

Review on the working of and Annual Reports and Annual Accounts with Audit Report of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur for 1991-92, etc.etc.

in laying papers mentioned at (3) above.

[Placed in Libraries. See No LT - 2799/92]

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE) (KUMARI SELJA): I beg to lay on the Table:

(1)(a) (i) A copy of the annual Report (Hindi and English versions) of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, for the year 1990-91.

(ii) a copy of the Review (Hindi and English versions) by the Government on the working of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, for the year 1990-91.

(b) A copy of the Annual Accounts (Hindi and English versions) of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, for the year 1990-91 together with Audit Report thereon under sub-section (4) of section 23 of the Institute of Technology Act, 1961.

(2) A statement (Hindi and English versions) showing reasons for delay in laying the papers mentioned at (1) above
[Placed in Library. See No. LT-2798/92]

(3) (i) A copy of the Annual Report (Hindi and English versions) of the Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, for the year 1990-91.

(ii) A copy of the Review (Hindi and English versions) by the Government on the working of the Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, for the year 1990-91.

(4) A statement (Hindi and English versions) showing reasons for delay

(5) A copy of the Annual Accounts (Hindi and English versions) of the Jawahar Lal Nehru University for the year 1990-91 together with Audit Report thereon.

(6) A statement (Hindi and English versions) showing reasons for delay in laying the papers mentioned at (5) above.
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MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The House will now take up further consideration of the passports (Amendment) Bill.

Shri Dhananjaya Kumar may continue his speech.

14.31 hrs.

PASSORTS (AMENDMENT) BILL - *Contd*
[English]

SHRI DHANANJAYA KUMAR (Mangalore) Hon. Deputy Speaker Sir, the Minister for External Affairs is not present in the House. Is he sent abroad on any urgent assignment? If I make any suggestions in his absence, I do not know whether they would reach him or not. Anyway, with the fond hope that the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs will take care of my suggestions and get them implemented, I will proceed with my speech.

Yesterday, I was dealing with the fees that would be levied for issuing a passport. Now, I would come to the procedure adopted for issuing the passport.

As per the procedures laid down, an applicant seeking a passport has to furnish all the required information. Then he will be left in the dark as to when he will receive his

[Sh. Dhananjaya Kumar]

passport. This is because the Department would require police verification, etc. before issuing the passport. Of late, absent six months ago, a circular was issued in the name of a directive. Under this circular, if the applicant submits the verification statement along with his application, he would be issued the passport at an early date. This verification certificates can be obtained from police officer above the ranks of superintendent of police or other officers of Government of India above the level of Deputy Secretary or a sub-divisional magistrate. My submission is that it is very difficult for a common man to approach such officers to obtain verification certificate before-hand. The Government may make it mandatory and issue directives to the concerned officials to issue verification certificates whenever an applicant approaches them. Otherwise, it would amount to making a discrimination. Only such of the people who can gain access to such officials can get their passport early. After all, why is this police verification required at all? You have got the authority in your hands to impound or withdraw or suspend the passport, if there are valid reasons. Finally you can even cancel a passport the moment you come to know about the bad antecedents of the passport holder.

✓ When such powers are vested with the authority, why do you require a police verification certificate before issuing a passport? If the Government insists on obtaining such a polite verification certificate, then, at least, they should fix a time frame within which such verification certificates should be submitted by the police officials.

The Experience is that police verification certificates are not issued for months together. There are a number of instances where the police verification certificate is delayed beyond more than one year. So, the Government should at least fix the time limit within the police verification certificate should be sent by the concerned police officer.

People would like to obtain passports for various purposes like for getting higher

education, for getting medical treatment abroad, to go as tourists, then to call on somebody who is sick. I would require the Government to make a difference among these passport seekers. You can issue different kinds of passports; you can issue a passport for a limited period so that the insurance of a passport is expedited. After all, the Government also appear to be eager to simplify the procedure and see that an applicant is ensured of obtaining a passport once he applies for it. So, the Government will have to come out with suitable steps; they need not propose any further amendment to the Act; they can fix the guidelines by issuing a circular, by issuing a Notification or by issuing a suitable order.

In the end, I would like to remind the hon. Minister that at least before he is divested of the charge of this particular Department, let him come to Mangalore and declare open a new passport office unlike Mr. Eduardo Faleiro, who held a promise but could not implement that; and ultimately he had to say that he was divested of the power. So, I would request the hon. Minister earnestly to make a declaration today itself in this House so that it would become a commitment and lest tomorrow he should not say that for want of funds and short of staff, a passport office at Mangalore cannot be opened.

So, with these suggestions I conclude my speech. I support the measures proposed in the Bill.

[*Translation*]

SHRI AYUB KHAN: (Jhunjhunu): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the bill brought forward by the hon. Minister to amend the Passport Act. These days the problem of passport is given in Rajasthan. The provision for issuing passport is only in Jaipur in Rajasthan whereas the persons going to the gulf countries from India live in Jhunjhunu and Sikar districts in the largest number. The largest number of labourers goes to foreign countries from there. Mr. Minister, since you have been in charge of Rajasthan, as General Secretary you have knowledge about every district of Rajasthan.

I want that so long as you are Minister, you should give permission for opening a passport office at Jhunjhunu immediately so that the poor persons should not have to go to Jaipur for obtaining passports. They face a lot of difficulties in undertaking journey to Jaipur. They face difficulties everywhere because in the rule of corrupt Government there money is taken from these people at every step (Interruptions)

SHRI GIRDHARI LAL BHARGAVA (Jaipur): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is totally wrong. No such money is taken in Rajasthan, rather the facilities are better in Jaipur.

While speaking on the Passport Bill, you have deviated from your subject matter. (Interruptions)

SHRI AYUB KHAN: There are irregularities. The procedure should be simplified to remove these irregularities. Therefore, my suggestion is that the verification of passport should be made by the Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat and not by the police. If the Sarpanch issues a certificate such and such person is good, the police verification should not be required for him and his passport should be issued. This will greatly help the officials of the passport office as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, there were umpteen complain's against the Jaipur passport office. I am happy that as soon as the hon. Minister occupied office, he was transferred somewhere else. I would like to request the hon. Minister to provide one-window system there so that all formalities pertaining to passport are completed at a single window and at all cost a person should be given his passport within five weeks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, through you I want to bring to your notice an episode. Shri Yusuf Khan the younger brother of the Ex-Pradhan of Rolsar Saheb, Fatehpur Tehsil was murdered in the embassy of Libya at Tripoli and it was the responsibility of that ambassador to bring the dead body to India, but he did not discharge his responsibility. Rather he is intimidating the Indians working

there that their passport will be impended. Therefore, through you, I request the hon. Minister to instruct the Libyan ambassador not to take action of intimidating them in this way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, several people from Rajasthan go to Arab countries. As the largest number of persons from Jhunjhunu and Sikar join army to guard the frontiers of the country, the people from my constituency Jhunjhunu have gone to Arab countries in the largest number in the country. The situation there is that landlords mortgage their land and borrow money at the rate of 10 per cent interest and give it to these people. Moreover they spend extra money for getting passports. Therefore, I request the Government to open a passport suboffice in my constituency Jhunjhunu so that the people may obtain their passport easily. Similarly, I would like to submit to the hon. Minister that when they are return Indian from abroad, they are harassed too much while carrying out checks etc. I would like to request him to take care of the citizens of Jhunjhunu in this regard. I express my gratitude for the time allowed to me for speaking here. jai Hind.

[English]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time allotted for this subject was one hour and we have taken one hour twenty minutes more. Since there are several hon. Members who are anxious to speak, so they can just pinpoint their submissions and can make suggestions also, if they wish.

[English]

SHRI SYED SHAHABUDDIN: (Kishanganj): I would like to remind the hon. Minister that the supreme Court has virtually guaranteed the right to passport in the famous *Maneka Gandhi* case, and there is old adage that justice delayed is justice denied. I would like to say that a right delayed is a right denied.

Sir, you had promised us that the passports shall be issued within five weeks.

[Sh. Syed Shahabuddin]

It has been brought out on the floor of the House that this is an exception rather the rule that passports are taking more than a year, some times to be issued.

AN HON. MEMBER: More than a year?

SHRI SYED SHAHABUDDIN: Sometimes, and this delay is for many reasons. But one of the most important reasons is the prevalent corruptions. I would like to inform you, Mr. Deputy Speaker and through you the hon. Minister, that in my town Patna, Passport forms are sold in the black market just out side the passport office This can be cured.

There is another fact, which must be kept in view, that this is a profit making department, this is a revenue earning Organisation, not only inside the country but also outside the country and, therefore, the other reasons for corruptions, that is, lack of staff can also be handled very effectively.

The hon. Minister has mentioned the rising number of applications. In fact, I was just calculating I do not know the percentage, the total number of passport holders in the country form of the total population. But I am sure that this percentage in India is much lower than the in many advanced countries. The number of applicants that he has cited, about 24 lakhs in a year is roughly only 0.2 per cent of the population. And, if I may say so, you are just beginning to see the flood. The real flood is still to come and you have to gear yourself to cope with the rising flood in the years to come.

