

**25**

**COMMITTEE  
ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
(2023-24)**

**SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA**

**MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

[Action Taken by the Government on the Observations /Recommendations contained in the Twentieth Report of the Committee on Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2023-24.]

**TWENTY FIFTH REPORT**



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT  
NEW DELHI**

*December, 2023 /Agrahayana, 1945 (Saka)*

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**(2023-24)**

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[Action Taken by the Government on the Observations /Recommendations contained in the Twentieth Report of the Committee on Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2023-24.]

*Presented to Lok Sabha on 6.12.2023*  
*Laid on the Table of Rajya Sabha on 6.12.2023*



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT**  
**NEW DELHI**

*December, 2023 /Agrahayana, 1945 (Saka)*

**COEA No.**

***Price: Rs. ....***

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Published under Rule 382 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha  
(\_\_\_\_\_ Edition) and printed by

## CONTENTS

|  | PAGE  |
|--|-------|
| COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE (2023-24).....  | (ii)  |
| INTRODUCTION.....  | (iii) |
| Chapter I Report.....  | 1     |
| Chapter II Observations /Recommendations which have been accepted by the<br>Government.....  | 15    |
| Chapter III Observations / Recommendations which the Committee do not desire to<br>pursue in view of the Government's Replies.....                                 | 75    |
| Chapter IV Observations / Recommendations in respect of which Replies of the<br>Government have not been accepted by the Committee<br>and require reiteration..... | 77    |
| Chapter V Observations / Recommendations in respect of which Final<br>Replies of the Government are still awaited.....   | 79    |

## APPENDICES

|   |    |
|---|----|
| I. Minutes of the Fifth Sitting of the Committee held on 04 December, 2023.....   | 81 |
| II. Analysis of Action Taken by the Government on the Observations /<br>Recommendations contained in the Twentieth Report of the Committee<br>on External Affairs (17 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha)..... | 83 |

## COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2023-24)

**Shri P.P. Chaudhary, Chairperson**

### **Lok Sabha**

2. Smt. Harsimrat Kaur Badal
3. Shri Abhishek Banerjee
4. Shri Kalyan Banerjee
5. Shri E. T. Mohammed Basheer
6. Shri Dileshwar Kamait
7. Smt. Preneet Kaur
8. Smt. Goddeti Madhavi
9. Smt. Poonam Pramod Mahajan
10. Shri Srinivas Reddy Manne
11. Shri P. C. Mohan
12. Smt. Queen Oja
13. Shri Ritesh Pandey
14. Dr. K. C. Patel
15. Shri N.K. Premachandran
16. Smt. Navneet Ravi Rana
17. Shri Soyam Bapu Rao
18. Shri Vishnu Datt Sharma
19. Shri Rebaty Tripura
20. Dr. Harsh Vardhan
21. *Vacant*

### **Rajya Sabha**

22. Smt. Jaya Bachchan
23. Smt. Misha Bharti
24. Shri Anil Desai
25. Shri Ranjan Gogoi
26. Shri Deepender Singh Hooda
27. Shri Prakash Javadekar
28. Dr. Wanweiroy Kharlukhi
29. Dr. Ashok Kumar Mittal
30. Shri Kapil Sibal
31. Shri Abdul Wahab

### **Secretariat**

- |    |                           |   |                 |
|----|---------------------------|---|-----------------|
| 1. | Dr. Ram Raj Rai           | – | Joint Secretary |
| 2. | Smt. Reena Gopalakrishnan | – | Director        |
| 3. | Ms. Maya Menon            | - | Under Secretary |

## INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Committee on External Affairs (2023-24) having been authorized by the Committee to submit the Report on their behalf, present this Twenty-Fifth Report (17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha) on action taken by the Government on the Observations /Recommendations contained in the Twentieth Report of the Committee on Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2023-24.

2. The Twentieth Report was presented to the Lok Sabha and laid on the Table of the Rajya Sabha on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2023. The Action Taken Replies of the Government on all the Observations/Recommendations contained in the Report were received on 2 August, 2023 (English Version) and 17 August, 2023 (Hindi Version).

3. The Committee considered and adopted this Action Taken Report at their Sitting held on 04 December, 2023. The Minutes of the Sitting of the Committee has been given at Appendix-I to the Report.

4. An analysis of the action taken by the Government on the Observations/Recommendations contained in the Twentieth Report of the Committee on External Affairs is given at Appendix-II.

**NEW DELHI**  
**4 December, 2023**  
***13 Agrahayana, 1945 (Saka)***

**P.P. CHAUDHARY,**  
***Chairperson,***  
***Committee on External Affairs***

## CHAPTER-I

This Report of the Committee on External Affairs deals with the action taken by the Government on the observations/recommendations contained in their Twentieth Report on the subject 'Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2023-24' which was presented to the Lok Sabha and laid on the Table of the Rajya Sabha on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2023.

2. The Action Taken Notes have been received from the Ministry of External Affairs on all the 63 observations/recommendations contained in the Report. These have been categorized as follows: -

i. **Observations/Recommendations which have been accepted by the Government: -**

Recommendation Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 63.

**Total- 57**

**Chapter-II**

(ii) **Observations/Recommendations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the Government's replies:-**

Recommendation No. 31

**Total- 1**

**Chapter-III**

(iii) **Observations/Recommendations in respect of which replies of Government have not been accepted by the Committee and require reiteration: -**

Recommendation Nos. 16, 17 and 53

**Total- 3**

**Chapter-IV**

iv. **Observations/Recommendations in respect of which final replies of Government are still awaited: -**

3. **The Committee desire that the final replies to the comments contained in Chapter-I and observations/recommendations contained in Chapter-V of this Report may be furnished to the Committee within three months of the presentation of this Report.**

4. The Committee will now deal with the action taken by the Government on some of their observations/recommendations that require reiteration or merit comments.

**Overall Budgetary Proposals , Allocation and Utilisation**

**(Recommendation No. 4)**

5. The Committee in their twentieth report had observed/recommended as under:

“The Committee are happy to note that the Report being prepared by Research and Information System for Economic Development (RIS) analysing the budgetary allocations of Ministries/Departments conducting foreign policies of important countries as per the expanded mandate of the study, has been completed and would be shared with the Committee shortly. The Committee desire that the Ministry should study the Report carefully and initiate action based on the findings of the study.’

6. The Ministry in its Action Taken Reply has stated as under:

“Hon’ble Committee’s recommendations have been noted. As desired, the Report prepared by Research and Information System for Economic Development (RIS) analysing the budgetary allocations of Ministries/Departments conducting foreign policies of important countries as per the expanded mandate of the study has been shared with the Hon’ble Standing Committee. Ministry would carefully study the conclusions & recommendations in the Report as well as share the findings of the Report with various stakeholders in the Government, particularly Ministry of Finance.”



7. The Committee had specifically desired that the Report of the Research and Information System for Economic Development (RIS), analysing the budgetary allocations of Ministries/Departments conducting foreign policies of important countries be studied carefully by the Ministry and action initiated based on the findings of the study. The Committee appreciate that the Report submitted by RIS in the matter has been shared with the Committee. But the Ministry has not expressed its response to the conclusions and recommendations drawn in the report. The Committee, therefore desire that before sharing the findings of the report with various stakeholders in the Government, particularly Ministry of Finance, MEA should sort out the points to be pursued with each stakeholder and decide a strategy for proper time bound follow up for implementation of the findings. The Committee may be kept apprised of the progress in the matter regularly.

### **Classification of the Budget of MEA**

#### **(Recommendation No. 7)**

8. The Committee in their report had observed/recommended as under:

‘The Committee find that a high-level mechanism is in place in the Ministry to monitor the implementation of development partnership programmes and weekly reviews are being done by the officials at different levels. It is further understood that the Ministry is planning to establish a Contract and Procurement Management Unit. As a part of that , an online dashboard is being built to see with the click of a button how far the project has progressed, even in the last 48 hours. The Committee are extremely happy to see the

efforts to mark all projects on line and monitor their implementation in a manner which links well with how the budget is spent on these projects. The Committee desire that the online dashboard is made operational and the Contract and Procurement Management Unit is set up in the Ministry at the earliest and the progress in this regard is intimated to the Committee.'

9. The Ministry in its Action Taken Reply has stated as under:

"Ministry has appointed EXIM Bank as Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) for Grant in aid projects. Ministry in the process of creating a dashboard for real-time online monitoring of grant in aid projects being extended by Government of India"

10. **With a view to providing impetus to the Ministry's monitoring mechanism for implementation of development partnership programmes, the Committee had desired that the online dashboard being built for the purpose be made operational and the Contract and Procurement Management Unit be set up by the Ministry at the earliest. The Ministry have informed that EXIM Bank has been appointed as Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) for Grant in aid projects. The Ministry have further informed that it is in the process of creating a dashboard for real-time online monitoring of grant in aid projects being extended by Government of India. The Committee understand that real time online monitoring would enable quick detection of anomalies, performance issues and potential problems while providing corresponding mitigating measures. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to expedite the process and keep the Committee apprised of the progress in this regard.**

—

**Embassies and Missions**

**Recommendation No. 16**

11. The Committee in their report had observed/recommended as under:

'The Committee note that an amount of Rs 3528.85 crore has been allocated in the BE 2023-24 under the Head 'Embassies and Missions' which is even lesser than the BE 2022-23 outlay of Rs. 3769.06 crore. The Ministry has stated that the allocated funds seem to be adequate to ensure the smooth operation of Missions and Posts abroad. The Committee have also been apprised those proposals for expanding India's diplomatic presence in important partner countries including in the neighbourhood, the Latin Americas and Caribbean region, the Pacific Island region and Europe are under process. In the opinion of the Committee, opening of resident Indian Missions in these countries is in line with the broad foreign policy vision of the Government to maximise India's presence abroad in the most optimal manner and to achieve our foreign policy objective of building a conducive environment for India's growth and development through partnerships with friendly countries. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to expedite the process involving logistics, deployment, and creation of infrastructure as well as coordination and liaison with the host Governments so that resident Indian Missions are opened in these countries at the earliest.'

12. The Ministry in its Action Taken Reply has stated as under:

"The recommendation of the Standing Committee is duly noted. The scope and depth of the bilateral relations with the countries where India does not have a resident Mission or Post are regularly reviewed, and Mission/Post are opened in these countries accordingly"

13. **Cognizant of the importance of opening Indian Missions in countries where there are no Indian missions, the Committee had urged the Ministry to expedite the proposals for the establishment of missions involving logistics, deployment, and creation of infrastructure as well as coordination and liaison with the host Governments so that resident Indian Missions are opened particularly in the neighbourhood, the Latin Americas and Caribbean region, the Pacific Island region and Europe in at the earliest. However, the Committee note the**

Ministry's reply merely states that the recommendation of the Standing Committee is duly noted and that the scope and depth of the bilateral relations with the countries where India does not have a resident Mission or Post are regularly reviewed, and Mission/Post opened in these countries accordingly. The Committee are of the considered view that more proactive action is necessitated on the part of the Ministry to expand India's diplomatic footprint, deepen political relations, enable growth of bilateral trade, investment and economic engagements, facilitate stronger people-to-people contacts, bolster political outreach in multilateral fora and help garner support for India's foreign policy objectives. The Committee, therefore reiterate their earlier recommendation and desire that Ministry should take concrete steps to expedite the process of establishment of Indian missions where there are no Indian Missions involving logistics, deployment, and creation of infrastructure as well as coordination and liaison with the host Governments apprise the Committee accordingly.

**(Recommendation No. 17)**

14. The Committee in their report had observed/recommended as under:

'The Committee note that 181 Indian Missions/Posts have so far been integrated into the Passport Seva Programme through the Global Passport Seva Project (GPSP). This integration, the Committee understand, will enable centralised passport issuance for our citizens in India and Diaspora abroad. The Committee desire that the process of integration of the remaining Missions/posts in to the GPSP applications should be completed at the earliest for smooth, expeditious and transparent delivery of passport services. The status of integration may be communicated to the Committee within three months.'

15. The Ministry in its Action Taken Reply has stated as under:

“The total number of Indian Missions/Posts integrated into the PSP through GPSP is 181. This covers practically all our Missions/Posts except few countries striven by civil strife, newly opened Missions/Posts etc”

16. **The Committee had noted that 181 Indian Missions/Posts had been integrated into the Passport Seva Programme through the Global Passport Seva Project (GPSP). The Committee were given to understand that and the Ministry was in touch with the remaining Missions/Posts i.e. Mission & Consulates in Afghanistan and Embassy of India, Pyongyang, DPR Korea to complete the process of integration With the aim to boost centralised passport issuance for our citizens in India and Diaspora abroad. The Committee had desired that the process of integration of the remaining Missions/posts in to the GPSP applications should be completed at the earliest for smooth, expeditious and transparent delivery of passport services From one reply of the Ministry, it seems that the integration process is still remains incomplete and no step has been taken to complete the same in all these months. The Committee, therefore, reiterate their earlier recommendation and urge the Ministry either with same coverage declare the process of integration as completed or make concerted efforts to ensure completion of process of integration of the remaining Missions/posts in to the GPSP under intimation to this Committee.**

**Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT)**

**(Recommendation No. 29)**

17. The Committee in their report had observed/recommended as under:

'The Committee are happy to note that the Ministry conducts pre- orientation programme for students also before they join their institutes abroad. It is also observed that Indian Embassies/Posts abroad do not possess complete details and addresses of students abroad. The gravity of this situation was brought home during the Ukraine crisis when the Ministry needed to contact all the Indian students in Ukraine. The Ministry has informed the Committee that Indian nationals abroad, particularly Indian students, are reticent about registering themselves with the Indian Embassies/Posts abroad. The Committee desire that the Ministry, through the PDOT sessions, should impress upon all the students as well as other Indian nationals going abroad that it is in their own interest and for their safety/security that they are required to register with the Indian Embassies/Posts abroad. Since it is with the Ministry and the Missions abroad to make them aware about the facilities/assistance provided to them including resolving of their grievances, the Committee recommend that the Indian Embassies/Posts abroad may also be pursued to do greater outreach and establish close connect with Indian nationals abroad including students through social media platforms so that an authentic database of students as well as Indian nationals abroad is available and maintained in the Ministry.'

18. The Ministry in its Action Taken Reply has stated as under:

The Ministry wishes to inform the Committee that PDOT sessions are not organised in India for students going abroad. However, as part of their outreach to students, Missions/Posts abroad collaborate with Universities and tertiary education institutions and student associations to organise welcome ceremonies and familiarisation sessions for new students, wherein students are also encouraged to register with the Mission/Post.

