The Government had requested the Committee to look into the representations from the auto-taxi operators, taxi operators and luxury taxi segment operators of the State (See Letter No.D3-17352/STA/2010 dated 01-07-2014). In addition thereto, the Committee was required to look into and deal with the directions issued by the High Court of Kerala dated 12-04-2013, made in WPC No.37447 of 2009. Of course in the judgment there were no positive directions in the matter of fare fixation. The case had been filed by the Swanthanthra Autoricksha Thozhilali Union (SATU). The direction was to consider Exts.P6 and p7 representations with notice to the petitioner within a prescribed time limit. The text of the judgment would show that it was time for the State to reconsider the fare.
structure in respect of autorickshaws because of the considerable changes that had come in the State, in effect burdening the industry with a load, which was practically unbearable.

Taking note of the issue involved, the Committee had thought it fit to invite opinion of general public as well as the operators and the workmen engaged in the industry. Hearing had been held at Thiruvananthapuram as well as at Kottayam and Cochin. Even though there was a request to hold sittings in other areas of the State, taking note of the pressing need highlighted, the Committee had thought it fit to the presentations available with the Committee from NATPAC, so as to make it the base for consideration of the issues highlighted. It may be pointed out that in spite of wide publicity given through notices, general public had hardly made any effort to attend the public hearing or highlight any specific issues. Although it may be possible to assume that there was general awareness among the public, that a reasonable hike in the existing fares might be consistent with the present day scenario, we would state that as far as possible our effort was to base the report on scientific datas collected by independent bodies, which were generally impartial.
In respect of taxi cars, we may at the outset, advert to the problems, which we had faced, while fixing generally acceptable hire charges. The change, which is, there in the pattern of the society during the past decade had been highlighted from several quarters. The situation as is prevailing is diametrically opposite to what it was ten years back.

The roads earlier were ruled by two brands of cars, namely the Ambassador, manufactured by Hindustan Motors and the Premier Padmini, a product of Premier Automobiles. Both the factories have stopped production and new entrants have come to the scene. The most common taxi car, at bottom line, now available for general public, is the Tata Indica. It would have been possible earlier to fix taxi fares in towns and mofussil areas with some amount of certainty, if the selection was confined between Ambassador and Premier Padmini cars. But, that is not the situation as at present. Tata Motors later introduced at least about 10 variants and another manufacturer Hundai have come with models such as Santro, i10 etc., which are also put on the roads in large numbers. Another factor, which is highly relevant in fixing fares is the capital to be invested by each operator. Here also the price of cars has nothing in common. Tata Indica
car is available for Rs.2.5 lakhs. More or less similar vehicle manufactured by other companies is in the range of Rs.6 to 9 lakhs.

Luxury car is another segment, where also the investment of an operator cannot be considered as uniform, while the enquiry is to fix standard fares. Therefore, the Committee is of the considered view that instead of supplying recommendations, which might prove to be impractical to be enforced, the better approach would be to permit the market to adjust itself as negotiated charges can by itself iron out inequalities. But, however, it may not be justifiable for the Government to forego its rights to fix the minimum fares in toto. Therefore, our suggestion and recommendation is to statutorily fix the minimum fares of the cars in the first rungs, such as taxi cars running by using Indica, L10, Santro etc. As the price of the cars fluctuate, this also cannot be scientifically used as a data for fixing the minimum fares and that is why we venture to suggest that basic fixation would be more acceptable and yield in lesser objections with only a step up for airconditioned vehicles.

It may not be possible to fix the rates for different areas or a uniform yardstick as is usually in vogue in Metros. This is because utilization of taxi cars in village areas and small towns will be
lesser than in town or corporation areas. As all India permits are being issued, the taxi cars cannot be effectively calibrated segregating the length of the journey in mofussil areas and town areas. Hence, we confess that what is practical is to suggest a rough and ready principle. We are refraining from making any stipulations as far as taxi cars in luxury and semi-luxury categories, as always they are negotiated. Of course the taxi operators had presented a problem, where private cars are used as taxi cars resulting in monitory loss to the Government as also certain operators using permitted taxi cars with number plates masquerading as private cars. In the matter of unauthorized taxi service, always enforcement of law is possible, but not in the latter cases. In addition thereto, several institutions have sprung up, who employ and supply from a pool of drivers, who are available on daily or hourly basis. This does not result in revenue loss to the Government, but make inroads to the taxi system that was existing in the immediate past. But, as suggested earlier, as long as there is no violation of norms, it is better for the Government to extend enforcement only to areas where corruptive tendencies are likely to occur. Thus, our recommendation may be understood as confined to basic taxi operators, who
are expected to cater to the needs of common man, but have limited resources, but still find it necessary and essential to engage taxies, at least on rare occasions. We recommend that, as of now the Government need not fix minimum fares for luxury car segment or semi luxury car segment and contract carriages.