I find that last year there was an arrear of eight lakhs, in 1991. You have not given us the figure for the backlog. On 1st January 1991 I imagine that it would also be a few lakhs. I would like to know on the floor of the House, from the hon. Minister what steps the Ministry has taken to cope with this backlog and to ensure that passport applications received within a given year are processed within that year.

Police verification was cited as a reason for the delay. There is an internal verification also. I imagine that the progress of computerisation in the Passport Organisation is going to expedite internal processing. For the Police verification I would once again remind you that we had been informed that if the District Police authorities do not respond with a fixed period of time then the passport Office may issue the passport without waiting for them. I would request the hon. Minister, through you, that this rule should be applied very very strictly.

The second reason is that you do not have sufficient staff. I find here from your annual report that there is a wide disparity in the number of applications received between one office and the other. In some cases it is higher than 2,50,000 nearly three lakhs in the case of Bombay. In other cases it is less than 10,000 or 8,000 or even 7,000 which shows that the geographical distribution of the Passport Offices is rather uneven and that needs to be cured. I would suggest, as a rule of the thumb that any office which is asked to take care of more than 50,000 applications in a year is likely to be corrupt and likely to cause delay. Therefore, you must rationalise the entire geographical distribution and organise of the passport system in a manner that a given office takes care of a given number of districts and roughly speaking it receives about 50,000 applications and has the necessary staff for the purpose.

I am making two more points. I am just finishing. I would also suggest that in every case where the time limit prescribed by the Ministry is somehow not implemented, then those cases must be reported to the CPO, as well as if you intend to form to an advisory Committee in every Passport Office. All such case where the passport is not issued within three months, must be reported not only to the CPO but also to the Advisory Committee.

As far as the fee is concerned, I regret that I do not agree with the views expressed by some hon. Members. I am sure that you

would be reasonable in prescribing the fee. Therefore, I leave it at that and we can give full authority for that purpose.

As far as the SARRC question is concerned, it is really not a question of the abolition of passports, but it is a question of the abolition of the visas. I do hope that the hon. Minister is raising this question in all meetings of the SAARC that there should be free travel among all the countries of the SAARC so that we can slowly get to know each other better and all the misunderstandings can be removed.

Sir, section 12 of the Bill is rather Draconian in character. There is an apprehension in my mind. There are a set of people who are today the target of a political campaign, whose citizenship and whose nationality is being questioned. Supposing one of them who is being treated as a suspect, applies for a passport, the mere act of application for a passport brings him under the mischief of this clause of the Bill. I do hope, therefore, that unless a person is declared to be a foreigner by the due process of law, the penalties under section 12 shall not apply and that you shall apply section 12 of the Bill with great caution and circumspection so that genuine citizens and those persons who have not yet been declared as foreigners, do not suffer.

Finally, I would suggest that you have the power of impounding the passport, canceling the passport, withdrawing the passport. We, in this House, would like to be informed at least of the number of such cases in which you impound the passport, you cancel the passport you withdraw the passport, giving the reason for them. An annual statement must be provided either in the form of a statement or as part of this Annual Report.

These are the few suggestions which I would like to make and I do hope that worth these views that cut across the party line, the Central Passport Organisation and the External Affairs Ministry shall make a very sincere effort to see to it that at the end of 1992, we do not have as much cases as we

had at the end of 1991 and that you do employ sufficient number of staff. I think you can pay for it and you do not have to come back to us for granting you more money.

DR. ASIM BALA (Nabadwip): Sir, while supporting this Bill, we find that the more we make the rules stringent, the more we breed the corruption. That is the present situation. If we simplify the present rules, we can stop or restrict corruption. It would be better if we make the rules more simplified and make a provision that the passports to the general public should be issued within five weeks.

Sir, you can imagine that there are 750 recognised travel agencies and they are the main agencies breeding corruption because they are collecting money and with that money they are giving passports illegally through some corrupt officers. So, it is my suggestion that an Advisory Committee should be formed and, as the previous speaker has proposed, the committee should comprise of the officers only. Sometimes some applicants are asked to get some certificate from an MLA or an M.P. It should be required to be given by a Government officer and not by some M.P. or M.L.A. because it is very difficult for them to do so as they are the very local people.

A large number of girls are given passport without any verification. These girls are taken abroad for illegal purpose. So, such applications should be verified and should be looked into by the passport officials.

In West Bengal, Particularly in my area, a large number of passport seekers are waiting month after month for getting the passport. I would request the Minister to look into the matter and open some new offices in the rural areas so that the passport seekers do not have to wait for a long time.

Another thing that I would like to say is that police verification is essential and the police should verify the application very carefully. Otherwise there is every chance for corrupt people, especially in the border areas, to flourish. There are chances of illegal passports also if the verification is not proper.

With these words, I conclude.

SHRI KAMLA MISHRA MADHUKAR (Motihari): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, since yesterday I have been listening with rapt attention all the speeches on the provisions of the 'Passport' Bill. Since the hon. Minister is a very kind hearted persons he really knows all the difficulties being faced by the public. In this connection, I would like to cite an example. A few months before, a young man who was anxious to go abroad for higher studies went to the District Magistrate for getting his passport verified because no officer having the rank of less than a District Magistrate can verify the passport as per the existing rules; but the District Magistrate did not verify the passport. Despite my repeated request that I know applicant quite well and he belongs to my constituency, the District Magistrate succeeded in avoiding the applicant without verifying the passport. Consequently, the youth had to go to Patna in person for his passport. Now you see how a person residing in Motihari, Betia or Chhapra, can afford to go the capital of Bihar-Patna for getting his passport verified by spending a lot of amount. You can well imagine of the situation.

The unemployment people in large number and even the people of the rural areas of my village go to Dubai for employment. These persons had to travel all the way to that place for their passports. These poor persons seek employment abroad because they are unable to get employment within the country. So the facility of passport should be easily made available to them and the corruption/malpractices in the issuing of passports should immediately be removed, as had been stated a by a number of the hon. Members in unison. I too would like to join them and submit that the passport procedure should be made simple and streamlined.

In the matter of verification it is not easy for the common man to get the application verified from the officers of the rank of D.M./Deputy Secretary and above as is mandatory at present. The Government must realise this difficulty and also ponder over how to simplify the verification procedure. I do not

see any problem in the implementation of the suggestion of a few hon. Members including Fatmi Sahab that in the office of the collector itself, a department should be created exclusively for getting the passport applications verified and it should be ensured that within 15 days the applications should be verified from the police and the D.M. The Police Officers know very well about the antecedents of the persons living in the villages. However, any person who is in need of getting the passport issued, has to make a number of rounds to the officer of the S.P. and the S.H.O. and other departments and in the process of approaching the above said authorities, he is so frustrated that he leaves the idea of going to the District Magistrate for his passport. A number of poor and illiterate persons still hesitate to approach the D.M. on their own and either take the help of the hon. M.Ps or M.L.As. Therefore, a clear cut policy should be announced by the Government in this regard ensuring the simplification of the passport procedure.

Secondly, the provision about the passport fee is quite vague. I would like to urge the hon. Minister to make a clarification in the House itself as to what would be the exact amount of fee respect of getting the passports which could be easily worked out by the officials sitting in the gallery, so that it becomes known all over the country and people do not face the difficulties.

As one of the hon. Member has given a suggestion to the hon. Minister that a system of issuing student passport should be started. I too support the same that a separate category of passport of the students should be started for the benefit of the Indian students going abroad for higher studies.

In Bihar there are just two passport offices - one in Patna and the other in Ranchi - for a population of 8 crore... (Interruptions) For a population of 8 crores if there is just one passport office in Patna, then the difficulties being faced by the people can be imagined.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to make a submission that there should be a

passport office in each divisional headquarters so that the people of the concerned division may be relieved of some of their difficulty getting the passports issued.

In the end I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister towards two things. One is the wide spread corruption prevailing in the passport officers, and it needs to be effectively checked and the second thing is that there is generally an undue delay in issuing the passports. The hon. Minister is not paying attention towards my speech. Please pay some attention towards my suggestion that there should be no undue delay issuing the passports to the public and there should be a guarantee to be given by the Government that the passports would be issued to the concerned persons within a period of 4 weeks. The House should also be assured in this respect.

SHRI SOBHANADREESWARA RAO VADDE (Vijayawada): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, thank you for giving me an opportunity to say a few words on this Passports (Amendment) Bill; 1992.

Sir, I agree with the several provisions that have been placed in this Amendment Bill to amend the Passports Act, 1967. In this Bill no specific mention has been made about the passport fee that is to be collected. The Government has said that it will consult the Department regarding the cost that is actually involved in the preparation of the forms and other incidental expenditure. I suggest to the Government that the fee should be quite reasonable without taking into consideration the cost involved.

Secondly, in spite of the promise by the Minister of External Affairs on the floor of the House, even now Passports are not issued within five weeks—not five weeks, even for five months they are not issued. The most important factor that is delaying the issue of a Passport is the police verification. I hope you also have your own experience. Many a time the Passport application come to us and ask us to write a letter to the Police Commissioner or the District Superintendent of Police to take a verification certificate from

the Police Department immediately and enclose it with the Passport application and send it to the Passport office so that they can get the Passport in the quickest possible time. Otherwise, by submitting the Passports application in the office of the Regional Passport Officer, Sending the application for police verification is taking very very long time. So, something should be done and I agree with the suggestion made by the speakers who proceeded me that a time limit of two weeks should be fixed for receiving the police verification certificates falling which the Passport office should be in a position to issue the Passport.