Indian Missions/Posts abroad attach great priority to having a reliable database of Indians nationals, including students. Missions/Posts use every available opportunity, including all events with participation of diaspora and social media platforms, to encourage the diaspora members and students to register with the Mission/Post"

19. **With a view to ensuring greater safety/security of Indians going abroad, the Committee, had recommended that the Indian Embassies/Posts abroad be pursued to do**

greater outreach and establish close connect with Indian nationals abroad including students through social media platforms so that an authentic database of students as well as Indian nationals abroad is available and maintained in the Ministry. The Ministry in the reply has informed that as part of their outreach to students, Missions/Posts abroad collaborate with Universities and tertiary education institutions and student associations to organise welcome ceremonies and familiarisation sessions for new students, wherein students are also encouraged to register with the Mission/Post. They have further informed that the Missions/Posts use every available opportunity, including social media platforms, to encourage the diaspora members and students to register with the Mission/Post. The Committee, while appreciating the efforts being put across by the Indian Missions/Posts abroad, are of the view that the database of the Indian nationals going abroad especially students needs to be available promptly in the event of crisis like the one we faced recently in Ukraine. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to come up with a foolproof strategy for securing an authentic database of students as well as Indian nationals abroad and inform about the outcome.

#### Aid to Sri Lanka

(Recommendation No. 44)

20. The Committee in their report had observed/recommended as under:

‘The Committee note that the Budgetary Allocation under ‘Aid to Sri Lanka’ has been reduced since 2020-21 as implementation of projects had been impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic followed by unprecedented economic crisis in that country. The economic crisis has also posed a challenge in terms of disbursement and utilization of

funds as well as currency crunch in the country. The Committee further note that the Government is trying to put in place an institutional framework for settlement of trade in Indian Rupee so that even in the absence of hard currency, trade may not be disrupted. In the opinion of the Committee, such a mechanism which facilitates trade in Indian rupee would be beneficial, not only for Sri Lanka but for other countries in the neighbourhood as well, that are facing economic crisis. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to finalize all the modalities, in consultation with other Departments and Agencies concerned, at the earliest in this regard. The Progress made to advance the prospects of trade settlement with partner countries in Indian Rupee, especially in countries of our neighborhood may be communicated to the Committee within three months.'

21. The Ministry in its Action Taken Reply has stated as under:

“Following the Government of India’s decision to allow settlement of trade transactions in INR in July 2022, a number of Sri Lankan banks applied for Vostro/Nostro accounts in Indian banks. As per available information, at least six banks from Sri Lanka currently have functional vostro/nostro accounts for facilitating trade transactions in INR. Separately, Sri Lanka has included INR in its list of designated foreign currencies which has also facilitated INR denominated economic transactions between the two countries. In March 2023, High Commission of India, Colombo had organized a interactive seminar on the use of INR for economic transactions between India and Sri Lanka, involving officials from Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Government of Sri Lanka, RBI, Government of India apart from representatives from business and industry including tourism sector, media personnel, bank representatives, economists and journalists, trade and industry associations and export promotion councils.”

22. **With a view to advancing the prospects of trade settlement with partner countries in Indian Rupee, especially in countries of our neighborhood, the Committee had urged the Ministry to finalize the modalities, in consultation with other Departments and Agencies concerned, at the earliest. The Committee are pleased to note that following the Indian Government’s decision to allow settlement of trade transactions in INR in July 2022, a number of Sri Lankan banks have applied for Vostro/Nostro accounts in Indian banks and**



that Sri Lanka has included INR in its list of designated foreign currencies facilitating INR denominated economic transactions between the two countries. The Committee may also be apprised of the steps being taken by the Government in the finalization of the modalities in this regard for global acceptance of the Indian Rupee and outcome of the efforts for International trade settlements and promote growth of global trade with an emphasis on Indian exports.

### **Indian Council For Cultural Relations (ICCR)**

#### **Recommendation No. 52**

23. The Committee in their report had observed/recommended as under:

'The Committee observe that ICCR's Cultural Centres are the principal instrument of India's institutional outreach. As of now, ICCR is operating 37 Indian Cultural Centres (ICCs) abroad and is in the process of opening a new centre in Paris during the upcoming financial year. The Committee further understand that the property acquired at U-Street in 2013 to set up ICCs in Washington is yet to be utilized due to structural challenges in the building and delay during COVID period. Recognizing that public and cultural diplomacy are among the key tools in the formulation and implementation of India's foreign policy, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should undertake a review of all its Cultural Centres to rationalize them with a view to identifying countries where we need to have a greater presence and requirement for increased linkages by establishing such centre. The Committee also hope that the new centre in Paris is opened as per timelines and the one at Washington too is made functional at the earliest.'

24. The Ministry in its Action Taken Reply has stated as under:

"The Ministry through its Mission in Paris is progressing to operationalize the Cultural Centre in Paris, with over 94% work completion. Ministry acknowledges Standing Committee recommendation on reviewing & rationalizing presence of Cultural Centres across the world while exploring feasibility & impact of increased linkages through cultural centres. "

25. The Committee had recommended that the Ministry undertake a review of all its Cultural Centres to rationalize them with a view to identifying countries where we need to have a greater presence and requirement for increased linkages by establishing such centre. The Committee had also hoped that the new centre in Paris is opened as per timelines and the one at Washington made functional at the earliest. The Committee are happy to note that the Ministry through its Mission in Paris is progressing to operationalize the Cultural Centre in Paris, with over 94% work completion. The Committee are optimistic that the Ministry would take concrete steps towards reviewing & rationalizing the presence of Cultural Centres across the world along with exploring feasibility & impact of increased linkages through cultural centres. The Committee urge the Ministry to expedite the process of review of its Cultural Centres and desire to be kept apprised of the progress in this regard.

#### **Recommendation No. 53**

26. The Committee in their report had observed/recommended as under:

‘The Committee also note that there are 11 operational Chairs of ICCR on different subjects in the universities in Croatia, Mauritius, Jamaica, Tajikistan, Papua and Guinea, Cambodia, Poland, Bangladesh, Iceland and UK. In addition to them, 17 Chairs have already been established and are in the process of being operationalized. Further, the proposals for setting up of 09 more Chairs are under consideration. The Committee, while according top priority and importance to the task of projecting cultural heritage of India through ICCR, recommend that a review of the functioning of the academic chairs instituted by ICCR in foreign universities may be done with a view to assessing their achievements

against the objectives of instituting them. The Committee may be apprised of the findings of such a review within three months of the presentation of this Report'

27. The Ministry in its Action Taken Reply has stated as under:

“The observations/recommendations of the Committee with regard to establishment of Chairs abroad are noted”

28. **Having noted that proposals for setting up of 09 more ICCR Chairs are under consideration, the Committee had recommended that a review of the functioning of the academic chairs instituted by ICCR in foreign universities may be done with a view to assessing their achievements against the objectives of instituting them. The Committee however, note that the Ministry’s reply is silent on the action taken/proposed to be taken in this regard. As the Ministry are well aware, the ICCR through its centres and Chairs play an important role in projecting Indian culture through public and cultural diplomacy. The strategic significance of the work done by ICCR through public and cultural diplomacy is amongst the key tools in the formulation and implementation of India’s foreign policy. The Committee, therefore, reiterate their earlier recommendation and strongly urge the Ministry to review the functioning of the academic chairs instituted by ICCR in foreign universities at the earliest. The Committee may be apprised of the findings of such a review.**

#### **Recommendation No. 60**

29. The Committee in their report had observed/recommended as under:

“The Committee lay great emphasis on the role of research inputs on foreign policy as well as on economic, social, scientific and technological issues, etc. The Committee understand that apart from ICWA and RIS, the Ministry is collaborating with research institutes, think tanks and has also started outreach to universities through its Policy Planning Division. In the opinion of the Committee, research in the field of funding requirement, allocation and spending is one area the MEA needs to work upon. The global trends in this regard would enable the Ministry to make a realistic assessment of our

present needs and what we lacked. The Committee are also of the view that universities possessing the academic expertise and talent are most suited to carry out research in this field and desire that the Ministry should move towards direct interaction with universities and provide appropriate funding for research. For this purpose, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should open/create a new Budget Head for research funding to universities in the country.

30. The Ministry in its Action Taken Reply has stated as under:

“Recommendation noted for compliance.”

31. **With a view to boosting research in the field of funding requirement, allocation and spending, the Committee had recommended that the Ministry open/create a new Budget Head for research funding to universities in the country. The Ministry, in their action taken reply, have submitted that the recommendation has been noted for compliance. The Committee are hopeful that compliance in this regard shall be ensured by making appropriate provision from the very beginning in the budgetary process. The Committee may be apprised of the specific steps taken in this regard**

## **Chapter-II**

### **OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT**

#### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 1)**

The Committee note that despite its challenging mandate in making India into a leading power and influential entity among the nations of the world, MEA remains one amongst the least funded Central Ministries and its revised budget hover around just 0.4 per cent of the total budgetary allocation of the Government of India since 2020-21. In B.E 2019-20, MEA had a share of 0.64% of GoI's total budget. The Committee further note that despite them recommending that the allocation for the Ministry should be at least 1 % of the overall Budget of the GoI and India holding the G20 presidency, the budgetary allocation in BE 2023-24 has rather dropped by 0.04% from 0.44% in BE 2022-23 and not increased. Keeping in view the magnitude and extent of India's diplomatic outreach and foreign policy objectives, the Committee continue to feel that an allocation of at least 1 % out of the overall Budget of the GoI to the Ministry is reasonable and achievable. The Committee, hence, desire that the Ministry should strive to enhance its financial resources in line with its diplomatic responsibilities globally. However, the increased allocation per se without the capacity to utilize the amount would be meaningless. The Committee, therefore urge the Ministry to work out a roadmap for enhancing its capacities and capabilities, whether it is in the form of structural change in the Ministry or a complete revamp of its organizational structure. Based on the roadmap prepared, a detailed proposal may be placed before the Ministry of Finance. Steps taken in this regard may be communicated to the Committee.

#### **Reply of the Government**

Ministry has noted the recommendations of the Hon'ble Committee. It is further submitted that the existing mechanism of holding Quarterly Budget Management Meetings with major Divisions and Spending Units, chaired by Foreign Secretary or Financial Advisor has assisted the Ministry in projecting realistic demands for a given financial year for the Revised Estimates and for the subsequent financial year for the Budget Estimates. Ministry acknowledges Hon'ble Committee's recommendation to develop a structured roadmap for availing higher budgetary

resources. Our efforts to deepen our implementation efficiencies keeping in view our Partner countries requirements underline the basis for our budgetary requirements. Further, Ministry will focus on achieving anticipated implementation progress in all key result areas and ensuring robust expenditure consistently throughout the Financial Year.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 2)**

The Committee observe that as against the overall Budgetary Demand of Rs. 19095.45 crore for RE 2022-23 and Rs. 21,276.65 crore for BE 2023-24 in respect of MEA, the Ministry of Finance had allocated Rs. 16,972.79 crore and Rs. 18050.00 crore respectively. As per the Demand-Allocation statistics, the Ministry of Finance has been slashing down the Budgetary Demands of the Ministry of External Affairs since 2020-21. The Committee acknowledge that the BE 2023-24 allocation is 6.4% higher than the RE allocation and over 5% higher as compared to BE 2022-23. But, the allocation of Rs. 990 crore for G20 India Presidency Summit alone is more than the difference between the BEs of 2022-23 and 2023-24. Though the Demand-Allocation ratio of RE 2022-23 and BE 2023-24 stands at 89% and 84% indicating an improvement over the last five years, it appears to the Committee that the shrinking of the gap between demand and allocation over the last few years is due to lower demand sought by MEA and not by better allocation given by the Government. Moreover, the fact remains that if the Budgetary requirements of the Ministry are not met, some of the schemes/projects/programmes would definitely be affected during 2023-24 also. The Ministry would also have to resort to various instruments for re-appropriating money, such as supplementary requests, permission for re-prioritization and reallocation/rationalization of funds for Budget Heads, etc. Taking various factors into consideration like India's international obligations, expansion of its global foot print, assumption of Presidency of the G20 and the expectation that projects/schemes of the Ministry would pick up speed in the Post-COVID world, the Committee are of the view that the BE 2023-24 allocation is inadequate to carry out all the important activities of the Ministry. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to make further improvements in its Budgetary planning process and impress upon the Ministry of Finance to provide adequate Budgetary provisions so that it is able to fulfill all its international commitments without being hindered by financial constraints. The Committee also urge the Ministry to

maintain constructive engagement with the Ministry of Finance so that additional Budgetary allocation, as and when sought, may be granted during the FY 2023-24.

### **Reply of the Government**

Ministry would like to assure the Hon'ble Committee that it will continue to engage with the Ministry of Finance at all levels to emphasize the importance of providing adequate budgetary allocations to the Ministry and to ensure that there is no shortage of funds for the Ministry in the pursuit of its international commitments. As submitted earlier and noted by the Committee, sustained engagement with the Ministry of Finance has resulted in increased allocation of Rs. 17250 Cr for BE 2022-23 has been made and it was enhanced to Rs. 17472.79 Cr at RE 2022-23 stage. The BE 2023-24 allocation of Rs, 18050 Cr has been made, with an increase of 4.64% over BE 2022-23 and 3.30% over RE 2022-23. Ministry's constructive liaison with Ministry of Finance is underscored by Contingency Advance approved for Rs 50 crores for evacuation of Indians from Sudan civil strife and Rs 4655 crores advance to cater to RBI mandated provisioning requirements for India's Line of Credits to various countries. In the face of urgent requirements of the Ministry, Ministry of Finance has thus been understanding of Ministry's international obligations and addressed through Contingency advances.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 3)**

The Committee note that despite getting lesser funds against its Demand for both BE and RE over the years, the Ministry has not been able to achieve full utilization of the allocated funds. The unspent balance surrendered during 2020-21 was Rs. 634.16 crores. During 2021-22, the actual expenditure of the Ministry was 88% and the unspent balance was Rs. 1828 crores. In the current Financial Year, the anticipated expenditure by 31 March, 2023 is 94%. Against this backdrop, the Committee desire that the Ministry should make constant endeavour to achieve full utilization of the RE allocation year after year and work towards this end during quarterly budgetary and spending evaluations. Only full utilization of allocated

funds can justify a compelling case to the Ministry of Finance for enhanced BE in the next FY.

