELHI;
8 August, 2002

17 Sravana, 1924 (Saka)

BASUDEB ACHARIA,
Chairman,
Committee on Petitions.

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