Sir, I feel so sorry to say that the hon. Minister's statement on the floor of this House was not implemented in letter and spirit. I would quote one example. In reply to question, the honorable External Affairs Minister has stated that the number of Passport applications pending with the Hyderabad office on 31.12.1991 was 84,085.

15.00 hrs.

On 23rd March, 1992, the hon. Minister stated:

"In Hyderabad passport office 988 applications are received on an average per day and on an average, 1,222 passport have been issued per day".

So, if we take these facts into consideration, we are made to understand that the Hyderabad Passport Office is able to give passports to all these 988 applications within a very reasonable time and in addition to that, they are clearing a backlog of nearly 344 applications per day. That means, by the end of June, 1992, the backlog should be only nearly 20,000 applications. You will be surprised to know that in reply to a question on the floor of this House, it is stated:

"The number of passport applications pending with the Hyderabad Office on 19th June, 1992 is 91,075."

That means, the hon. Minister's assurances on this House do not stand the test or reality. I humbly urge upon the Government to take suitable steps to re-open the Passport Office at Vijayawada which had functioned for some time. It was opened in 1983-84 and functioned upto 1985 and in 1985 it was withdrawn for reasons best known to the authorities. I agree with my colleague Mr. Shahabuddin when he stated that presently certain officers are overload and they cannot process the applications properly. So the workload of such offices should be reduced and more offices should be opened.

In Kerala, there are three offices at Trivandrum, Kozhikode and Kochi. In Tamil Nadu there are Passport Offices at Madras and Trichy. In Maharashtra, there are Passport Offices at Bombay and Nagpur. While that is so, I do not see any reason for not re-opening the Passport Office at Vijayawada. At Vijayawada, when the office functioned, it has processed a very large number of applications when compared with several other offices. For example, at Nagpur only about 10,000 applications are processed and in Vijayawada about 30,000 applications were processed. So, for the convenience of the people located in the coastal Andhra districts from Srikakulam to Nellore districts where the literacy is more and from where a very large number of people go to Gulf countries and other countries in search of employment, studies or some other avocations, I strongly urge upon the Government to reconsider the issue of re-opening of the Passport Office at Vijayawada. I also urge upon the Government to take necessary steps to instal sophisticated machinery such as laminating machines and they should also computerise the whole process of issue of passports so that in the shortest possible time passports can be issued and issuing of passports do not become a lengthy procedure and also if there are some deficiencies, they can be taken care of. **with these words, I conclude my speech.**

SHRI P.M. SAYEED (Lakshadweep): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, first of all, let me offer my thanks to you for having given me the opportunity to speak on this Bill. This Bill seeks to achieve only two objectives. I must congratulate the hon. Minister for having brought this Bill in time. If this limited purpose is achieved, I think, we may have to demand from him that certain things are to be set right in the Passport offices.

I come from Lakshadweep and our jurisdiction fall in Kerala and that too in Ernakulam. I happened to go many times there. With a great difficulty, we were to come out of it. It was so suffocating, we were not in a position to get out from there easily. Such is the situation because the space for the office is too small and the number of passport applicants is so large in number, I do not know how they are accommodating themselves. I have to inter-act with the Regional Passport officer.

He said, "You yourself see, how we are working". Some of the staffs are not visible because files are above them. Such is the situation. We are authorising the Ministry to rise the passport fees. Now it is Rs. 50. Even if you make it Rs. 1,000, it does not matter but the intended purpose should be achieved. The applicant should be issued passport with least difficulty and also with least time factor. I think, it is high time we must computerise our passport offices.

You are seeking to give rigorous punishment through this Bill. We welcome it. There is certain amount of complaints I heard from various parts, particularly from Calicut passport office. The Regional Passport office at Ernakulam has a certain amount of goodwill. The officials have a number of problems to attend to. The Regional Passport office at Calicut, I am told, has been instrumental in turning the public hostile, particularly even to the MPs and MLAs. The Passport officer does not care to lift the receiver. I draw the attention

of the hon. Minister that the Regional Passport Officers may be informed that when the representatives of the people—MPs and MLAs—contact them, with courtesy they must attend to them and to see that the passport applications are expedited. In certain offices, we are told, it has become a racket. Money is given through back door and they are in a position to secure passport, on paying a certain amount as a sort of brokerage. Therefore, if such things are found, not only the passport holders, if they hold dual passports, but the officials involved in it should also be punished. If the officials are found guilty, they should also be taken to task.

Coming to my constituency, our populations itself is 51,000. Whenever I bring any problem to be redressed, the first thing that the people will say is, your population is so meagre. When I demanded, there would be elected set up, I was told by the then Home Minister, you were only 51,000 population. How can we give? So, even for entitlement of elected set up. I have to give leadership in enhancement of the population of the island. That happens in my case. You can imagine my plight. If I demand for passport office to Lakshadweep, I know the limitation. Immediately, the hon. Minister who happens to be a friend of mine will say, it is not possible. I request him to please open a counter for people from Lakshadweep in the Regional Passport office at Ernakulam. I would like to have a reply from the hon. Minister that at least this facility should be made available to our people. When our people from Lakshadweep go to the passport office at Ernakulam, in that Ocean, our fellows are almost lost. They have become a drop in this ocean of applicants in Ernakulam. Therefore, kindly see that a counter is opened for the sake of Lakshadweep applicants.

With this, I wholeheartedly support this measure so that we will have better days for the applicants. They do not have ample employment opportunities here. When they are seeking the passport to go elsewhere and get employment, we must try to help them. From the very beginning they should

go with the passport with a cheerful face.

With this I conclude.

SHRI ANNA JOSHI (Pune): Sir, I rise to speak on this Bill on two or three points. In the aims and objects of this Bill, they have given the points. I have read all the points. They relate either to increasing the punishment or increasing the fee or giving more rights for the officers to do all these thing. But nowhere in this Bill or Statement is it written or have they given their intentions to improve the services in respect of passport.

15.12 hrs.

[SHRIMATI MALINI BHATTACHARAYA *in the Chair*]

At the very outset, I strongly oppose to giving blanket authority to the bureaucracy for deciding the fee because it is the right of this House to decide the fee or to sanction the increase in the fee. Because of that, at least, you come from time to time here with that request. We get the opportunity to ventilate the grievances; to put before you the difficulties of the people. Therefore, if this blanket authority of increasing the fee and all the things is given to you. I am afraid, you will not come to the House and we will not get the chance of putting our grievances before you. Therefore, I think this authority for increasing the fee without particularly deciding the number or figure, will not be better. Therefore, I oppose that provision.

Madam, upto now so many speakers have ventilated their grievances and all of them have complained about the delay or the time taken for issuing the passports. There are so many examples. so I want a categorical answer from the Minister, through you, that why this much delay in there in issuing the passports. You have said somewhere that you have adopted the system of first-come first-served. But there are so many incidents where you have by-passed the waiting list. For example, some serious patients are generally there. Some students have to join the Universities or the educational institutions abroad. A particular date is prescribed. If

[Sh. Anna Joshi]

they do not go there then their chances are lost. It holds goods for the entrance for the services also. For the scientists and experts, for attending the various conferences, the date and time is fixed. If you take inordinate time for issuing the passport, if you ask them to come in queue, then all of them will have to lose their chances. Therefore, there must be some arrangement that those who need passports urgently—whether they are students or servicemen or doctors or patients or scientists or exports or politicians like us—must be given on priority basis. Of course, they should also give the reason why they require urgently, not merely because he has come from that profession, he should be given. If there is a time limit put for him to join abroad, then his passport should be given on priority basis.

As my esteemed friend, Mr. Shahbuddin suggested, you must take into account why so many number of passport applications are pending. I would suggest, you should call for the explanation from the concerned officers why so many numbers are pending. I do not know whether you have prescribed any time limit for that. But it should be within say four or five weeks. If the passport is not issued in the normal course, within that period, the particular officer must be held responsible and he must be answerable for reasons of delay etc. Therefore, I will suggest or streamlining the process of giving passport. You must also open new regional offices.

In Maharashtra, there was only one office at Bombay. Afterwards, on repeated appeal, after giving due consideration, you have opened one other office at Nagpur. I appreciate that. Now there are demands that one more regional passport office be opened at Pune also. Just as you have taken down the name of Enrakulam, similarly I shall be very thankful if you announce in your reply that one regional office should be opened at Pune also. There is vast scope for that. You should encourage people to take more and more passports and prepare themselves for going abroad for so many

reasons. More regional officers should be there as the hon. Members have requested.

Then, about staff, there should be adequate staff. The vacancies should be filled in. You must streamline the system. You should not be under the impression that whosoever comes for passport are criminals or undesirable elements. Therefore, you have to simplify the procedure. That will help both—your staff and also the passport holders.

I want to mention one more points. So many persons go out to foreign countries and sometimes they lose their passports there. Of course, passport No. and all those things are there. Then, the Embassies are authorised to give temporary diplomatic passes. But the behaviour of the Ambassadors or our representatives abroad is not very satisfactory. We hope in such situation our Ambassador in that country should help our citizens in difficulty. But there attitude also needs to be studied and they should be given proper instructions. If the passport holders could give particular number or confirmed information about the passport which is lost, then, the embassy staff should immediately issue a temporary passport. If that is done, I think, it is good and the Bill can be passed.