### **Reply of the Government**

Hon'ble Committee's recommendations are duly acknowledged. This is to further submit that the projected demand & allocation of RE 2022-23 and BE 2023-24, is based on exhaustive unit wise discussions with respective Divisions, careful assessments of progress in projects and realistic assessment of budgetary utilization in respective Financial Years. The past 3 years being unusual, given COVID related lockdowns and Cash Management guidelines in place, in consonance with country's fightback to COVID, Ministry's efforts have been to keep establishment expenses in accordance with GOI's guidelines. Barring the COVID years, Ministry's expenditure has in fact ranged closed to 99-100% utilisation of RE allocations. Ministry's improved utilisation in FY 2022-23 is reflected in Actuals 2022-23 (estimated.) of Rs 16714.35 crores (96% of enhanced FE 2022-23 & 98% of RE 2022-23). Our expectation & endeavor is to fully utilize the allocation and revert to utilization trend of pre-Covid years in the Current Financial Year.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 4)**

The Committee are happy to note that the Report being prepared by Research and Information System for Economic Development (RIS) analysing the budgetary allocations of Ministries/Departments conducting foreign policies of important countries as per the expanded mandate of the study, has been completed and would be shared with the Committee shortly. The Committee desire that the Ministry should study the Report carefully and initiate action based on the findings of the study.

### **Reply of the Government**

Hon'ble Committee's recommendations have been noted. As desired, the Report prepared by Research and Information System for Economic Development (RIS) analysing the budgetary allocations of Ministries/Departments conducting foreign policies of important countries as per the expanded mandate of the study has been



shared with the Hon'ble Standing Committee. Ministry would carefully study the conclusions & recommendations in the Report as well as share the findings of the Report with various stakeholders in the Government, particularly Ministry of Finance.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 5)**

The Committee note that as per the Budget Circular dated 06 September 2022, Ministries/Departments have been requested to take special note of data being captured under Estimated Committed Liabilities (ECL) in Ministry of Finance Portal for projecting allocations. The ECL module envisages to capture all committed liabilities of Government of India, internationally and domestically in a single place and map them to budgetary outlays and commitment of execution period. The Committee desire that the MEA should fully comply with the stipulations in the said Circular so that its Budgetary Allocations are aligned with the actual commitments made.

### **Reply of the Government**

The Budget Circular 2023-24 dated 06 September 2022, wherein among other things, Ministries/Departments have been requested to take special note of data being captured under Estimated Committed Liabilities (ECL) in MoF Portal for projecting allocations. The ECL module envisages to capture all committed liabilities of Government off India, internationally & domestically in single place and map them to budgetary outlays & commitment execution period. This in turn is expected to align budgetary allocation with actual commitments made. This Ministry has already submitted the data as per the prescribed format on the portal designed by Ministry of Finance.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 6)**

The Committee note that the Budget classifications of the Ministry are in terms of Revenue and Capital Heads and Scheme and Non-Scheme sections. The

allocations under Revenue and Capital Heads have been reduced at the RE stage during 2022-23. However, in the BE 2023-24, both the Revenue and Capital components are enhanced. The outlay for capital expenditure has been increased from ₹1,416.23 crore in 2022-23 to ₹1,520.21 crore in 2023-24. Under Scheme section, RE 2022-23 and BE 2023-24 have been reduced. However, RE 2022-23 and BE 2023-24 in respect of NonScheme section have been enhanced. The Committee take note of the reasons put forth by the Ministry such as, pace of expenditure, careful assessments of progress in projects and realistic assessment of budgetary utilization in respective Financial Years, etc., for these reductions or enhancements. Though the development partnership portfolio comprising the MEA's "aid-heads", continues to be a priority of the budgetary allocation as it aggregated at 32.40 per cent of total budget allocation, it is a concern that the allocations under the budget heads 'Aid to Sri Lanka', 'Aid to other Developing countries', 'Aid to ITEC Programme' 'Aid to African Countries' and 'Aid to Seychelles' have consistently decreased from BE to RE since 2020-21. The Committee also note the slow pace of various projects. Since financial assistance or aid to other countries is not just about altruism but a lot about strategic partnership with a view to maximum dividends, the Committee desire that MEA's development aid to no country should be affected hampering the scope of India's rising stature and prominence amongst nations. The Committee also desire that with near normalization of the COVID situation, the Ministry should make all out efforts to improve the pace of expenditure in the current year.

### **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry's anticipation of expenditure progress in the current fiscal years is regularly assessed, which makes budgetary demand and allocation a dynamic process. Instruments for re-appropriating money, such as Supplementary requests, permit re-prioritization and re-allocation of funds in order to allocate budgetary resources fully and effectively. Therefore, funding provided to the Ministry in RE 2022-23 reflects a fair evaluation of our current international obligations, predicted spending growth, and realistic assessment of requirements in BE 2023-24 – including likely increase in its activities in the post-COVID times. The quarterly budgetary and spending evaluations put in place by the Ministry in the form of

Quarterly Budget Management Meetings reinforce the beneficial reallocation of budgetary distribution with a preference towards the Ministry's development partnership portfolio. The allocated outlays shall suffice current international obligations and if need be, Ministry will take all necessary steps to seek additional outlays from Ministry of Finance.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 7)**

The Committee find that a high-level mechanism is in place in the Ministry to monitor the implementation of development partnership programmes and weekly reviews are being done by the officials at different levels. It is further understood that the Ministry is planning to establish a Contract and Procurement Management Unit. As a part of that , an online dashboard is being built to see with the click of a button how far the project has progressed, even in the last 48 hours. The Committee are extremely happy to see the efforts to mark all projects on line and monitor their implementation in a manner which links well with how the budget is spent on these projects. The Committee desire that the online dashboard is made operational and the Contract and Procurement Management Unit is set up in the Ministry at the earliest and the progress in this regard is intimated to the Committee.

### **Reply of the Government**

Ministry has appointed EXIM Bank as Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) for Grant in aid projects. Ministry in the process of creating a dashboard for real-time online monitoring of grant in aid projects being extended by Government of India.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 8)**

The Committee observes that the pace of expenditure has been slow during 1st and 3rd quarter of 2021-22 and 2022-23. The Ministry, however, has stated that in Financial Year 2022-23, Ministry has ensured smooth and balanced pace of

expenditure during each quarter, to the extent possible. The quarterly expenditure by the Ministry in FY 2022-23 was in consonance with Cash Management Guidelines of Ministry of Finance, last quarter ceiling of 33% and 15% in March 2023. The percentage of expenditure is over 61% at the end of December 2022. The Committee desire that it should be the endeavour of the Ministry to constantly improve its performance and pace of utilization of funds and make all possible efforts to achieve full and complete utilization of the allocated funds within the Financial Year.

### **Reply of the Government**

For effective quarterly expenditure management, all expenditure is closely monitored and fund releases are made in line with physical and financial progress of projects to ensure that there is no parking of funds with implementing agencies. To ensure optimal utilization of budgetary resources during each quarter of the financial year, expenditure is closely and regularly monitored by the Financial Advisor in consultation with Division Heads, including through quarterly budget management & expenditure review meetings. In these meetings, the expenditure plans of the Ministry's various Divisions and Spending Units are discussed and the importance of ensuring balanced expenditure during each quarter of the financial year is emphasized & monitored. Divisions/Spending Units accordingly make all efforts to ensure evenly paced expenditure, within the constraints of majority of the Ministry's spending being in foreign countries, where diverse local conditions, inter-alia including geological, security, administrative, legal & economic ecosystems and varying project development and implementation schedules posing significant challenge for alignment of expenditure to our own budget cycle. Ministry's budgetary & expenditure management, thus is unlike any other Ministry in Government, with global diversity of various ecosystems, in which our projects are executed & expenditure managed.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 9)**

The Committee note that India's Diplomatic Service is perhaps the most short-staffed in comparison to many other countries whose economy and stature is

much leaner than that of ours. The total strength of 4888 is distributed across different cadres of the Ministry such as the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), IFS General Cadre, Branch B, Stenographers Cadre, Interpreters Cadre, Legal & Treaties Cadre, among others. The cadre strength of Indian Foreign Service Officers is only 1011 which is just 22.5% of the total strength. Out of IFS 'A' cadre, 667 are posted at our Missions abroad and 334 are manning the headquarters in Delhi which at present has 57 divisions. The 42 Committee feel that we have far too less number of IFS "A" Officers than actually required to represent India's interests at the Headquarters and at our Missions abroad, including various multilateral agencies. The Committee are of the view that with the profound changes taking place in the Foreign Policy from Indian perspective it is imperative that the cadre strength of the Ministry commensurate with India's expanding international stakes. To work towards global leadership as envisaged and for executing foreign policy strategy effectively across countries, our missions must be staffed with highly skilled/trained diplomats. With the felt need of having Missions in all the UN member countries, there is an increased requirement of manpower in the diplomatic cadre. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Ministry should get their cadre review done at the earliest to build capabilities for shouldering the expanded mandate while enriching the capacity of its existing personnel. The Committee may be apprised of the efforts taken in this regard. The Committee may also like to see that this review should primarily be based on a comparative analysis of the strength of the diplomatic corps of our country with major developing countries, countries in the neighbourhood and China.

### **Reply of the Government**

Ministry of External Affairs regularly reviews human resource requirement in Missions and Posts abroad. The Ministry accords highest priority to optimize the deployment of its human resources to fulfill its growing responsibilities through recruitment and cadre management of the Indian Foreign Service and other Cadres of the Ministry, and also through deputation of officers from other Ministries and Departments. Vacancies in Missions/Posts abroad are regularly reviewed, and officers/officials are posted against these vacancies. With respect to cadre review,

the meeting of the Cadre Review Committee has been held, and the proposal is under consideration.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 10)**

The Committee are happy to note that the Ministry keeps reorganising its divisions and their responsibilities to account for new developments and functional priorities such as the creation of G 20 Division. The Committee are of the view that filling up of vacancies should be taken up on priority basis. The Committee also observe that the Ministry have been taking a series of affirmative action such as increasing the indent to UPSC, engaging consultants and bringing in talents from non MEA Departments and Ministries through deputation. Time and again the Ministry have taken a plea that manpower crunch is on account of the delay in timely filling up of vacancies which is being done by UPSC and SSC. The Committee urge the Ministry to take it up at the highest levels of the Government to consider the human resource requirements of MEA favorably and also pursue vigorously with Staff Selection Commission (SSC) and Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) to fill up the vacancies on priority basis.

### **Reply of the Government**

The recommendation of the Standing Committee is duly noted. Keeping in mind the requirements of Ministry, and to fill up the vacancies on a priority basis, Ministry has increased our indent with the UPSC, and over 300 officers have joined the Indian Foreign Service since 2014 by direct recruitment through the Civil Services Examination. Ministry had also placed an indent of around 700 vacancies in 2021 and 2022 for direct recruitment of officials through SSC, and the recruitment is expected to be completed in the coming months. For the year 2023, a total of 37 vacancies for UPSC and around 150 vacancies for SSC have been indented.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 11)**

The Committee note that out of the allocation of Rs 320 crore in 2022-23 for G20 India's Presidency Summit, the expenditure incurred so far under this Head is Rs 92.59 crore and an amount of Rs 990 crore has been provisioned in the BE 2023-24. The Committee understand that the BE 2023-24 allocation is not adequate based on current estimations and projections and G20 Secretariat/MEA would seek additional outlay for implementation of G20 meetings during the course of FY 2023-24. Being aware of the magnitude and scale of events/programmes planned all over the country during India's G20 Presidency, the Committee expect timely availability of funds for effective implementation of events and programmes scheduled for the current year. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Ministry should remain vigilant and keep close and diligent watch on the trend of expenditure while holding G20 meetings/events and make careful regular analysis for funding requirements so that a realistic projection of anticipated expenditure is arrived at well in advance and the Ministry can get the desired funds from the Ministry of Finance well on time to meet all the expenses in this regard.

### **Reply of the Government**

Note for Cabinet on Revised and enhanced Estimated expenditure for conducting G20 Meetings and Leaders' Summit under India's G20 Presidency after Inter Ministerial Consultations is being submitted for the consideration of Cabinet with the approval of External Affairs Minister. Consequent to Cabinet Approval, MEA will obtain allocation of funds through its annual budgetary exercise at BE and RE stages / advance from Contingency and appropriation under Supplementary provision for revised expenditure requirement for conducting G20 meetings.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 12)**

The Committee note that the G20 Presidency is India's most high profile international endeavour ever. It is also a unique opportunity to present a face of leadership, diversity, success and our development template to the world. The Committee feel that in order to showcase the best of India to the world, and to live up to India's vision of becoming 'Viswa Guru' each and every personnel to be engaged from the stakeholder organisations for G20 programmes need to be groomed appropriately. Hence, the Committee desire that formal training for all the officials involved in the upcoming events should be held at regular intervals, in addition to inter-ministerial training and familiarisation programmes held by the G20 Secretariat. As citizen engagement and large-scale public participation through various 'Jan Bhagidari' activities are also being planned and conducted across the country, follow up training for the officials of all line Ministries as well as the Protocol Officers of States should also be conducted so that the decentralized activities and programmes are brought in alignment with the G20 initiatives and programmes. Further, no stone should be left unturned in creating awareness among the citizens about the mission and vision of G20 to be upheld as a country before the visiting delegations.

### **Reply of Government**

Formal trainings have been organized by the G20 Secretariat which include training module for Liaison Officers, with sessions on Protocol, personal grooming and practical aspects/ duties of Liaison Officers; Session on Logistical, Branding and Security matters for Logistics Nodal Officers (DS/Director/JS level) of Line Ministries; and multiple training sessions on the operational matters of G20 Website and Accreditation process of foreign delegates and on G20 Website. G20 Secretariat in collaboration with Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD), MHA organized training of trainers on soft skills and other security related issues for Nodal Officers of State Governments who in turn organized extensive trainings at State Police Training colleges for State Police personnel deployed at the G20 Meetings. For creating awareness amongst citizens, about the vision and mission of G20, 'Jan Bhagidari' activities have been taken up that include G20 University Connect lecture series in 75 Universities across the country, Selfie with Monuments, 'Know Your G20' quiz through MyGov,



dissemination of a G20 'School Connect' brochure, setting up of G20 pavilion and exhibition at the New Delhi World Book Fair and other select venues, a G20 themed Food Festival, Flower show, vintage car rally, golf tournament, G20 themed painting, quizzes, slogan writing competitions, panel discussions, beach cleaning activities etc. Engaging activities such as runs, rallies, cyclothon, tree plantation drives, exhibitions, Model G20 series, etc. have also been organised by various State/UT governments. Further, to carry the message of G20 to the masses, extensive outdoor, TV, social media, radio, and print publicity is being carried out by the G20 Secretariat. Use of Regional languages in branding and publicity across media (print, outdoor, radio, television, etc.) has also strengthened outreach.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 13)**

The Committee find that as a premier diplomatic training institution, the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service (SSIFS) cater to the professional training requirements of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers, members of other civil services and foreign diplomats. The Committee have been informed that the Budgetary Allocation of Rs 21.19 crore provided for the FY 2023-24 is sufficient and all the training programmes, both mandatory and skill development programmes, will be conducted as per the training calendar of SSIFS. The Committee, however, note that since 2020-21, the actual utilisation and the pace of utilisation of funds on training by the SSIFS has been slow. Though a few courses for Foreign Diplomats have been rescheduled due to COVID-19 lockdown and travel restrictions, all regular training programmes were conducted. Since the COVID situation has eased out, the Committee expect that more training programmes for Foreign Diplomats would be conducted during 2023-24 and as a result, utilisation of funds under the Head would also improve. The Committee desire that the Ministry should begin the process of consultation with interested/participating countries early so that the schedule for training courses are finalised and training could commence at the beginning of the Financial Year itself.