The present rates vis-à-vis the classification of taxi cars presently in operation, as prescribed by the notification (G.O.(P) 77/2012/Trans.dated 30-11-2012; motor cabs and ordinary motor cabs with a seating capacity of 7 persons, including the driver, are to levy Rs.9/- per kilometer, irrespective of the fuel used and a minimum hire charges are to be fixed at Rs.100/-. In the case of airconditoned cars, additionally the notification prescribes 10% addition of the charge shown in the meter.

Taking notice of the change in the circumstances as now prevailing and the necessity to take notice of fluctuations that may occur in the immediate future years, we suggest that the minimum charge that would be payable will be Rs.200/- (Rupees two hundred only) and a passenger can travel up to 5 kilometers by paying such minimum charge. Additional running kilometers required for the trip would be fixed at
Rs.15/- per kilometer and there should be a stipulation that the minimum charge specified above will be leviable for detention of 4 hours. We may also indicate that if Government so considers, a 10% increase might be brought about as fares payable for the next class of vehicles, irrespective of airconditioned or not, so that necessity for adverting to the claims of such class of vehicles could be avoided. The running charges leviable will be streamlined to the nearest ten rupee point.

In respect of autorickshaws, the Government had revised the fares by notification, G.O.(P) No.77/2012/Trans. Dated 30-11-2012. But, however, by an amendment notification of 01-06-2013, the said notification had been amended (SRO 60/2013). The minimum charge payable were to be Rs.15/- and the passengers are entitled to travel 1.25 kilometers by paying the minimum fare. Of course, for night journey additional 50% charges are leviable and there is also a provision for waiting charges. However, taking note of the upward rates for the cost of living, the earnings of the autorickshaw operator or an autorickshaw driver is very low. When an unskilled worker in the Kerala State receives on an average of Rs.700 to 750/- per day, the materials supplied would indicate that the average earnings of persons engaged in this
industry is less than Rs.750/-. There is nothing to protect such persons from increase in the cost of living as admissible to many others, such as dearness allowances. An increase in the operational cost, including capital employment, suggest for a substantial enhancement in the minimum rate from what is existing as of now. The comparable fares of adjacent States also appear to be much higher than from what is now levied here. One another factor, which is relevant, is the circumstance that an autoricksha can carry 3 to 4 persons, but almost always it is not run with full capacity. In our Report No.18, we had indicated to the necessity for introducing share autorickshaws. They would substantially reduce per head travelling expenses. But, the Government has not so far taken further steps for implementing or considering the above recommendation. Till such time additional facilities are made available to the commuters, it would be unjust to deny the benefit of enhancement of minimum rate to autoricksha operators and our suggestion is to increase the minimum rate to Rs.20/- for travel up to 1.5 kilometers and additional Rs.10/- per k.m as shown in the meter. Due to the explosion of vehicles, the journey, excepting in mofussil areas, has become time consuming and the cost of fuel cannot
effectively be reflected by the meter charges, by any method of calibration. Likewise, there is also necessity for ensuring that appropriate safeguard is to be taken to ensure that a passenger engaging autorickshaw should bear at least part of expenditure incurred for the return journey, excluding town and municipal areas.

Therefore, our recommendation is that in places, including high-ranges, 50% of the charges are to be additionally paid for trips beyond 5 kilometers. During the period from 10 PM to 5 AM, in corporation areas, after minimum charge 50% additional charge of what is recorded in the meter is to be fixed treating them as dropping trips. In respect of waiting charges, the existing pattern can continue.

As indicated earlier, autorickshaws are special conveyances, which are utilized for personal convenience and this by itself suggest that for such luxury enjoyed by the passenger, he is expected to pay adequate remuneration, taking note of sustenance of the persons who had supplemented to his convenience and comfort in life.

In this context, we also bring to the attention of the Government that pre-paid auto and taxi rates are successfully implemented in several centres in
the State. This may not conform with exactitude to the minimum rates that might be notified by the Government from time to time, but it may be possible for the local transport authorities to fix and finalise the minimum taxi/auto charges, taking into account the geographical areas to be traversed substantially taking note of the fares notified. Such a mechanism would be beneficial not only to the passenger community but also to avoid unnecessary friction and calculation of fares from time to time, whether or not the driver of the vehicles opt to operate the meter, although it is obligatory to make available the meter while a trip is undertaken. The issues of drop in, waiting etc., also can thus be avoided.

JUSTICE M.RAMCHANDRAN (Retd.)
(Chairman)

T.ELANGOVAN (Member)

Prof.B.A.PRAKASH (Member)

R.SREELEKHA (Member)