At the end, my request about regional passport office at Pune should be considered favourably. With these suggestions, I conclude my speech.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There are five more names on the list and four others have expressed the desire to say a few words. So, in order to accommodate everybody, I would suggest that all the hon. Members any observe a time limit of two or three minutes.

SHRIMATI SUSEELA GOPALAN (Chirayinkil): Madam chairperson, the need for an amendment to this Bill was felt long ago. Anyhow, it is good that at least now the Minister has brought forward such a Bill.

About this amendment to Section (5), I am afraid, who is going to prescribe this

amount. Even otherwise, lot of troubles are there to get a passport and if it is not specified then what will happen. If it is not spelt out in the Bill it can be done otherwise. But it must be known to the people as to how much is the amount. Otherwise, they will be actually duped like anything. This possibility is there. This has to be understood and it should be spelt out and also inform the people especially the poor people who does not know these things. They are going there for passport and all these things. So, this should be specified and I hope that the Minister will take steps to make it specified.

With regard to getting of a passport, it is an ordeal for the passport applicant to get the passport. It is not only an ordeal for them but for us also because MPs are approached by these people very often especially in a place like Kerala where so much of applicants are there. They approach us and we are unable to help them. We are telephoning to them, we are writing to them. We are doing that. But even then, it is so much delayed. The ideal thing would be, as the Minister has said, within five weeks, this passport should be given. I know cases where even after five or six months the passport was not given. It is always a very big trouble for the applicants to get the passport. And then the question of giving it to police verification comes. There should be a time limit which at the most should be two weeks and within that time they can send it. But it is now very much delayed and even after proper verification when it is sent back, the officers at the passport office say that they have not received it. I know so many such cases where I have experience and I myself telephoned to them to find about it. So, such things are there and hence a specific time limit of five weeks is very much ideal. But even if you can give after two months it will be most welcomed by these ordinary people. They are suffering for this passport.

The passport offices should be straightened. The previous speaker told in this House about the Emakulam District and how it is difficult to get the passport. The space is very limited and I think only fifty extra persons were posted and they will be

asked to return back. But they should be allowed an extension. And not only that, in other areas like in Trivandrum, there are 75,000 applicants and from what I understand, in Cochin there are about 1,65,000 applicants. It will not be less in Calicut also. And there is a great demand from Kasargod that there should be a passport office there because in Calicut it is very difficult to get the passport. And there is no difficulty in giving extra staff because there are so many people wanting to go to Kerala. They want transfers. They can be transferred to passport offices and no extra expenditure will be there and many people are willing to go to these offices. If you do that it will be of a great help. More staff will have to be provided in all offices and there should be a passport office in Kasargod. Then, I think it will be much easier to get the passport.

The Government should consider these things and stringent punishment should be given to all those people who are forging these passports. Actually I am for it. We have to see that genuine people are not disturbed. Otherwise some people in Pakistan who are actually citizens of India and who might not have got the citizenship would suffer. I know so much of harassment. Stringent punishment should be given to the people who sell passports. So many things are done like taking of money. So many agencies are there which are taking so much of money and so many people are not given job. Their passports will be sold also. So stringent punishment should be given to them. The only things we have to see is that genuine people are not disturbed.

With these words, I conclude.

DR. C. SILVERA (Mizoram): Madam Chairperson, I rise to support the Passport (Amendment) Bill of 1992. Much has been said about the difficulties and problems from different States. Coming from the north-eastern region of the country, I am going to speak for six-seven States of the north-eastern region. I would like to bring three problems for the Central Government to look into and solve.

First of all there is only one regional passport centre at Guwahati for the whole of north-eastern India. This is for all the six-seven States of the north-eastern region. The regional passport office in the north-eastern area is situated at Guwahati which is about three days journey from a place like Mizoram. You can imagine the time taken by the authority in all the procedure to have the passport issued. I therefore, on behalf of the people of the north-eastern area, would like to request the Minister to open more regional passport offices in the north-eastern area.

I think there are only two States in the whole of the country where the applicants of the passport are subjected to dual verification. By dual verification I mean to say that the applicant is verified by the local police of the State and also the same applicant has to be verified by the Home Ministry. You can imagine how much time would be taken. This problem has been brought to the notice of the Government to the Prime Minister, to the Minister concerned and even on the floor of this House I talked about this problem. I feel that only the applicants from the States of Nagaland and Mizoram are subjected to this dual verification. I feel that injustice has been done to the people of these two States. I earnestly request the Minister to look into the matter and do away with this dual verification, to do away with this step-motherly second-class citizenship treatment of the people of Nagaland and Mizoram.

As stated by Shri Oscar Fernandes, I feel that the problems of various States are different. I would suggest that a team of MPs should different capitals of the States, so that the difficulties of all the States would be solved through the team of these MPs.

[Translation]

SHRI RAJENDRA KUMAR SHARMA (Rampur): Madam Chairperson, I rise to express my views on the Passport Amendment Bill. According to the ruling given by the Supreme Court, every citizen of

this country can have a passport. Only Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee has seriously considered this issue during the last 45 years. During his tenure as External Affairs Minister, he provided this facility to lakhs of people of this country through his liberal policy.

Madam, since I know it personally, I would like to tell the hon. Minister that I got the passports of 25 thousand persons of Rampur city issued within two years and as a result, the country earned a lot of foreign exchange. Thousands of people earned money in the Middle East and the Gulf countries and sent it to their relatives living here. A number of Indians get employment in these countries and there is no dearth of such people who want to work there. But due to non-availability of passports in time and due to other difficulties, our people are facing lot of problems. The basic reason for this delay in issue of passports may be that it will encourage terrorism. May be this arrangement has been made to impose restrictions on anti-social elements. I would like to submit that these terrorists and anti-social elements get passports by hook or crook, but the common man suffers. Most of the hon. Members of this House have expressed concern on this issues that the process of issue of passports is very complicated.

Madam Chairperson, the first regional passport office in Uttar Pradesh was opened at Lucknow and the next one was opened at Bareilly in 1978. Near about 7 years ago, a big racket involving the agents and officials of the passport office in Bareilly was unearthed. The Government incurred a huge loss of crores of rupees due to it. The agents had conspired and started issuing passports to the people within some days by taking big amounts of money.

Madam Chairperson, through you I would like to request the hon. Minister that there are inadequate sitting arrangements for the people who go to the regional passport offices and the staff is also inadequate. The hon. Minister should pay attention in this regard. As this Bill has been brought here to

increase the fee, there should be adequate staff and adequate sitting arrangements at the passport offices. I welcome this amendment Bill, but would like to tell the hon. Minister that he should tell us about the amount which will be fixed, even if it is increased to Rs. 500/-. If we are told the fixed amount, I will support this proposal.

Madam, through you, I would like to demand from the hon. Minister that two regional passport offices should be opened each at Varanasi and Gorakhpur, so that the people of these areas can also avail of this facility.

Madam, regarding the police verification, I would like to submit that the police verification is not done properly. Whoever gives money gets favourable report, but who denies to pay, gets report with unfavourable remarks. In this situation, such person never gets a passport. This is happening everywhere and this is going on for years. It will take time to improve this situation. So, the hon. Minister should pay attention in this regard and it should be determined that if the police verification report is not received within a stipulated period of 2 months, passport should be issued to the concerned person by assuming that there is nothing against him.

All the hon. Members has emphasized on providing passports to doctors, engineers and students. I would request that special attention should be paid to the issue of passports to the students. Most of the students had to face problems due to non-availability of passports in time. The anti social elements get their passports issued somehow or the other. Stringent punishments should be given to them according to the provision made in the Bill. When such people will be punished, it will have its impact on others as well.

In the end, I have one more point to submit. Diplomatic passports should be provided to the ex-M.P.s. also. Once they become an M.P., they acquire a particular status which may require them to pay foreign visit. So, their passport should continue.

SHRI P.C. CHACKO (Trichur): Madam Chairperson, It is very difficult to express my thoughts on this subject in two minutes time. But still I would abide by your direction. So I would like to highlight the points which, hope, the hon. Minister will reply. I support the two amendments which have been moved by the hon. Minister. Of course, I wanted to caution on one aspect. But because of the constraint of time, I am not going into that. When these powers for increasing the fee are given, there should be sufficient safeguard that these are not misused. I hope the Minister will take care of these points.

While supporting these two points I would like to highlight one or two points which have already been suggested by my friends. This is regarding the present functioning of the passport offices. We expect that the hon. Minister will express his opinion or say something about what is being told already.

There is a passport office located in Cochin about which Mrs. Suseela Gopalan has made it clear. 1,80,000 passport applications are pending today. The maximum they can issue are 600 passports a day. That means, it will take more than eight months to clear the backlog. They wanted 50 or 60 temporary employees to clear the backlog. It is with great difficulty that they could manage some additional temporary hands to be sanctioned for Cochin office only. And they were given for three or four months. Some arrears were cleared. But now the staff is being withdrawn and the sanction is being withdrawn.