### **Reply of Government**

Since FY 2022-23, subsequent to pandemic induced restrictions during the past couple of years, SSIFS has picked up speed in conducting courses for Foreign Diplomats, in consultation with participating countries. Since April 2022, country specific and region-specific training programmes for diplomats from South Sudan, Mexico, Central Asia, Iran, Pacific Island Countries were conducted. Further, '3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Disarmament and International Security Affairs Fellowship' and two editions of 'Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats' were also conducted. In the CFY 2023-24, SSIFS has already conducted a special course for diplomats from Eritrea and Zambia in April 2023. Going forward, a number of special courses for foreign diplomats from countries in the Developing South, particularly from Asia, Africa and Latin America are being planned to be conducted during the year.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 14)**

The Committee note that SSIFS has introduced a new training module on 'India and its Neighbourhood' during the 96th Foundation course at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie in March 2022 and the same has become a part of SSIFS's Annual Calendar. The Committee understand that the first ever training module of this nature for the IAS Officers is part of the Government's efforts to mainstream Neighbourhood First Policy in the functioning of all Ministries and Departments of the Government of India. While expressing their deep appreciation about this training programme, the Committee hope that the SSIFS will keep updating and upgrading the contents/structure of this training to help every IAS officer imbibe the spirit of India's Neighbourhood First Policy.

### **Reply of Government**

The Training Module on 'India and its Neighbourhood' has been institutionalized as an integral part of the Foundation Course at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National

Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie for all civil service officer trainees including IFS, IAS, IPS and other All India and central services. The second edition of this training module was held in September 2022 as part of the 97th Foundation Course at LBSNAA. SSIFS updates this training module after due consultations with neighbourhood territorial divisions of MEA and incorporates appropriate changes based on the feedback received from the participants. The overall aim is to make all Indian civil servants understand the strategic importance of the neighbourhood and the various steps taken by Government of India to improve ties with our neighbouring countries such as connectivity initiatives, better border infrastructure, trade & economic cooperation, developmental projects, security cooperation, people to people contacts, etc.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 15)**

The Committee further note that as announced in the Global South Summit, SSIFS would be conducting training programmes for Diplomats of the Global South under Global South Young Diplomats Forum. This, the Committee understand, would open up our training programmes to all the 134 countries of Global South. Since courses and programmes for foreign diplomats are a way to build bridges of friendship with other countries, the Committee desire that our footprint as member of the International Forum on Diplomatic Training (IFDT) is increased in coming years. The Committee further desire that the modalities for training Diplomats of the Global South should be worked out at the earliest so that the training could commence from the first quarter of FY 2023-24.

### **Reply of Government**

SSIFS has been a pro-active member of the International Forum on Diplomatic Training (IFDT). SSIFS hosted the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the IFDT in New Delhi as part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM) celebrations from 14-18 November, 2022. The meeting was attended by 65 participants from 45 diplomatic

training academies and academic institutions drawn from 40 countries. SSIFS will endeavour to conduct special training programmes for all the countries of the Global South in two or three batches in the Current Financial Year 2023-24.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 18)**

The Committee note that the Performance Evaluation and Monitoring System (PEMS) 2.0 portal which is a centralized online monitoring mechanism to evaluate the functioning of Missions/Posts abroad on an annual basis, was launched in 2021 followed by the launch of PEMS 3.0 questionnaire in May 2022. Out of 188 Missions/Posts evaluated through the PEM 3.0 questionnaire, 184 Missions/Posts have taken further action on the basis of remedial actions suggested by the Ministry after the Final Evaluation while 4 Mission/Posts are in the process of submitting their responses. The Committee desire that these four Missions/Posts should be pursued to submit their further action taken report expeditiously so that the responses received from them are evaluated for further improvement in their performance. The Committee further desire that evaluation of the functioning of Indian Missions/Posts should be a continuous process and it should be the endeavour of the Ministry to bring about qualitative improvements in their performances through upgradation of the questionnaire and physical inspection, if required.

### **Reply of Government**

The Ministry has been regularly following up with all the Missions/Posts abroad w.r.t submission of responses on the PEMS 3.0 portal. All of the aforementioned four Missions/Posts have duly submitted their responses and the same are being evaluated to enable further improvement in their performance.

The process of the evaluation of the functioning of Missions/Posts abroad has been developed by Ministry of External Affairs as an annual exercise. An updated questionnaire is being prepared for the evaluation of the functioning of Missions/Posts for FY 2022-23 and the evaluation exercise for FY 2022-23 will be started shortly.

This is to reiterate that the objective of the PEMS is not punitive but recommendatory in nature so as to improve the performance of the Missions/Posts over time.

The Ministry has made significant progress in the annual performance appraisal of Missions/Posts abroad and efforts are continuously being made for improving their efficiency. Additionally, the PEMS initiative has minimized the need of onsite inspections resulting in saving time and resources.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 19)**

The Committee note that the BE 2023-24 under the Head 'Passport and Emigration' has been kept at Rs 1002.78 crore which is even lesser than the RE 2022-23 allocation of Rs. 1154.76 crore. In this regard, the Ministry has stated that the proposal is to start from a lower base with augmentation of funds to be sought at the RE stage as the bills/invoices related to the printing and procurement of travel documents for that year are expected to be raised later in the Financial Year only. The Committee feel that anticipated expenditure should have been accounted for in the BE stage itself. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to ensure that lack of funds do not impede the delivery of passport related services as well as the scheduled launch of the e-Passport Project in the current year. The Committee also desire that the Ministry should maintain smooth and efficient utilisation of funds from the beginning of the Financial Year itself so that based on the pace of expenditure, augmentation of Budgetary Allocation may be got concurred by the Ministry of Finance.

### **Reply of the Government**

As against the proposed BE 2023-24 of Rs. 900 crores under the minor head, Printing and Publication of Travel Documents has been allocated Rs 230 crores. Based on Ministry's genuine felt needs for funds, Ministry of Finance has approved a Contingency Advance of Rs 500 crores for Printing & Publication and Rs 150 crores for Passport Sewa project. Ministry's endeavor will be to efficiently utilise allocated resources to advance public service interest of passport sewa.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 20)**

The Committee observe that in addition to 430 POPSKs operational in the country, 4 POPSKs in the Lok Sabha Constituencies of Guna, Ettawah, Aliburg and Nandurbar are likely to be opened in the current year. The Committee urge the Ministry to expedite the process of opening these POPSKs in the said Constituencies. The Ministry should also maintain regular follow-up with the Department of Posts for allotment of space so that POPSKs are opened in all the remaining Parliamentary Constituencies in the country where PSK or POPSK have not been opened as yet.

### **Reply of the Government**

As on date 430 POPSKs are operational across the country. In the remaining 51 Lok Sabha constituencies the POPSKs are yet to be opened. The Ministry is assiduously working on the same.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 21)**

The Committee note that the Ministry's Flagship Programme, ePassport Project is facing several challenges which include, complex technical infrastructure and participation of multiple stakeholders; technical limitation of PSP version 1.0's ability to take on the additional load, etc. The Committee understand that the Ministry is now proposing to launch only the pilot of the project in the first stage. Once the PSP Version 2.0, which has the technical ability to take on the additional load is launched, e-Passport will be rolled out in stages at all passport offices across India and at Missions/Posts abroad. The tentative date for Go-live for PSPV 2.0 is 7 July 2023. The Committee desire that the Ministry should maintain close coordination with all the stakeholders and get the technical concerns resolved for smooth/ early launch of the e-Passport Project. The progress in this regard may be communicated to the Committee.

### **Reply of the Government**

Present status with regard to e-Passport Project is as under -

E-Passport project involves setting up of complex technical ecosystem, including Public Key Infrastructure (PKI), Key Management System (KMS), Interoperability test bed, Project Management Unit, e-Personalisation, as also creation of e-Passport verification set-up at Immigration Check Points.

ISP Nashik has placed an order of 4.5 Crore RFID Chips and started production of e-Passport blank booklets. PKI, KMS and e-Personalisation have since been finalized and presently integration testing is going on, which will be followed by performance and security audit of the project. It is estimated that two-thirds of the project has since been completed.

E-Passports will be launched in a pilot mode at one of the RPOs and thereafter would be made available in phases at all passport offices across India and at Indian Missions/Posts abroad.

The Ministry is striving for a smooth and early launch of the e-Passport Project.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 22)**

The Committee note that mPassport Police App for the expeditious submission of Police Verification Report (PVR) has been launched in 24 States/UT. In States/UT where the App has been launched, the PVR is received within 3-5 working days. Since the use of the mPassport Police App reduces the overall issuance time for passports, the Committee urge the Ministry to pursue the remaining States/UTs vigorously so that the mPassport Police App is launched by them without further delay. The Ministry and its Passport Offices may also extend all the needed assistance in terms of infrastructure and technical expertise/training to the police Departments of these States/UTs for its early launch in all the States and UTs in the country.

### **Reply of the Government**

As on date mPassport Police App has been launched in 24 States/UTs across the country. For the remaining States/UTs, the Passport Officers in the concerned State/UT is coordinating with the police authorities to initiate the launch of mPassport Police App.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 23)**

The Committee understand that the integration of the Passport Seva Program with DigiLocker in 2021 is a major digital transformation in the delivery of Passport Services in India. DigiLocker, a key initiative under Digital India is a platform for issuance and verification of documents/certificates in a digital way thereby eliminating the use of physical documents. Since the integration of



Passport Seva Project with DigiLocker, a total of 16,69,335 applicants have utilized the facility. The Committee understand that the DigiLocker facility has helped in reduction of paper work and verifying the documents in the source database, which in turn results in expeditious delivery of passport services to the citizens and hence, urge the Ministry to disseminate awareness regarding the DigiLocker facility on a country-wide basis.

### **Reply of the Government**

As on date a total of 18,24,346 applicants have utilized the facility of uploading documents through DigiLocker. Further awareness of use of DigiLocker is being disseminated.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 24)**

The Committee note that out of the sanctioned strength of 2741 personnel in Central Passport Organisation (CPO) cadre, the working strength is only 1749 personnel resulting in 992 vacancies. This shortage of 36% personnel in CPO is also one of the major challenges being faced by the Ministry in the expansion of the Passport Seva Programme. The Committee had recommended, in their previous Reports on Demands for Grants that the issue of human resource constraints in CPO should be taken up with the Department of Personnel and Training. However, not much progress has been made in this regard. The Committee feel that as the Passport Seva Programme is the largest citizen-centric project in the MEA, the Ministry should mpress upon the DoPT of the urgency for filling up the vacancies in CPO at the earliest. The Ministry may also continue to take all remedial measures within the Department to ensure that shortage of personnel do not hamper the smooth and efficient implementation of the Passport Seva Programme.

### **Reply of the Government**

Ministry is taking all remedial measures for filling up the vacancies as per the procedure laid down by the Government. As Direct Recruitment in CPO is carried out by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), all the indents have been timely placed by the Ministry to SSC as and when called for. Vacancies upto the year 2023 have been indented to SSC. Ministry has received dossiers of 59 Assistant Superintendents by SSC against the vacancy year 2021 for which appointment orders have been issued. SSC has also declared the result of Combined Higher

Secondary Level Examination (CHSLE) 2021 and Combined Graduate Level Examination (CGLE) 2022 against which 68 Junior Passport Assistants (JPAs) and 23 Assistant Superintendents, respectively are expected to join in 2023.

Promotions through Department Promotion Committees (DPCs) meeting are being carried out timely. For the vacancy year 2023, 98 Junior Passport Assistants (JPAs) were promoted to the post of Senior Passport Assistants (SPAs) and 05 Assistant Superintendents were promoted to the post of Superintendent. 140 Superintendents were also promoted on ad-hoc basis to the grade of Senior Superintendent against the vacant posts.

Promotions through Limited Departmental Competitive Examination (LDCE) for the post of JPA and SPA are conducted by SSC. All the indents are being placed by the Ministry to SSC as and when called for. As far as LDCE for the post of Assistant Superintendent is concerned, Ministry recently conducted the exam upto the year 2023 and promoted 31 Officials.

The Ministry has also hired 347 Data Entry Operators (DEOs) and 51 Multi Tasking Staffs (MTSs) from Outsourced Agency as an interim measure to fill the gap against the vacant non-Gazetted posts for smooth functioning of the Passport Offices.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 25)**

The Committee note that the Protector of Emigrants (PoEs), responsible for granting emigration clearance to the intending emigrants performs the functions assigned to them under the Emigration Act, 1983. Presently, there are 14 offices of the PoE located at Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Cochin, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur, Rai Barelli, Patna, Bengaluru, Guwahati and Ranchi. The Ministry has also stated that the setting up of new PoE offices in the States of Tripura, Jharkhand, Odisha, Gujarat and Uttarakhand is underway, in consultation with the State authorities concerned. In view of the fact that large number of blue collar workers, nurses, DSWs, etc. migrate abroad for employment every year, the Committee desire that the process of setting up new PoE offices should be completed at the earliest for facilitating and providing protection to the intending migrant workers as well as emigrants . The Committee also urge the Ministry to identify the migration hot spots in the country and open PoE offices in such locations.

## **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry has already identified migration hotspots (in terms of Emigration Clearance issued) which includes the states of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh & Telangana. Protector of Emigrant (PoE) offices have already been opened in these areas. PoE Hyderabad has jurisdiction over Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The Ministry has also established the eMigrate portal which is a digital platform for regulation of recruitment of Indian workers having ECR category passports as per the provisions of the Emigration Act 1983. The eMigrate portal provides a contact less, paperless and cash less mechanism for issuing of Emigration Clearances (ECs).

The Ministry, through the PoE board, has already advertised vacancies pertaining to PoEs of Tripura and Orissa. The selection of suitable officers for these PoE offices is under process, while PoE office in Ranchi (Jharkhand) is already functional. Financial approval for the establishment of PoE office in Gujarat is also under process.

## **Recommendation (Sl. No. 26)**

The Committee note that for the matters relating to overseas Indians an amount of Rs. 13.21 crore has been allocated under the Sub Head 'Welfare of Overseas Indians' and Rs. 37.00 crore under another Sub Head 'Engagement with Indian Diaspora' in the BE 2023-24. The allocation under these two Sub Heads has been brought down as compared to RE 2022-23. For the BE 2023-24, the allocations under Scholarship Scheme for Diaspora Children and Awareness Campaigns, etc. have also been brought down. Since the Indian Diaspora comprising of over 18 million PIOs and 13 million NRIs, spread across the globe is one of the largest overseas community of any country and comprises a diverse range from laborers/workers, traders, political leaders, professional and students etc., the Committee have been continuously recommending the Ministry to make requisite Budgetary Allocation for the schemes and programmes related to their welfare and protection. However, the Committee note that the Budgetary Allocation for scheme/programmes related to Welfare of Overseas Indians in the BE 2023-24 has been reduced considerably even after coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The Committee, hence desire that the Working Group constituted for the evaluation of various Schemes and Programmes for the welfare of the Indian Diaspora should review the adequacy of financial allocations made

under each programme and make appropriate recommendations under intimation to the Committee so that a smooth and timely implementation of schemes/programmes for the welfare of overseas Indians is done through efficient and optimum utilization of the same in the post-COVID world.

### **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry wishes to inform the Committee that adequate budgetary allocation is being done for all schemes/programmes related to welfare of Overseas Indians. The budgetary allocation for diaspora engagement schemes/programmes depends on several factors, including the projected requirements and the expenditure incurred. The overall allocation for BE 2023-24 seems reduced compared to RE 2022-23 due to the expenditure incurred on 17<sup>th</sup> Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention (which is a biennial event) during the last Financial Year. The diaspora schemes/programmes are reviewed on regular basis and Ministry always allocates adequate fund as per the requirements projected after any such review. The Working Group has reviewed the fund allocation for diaspora schemes and no instance of inadequate fund allocation has been noticed.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 27)**

The Committee note that the Budgetary Allocation under the head 'Welfare of Overseas Indians' is Rs. 13.21 crore for 2023-24 out of which Rs. 3 crore has been provisioned for 'Pre-Departure Orientation Training and Skill Up-gradation of Emigrant Workers'. The Committee note that for this purpose an amount of Rs. 7 crore was allocated at BE 2021-22 which was revised to Rs. 2 crore at RE stage but there was 'nil' expenditure on this programme during 2021-22. Similarly, against the BE and RE of Rs. 3 crore during 2022- 23 only Rs. 0.26 crore has been spent for the purpose. The Committee desire that such trend should be reversed and the full Budget of Rs. 3 crore allocated for this purpose for 2023-24 should be appropriately utilized. The Committee further desire that the Ministry and Missions/Posts abroad should actively engage the Indian Diaspora and intimate the Committee about the initiatives taken to facilitate their active involvement in the socio-economic, political and technological development of the country, at regular intervals.

### **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry and Missions/Posts abroad utilise all available platforms of interaction with Diaspora to encourage them to contribute to India's growth and development in all sectors, including socio-economic and technological development. Diaspora business community is key component of trade and investment promotion efforts of Missions/Posts abroad. Invest India has launched a PIO Help Desk with objective of facilitating trade and investment-related services for PIO individuals and businesses. Initiatives such as Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN), Pravasi Bharatiya Academic and Scientific Sampark (PRABHASS), and proposed Vaishwaik Bharatiya Vaigyanik (Vaibhav) fellowships would be facilitating diaspora contribution in the fields of academia, scientific and technological research.

Ministry had anticipated that the pace of PDO Training will pick up post Covid-19. However, the number of emigrants has not seen a sharp rise post Covid-19 which has resulted in reduced expenditure on PDOT Programme. So far the State Governments have met the expenditure on PDOT from funds already released to them by the Ministry in previous financial years. The Budget Estimate of the PDOT Programme for the F.Y 2023-24 is expected to be utilized during the current F.Y. as many centres out of 58 approved PDOT Centres are expected to be operationalised shortly.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 28)**

The Committee observe that presently, 32 PDOT centres are operational in 29 cities in 15 States of the country. The Ministry has informed that opening of 58 additional PDOT centres in 8 States viz., Rajasthan, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab has been approved in the current Financial Year. However, the Committee note that the funds for operating PDOT centres have so far been released to the State Government of Telangana only. The Committee understand that execution of various schemes and programmes related to the welfare of overseas Indians as well as migration of workers abroad have been hampered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in the post-COVID world, since more and more workers would seek employment abroad, the Committee expect the Ministry to help enhance the soft skills of such workers, sensitize them about the pathways to safe and legal migration and educate them about the various Government programmes for their welfare and protection

through the Pre-Departure Orientation Training and Skill Upgradation programme. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to undertake vigorous follow-up action with the remaining 7 States so that the funding requirement for opening of PDOT centres are received from the States and the centres are operationalised without further delay. In view of the popularity of the online training and the positive response from participants, especially women participants to it, the Committee desire that the Ministry offer more online PDOT trainings along with in-person trainings in the Financial Year 2023-24. They also desire that the details of such trainings since inception may also be furnished to them.

### **Reply of the Government**

Ministry is continuously following-up with state agencies for operationalising 58 PDOT Centres. Recently, 6 PDOT Centres have been operationalised in Punjab. The Punjab state agency has assured that the recommendation for the remaining 16 centres will be conveyed to this Ministry soon. The demand for funds has been received from the state agencies of Telangana and Punjab. Accordingly, the requisite funds are being released to the respective states agencies. On receipt of the recommendations for operationalization of remaining centres from the state agencies, prompt action will be taken by the Ministry to operationalise the PDOT Centres by granting additional requisite funds.

Ministry is also constantly making efforts to make the PDO Training available in online mode. Most of the PDOT Centres have been equipped with the online training facility in order to facilitate women participants and to increase the reach of PDOT programme to distant regions of the country.

Since the inception of the PDOT centres in 2018 a total number of 1,27,127 workers including women have been imparted PDO training till April, 2023. The Ministry also launched the first online Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT) Programme on 7 April 2021.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 29)**

The Committee are happy to note that the Ministry conducts pre-orientation programme for students also before they join their institutes abroad. It is also observed that Indian Embassies/Posts abroad do not possess complete details and addresses of students abroad. The gravity of this situation was brought home during the Ukraine crisis when the Ministry needed to contact all the Indian

students in Ukraine. The Ministry has informed the Committee that Indian nationals abroad, particularly Indian students, are reticent about registering themselves with the Indian Embassies/Posts abroad. The Committee desire that the Ministry, through the PDOT sessions, should impress upon all the students as well as other Indian nationals going abroad that it is in their own interest and for their safety/security that they are required to register with the Indian Embassies/Posts abroad. Since it is with the Ministry and the Missions abroad to make them aware about the facilities/assistance provided to them including resolving of their grievances, the Committee recommend that the Indian Embassies/Posts abroad may also be pursued to do greater outreach and establish close connect with Indian nationals abroad including students through social media platforms so that an authentic database of students as well as Indian nationals abroad is available and maintained in the Ministry.

### **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry wishes to inform the Committee that PDOT sessions are not organised in India for students going abroad. However, as part of their outreach to students, Missions/Posts abroad collaborate with Universities and tertiary education institutions and student associations to organise welcome ceremonies and familiarisation sessions for new students, wherein students are also encouraged to register with the Mission/Post.

Indian Missions/Posts abroad attach great priority to having a reliable database of Indians nationals, including students. Missions/Posts use every available opportunity, including all events with participation of diaspora and social media platforms, to encourage the diaspora members and students to register with the Mission/Post.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 30)**

The Committee also note that the Ministry is making efforts to establish a system to regulate migration to such countries where greater possibility of exploitation is felt, like the Gulf countries as well as to countries where skills and talents are needed. The Committee desire that this exercise may be completed at the earliest so as to obviate exploitation of Indian migrant workers abroad.

### **Reply of the Government**

A robust system to address grievances/complaints and mechanism to ensure safety and welfare of blue collar Indian workers holding ECR category passports and migrating to 18 ECR countries(including the 6 GCC countries) has been established by the government through the eMigrate portal. The portal has registered over 1900 Recruiting Agents(RAs) and over 2 lakh Foreign Employers(FEs). There are provisions for compensation from the RA/FE in case the terms and conditions of the employment contract are breached during the contract period.

2. Other benefits available to the Indian migrant workers are as under:-

(i) Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) has been set up in all Indian Missions and Posts abroad to assist Indian nationals in distress abroad. Fund is used to provide legal assistance, boarding & lodging, emergency medical care, air passage to stranded Indians and transportation of mortal remains of Indian nationals.

(ii) (Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana (PBBY) is a mandatory insurance scheme for all Emigration Check Required (ECR) category workers going to ECR countries. The scheme provides an insurance cover of Rs.10 Lakhs in case of accidental death or permanent disability and other benefits.

(iii) In addition, there are other mechanisms like MADAD, Pre-Departure Orientation Training, Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendras, 24x7 Helplines at Indian Missions and Posts, Shelter Homes etc. for the welfare and protection of Indians abroad.

(iv) Besides, Labor and Manpower Cooperation Agreements are in place with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Jordan and have provision of implementation through Joint Working Groups. All the labor and manpower-related issues are discussed during these JWG meetings. Further, to safeguard the specific interest of domestic workers in GCC Countries, agreements on Labor Cooperation for Domestic Sector have been signed with Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait.

(v) Finally, the proposed Emigration Bill of 2023 envisages comprehensive emigration management, institutes regulatory mechanisms by developing a regime for safe and orderly migration governing overseas employment of Indian nationals for their protection and welfare. The purpose is to establish a robust, transparent



and technically advanced structure and maintain a shared database for emigration to facilitate and promote overseas employment.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 32)**

The Committee find that under the scheme ‘Promotion of Cultural Ties with Diaspora’, a new initiative ‘Felicitation of Armed Forces Veterans Abroad’ has been started by the Ministry to engage retired veterans from Indian Armed Forces. The Defence Wings of our Missions/Posts organize ‘Varistha Yodhha’/‘Yodhha Samman Divas’ events and recall the service/sacrifice of our distinguished veterans by honoring them and their spouses with the presentation of mementoes. The Committee understand that such events have so far been organised in US, Canada and Australia and the participation of Diaspora leaders and local political leadership in them has been so encouraging. In view of the importance of organizing such events and the enthusiastic response from the Diaspora, the Committee recommend that more such events to honour our armed forces veterans and veterans of other fields may be organized in other countries too where the Diaspora presence is high and the outcome may be shared with the Committee in due course.

### **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry accords priority under the scheme ‘Promotion of Cultural Ties with Diaspora’ to proposals from Missions/Posts to engage with retired veterans from Indian Armed Forces. In 2022-23, Missions/Posts in Canada, US, UK, and Saudi Arabia organised ‘Varistha Yodhha’/‘Yodhha Samman Divas’ events to honour veterans. These functions by Missions/Posts received enthusiastic response from veterans, and appreciation within the Indian community. The Ministry continues to encourage Missions/Posts to organise more such events to engage with veterans’ community and the Ministry is hopeful that in future more Missions will organise such events.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 33)**

The Committee note that the Government has undertaken several initiatives such as, Vaishwaik Bharatiya Vaigyanik (VAIBHAV) Summit, Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) and Pravasi Bhartiya Academic and Scientific Sampark (PRABHASS) to facilitate active engagement of leading Diaspora academicians and scientists to the scientific and technological development of

India, tap the talent pool of scientists and entrepreneurs internationally and bring on board the Global Indian S & T community. Further, the Department of Science and Technology is working towards announcing VAIBHAV fellowships programme for collaboration projects identified under the VAIBHAV initiative. Under the GIAN Scheme, 2163 collaboration projects have so far been approved and 1716 projects have been completed. The PRABHASS initiative has also resulted in a few collaborations. The Committee welcome these initiatives as they serve the purpose of enhancing India's educational, scientific and technological capacities. The Committee acknowledge that such engagements would result in more collaboration projects with academicians and scientists from the Diaspora community. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to deepen its engagements with the said community and strengthen its collaboration efforts with an outcome oriented approach and enhance its scientific, technological, educational and economic capacities using Indian talent abroad.

### **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry continues to work with Department of Science and Technology and other stakeholders to facilitate contribution of diaspora academia and scientists to India's educational, scientific and technological capacities. VAIBHAV fellowships have been announced exclusively for Diaspora scientists and researchers to facilitate academic and research collaborations between Indian institutions and the best institutions in the world through mobility of diaspora faculty/researcher from overseas institutions to India.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 34)**

The Committee have always felt the need to sensitize the Indian Diaspora on the crucial role played by them in India's soft power diplomacy and in exercising economic and political influence in their host countries so as to build up and strengthen the existing relationship between their home and host country. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Ministry and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, which supplements its efforts to leverage the Indian Diaspora in soft power projection, should come out with a blueprint to utilise the Indian Diaspora as a 'resource' in projecting India's soft power, culture and values abroad.

### **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry works closely with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in leveraging the Indian Diaspora as a resource to project India's soft power abroad. Missions prepare the country specific calendar of events or action plan based on local interest including the presence of diaspora and recommend activities which should be effective in promotion of the soft power. All activities of the Ministry & Indian Council for Cultural Relations, including those conducted through its extended arms of Indian Cultural Centers, the Chairs of Indian Studies in Foreign Universities, and the foreign students' scholarships programme, are conducted in close coordination with Indian Missions/posts in the country concerned. For greater coordination among other stake holders, Ministry and ICCR also work with other departments involved in projection of soft power such as Ministries of Culture, Education, Sports and Youth Affairs, Textiles, AYUSH, and Information and Broadcasting. The above mechanism broadly takes care of tapping and harnessing the opportunity provided by the enormous and diverse Indian diaspora in furthering India's interest and influence globally.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 35)**

The Committee find that India's international development cooperation, inspired by the spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' has expanded significantly in the recent years in its geographical reach as well as in the areas of cooperation. India's development engagement in various countries includes Grant assistance, Lines of Credit (LOC), technical consultancy, disaster relief, humanitarian aid, heritage restoration, educational scholarships and a range of capacity-building programmes including short-term civilian and military training courses. The Committee find that the development partnership portfolio or the Technical and Economic Cooperation (TEC), which constitutes India's Aid to various countries, continues to be the focus and priority with the largest allocation in the Ministry's Budget. In FY 2023-24, out of the total budget of Rs. 18050 crore, the TEC outlay is 32.40% , i.e. Rs. 5848.58 crore, out of which Rs. 5080.24 crore (28.14%) is for grant programmes and Rs. 768.34 crore (4.25%) is for loans. However, the Committee find that the percentage share of outlay under development partnership portfolio has been declining and has reached the lowest in the current financial year from 42.06% in B.E 2021-22. From B.E of 2022-23, the reduction in allocation is 6.73%. Since the Committee have always stood for the expansion of our development partnership footprint, the consistent reductions in the TEC outlay year after year, needs attention. In view of the fact that our development assistance has been a major catalyst for creation of much needed infrastructure such as

railway links, roads & bridges, waterways, border related infrastructure, transmission lines, power generation, hydropower, etc., in the partner countries and goodwill towards India, the Committee recommend that the development partnerships with countries needs to be reinforced with adequate Budgetary provisions especially in view of the increasing interest and influence of Regional players like China in the neighbourhood. The Committee, therefore, desire that additional Budgetary requirements under these international scheme Heads may be taken up with the Ministry of Finance through Supplementary Demands for Grants or an increased RE by putting forth a compelling case for enhanced funds.