Mr. Bhatia is a very able administrator. When he is at the top of this department, I want that such small things, which are plaguing this department, which are affecting the prospects of the applicants to a great extent, may kindly be cleared.

There are hundreds of people from my place with an employment visa. Mr. Bhatia, you kindly understand that an employment visa means Rs. 1,000 or 2,000 or 3,000 or 5,000 worth of dollars every month. It is an

Sh. P.C. Chacko]

employment visa. With an employment visa, people are roaming around the precincts of the passport office and are not able to get one. It takes a minimum of 10 months to 11/12 years in Kerala to get a passport. Why is this happening? Why are we allowing such things to happen like this? This is very unfortunate.

Then, I take this opportunity to go into such anomalies. This amendment is very simple. All of us are supporting it. Especially in this Kar Seva session, this is probably the only suggestion which has been welcomed by the BJP friends also. All of us are unanimous in this. But the hon. Minister may kindly say what is the difficulty for the Government to give some additional staff where lakhs and lakhs of passport applications are pending.

One hon. Minister has said that it should be a fundamental right of every citizen. The hon. Minister may kindly say. Whatever fees you want to increase, the Government is authorised by this House. But the thing is that we want to know within how many days or within how many months a citizen is entitled to a passport. You do all the verification. Kindly think about how you can simplify the process and please assure this House. There were assurances in the past also but these could not be implemented. I am not blaming anybody. But let us have an assurance that at least a citizen will get a passport within three months time. A large number of employment opportunities are there in the Gulf countries. The people are getting visa.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please conclude.

SHRI P.C. CHACKO: Madam, I am finishing. Visa is expiring day by day and when people realise that visa date is going to expire, they are after the MPs. We are writing at least 15 letters a day and we know that with the minimum and inadequate staff strength, they cannot attend even to our letters. It is very unfortunate that this is happening. So, Cochin, Trivandrum and Calicut passport offices which are the busiest

passport offices in the country and which are grossly under staffed may kindly be provided with a minimum of 50 to 100 extra staff to clear the backlog. Let this be at least as a temporary measure for the next six months. Otherwise, in the present situation, the existing applications itself will take more than one year to be cleared. And everyday, thousands of applications are joining in this long queue. So, these small things are affecting the functioning of the department in a big way. If all the suggestions which have come before the House are properly attended to, then it will definitely improve the functioning of the department. So, while supporting these two amendments which are brought to the Passport Bill, I request the hon. Minister, Bhatiaji to kindly constitute a consultative committee of MPs attached to all the passport offices. At present, there are no popular committees relating to passport offices.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please conclude, Mr. Chako as there are others waiting to speak.

SHRI P.C. CHACKO: Madam, I gave my name yesterday and those who gave their names today are also speaking. You and other MPs may also be thinking the same thing that the letters which we are writing to the passport offices are just an eye-wash. We are trying to pull everybody but if there is a consultative committee attached to the passport offices, we can give practical suggestions. I thought that this suggestion had not come before the House and so, while welcoming all the suggestions which came before the House, I place this new suggestion before the House. Madam Chairperson, you may not kindly get restless. With your permission, I place this suggestion before the hon. Minister and request him to respond to all the suggestions already made before the House.

SHRI PALA K.M. MATHEW (Idukki): I also support both the amendments. The basic and main problem is the growth of the number of applications and the delay in issuing passports, as has been rightly pointed out yesterday. I endorse the views expressed regarding the delay lack of staff, office equipments and other facilities in various

I just want to point out one thing which affects mainly the State of Kerala to which I belong to. In the 1991 census, it is reported that Kerala has got the highest non agricultural economy in the country. Agricultural workers form only three and a half per cent of the population. 62 per cent of the population are engaged in non-agricultural activities. It means that most of the people are much more mobile than in others parts of the country. More than a lakh of people who belong to Kerala have been evacuated from Kuwait during the Gulf war. More than a million people are working in Gulf areas. They belong to Kerala itself. This shows that hundreds of thousands of people are going out for jobs from Kerala. More than 30 lakhs of people are jobless in the State. Kerala or the country cannot give them jobs. When they have to go out, they approach the Passport Offices for getting a passport. Inordinate delay in the issuance of passports is inexcusable. This point has already been made here.

As suggested by Shri Ramesh yesterday, I would also suggest that one more passport office, at least a sub-office, should be located at Kottayam which is located in the central part of Kerala. Not only that, most of the people who would like to go out, come from this area.

I also support the view expressed by Shri P.C. Chacko that there should be a Consultative Committee of Members of Parliament attached to all the Passport Offices in the country.

[Translation]

SHRIMATI GIRIJA DEVI (Maharaj Ganj): Madam, sufficient discussion has taken place and the time, allotted by you, is also short.

In such a situation, I want to make few suggestions and conclude. The poor people are harassed by travel agencies and Government machinery and they face a lot of trouble in obtaining their passports. My constituency Maharaj Ganj is the most

densely populated area. The citizens of the area are poor and landless. Therefore, they go to other parts of the country to live there and they migrate even to foreign countries. In such a situation, I make a demand that since there is no regional passport office in north Bihar the Government should keep that in view as also the delay and malpractice that take place in issuing passports, and in order to remove these irregularities, regional passport office should be opened in every district headquarters so that passport may be made available to common people.

The other point raised by hon. Member is that people face difficulties in getting passport forms. In such a situation, if passport forms are made available at block level, then a large number of people will not fall prey to professional agents and it will also help to lessen the time taken in issuing passports.

Some other points have also been raised as to who should be issued passport, there should be consensus on issuing passports to people of different categories, be they people of SAARC nations or students, sitting former legislators, M.Ps. or councilors.

There is a class of artists also which has been left out here who earn their livelihood from foreign countries. In the country they are not given due importance and when they return from foreign countries, they are given due credit and only then their degrees are considered of some value. When they show the proof of the performance abroad by way of broadcast or telecast or by way of their visits to some country, only then they are given due respect. But the poor artists who are not educated, they have to face a lot of trouble. It becomes very difficult for them whether they should devote time to the art or make rounds of passport offices. Therefore I request that the Government should provide artists under a special category and make passports available to them invariably. At the same time, the students of arts should be issued passports in their student-life and their passports should be renewed throughout their life and if they are caught indulging in any malpractice. Their passport should be cancelled.

With these words, I conclude my opinion.

SHRI K.P. SINGH DEO (Dhenkanal): Adam Chairperson, I just wish to submit one point. The Parliament and the country have been very kind to people who have served the people and the Parliament. They are given various concessions and amenities. But people who have been in Parliament before are not given this facility of diplomatic passports. Some of the present parliamentarians were ex-Members of Parliament last time and some of the sitting Members may become ex-Members of Parliament next time. This is the law of the land and this is the battle of the ballot boxes. I would like to plead that the ex-Members of Parliament may also be considered for giving diplomatic passports.

SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR (Mayiladuturai): Every Member of this House has been a recipient of a passport. There are only two Members of this House who have issued passports. One is Shri Syed Shahabuddin. The other is myself. I cannot speak for Mr. Syed Shahabuddin, but on behalf of 50 per cent of the strength of this House that has been issued passports, I have a request to make to our Minister of State for External Affairs. The request is that we must devolve out of the Ministry of External Affairs the responsibility for issuing passports, because until we make this basic systemic change, there is no way in which my Minister will be able to do better than any of his predecessors or any of his successors. I am actually fixing and begin able to enforce a deadline within which these passports can be issued.

It is the experience of most or at any rate of very many developed countries that the responsibility for issuing passports is not that of the Passport Office; it is that of the local authority. Immediately by after we finish passing this Bill, we are going to be taking up the Constitution (Amendment) Bills relating to Panchayats and the Nagar Palikas. As soon as those Bills are passed and become part of our Constitution, my request to the Minister of State for External Affairs is that they set themselves a deadline by which all

Passport Offices will be wound up and the responsibility for issuing passports will be given to the local authority, be it a village panchayat or an appropriate authority in an urban area. It is only by such a drastic, basic systemic change that we will be able to ensure that every citizen of India, who has a right to a passport, is, in fact, given this passport.

The other great advantage of this system will be that the first benefit of anyone leaving a village or a *mohalla* to make his destiny abroad should go to that village *mohalla*. If the passport is issued by the Municipal Authority or by a Panchayat, then the fees realised should remain inside that village or inside that *mohalla* for the benefit of the local people. In that way, the Ministry of External Affairs will be able to concentrate on improving our relations with foreigners instead of, as at present, spending a great deal of its time in oppressing our citizens.

With these words, I support the Bill

[*Translation*]

SHRI GIRDHARI LAL BHARGAVA (Jaipur): Madam, I have not to say anything specific on this Bill. I have to submit in brief that at present procedure is not easy. There is no guarantee whether one will get a passport in five months or in five weeks. People come, to us they are a harassed lot because they do not get their passport. The process of getting reports from an S.P. or the C.I.D. is quite lengthy, so, this process needs to be simplified. This is my first submission. Moreover, there is no proper sitting arrangement for people visiting passport offices nor anybody pays any attention to the persons who are distressed. The power of verification given to Members of Parliament has been withdrawn from us and hence the people, who come to us, have to face difficulty. The recommendation of a doctor of a dispensary is valid for verification but a Member of Parliament cannot sign it and his signature will not be considered valid for verification as it used to be earlier. I think this is an insult to an elected representative of people. Therefore, I want to submit in this

connection that the Member of Parliament should be empowered to verify it. So far as the provision for imposing fine is concerned, the fine is on high side. This is what I want to say and submit that this process should be implied.

I have to make one more point. Jaipur is the only city where passport office is there.; No other city in Rajasthan has any passport office, as a result of which people have to come to Jaipur and they have to spend a lot of money on the journey and people have to wait for months together. Therefore, there should be passport offices in all the big cities in Rajasthan.

Madam, there are no two opinions that when Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Minister of External Affairs, he simplified the procedure for issuing passport to a great extent. People visiting Pakistan and other countries, had been given many facilities. Even today, people visiting Pakistan or visiting passport offices, remember Shri Vajpayee. I hope the present Minister will also make the entire passport procedure simple so that people may obtain their passport within stipulated period.

[*English*]

SHRI SUNIL DUTT (Bombay North West): Madam Chairperson, I am really grateful to you that you have given me time to speak.

I rise to support this Passport (Amendment) Bill. I am very happy to know that because of the increase in the daily necessities of life, the hon. Minister has thought of increasing the price of the passport also. I actually agree with the view point of the hon. Shri Mani Shankar Aiyer because the issue of passport might be in the hands of the Ministry of External Affairs but all the other inquiries are done by the CID and Police Department. So there is a basic fallacy that the issue of passport is in the hands of the Ministry of External Affairs.

I generally feel that if this Bill has to be passed then the Ministry of Home Affairs

also should have been here to hear our view points as to what we are going to expect from ourselves. I am saying this because as soon as you apply for a passport, the entire papers go to the CID, local police etc. and after they complete their inquiries the information is sent back. They only stamp the papers. So for stamping papers, I think the Ministry has expanded its offices all over where they have all the people over there. At the same amount of power that they are using here for issuing passports they can use for the Ministry of External Affairs. They can contribute in our relationship with other countries and can devote more time for the foreign affairs.

Therefore, I agree with Shri Mani Shankar Aiyer that we must rethink about this, after this Bill is passed, so that we must really change the basic concept.

Secondly, I am very grateful to our hon. BJP Members who are of the view that ex-Members of Parliament must also have diplomatic passports. I think, this will be a very good gesture, if hon. Minister really shows his kindness to us.

Madam, I would also like to explain that we should have a heavy punishment for the people who make forged passports. This racket is going on in the country and this is only in the hands of the local police and local authorities. Here we all must work together, no matter which political call party is having the Government in the States. This is harmful to the country and we must rectify it.

Lastly, I would like to say, Madam, that whatever increase in the fees in proposed; I generally feel that in today's time rich people can afford the increase in the fees but the labour class, the working class cannot afford this. Therefore, as far as the increase in the fees is concerned, I request to the Government that they should have a consideration on this. Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

SHRI NITISH KUMAR (Barh): Mr. Chairman, Sir, going through the Passport Amendment Bill introduced by the hon.

Minister, it seems like "Penny wise pound foolish". Thousands of crores of rupees have been misappropriated in the banking scam and the Government is going to increase passport fee. Bhatya Saheb is a very good man as well as a very good Minister and he is the incharge of petrol-dollar area then as to why he is introducing this Bill due to which poor and the commonman will have to pay more passport fee.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, the real problem is of the passport office. There should be no passport fee for those people who go abroad for employment and education purposes. At least, they are not becoming burden on this country. They are seeking employment abroad. There are students also, who are helping in reducing expenditure on education by studying abroad. More concession should be given to such people and full concession should be given to them in respect of passport fee.

The second point is about the location of passport offices. Just now my colleagues were saying that passport offices were opened during the term of Vajpayeeji. There is no time of the Minister, the time is of the Prime Minister. It was the rule of Janata Party. Shri Morarji Desai was the Prime Minister and Chaudhari Charan Singh and Shri Jagjewan Ram were the Deputy Prime Minister. At that time facility was provided regarding issuing of passport. It could not be done on the initiative of Shri Vajpayeeji only. It was the decision of the whole Government and the procedure was liberalised. Vajpayeeji was also in that Government. It is a contribution of the Janata Party Government that it had made arrangements for the issuance of passport in the State capitals. But now these arrangements are not in proper condition. When we ring up Patna Passport office about any passport, the passport officer narrate his own problems. He says to us that as we are Members of Parliament, we should look into this or that issue. I would like to say that there is shortage of staff. Earlier Ranchi was the summer capital of Bihar. Passport Office is in Patna.

Now-a-days the issue of Jharkhand is also getting momentum. Keeping in view the problems of adivasis I would like to request the Government to open a regional passport office in Ranchi also. Through you, I would like to tell the hon. Minister as well as the House that people face a lot of difficulties in obtaining passport. I have come to know that it takes one to one and a half year. General public faces difficulties and in M.P. gets it at once. In spite of being a member of Parliament I have not applied for passport.....(Interruptions) I have not applied for passport in sympathy as well as in solidarity with the people. It takes 1 1/2 years, therefore I have not applied for passport. Now one year has completed. I will apply for passport. Meanwhile, I got an opportunity to go abroad. Mr. Speaker directed me to visit Nepal, for which no passport is required. Where the passport was needed I brought exemption form visiting those countries because I am against it, as it takes one to one and a half year. I would like to request the hon. Minister to make such arrangements that passports are made as soon as possible. As in the case of Nepal there should not be any need of passport for visiting SAARC countries. Only permit or a system like that should be there and not of a full fledged passport.

In the end, I would like to say that it would be disastrous if we agree with what Mani Shankar Aiyar has said. It may be an ideal and good thing that this authority is conferred on the Panchayats Madhukarji is also an experienced leader. He is saying that passport offices should be opened at district level. Madam Chairperson, I also believe in decentralisation. We had also made efforts for 72nd Amendment like Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar. If this proposal is acceded to and it is made at the district level then more amount will have to be spent. At present Rs. 10-15.

16.00 hrs.

thousand are enough but it will be much more. Therefore, passport offices should be there. Increase the number of employees and regional offices. This is my suggestion.

SHRI MRUTYUNJAYA NAYAK (Phulbani): I am very grateful to you for giving me an opportunity.

After adopting the new economic policy and the new industrial policy it is no very much necessary that in order to solve the employment problem, there should be two-fold opportunities. One is by increasing the number of passports we can ensure more employment opportunities. At the same time by allowing more passports, by allowing the participation of the tribal people who have got the physical figure and also the strength to go abroad, to earn more money, the Government can help them. We want to acquire more foreign exchange. It is necessary that more people should be sent to the foreign countries to acquire more foreign exchange. It is worth to have more passport offices at the District headquarters or atleast at the Revenue Divisional Commissioner's Office. Or else it can be attached to the Head Post Office.

16.06 hrs.

[SHRI SHARAD DIGHE *in the Chair*]

Sir, supposing the passport office is situated at a remote place, the tribals and particularly the most economically backward people cannot afford so much of money to reach there or to reach Delhi in order to collect there passport. So, it will be more fair and also justice can be ensured if we open more passport offices at the Revenue Divisional Commissioner's Office or at the District Headquarters.

SHRI EBRAHIM SULAIMAN SAIT (Ponnani): Mr. Chairman, Sir, the greatest botheration today for the younger generation is to secure a passport. Thousands and thousands of young men undergo lot of misery for getting a passport. And particularly from Kerala, thousands and thousands of people go to foreign countries for jobs, that is Gulf countries. Actually they run after the passport office to get a passport for months together and finally neither they get the

passport nor the job. The country is losing so such. I cannot understand why they have to wait fro months together to get a passport. When they approach the passport office, the office people say that they do not have passport books. These difficulties are there. If the staff is not there, the Government should provide more staff. Thousands and thousands of applications are there and there is no adequate staff to issue the passports. We cannot understand such situations.

Shri Bhatia is a very dynamic Minister. I know that he is a very dynamic personality and therefore he can solve this problem. Every young man who wants to have a passport must be given a passport within a month's time. The maximum period should be one month and not more than that. The verification takes sometimes six months and sometimes years. I have got such cases. People come to me and told me that they did not get a passport for years together. I cannot understand this situation. And how much agony the young men undergo to get a passport? Therefore, we must see that passports are issued within a month's time. If there is no staff, you have to provide staff. If there is no books, you have to supply books.

Sometime back M.Ps were given the power of verification. Now that has been taken away. I do not know why. No doubt now we have some leisure time because of that. But still we are here to serve the people. If that burden is given to us, we are prepared to accept that and we are prepared to serve the people of our constituency. And we do not want to escape from this responsibility. Now, verification is done by the police officials. They take so much of time. All these things have to be understood and the sufferings of the people must be removed.

Here, you have mentioned that the fee is going to be increased. How much are you going to increase? Are you going to make it as Rs. 500 or Rs. 1000/- / That has not been mentioned here. It says:

"such fee as may be prescribed to

[Sh. Ebrahim Sulaiman Sait]

meet the expenses incurred on special security paper, printing, lamination and other connected miscellaneous services in issuing passports and other travel documents."

We must know as to how much you are going to increase. Are you going to increase it by Rs. 25 or Rs. 50? You want to have such sweeping powers and do as you like. Such things will not help.