### **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry's will continue its efforts with the Ministry of Finance to secure additional funds in order to give effect to the various foreign policy initiatives at the highest levels. Our endeavour towards achieving higher resource allocation for Scheme heads will be based on realistic assessments of fund requirements for projects, implantation efficiencies in execution of project and overall international commitments.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 36)**

While observing the pace of expenditure under aid to various countries, the Committee note that the utilisation in respect of 'Aid to Bhutan' which is the largest financial assistance among the countries is only Rs 701.11 crore till December 2022 out of BE 2022- 2023 allocation of Rs. 2266.24 crore. An amount of Rs. 1.05 crore only has been incurred in respect of 'Aid to Latin American Countries', while expenditure is nil for 'Aid to Mongolia' up to December, 2022. Barring two countries viz, Myanmar and Afghanistan out of the rest, utilisation of funds hover around 30-40 percent in the current Financial Year. The Committee are aware that the execution of projects and utilisation of funds have been impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020-21 and 2021- 22. They, however, fail to understand as to why the pace of implementation of projects and utilisation of funds has not picked up with the easing of the COVID-19 situation during 2022-23. The Committee also find that despite the political turmoil in Myanmar and Afghanistan, more than 50% of the allocated funds have been utilised. Taking all the above into consideration, the Committee conclude that there are certain gaps in project implementation and monitoring and desire that such gaps/loopholes should

be identified and remedial measures taken to plug the same. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to strengthen its coordination with the Implementing Agencies so that in the post-COVID world, schemes that cater to India's global image may be executed smoothly and efficiently.

### **Reply of the Government**

To ensure optimal utilization of budgetary resources during each quarter of the financial year, expenditure is closely and regularly monitored by the Financial Advisor in consultation with Divisional Heads, including through quarterly budget management & expenditure review meetings. In these meetings, the expenditure plans of the Ministry's various Divisions and Spending Units are discussed and the importance of ensuring balanced expenditure during each quarter of the financial year is emphasized & monitored. Divisions/Spending Units accordingly make all efforts to ensure evenly paced expenditure, within the constraints of majority of the Ministry's spending being in foreign countries.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 37)**

The Committee understand that the 'Technical and Economic Cooperation with Other Countries' caters also to Aid for Disaster Relief. Besides Turkey and Syria recently, the Committee find that Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) was given to over 150 countries. In the Financial Year 2023 alone, HADR assistance was provided to Afghanistan, Bhutan, Botswana, Cambodia, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Fiji, Kiribati, Maldives, Mozambique, Timor-Leste, Thailand, Tonga, Ukraine, etc. While wholeheartedly applauding the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief activities of the Ministry, the Committee desire that the possibility of having a separate fund for disaster relief operations may be looked into. The Committee also desire that India continue to remain first of the block in extending humanitarian assistance to people and countries whenever there is a need.

### **Reply of the Government**

This separate head towards 'Aid to Disaster Relief' was created to provide for humanitarian/relief assistance to countries hit by natural calamities. Under this sub-head, the budgetary allocation for BE 2023-24 was Rs. 5 Cr. Further, an additional allocation of Rs. 50 Cr has been sought on contingency basis to cater to

expenditure towards Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief in Turkey, Syria, Sudan.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 38)**

The Committee note that the BE 2023-24 under ‘Aid to Bangladesh’ has been retained at Rs. 200 crore in anticipation of completion of some of the ongoing projects such as the IndiaBangladesh Friendship Pipeline. In respect of the Akhaura-Agartala Rail Link Project which has been delayed due to multiple factors, physical progress of 70% has been achieved and extension of time has been granted to the contractor till June 2023. The Government has also been providing Grant assistance for implementation of High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) related to socioeconomic development aimed at creating maximum impact for local communities. So far, 74 HICDPs have been completed while 15 HICDPs are ongoing. Under Line of Credit (LoC), 9 projects are currently under execution and 10 projects are currently under preparation by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) while 10 projects are under tendering by GoB. The Committee further note that out of a concessional credit line of approximately 10 billion dollars, utilization so far is only to the tune of 2.8 to 2.9 billion dollars. The Ministry has also stated that some new projects in the areas of education, health, water and sanitation, urban development, conservation of environment, sports and cultural heritage, women empowerment, child welfare, community and livelihood development are under consideration for implementation in FY 2023-24. The Committee expect the Ministry to improve the pace of expenditure for all the projects during 2023-24 as the COVID situation has normalized. Expeditious completion of all the pending/ongoing HICDPs projects as well as projects taken up under Line of Credit is required to avoid time and cost overruns. In view of the benefits of HICDPs to the local community, new projects under consideration for implementation in FY 2023-24 may also be finalized at the earliest. As Line of Credit (LoC) projects are likely to play a significant role in the development of critical infrastructure and overall development of Bangladesh, the Ministry may also extend all assistance for finalization of those projects under preparation/tendering by the Government of Bangladesh for speedy execution.

### **Reply of the Government**

The India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline, a flagship project under GoI grant, has been commissioned and was jointly inaugurated by both Prime Ministers in a virtual ceremony held on 18 March 2023.

The Agartala-Akhaura rail link project, a 6.77 km line, from the border to Gangasagar Station in Bangladesh, has seen 84% physical progress and is expected to be commissioned before end of this year. Periodic review meetings involving all stakeholders are being held on regular basis to monitor the progress of the project. The last such meeting was held on 4 June 2023.

Apart from ongoing High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs), five new project proposals in areas of skill development and training institutes, orphanages and restoration of common cultural heritage are under consideration.

All possible assistance for finalization of LoC projects undertaken by the government of Bangladesh is being extended by GoI through bilateral mechanisms.

The points pertaining to LOCs extended to Bangladesh are duly noted. The Division is extending all assistance for finalization of the projects under preparation/tendering by the Government of Bangladesh for speedy execution.

Akhaura-Agartala Rail Link is a cross-border rail connectivity project to connect the existing station of Agartala in India to the Gangasagar station in Bangladesh. MEA is handling the 6.78 km long Bangladesh portion on the rail link. Till date, physical Progress of 84% has been achieved. The Indian portion of the rail link is funded by Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) and implemented by Ministry of Railways through M/s IRCON. The project has been hampered by multiple factors including short working period due to prolonged monsoons season, COVID pandemic and the weak financial position of the Contractor appointed by the Government of Bangladesh. Multiple review meetings have been conducted by MEA and by Ministry of Railways to increase the pace of progress. The latest Joint review of the project has been conducted on 5th June 2023 by MEA with concerned Bangladesh officials and PMC, M/s IRCON. Extension of time has been granted to the contractor till June 2023. Further GoB has granted EoT till June 2024 including Defect Liability Period DLP.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 39)**

The Committee observe that Bhutan is the recipient of the highest developmental aid amongst our neighbouring countries. Currently, India is having more than 600 projects in Bhutan across various domains and under various Heads. India's aid and assistance programmes in Bhutan are currently covered under both Grants and Loans totalling of Rs. 2400.58 crore in the BE.2023-24 which is 41% of the total development cooperation budget for the FY. The Grant in Aid component in the BE 2023-24 is Rs. 1632.24 crore and the loan component is Rs. 768.34 crore. The fund requirements under 'Aid to Bhutan' has been fluctuating due to the impact of COVID-19 related restrictions and strict lockdown in Bhutan as late as April 2022, as well as unforeseen geological conditions in case of hydroelectric power projects. The Committee have been informed that most projects are now back on track with smooth and seamless flow of material and human resources. The Committee, therefore, feel that the Budgetary allocation for 2023-34 may be inadequate and the Ministry might have to seek additional funding through Supplementary Demands for Grants. As the allocation of more funds through supplementary grants or an increased RE would hinge on utilization pattern and anticipated expenditure in the last quarter of the Financial Year, the Committee urge the Ministry to ensure efficient utilization of funds in every quarter of the FY 2023-24.

### **Reply of the Government**

MEA continues to prioritize the special relationship with Bhutan by ensuring completion of all the ongoing projects in a time bound manner. MEA is making sure that fund release to all GoI assisted projects in Bhutan including GoI funded HEPs are kept aligned with fund requirements as projected by the Project Implementing Authorities based on the project's physical progress achieved. All efforts are being made to ensure efficient and target bound fund utilization for every quarter of the FY. Ministry will seek additional resource requirement based on realistic requirements for the projects in Aid to Bhutan.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 40)**

The Committee are aware that cooperation in Hydroelectric Power Projects is a very crucial area of our partnership with Bhutan and significant Budgetary Outlays have been provisioned over the years. The Ministry has informed that Mangdechhu Hydroelectric Power Project of 720 MW has been commissioned and handed over to Bhutan. As of January 2023, the physical progress in respect of



Punatsangchhu-I (1200 MW HEP) is 87.61% and that of Punatsangchhu-II (1020 MW HEP) is 93.84%. Currently, Punatsangchhu-I is facing unforeseen geological conditions and technical discussion in this regard are underway while Punatsangchhu-II is scheduled for completion in December 2023. The Committee desire that all out efforts should be made to resolve the technical problem being faced in the implementation of Punatsangchhu-I so that it is back on track. The Committee also desire that the scheduled date of completion for Punatsangchhu-II should be met.

### **Reply of the Government**

Punatsangchhu-I HEP has been delayed due to severe geological challenges encountered at the project site. An Inter-Governmental Group (IGG) of experts is looking into the issues to find a technical solution to the matter. Puna-II HEP is back on track and the project is expected to be completed shortly. All efforts are being made to ensure timely completion of the construction and commissioning of the project.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 41)**

The Committee note that under the GoI's committed assistance of Rs 4500 crore to Bhutan's XII Five Year Plan for 2018- 23, Project Tied Assistance (PTA) and Small Development Projects are implemented in Bhutan. Out of India's commitment for the said Plan, Rs 3721.19 crore has been released so far. The Committee desire that the committed funds should be fully utilized in the specified period for which it was committed and urge the Ministry to ensure that execution of projects gain momentum from the start of the FY 2023-24 itself so that based on the pace of expenditure, the remaining funds could be released in this last year of the said 12th FYP.

### **Reply of Government**

GoI is implementing Projects including through Project Tied Assistance and Small Development Projects in Bhutan under the GoI's committed assistance of INR 4500 Cr to Bhutan's XII Five Year Plan for 2018-23. Out of this, Rs. 4201.52 Cr has been released so far. Post the disruption due to COVID-19, upon request by RGoB, MEA in consultation with the Project Implementing Authorities of RGoB, have been reallocating funds and re-prioritizing projects, through the inter-governmental mechanism of Plan Talks. Through mutually agreed quarterly

targets, MEA is pacing expenditure throughout the FY to ensure full and efficient utilization of the funds allotted for Bhutan's 12<sup>th</sup> FYP.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 42)**

The Committee observe that the requirements of funds under 'Aid to Nepal' has been low i.e Rs 550 crore for the FY 2023-24 as some of the major projects are in advanced stage of completion or have been completed. Some of the ongoing projects like Integrated Check Post Phase-II at Nepalgunj, Post-earthquake reconstruction in health, education and cultural heritage sectors, Jogbani-Biratnagar rail link, etc. are likely to be completed in 2023. In respect of the Terai Roads packages, 9 out of 14 were handed over to the Government of Nepal on March 2021 and 5 are yet to be handed over to Nepal. Hydro electric power projects in which the power generated can have linkages back to India include Arun III hydroelectric power project, lower Arun Hydroelectric power project, Arun IV hydro electric power project, Upper Karnali Project, etc. The Committee also note that work on some projects are yet to commence. Further, there were issues related to land acquisition by the Government of Nepal on some of the projects. The Committee desire that the GoI should impress upon the Government of Nepal to resolve all the pending land acquisition issues at the earliest so that the work on these projects could commence. As connectivity is one of the key features of India's Neighbourhood First Policy, the Committee desire that all out efforts may be made to complete all the ongoing projects as per the timeline/target. The Committee also urge the Ministry to expedite the handing over of five Terai road packages which have already been completed to boost people to people contact between the border areas of the two countries. progress in this regard may be communicated to the Committee.

### **Reply of the Government**

- i. Jogbani - Biratnagar rail link project comprises of Two (2) phases . Phase – 1 of the project spans from Bathnaha (near Jogbani) to Nepal Custom yard (7.6 km. Phase – 1 is completed and jointly inaugurated by both PM on 1 June 2023. Phase-II of the project connecting from Nepal Custom Yard to Biratnagar (11 km) is currently under execution but delayed due to land acquisition issues for about 1.2 km stretch which is pending with Govt. of Nepal authorities. MEA had recently conducted a Joint Project Steering Committee meeting with officials of Govt. of Nepal on 20 April

- 2023 to resolve such issues. All efforts are being taken and monitored at highest level to expedite the project progress.
- ii. Jaynagar – Bijalpura – Bardibas Rail Link project comprises of Three (3) phases. Phase – 1 of the project spans from Jaynagar (India) to Kurtha (Nepal). Phase – 1 is completed and jointly inaugurated by both PMs on 2 April 2022. Phase-II of the project connecting from Kurtha to Bijalpura was handed over on 1st June 2023 to Govt of Nepal during recent visit of PM of Nepal to India. Phase-III of the project connecting from Bijalpura to Bardibas yet to be commence as land acquisition is yet to be completed by Govt of Nepal. MEA had recently conducted a Joint Project Steering Committee meeting with officials of Govt. of Nepal on 20 April 2023 to resolve the outstanding issues. All efforts are being taken and monitored at highest level to expedite the project progress.
  - iii. Integrated Check Post at Nepalgunj; Integrated Check Post at Nepalgunj has been virtually inaugurated by Prime Ministers of both India and Nepal on 01.06.2023 during latest visit to India.
  - iv. The construction of an another ICP at Bhairahawa in Nepal along Indo-Nepal International border has commenced from 11.05.2023 and is to be completed within the prescribed period of 24 months. Ministry regularly monitors and follows up with all stakeholders to ensure timely completion of projects.
  - v. The Committee’s recommendations are well noted. There are oversight mechanisms at various levels which monitor and review the progress of the GOI assisted and funded projects in Nepal. These include high-level mechanism at Ministerial level as well as working level mechanism at senior officials’ level. There are also Joint Project Monitoring Committees with Government of Nepal to regularly oversee and ensure smooth and expeditious implementation of projects and achievement of targets within specified timelines. Through these mechanisms, GoI has been regularly taking up issues pertaining to land acquisition as well as handing over of various projects including Terai roads project.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 43)**

The Committee acknowledge the post-earthquake reconstruction work taken up by the Government of India in Nepal in addition to constructive interventions in health, education and cultural heritage sectors. A significant project in health space has been the successful setting up of dialysis machine infrastructure in Nepal with the supply of 200 kidney dialysis machines along with the consumables which go with it. The Committee are also pleased at the humanitarian assistance provided to Nepal in the form of 1.1 million doses of Made in India Covishield Vaccine as well as essential medicines, equipments and medical supplies for combating the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee are optimistic that the Government will continue to prioritize its relationship with Nepal and extend all assistance – financial, technical or humanitarian whenever needed and be a first responder to our immediate neighbour in times of need.

### **Reply of the Government**

Government of India continues to prioritize its relationship with Nepal and extend all assistance – financial, technical or humanitarian whenever needed and endeavors to be the first responder to our immediate neighbour in times of need.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 44)**

The Committee note that the Budgetary Allocation under ‘Aid to Sri Lanka’ has been reduced since 2020-21 as implementation of projects had been impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic followed by unprecedented economic crisis in that country. The economic crisis has also posed a challenge in terms of disbursement and utilization of funds as well as currency crunch in the country. The Committee further note that the Government is trying to put in place an institutional framework for settlement of trade in Indian Rupee so that even in the absence of hard currency, trade may not be disrupted. In the opinion of the Committee, such a mechanism which facilitates trade in Indian rupee would be beneficial, not only for Sri Lanka but for other countries in the neighbourhood as well, that are facing economic crisis. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to finalize all the modalities, in consultation with other Departments and Agencies concerned, at the earliest in this regard. The Progress made to advance the prospects of trade settlement with partner countries in Indian Rupee, especially in countries of our neighborhood may be communicated to the Committee within three months.

### **Reply of the Government**

Following the Government of India's decision to allow settlement of trade transactions in INR in July 2022, a number of Sri Lankan banks applied for Vostro/Nostro accounts in Indian banks. As per available information, at least six banks from Sri Lanka currently have functional vostro/nostro accounts for facilitating trade transactions in INR. Separately, Sri Lanka has included INR in its list of designated foreign currencies which has also facilitated INR denominated economic transactions between the two countries. In March 2023, High Commission of India, Colombo had organized an interactive seminar on the use of INR for economic transactions between India and Sri Lanka, involving officials from Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Government of Sri Lanka, RBI, Government of India apart from representatives from business and industry including tourism sector, media personnel, bank representatives, economists and journalists, trade and industry associations and export promotion councils.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 45)**

The Committee note that a series of new projects like renewable energy projects, power line between Sri Lanka and India, housing projects, refinery projects, fuel bunkering units, etc. are in the pipeline with Sri Lanka. Moreover, various other high profile infrastructure projects are under tendering stage. The Committee desire that all such projects should be finalized and implemented during the FY 2023-24.

### **Reply of the Government**

Government of India is working closely with the Government of Sri Lanka in implementing new projects in the field of renewable energy, housing, refinery and fuel etc. This includes discussions on Inter-grid connectivity project, Sampur Power plant project and constructing a multi-product petroleum pipeline project. Similarly, Phase III of Indian Housing Project has seen 95% physical progress, and for Phase IV, selection of Implementing Agency is underway and in parallel, approvals for cost escalation per unit is being processed. In addition, projects such as Unique Identity Document and Three Islands projects are at tender stage and installation of solar panels on religious sites is under preliminary stages of consideration.

The Indian Housing Project is a Government of India (GOI) flagship Housing project in Sri Lanka to address the housing needs of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Indian Origin Tamils (IOTs) through the construction/renovation/repair of houses. A commitment of a total of 60,000 houses has so far been made by GOI and IHP has been divided into four (4) different phases. Phase-I and II has been completed in 2012 and 2016 respectively. Under Phase III of the project, India is constructing 4000 houses under a community-driven approach in Central and Uva Provinces in Sri Lanka. As on date 3859 houses have been completed and the construction of the remaining 141 houses is at various stages of implementation. Under phase- IV India will construct 10000 houses in different regions of the plantation areas of Sri Lanka for IOT plantation workers. The selection of implementing agencies for the execution of the project of 10000 houses has been completed on 16 June 2023.

#### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 46)**

The Committee note that the RE 2022-23 under ‘Aid to Myanmar’ was reduced to Rs. 500 crore from the BE Allocation of Rs. 600 crore based on actual pace of project implementation and budget utilization pattern and also taking into consideration the challenging security situation in Myanmar. The BE 2023-24 has been pegged at Rs. 400 crore on the basis of anticipated expenditure to be incurred during the Financial Year. The Committee further note that due to the ongoing security situation in Myanmar, pace of work in the developmental projects including Kaladan Multi Modal Transport Project and India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway have been impacted. The Committee desire that the pace of project implementation should gain momentum in the post COVID world and hence urge the Ministry to step up its diplomatic efforts with the authorities in Myanmar to secure their support for smooth and expeditious implementation of all the ongoing development projects in that country.

#### **Reply of the Government**

Ministry has noted the observations in the recommendations of Hon’ble Committee in its Report on Ministry’s Demand for Grants 2023-24. One of the flagship projects under grant-in-aid being executed with respect to Myanmar is the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP). The Sittwe Port, which is an important component under the KMTTP, was jointly inaugurated on 9 May

2023 and work is continuing on the Paletwa-Zonrinpui Road under the Kaladan Project. Work on India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway has been impacted because of the ongoing security situation in Myanmar.

Activities under Border Area Development Programme (BADP) in Chin State and in the Naga Self-administered Zone in Myanmar, and under Rakhine State Development Programme (RSDP) have continued.

In May 2023, GoI has also sent relief supplies including medicines, food and shelter kits to Myanmar in the aftermath of the Cyclone Mocha.

All efforts are being undertaken to expedite the ongoing development projects in Myanmar. The matter has been taken up at the highest level through our Mission in Yangon and at various relevant bilateral mechanisms to ensure expeditious implementation of the GoI funded projects in Myanmar.

- (I) MEA is taking all the necessary diplomatic efforts to expedite the project progress in Myanmar. However, prevailing security challenges and local conditions are posing intermittent hindrances and at times, access to site is also restricted to Indian nationals for both Kaladan project and Tri-lateral highway projects. However, inspite of challenges, MEA has successfully completed the operationalisation of the Sittwe port under Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport project in May 2023. The Road component of Kaladan project is also in progress since the project was awarded to IRCON in March 2023and. Both these projects are being monitored regularly by our Mission in Myanmar and, also, at the Ministry and regular consultations are being held with the concerned agencies/leadership in the Government of Myanmar.
- (II) Construction / upgradation of Kalewa-Yargi Road section of the Trilateral Highway in Myanmar: The current law and order situation in Myanmar has slowed the project execution. However, bituminous Concrete work is progressing between Km 60 – 112 with frequent intermittent disruptions. The Physical progress in the project is 50% as on date.
- (III) Construction of 69 bridges including approach roads in the Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa section of the Trilateral Highway in Myanmar: The contractor for implementing the project was appointed on 28 November

2017. Contract was terminated on 24 December 2018 in view of Nil progress. Manipur high court on 20.08.2020 dismissed the contractor's appeal and upheld the termination. The DPR for 69 Bridges has been updated on cost and technical parameters. NHA on 28.02.2022, has been appointed as new Technical Executing Agency. NHA invited tender in July 2022. Evaluation of Financial bid is under process.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 47)**

The Committee note that ITEC has been one of the world's longest running structured capacity building programme and has now evolved as an important strand of India's Development Partnership. For the current Financial Year, 188 courses are approved to be offered to ITEC partner countries and during the last three years 161 countries and 18 Secretariats have been benefitted from ITEC programmes. In respect of customised courses, 63 inperson/physical courses and 19 e-ITEC/ virtual courses have been approved for partner countries. The Ministry has also stated that it is trying to graduate to full-fledged online degree programmes . The Committee are further happy to note that ITEC programmes have gained popularity and the positive feedback from participants posted on the ITEC website and social media is testimony to it. ITEC being an integral part of India's development partnership, the Committee desire that new training modules catering to the specific requirements of partner countries should be evolved to make the programme more relevant and impactful. The Committee also urge the Ministry to work out the modalities for a full-fledged ITEC online degree programme in collaboration with the various stakeholders so that the same is introduced at the earliest. The feedback from participants in the training programme may also be incorporated in the training modules to the extent possible.

### **Reply of the Government**

Keeping in mind the training needs and development requirements of our partner countries, ITEC has developed the following specific modules:

- (i) A QUAD Infrastructure Fellowship (QIF) package of ITEC courses, which will provide infrastructure related training to our partner countries in the Indo-Pacific
- (ii) SAGAR-AMRUT scholarships under ITEC which will provide 1000 training slots over the next five years for island countries in the Pacific region;



(iii) a package for Latin American and Caribbean countries which will provide ITEC courses on Digital public infrastructure, flagship agriculture schemes of India, PM-BJP programme and technical courses in Spanish on themes like SDG, South Cooperation and IT.

Under the QIF, Division has offered certain 2-year degree in-person courses. Collaboration with other stakeholders has been initiated to ascertain the requirements of partner countries and accordingly develop the modalities for the full-fledged online degree courses.

4.95 The Committee note that under the Head 'Aid to African Countries', the BE 2022-23 of Rs. 250 crore was reduced to Rs.160 crore at RE stage as implementation of most of the projects/activities slowed down resulting in lesser expenditure and subsequent reduction in allocation due to the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic situation. The Budgetary Allocation has been kept at the same level of Rs. 250.00 crore in BE 2023-24. Under projects relating to Line of Credit (LoC), the Ministry is facing challenges as there are 17 high risk countries in Africa. The Committee further note that there has been delay in setting up of institutions in Africa as per the commitments under the India- Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)-I,II & III due to various problems in the host countries. Moreover, the IAFS –IV which was expected to be held in September 2020 was also postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee desire that in the post COVID world, all out efforts should be made by the Government for expeditious execution of projects including LoC projects in African countries and also for fulfilling all commitments under the IAFS. The Committee further desire that consultations with the African Union Commission may also be initiated without delay for holding of IAFS –IV and the outcome may be shared with the Committee.

### **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry has noted the concerns and recommendations of the Hon'ble Standing Committee. The Ministry would like to reassure the Hon'ble Committee that Africa is receiving high priority by the Government.

India has maintained a vibrant relationship with African countries, which is evident with 36 outgoing visits since 2014 [President (13), Vice President (14) and Prime Minister (9)] and around 100 incoming visits at ministerial level. EAM has also

undertaken visits to Ethiopia & Rwanda (June 2022), Egypt (October 2022), Kenya & Mozambique (April 2023) and South Africa & Tanzania (June 2023). The 10 guiding principles enunciated by the Prime Minister in Uganda in 2018, have continued to guide India-Africa relations and to take our engagement to the next higher level. These guiding principles have been given ‘top priority’ in various areas including digital & IT, agriculture, trade & investment, development partnership, especially designed people-centric projects, enhance local capacity and assist African youth, capacity building, climate change, cooperation in terrorism & maritime issues, etc.

In order to enhance our diplomatic presence in African continent, GOI has opened 18 new Missions. After opening of the 18 new Missions in Africa, India now has resident Missions in 47 out of 54 African countries.

The IAFS-IV was expected to be held in September 2020 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In consultation with African Union, this Ministry is exploring various options to hold the IAFS-IV at the earliest.

The Ministry, with the budgetary allocation of Rs. 250 crore for the financial year 2023-24 provisioned under the Head “Aid to African Countries”, would continue to focus on catering to the setting up of Institutes; offering Scholarships/Training programmes under IAFS-III; ICCR Scholarships; Food Aid, Medical aid including equipment; humanitarian aids to fight natural disasters; Books; Vehicles; organising Events/Seminars/ Studies/Visits; Cash Grants; development assistance projects; etc. in order to further strengthen our friendly relations with African countries. The Ministry will continue to vigorously follow up and review the projects announced during IAFS-I, IAFS-II and IAFS-III which are presently at various stages of execution. In order to augment our development partnership with the friendly African countries, India would continue to extend LoCs and Grants to African countries.

The Ministry will ensure for effective utilisation of funds for expeditious implementation of our ongoing projects in Africa and seek enhanced allocation under the budgetary Head “Aid to African countries” at Revised Estimates (RE) stage, if necessary; and/or on finalisation of the dates of the IAFS-IV. We have noted Hon’ble Committee’s observations on the reduced allocation and the slow pace of progress in projects under this budget sub-head. During the fiscal year 2022-23, we made utmost efforts to spend the funds allocated under the budgetary

Head “Aid to African Countries”. In view of the COVID-19 induced restrictions, many of our aid projects in Africa could not make optimal progress. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided now and the situation has returned to normal, the Ministry will make all out efforts for expeditious execution of projects in African Countries and also for fulfilling commitments made under the IAFS.

The Ministry has taken a note of all the recommendations of the Hon’ble Committee.

In relation to the projects in countries in Africa financed under the Lines of Credit scheme, these are being monitored for their expeditious implementation through Project Management Consultants, review meetings held in consultation with Exim Bank of India, bilateral review meetings, visits by Ministry of External Affairs and Exim Bank officials and continuous supervision through concerned Indian Missions and Posts in concerned countries. These efforts are aimed at achieving the project completion targets in time.

#### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 49)**

The Committee note that the e-VidyaBharati and eAarogyaBharati Network Project (e-VBAB) project, approved by the Union Cabinet in November 2015, for a period of 5 years from 2016- 21, with a project cost of Rs. 951.22 crore provided tele-education and tele-medicine services through the medium of internet using specially developed web-based platforms. Under the tele-education component, scholarships have been awarded to 14,390 African students, who have been pursuing online higher education from Indian Universities while the tele-medicine component of the project is yet to be launched. The Ministry has stated that it is in the process of finalizing the courses, creation of content and identifying the specialties, hospitals in India as well as partner hospitals in Africa, etc. It is also working on the tender document for finalizing an agency to create a dedicated portal for offering Tele-Consultation and Continued Medical Education with the Implementing Agency. The Ministry has further informed that an inter-Ministerial meeting will be held soon to discuss the modalities and the way forward. The Committee note the delay in launching the tele-medicine component of the e-VBAB project though it was approved way back in 2015 and urge the Ministry to commence discussion on the modalities so that the same may be finalized and implemented at the earliest.