What I want the Minister to do is that every young man must get a passport within a month's time. And he has to go out for jobs because they do not get jobs in India. They do not just go for the sake of tourism. They go out because they do not get jobs here. The gain that the country gets is foreign exchange. Actually we are acting against the interest of the country by denying a passport to the younger generation. This situation should change. If this situation is not changed, you will be held responsible in future.

SHRI BUTA SINGH (Jalore): Sir, I am not going to take a long time. I have only one or two suggestions to make.

Firstly, I join all the hon. Members who have spoken to get the passport issued expeditiously and without involving much of the office work. At the moment, the method of issuing the passport is through the Regional Passport Office. Unfortunately, in Punjab - I do not know much about the Haryana - it has become extremely difficult to obtain a passport because of a special situation there. In Punjab, restrictions are imposed. The Passport Offices in Jalandhar and at Chandigarh are finding it difficult and the people who go for passport have to wait for years, not for months. We are lucky that our dynamic and handsome Minister Shri R.L. Bhatia comes from Punjab and he knows the problems of the people in Punjab. Most of the people in Punjab have a dual system of family. Half of the family is in Punjab and half of the family is abroad, especially the people have gone abroad even before the

Independence from the districts of Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur and Amritsar. There are a large number of people, who have been asking for a dual passport. I am the Chairman of the N.R.I. Association. We have held five conferences both in India as well as in certain other parts of the world including the neighboring countries. In case of the conferences, Shri R.L. Bhatia was present and he conceded this demand. I think, now in his present assignment he will do a great service to the people of India who live abroad and who have earned money. I do not mind and they will also not mind, if you charge a special fee for a dual passport - one passport that they are holding because of their rights there, in that country, where they dwell, and the other passport for their motherland. It is not a new system. Most of the countries in the world are having this practiced. I am sure, Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar will bear with me and he will also support me when the request for a dual passport for NRIs is made, and the Government can earn money out of this also.

I support Shri Ebrahim Sulaiman Sait's suggestion that the passport should be treated as a document of a prestige for the Union.

I do not find any reason why are we giving identity cards to all the border States like Kashmir, Rajasthan, Gujarat etc. Why are we wasting money? We should give them passports. Every village in the border State must have a passport for which the Government will not have to spend a praise. They will get the privilege of holding a passport and they will pay for it.

I am sure, the hon. Minister, who is very progressive and revolutionary, has made his impact. I have been abroad. The people have started talking about his visits and he has been able to mobilise quite a lot of support for the new environment in Punjab. We must congratulate the present Chief Minister and the Punjab Government where they have brought about a situation where the people are very happy, there is no fear and the terrorists are on the run. Therefore, they must liberalise the Passport Policy in

Punjab and they must introduce a dual passport system which will help to a great extent in establishing the right of the people. they must feel proud that they are Indians when they carry a passport from India to abroad.

With these submissions, I support the Bill and I request the hon. Minister to react positively to my suggestions.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R.L. BHATIA): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am grateful to the hon. Members who have contributed in this discussion and given valuable suggestions. Originally the Bill was to be discussed within two hours, but I think, it is more than four hours and many Members have taken interests in it and have given their valuable suggestions. They have lightened my burden because some of them are very valuable suggestions and I am bound to react to those suggestions.

All the hon. Members have shown a great concern for the delay in the issuing of passports. That is true. I agree with them. But I have certain constraints that I am not able to issue passports within a prescribed time or early. Before I reply to the points raised by my friends, the hon. Members of this House, I would like to apprise them about the constraints which I have in issuing the passports early. The first is that normally we used to have 7-8 lakh applications every year. Then it increased to one million and then to twelve lakhs. But last year the number of applications has suddenly risen to twenty-five lakhs. My office is under-staffed and is unable to meet the influx of applications. For this I made a request to the Minister of Finance that I need more staff, but there was no positive reply. So, I approach the Prime Minister who has agreed to give me 400 people to be added to the present staff, for which advertisement has already gone and I hope that 400 people will be added soon. This will be one way to ease the situation.

The other constraint is the passport books. These are being printed at the Nasik Security Press. They have the capacity of

not going beyond a million or twelve lakhs. So, I have had meetings with them and we have persuaded them to augment their functioning, their supplies. They have promised that they will add new machines and will be able to give us twenty-five lakh books from the beginning of next year because they have to install new machines and all that. So, they have promised that they will help me by meeting the demand. I do not know whether they will install machines for twenty-five lakh. The demand may go to thirty lakhs because it is a constantly growing demand. But certainly we are looking into the matter. I have a difficulty that I cannot go to the private people because it is a very valuable document and the Home Ministry will not allow me. Therefore, I have to depend on the Nasik Press.

The other constraint was that passports are written by hand by our staff. I have demanded computers from the Government. They have given me the computers and now I have started computer system in Delhi, Bombay and Bangalore. But I need money, for which I have come to you. If you support me by giving me funds, I think I will be able to meet this demand and have computer system in all the passport offices. It will certainly facilitate and help us in issuing the passports early.

The difficulties of passport applicants were mentioned here by many friends. The travel agents, in collusion with the local passport officers, create problems for the applicants. They are charging exorbitantly. So, in order to mitigate that problem, I have suspended the system of traveling agents. Now any applicant can directly apply to the passport office. He need not come personally, he can send his application by post also.

A point was raised here by Shri Chitta Basu that they have difficult in getting the passport applications. The travel agent charge huge sums for just giving them the application forms. I have suspended that system and I have created 2,000 Post Offices in India which will be able to supply passport application forms to the people. People need not go to the distracter authorities or local

[Sh. R.L. Bhatia]

authorities or they need not come to passport offices. They can get the passport application forms from the post offices. They can apply for passports. They will get the passports by post.

We have, so far, been charging a fee of Rs. 50 for the issue of passport. It was last raised in 1978. It is a very meager sum. My cost per copy of passport comes to around Rs. 160. The Government is losing money on this. That is how I have come to you to provide me funds so that the passports can be issued in an efficient form but also in an improved form.

In the international scene, the passports have been very much changed in the standard. In the present form, it is very easy to remove the photograph or change signature. But in the latest electronic or and laminated systems which have come in the world, it is very difficult to change these things. We are also going to introduce this. I have no idea how much is the money involved and how much money I will be getting for this.

[*Translation*]

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: Get some money from Harshad Mehta.

SHRI R.L. BHATIA: I have noted your suggestion. You are supporting Harshad Mehta. (*Interruptions*)

[*English*]

The passports will be on the international standards. Therefore, I require funds for this and I hope you will cooperate with me. Most of the friends have assured me that they will certainly cooperate with me.

Normally anybody who goes abroad pays Rs. 300 as airport tax. The travel agents take a lot of money. The people, who are labourers, are paying five to ten thousands of rupees to the middlemen to arrange their services outside. Many friends have brought this to my notice. The money paid to

middlemen is rather more than that. I agree. In order to eliminate all that I am trying to simplify the procedure. I am trying to expedite the issue of passport and I am trying to remove the middlemen out of this. For all these services, I need money and I hope you will be kind enough to help me in this regard.

[*Translation*]

SHRI MOHAMMAD ALI ASHRAF FATMI (Darbhanga): Mr. Minister, are you going to abolish Airport tax.

[*English*]

SHRI R.L. BHATIA: I am coming to that. That is not under my Department.

Apart from that, I am going to give jumbo passport. There are traders who go abroad often. The traveling agents travel so often. You know that lot of people go everyday to Singapore - take things from here and bring things from there. It has become a trade. The same thing is now happening with regard to Central. All the planes are full with people coming and going. People are traveling once a week or twice a week. You know that the number of pages in the passport is limited. For these people, you require a big book. For them I propose a fee of Rs. 500 for the issue of jumbo passport with more pages. The people who travel so often will get them so that they need not come to passport office again and again and waste their time and our time.

Almost all the hon. Members have complained about police verification. You will be glad to know that I have directed that if the police people verify the character within a month it is O.K.; otherwise the Passport Officer has the authority to ignore them and issue the passport. (*Interruptions*) The verification can take place later on. That is how I have asked for the powers. One of the hon. Members asked why do I ask for more powers. If, after a period of say 3 to 4 months, after the verification, it is brought to my notice that the man is not a desirable one, I will be able to impound his passport. But the passport will not be delayed simply because

of police verification. If the police people do it within a month it is O.K.; otherwise the Passport Officer will go ahead with the issue of passport. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR (Mangalor): Don't say 'can', you make it 'must', within four months. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI R.L. BHATIA: Within a month. I have already given instructions. They do not wait for that. If within a month verification comes, leave it; we will do that.

Some friends have also suggested that M.Ps. are to verify. But most of them said that 'for God's sake don't introduce this system, it will be difficult.' So, I am not introducing that.

Sir, Oscar Fernandes and some other friends also suggested that there should be some Committee of the Members of Parliament who should go to Passport Office and find out the difficulties of the applicants. Here I would like to tell you that I have started, in this connection, by setting up advisory committees in each Passport Office in which M.Ps., M.L.As. and important local people will be there. So, all these local problems will be looked after by you. So, there is no need of sending a Parliamentary Committee and all that, the local Passport Committee will be able to look after the small problems which are there. (*Interruptions*)

Sir, some friends made a reference to the Estimates Committee's proposal and recommendation with regard to the Passport Bill and Immigration Bill. That matter has already been given to the Law Ministry, they are examining it and when their report comes, I may be able to come to you with a comprehensive Bill, but in the meanwhile the Law Ministry is examining them.

Shri Fatmi suggested that the District Headquarters should receive the applications. That will be introducing another agency for which we are all objecting. I have removed all the middlemen and agencies. Now, you can apply directly to the Passport Office by post, you will get the Passport by

post. I think there is no need of introducing other agencies. (*Interruptions*) I am coming to all of you one by one. I am coming to all your suggestions.

A very important suggestion was made by a number of friends that the people who go out for education — students — and the labourers who get jobs, should get the Passports. Shri Joshi has suggested it and various other friends said about that. For that I have already given instructions to my Passport Officers that anybody who has got a job outside and he has been assured, and he has got a letter, just by showing of that letter he will be immediately given a Passport. Secondly, any student who wants to study outside, if he has an Admission letter, he should also straightway go to the officer for Passport and it will be issued.

[*Translation*]

SHRI ANNA JOSHI: It seems that you would excel even over Shri Vajpayee.

SHRI R.L. BHATIA: Yes, if your blessings are with me.

[*English*]

Prof. Ram Kapse mentioned about some Thakur Singh, who was under TADA. I would like to inform him that I have impounded his Passport because later on when anybody comes with an application to me and police verifies, I have no right to refuse that application. But if this thing is brought to me, that is how I wanted the right to impound it, which you objected saying, 'way do you want to have the power?'

SHRI RAM KAPSE: I have not objected to it, I have supported. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI R.L. BHATIA: Sir, another proposal I have brought in. People have to come again and again to the Passport office for renewal. So, I have raised the age of Passport to 10 years. Now, I will not be issuing the Passport for five years, but any Passport applicant now will be getting the Passport for ten years so that he does not crowd my office and he

[Sh. R.L. Bhatia]

[English]

does not have the inconvenience of coming to the office again and again. There was neither objection that people are given temporary passports for one year. I have asked my authorities that it should be given for 10 years. The reason is the same that those people need not come again and again.

Then, there were many proposals to open more passport offices at Calicut, Mangalore, Ernakulam, Vijayawada and in some places in the North Eastern parts of the country. *(Interruptions)* If you help and allow me to charge enough fee, then I can do computerisation, I can open more offices and I can have more staff. Some other hon. Members wanted me to declare here as to how much money I want. I do not know how many offices I have to open and so, I would request those Members who have not suggested, they should write to me so that I will be able to formulate as to what will be the expenses for modernisation like computerisation etc. I assure that this is not a commercial department, but it is a service department. So, whatever you give me, to that extent I will be able to serve you better, but please do not put any condition on that.

Then, there was another proposal about SAARC countries. In this connection, a decision has already been taken to give passport and there should be no visa system for the Members of Parliament and Judges in SAARC countries and that is being processed. In our country, we have started issuing that. So far, 31 persons have been issued those stickers by which they can go to Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka. The Members of Parliament are not required to have any passport for that. So, I would request Mr. Nitish Kumar to at least send me an application so that I can issue a passport to him.

[Translation]

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: It took almost year and a half in solidarity.....*(Interruptions)*

SHRI R.L. BHATIA: You should have solidarity for the efficiency, not for having the right as to not to reply for the passport. I will issue promptly a passport to you as soon as you apply for it. *(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: Shri Azad disturbs the hon. Minister who speaks well. Now when Bhatia Saheb is speaking well and is getting the support of the whole House he is being disturbed by Mr. Azad.

[English]

SHRI R.L. BHATIA: I will tell you a story in this connection. There were insurance agents and they were telling that they would pay the dues very promptly. One person said that he would pay it within a month. The second person said that his company would pay within eight days. Then, the third person was an American and he said that in this age, it should be done immediately. He said: "Only the other day a man was falling from the roof of the 23rd floor of a building. We had the office on the fourth floor. So, while he was going to die, we have given him a cheque and that is the efficiency." So, please give me the money and I can assure you that I will be able to fulfill my duties towards you.

A mention was also made about the lost passport in other countries. A number of complaints have been received by me that bags of many of our friends who go abroad have been stolen or they have been lost etc. In that case, I have given direction to all my Embassies abroad that instead of bothering for photograph or passport, they should immediately give them certificate so that they come back home.

About diplomatic passports, well, all MPs enjoy this privilege. A suggestion was made by Shri Mohan Singh that many other friends, ex-MPs should also have it. Well, I will consider it. Their number will be very large. Right from independence day, some

people were one-term MP, some were two-term like that.

[*Translation*]

SHRI MADAN LAL KHURANA (South Delhi): Mr. Chairman, Sir, twice the hon. Prime Minister promised that a Passport office would be opened in Jammu because the people of Jammu and Kashmir have to come to Delhi for getting the Passport issued. I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize that a passport office should be opened in Jammu.

[*English*]

SHRI R.L. BHATIA: The order has already been passed to have office in Jammu.

With regard to diplomatic passport for ex-MPs, well I will have to discuss with my people. I think, it should be possible. But off hand, I cannot say. I will certainly look into the matter.

Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar has given a revolutionary suggestion. I think, it has larger implications and it is connected with the Home Ministry also. We will see the possibility of such things.

Sardar Buta Singh has asked for dual passport system. I have no objection in giving dual passport to NRIs or to the people who are in the other countries. But my difficulty is, so far India has not accepted dual citizenship and till that is accepted, dual passport may not be possible.

DR. C. SILVERA: The peculiar difficulty faced by the people of Mizoram and Nagaland is dual verification. Can you give an assurance that this will be abolished? Otherwise people will feel alienated. These are the only States where the people are subjected to dual verification.

SHRI R.L. BHATIA: I take note of your point. But it concerns the Home Ministry and not my Ministry. I will certainly write to him.

With these words, I request the hon.

Members to pass the Bill.

[*Translation*]

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: I would like to congratulate the hon. Minister for making a very good speech. He should be elevated to the rank of Cabinet Minister for that (*Interruptions*)

[*English*]

MR. CHAIRMAN: There are amendments to Motion for consideration. Shri G.L. Bhargava.

[*Translation*]

SHRIGIRDHARILAL BHARGAVA: The hon. Minister has announced several measures of streamlining the issue of passports. I would like to submit that these should be implemented at the earliest so that those who need passports are benefited. With this submission I withdraw my amendment.

[*English*]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Has the hon. Member leave of the House to withdraw his amendment?

SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

Amendment No. 1 was, by leave, withdrawn

[*Translation*]

SHRI MOHAN SINGH: I am bound to support the hon. Minister as he has made some good announcements. We would now like to give him some time to implement them. Therefore, I withdraw my amendment.

[*English*]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Has the hon. Member leave of the house to withdraw his amendment?

SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

Amendment No. 2 was, by leave, withdrawn

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question is:

(DEPARTMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT) (SHRI G. VENKAT SWAMY): Sir, I beg to move: "

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

"That the Bill further to amend the Constitution of India, as reported by the Joint Committee be taken into consideration."

The motion was adopted

MR. CHAIRMAN: The House will now take up Clause-by-Clause consideration of the Bill.

Clause 2, there is an amendment of Shri Rambadan.

I think he is not present. So, I put Clauses 2 to 10 to the vote of the House.

The question is:

"That clauses 2 to 10 stand part of the Bill."

I would like, at the outset, to refer to the Directive Principles laid down in Article 40 of the Constitution. This casts a duty on the Centre as well as the States to establish and nourish the village panchayats so as to make them effective, self-governing institutions. However, even after 42 years, we have not been able to fulfill this expectation of the founding-fathers of the Constitution; it is for this reason that the Government, under the leadership of our beloved Prime Minister Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, have introduced a Constitution (Seventy-second Amendment) Bill 1991. In effect, we are fulfilling - Gandhiji's dreams.

The motion was adopted

Clauses 2 to 10 were added to the Bill

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question is:

"That Clause 1, the Enacting formula and the Long Title stand part of the Bill"

The Gandhian concept of Gram Swaraj has been the guiding principle of our political struggle even before Independence. Attempts have been made to give effect to this idea ever since 1947. Panditji established institutions of Panchayati Raj as the primary instrument for bringing development to rural India. Shrimati Indira Gandhi stressed the need for people's participation in the process of economic and social transformation and Shri Rajiv Gandhi emphasised the need to revitalise and strength Panhayati Raj institutions in order to sustain democracy in the country. In spite of these efforts, it cannot be denied that in many parts of the country the full potential of the institutions of Panchayati Raj has not been realised.

The motion was adopted

SHRI R.L. BHATIA: Sir, I beg to move:

"That the Bill be passed."

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question is:

"That the Bill be passed.

The motion was adopted

16.42 hrs.

CONSTITUTION (SEVENTY-SECOND AMENDMENT) BILL
(INSERTION OF NEW PART IX)

As reported by Joint Committee

[English]

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE
MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

This is not to deny that some efforts were made from time to time. In fact, in certain States, such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Panchayati Raj structure was strengthened following the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mahta Committee in 1957. More recently, States like West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have provided wide-ranging delegation and powers of authority down to the district and intermediate level.