## **Reply of the Government**

An Inter-Ministerial meeting was held on 2 May 2023 to discuss the way forward for implementation of the tele-medicine component of e-VBAB project. The need to take stock of current status in Africa of IT infrastructure, connectivity, data storage requirement of radiology images and specialties required has been highlighted. A meeting shall be organized with all the stakeholders to take stock of the above, thereafter the customization of e-Sanjeevani portal could be undertaken and the project could be launched.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 50)**

The Committee find that the Ministry of External Affairs, India's Missions abroad and ICCR constitute the triangle within which the task of projecting Indian culture through public and cultural diplomacy is fulfilled. All activities of ICCR including those conducted through its extended arms like Indian Cultural Centers, the Chairs of Indian Studies in Foreign Universities, and the foreign students' scholarships programme, are conducted in close coordination with MEA and Indian Missions/posts in the country concerned contributing substantially towards overall formulation of India's foreign policy. The Committee understand that the ICCR is fully funded by MEA through Grants-in-Aid as the promotion of soft power and cultural diplomacy cannot be based on profit generation. As regards budget grants given to ICCR, the Committee observe that an allocation of Rs. 345.21 crore has been made in BE 2023-24 against the BE and RE 2022-23 of Rs. 320 crore. This enhanced allocation in BE 2023-24 to the tune of 25.21 crore has been made on account of expanding research & academic activities, expanding scope of cultural diplomacy under ICCR as well as the revision in scholarship rates, cultural hospitality norms, etc. However, the Committee are not sure about the adequacy of the allocation especially in view of the new initiatives of ICCR like 'Gyan-Setu' for connecting Culture through Knowledge, 'Gen-Next Programme', Blog competitions, etc. in addition to the revision in scholarship rates and cultural hospitality norms. Moreover, the soft power and cultural diplomatic activities being undertaken by other countries are way above ours despite India aspiring to be a very strong soft power player in the years ahead. The Committee, therefore, reiterate their stance on augmented funding to ICCR to enable sponsoring proactive and effective conduct of our country's soft power and cultural

promotion. The Committee also recommend that an assessment be made by the Ministry to find where our country stands in the global ranking of soft power projections as compared to major developed and developing countries.

### **Reply of the Government**

Ministry acknowledges recommendation of Hon'ble Standing Committee and will endeavor to enhance additional budgetary resource allocation based on realistic assessment of ICCR Schemes & programmes requirements with the objective of advancing India's cultural diplomacy.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 51)**

The Committee are happy to find that in consonance with an earlier recommendation of theirs, ICCR has made efforts to reorganise its structure and accordingly merged seven Regional Offices, namely Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Goa, Hyderabad, Trivandrum and Varanasi with the Zonal Offices on 1st July, 2022. Consequent upon this restructuring, at present ICCR has its Zonal, Sub-Zonal and other offices only in 11 cities of the country instead of 18. This means that the work hitherto being carried out by the Regional Offices is now being carried out by Zonal Offices. While appreciating the restructuring of ICCR, the Committee further wish that the same will bring in the much required efficiency and effectiveness in ICCR's operations in India and ensure optimum utilization of the funds allocated.

### **Reply of the Government**

The appreciation of Standing Committee on External Affairs that it is satisfied with efforts made by ICCR in the direction of restructuring of its Regional Offices from 18 to 11 under Zonal System, is kindly taken on record.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 52)**

The Committee observe that ICCR's Cultural Centres are the principal instrument of India's institutional outreach. As of now, ICCR is operating 37 Indian Cultural Centres (ICCs) abroad and is in the process of opening a new centre in Paris during the upcoming financial year. The Committee further understand that the property acquired at U-Street in 2013 to set up ICCs in Washington is yet to be utilized due to structural challenges in the building and delay during COVID period. Recognizing that public and cultural diplomacy are

among the key tools in the formulation and implementation of India's foreign policy, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should undertake a review of all its Cultural Centres to rationalize them with a view to identifying countries where we need to have a greater presence and requirement for increased linkages by establishing such centre. The Committee also hope that the new centre in Paris is opened as per timelines and the one at Washington too is made functional at the earliest.

### **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry through its Mission in Paris is progressing to operationalize the Cultural Centre in Paris, with over 94% work completion. Ministry acknowledges Standing Committee recommendation on reviewing & rationalizing presence of Cultural Centres across the world while exploring feasibility & impact of increased linkages through cultural centres.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 54)**

The Committee note that the ICCR has executed a new process for admission of Foreign National on scholarship slots and the same has helped ICCR in improving its academic and intellectual activities. It has been informed that the "A2A" (Admissions to Alumni) Portal was developed in 2018 to digitize various scholarship schemes administered by ICCR for foreign students. The Committee further understand that the portal consists of all relevant information including the details of State and Central Universities/Institutes, availability of various academic courses, guidelines, eligibility criteria, availability of hostels, etc., that help foreign students in making a decision while applying to Universities/Institutes. The Committee are happy that this portal has led to expeditious, timebound and accountable method of admissions and brought in transparency to a very large scholarship programme offered by our country. However, the Committee note with concern that despite the introduction of A2A portal which digitized the entire admission process, a large number of scholarship slots are left unutilized over the years. Since these scholarships are meant to create goodwill about India and project to the world what India has to offer in the cultural and academic fields, it is not a discerning trend that the slots are not fully taken. The Committee, therefore desire that an independent study be made before the next academic intake to understand the reasons for the same so that improvement in the effectiveness of the scholarship programme is brought in without further delay.

## **Reply of the Government**

It is mentioned that to address the issue of less utilization of slots, the following steps have been undertaken:-

- (i) Admission process has been digitized. Applications are now received online on Admission to Alumni (A2A) Scholarship portal. It gives easy and transparent access to the aspirants for availing ICCR scholarships.
- (ii) Students can now apply in five Universities/Institutes instead of three Universities/Institutes.
- (iii) Governing Body has approved to and fro air fare to all the students in General Scholarships Scheme (GSS) from 2022-23. (Earlier air fare was provided to the students of a few countries under GSS)
- (iv) Any number of students can apply on the portal.

Above steps have not only led to transparency and increased utilization of slots but also the quality of students has improved. The slots utilization of scholarship for last three years is given below: -

| Sl. | Academic Year | Total Slots offered | Utilization       |
|-----|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1   | 2020-21       | 3851                | 2059              |
| 2   | 2021-22       | 3822                | 2837              |
| 3   | 2022-23       | 3878                | 3198 (acceptance) |

It could be seen from the above chart that with the implementation of above steps, the utilization of slots has been steadily increasing.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 55)**

The Committee note that the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) work in close coordination with MEA to address issues that are at the top of the foreign policy agenda and in making dialogues and discussions of MEA more policy effective and impactful. To fulfill its mandated objectives, ICWA has been

undertaking a range of activities, which include research, publications, dialogues with international partners, holding of conferences, seminars, lectures, discussions and undertaking outreach activities. The Committee note that in the last 3 years, since April 2020, ICWA has organized a total of 175 International and National Seminars/Bilateral dialogues/Lectures/ Panel discussions and book discussions in online, physical and hybrid mode. The publications of ICWA include Sapru House Papers, issue briefs, view points, special reports, journals and books. In the last three years the Council has published 204 issue briefs, 149 view points, and 8 special reports. As regards the allocation of funds, the Committee find that in the FY 2023-24, a budgetary allocation of Rs. 14.02 crore has been made for ICWA which is lower than the RE 2022-23 of Rs. 14.24 crore. The Ministry has stated in this regard that the slightly reduced allocation has been on account of expenditure trends. As regards the utilization trends, the Committee note that in 2019-20, ICWA had managed complete utilization of funds and in the next two years, due to COVID-19 pandemic, the actual spending had shown a decline. In FY 22-23, up to December 2022, the actual expenditure is Rs. 9.95 crore which is about 71% of the RE allocation. The Committee hope that the ICWA may be able to reach the pre COVID standards in utilization of funds as the activities of ICWA are in full steam now. The Committee also desire ICWA to play a more effective role in policy formulations of the Government while continuing focused studies on specific areas of Government's priorities.

### **Reply of the Government**

1. ICWA would work towards complete utilization of the allocated budget.
2. The Council consistently makes an effort to contribute to policy formulation through its various activities such as research work, publication, dialogue & communication, and interface with policy-makers. In consonance with government priorities, the Council in the preceding years has, for instance, worked on themes such as SCO, G20, Indo-Pacific, Ukraine, Afghanistan etc.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 56)**



The Committee understand that Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) is a think tank specializing in international economic relations and development cooperation. RIS conducts in-depth research on multilateral issues, primarily on economic, social, scientific and technological matters. It brings out evidence-based policy research studies, policy briefs and research papers on emerging issues and organize a wide range of events within the country and abroad under the overall guidance and support of the Ministry of External Affairs. In the FY 2022-23 , an outlay of Rs. 14.59 crore was earmarked for RIS and under BE 2023- 24 the allocation is Rs. 16.64 crore which is a substantial increase of 14.05% from last year's budget. The enhanced allocation, as the Committee understand is on account of some special tasks RIS is going to undertake during India's Presidency of G20. Accordingly, RIS is expected to focus on India's development cooperation with Global South and Triangular Cooperation and utilize its network of national and global partner institutions to ensure that the priorities set by India during its G20 Presidency are carried forward beyond the Indian Presidency. The Committee are happy to see that RIS has been ensuring optimum utilization of funds during FY 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2022-23. In view of their track record of utilization of funds and also of their network of partner institutions across the world, the Committee hope that India's core interests are upheld during its G20 Presidency by RIS. Since the Government of India seeks advise from RIS on matters pertaining to multilateral economic and social issues from time to time, the Committee desire that the specialized research programme of RIS should be strengthened further and integrated within the Government system. They also desire RIS to widen its outreach to vigorously promote India's narrative on areas of critical importance to the country in the evolving world where counter narratives need to be handled effectively through evidence-based research.

### **Reply of the Government**

RIS is undertaking several steps to strengthen its specialized research programme and integrate its research inputs with India's foreign policy objectives.

Some examples of steps taken in this regard are:

- i. Ministry enhanced the annual grant in aid to RIS during the current financial year to meet the requirements of the institution and strengthen its policy research programme, including organization of meetings, dialogues and

conferences and evidence-based research programme with the help of subject experts and scholars and its own expanded Faculty.

- ii. Ministry has assigned the task of organizing the G-20 Lecture Series to RIS under its University Connect Programme. It would also result in forging closer partnership of the institution with their faculty and scholars and strengthen its policy research programme to have a much wider national perspective on critical issues facing the country.
- iii. MEA has approved five 2-week ITEC programmes for 30 participants from ITEC partner countries proposed by RIS. In addition, RIS has been advised to organize an ITEC programme in French language on South South Cooperation. RIS has also been advised to conduct an Executive Level ITEC programme for senior officials from ITEC partner countries of the level of JS and above to familiarize them about India's flagship programmes. These capacity building programmes are bound to deepen closer policy research linkages of RIS with these countries, their think tanks and other institutions and widen the spectrum of its policy research perspectives on trade and economic issues confronting the Global South.
- iv. Similarly, MEA had assigned the task of conducting the IBSA Fellowship Programme at RIS. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Round of the Fellowship programme is now underway. It is bound to strengthen its engagement with research scholars of IBSA partner countries and contribute to the strengthening of the IBSA process.

RIS is also conducting policy research studies for the Department of Science & Technology through its Science Diplomacy programme, Ministry of Agriculture for knowledge partnership on G-20 issues, IN-SPACE for providing consultancy service for "Strategy for Expanding India's Space Sector Footprint Globally", Ministry of Ayush through the Forum for Traditional Medicines to promote linkages with external partners in this field, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways with the establishment of its Centre for Maritime Economy and Connectivity to ensure an integrated development of this sector in the country, and the Department of Youth Affairs to organize "Brainstorming Sessions" for Y20 engagement group under the overall framework of G20.

RIS has also intensified its policy research on issues impacting the core interests of India with the engagement of a wide range of policy and subject experts from

within the country and abroad and its research studies on emerging issues are being widely disseminated through the print and electronic media to effectively put forward India's standpoint on important issues in the backdrop of growing Western narrative that their ideas, strategies and frameworks for social and economic development of developing countries are the best way forward for integrated global development.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 57)**

The Committee note that the Policy Planning and Research (PP&R) Division of MEA collaborates with its network of autonomous bodies like ICWA and RIS; think tanks and academic institutions for the purpose of policy planning and research in foreign affairs and for creating policy products and policy recommendations. Policy formulation, whether it is foreign policy or domestic, economic or social policy, depends on research inputs from a range of actors. The Committee, however, find that not much stress has been laid on research in the country. The Committee, therefore, desire that the MEA should take the lead in developing research culture through its PP&R Division, create more think tanks and directly interact with universities in the country. The current interaction and collaboration with think tanks and universities should also be scaled up exponentially with proper assessment of funding requirement for research and provisioning of adequate Budgetary Allocation for the same.

### **Reply of the Government**

Recommendation is noted for compliance. PP&R Division is working towards greater collaboration with think tanks and universities in the country.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 58)**

The Committee desire that the Ministry should submit to them a list of think-tanks across India, along with a programme of engagement to be undertaken with them. Focus areas may also include efforts to identify and nurture emerging think-tanks in North Eastern India with the aim of improving implementation of Government of India's Act East Policy. Outreach may also be made to institutions

that specialize in international legal issues. The steps taken and progress made in this regard may be communicated to the Committee within three months.

### **Reply of the Government**

Some of the recent and established engagements of the PP&R Division with Think Tanks across the country are tabulated below. The Division would continue to engage and support events by Think Tanks in a demand-driven and outcome-oriented approach.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| India-Canada Track 1.5 Dialogue   | Gateway House: Indian Council of Global Relations |
| Asia Economic Dialogue  | Pune International Centre                         |
| Kolkata-Dhaka Dialogue 2021   | Bandhan Konnagar                                  |
| Virtual symposium on “BIMSTEC: A Vehicle for Growth and Development”  | Institute of Social & Cultural Studies, Kolkata   |
| Webinar on ‘Blockchain Technology’ (Advance payment)  | Policy 4.0 Research Foundation                    |
| Indian Ocean Conference   | India Foundation                                  |
| Raisina Dialogue  | Observer Research Foundation                      |
| Global Technology Summit  | Carnegie Endowment for International Peace        |
| Indo-US Forum   | Ananta Aspen Centre                               |
| ‘Act East to Indo-Pacific: Role of northeast Indian States in connecting the connectivities’ (Imphal Dialouge-200 | Asian Confluence, Shillong, Meghalaya             |
| NADI Dialogue on theme ‘Celebrating our Shared Riverine Heritage’ 2022  | Asian Confluence, Shillong, Meghalaya             |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| India-Canada Track 1.5 Dialogue  | Gateway House: Indian Council of Global Relations |
| India-EU Track 1.5 Dialogue  | Ananta Aspen Centre                               |
| India-Japan Track 1.5 Dialogue   | Delhi Policy Group                                |
| India-Korea Track 1.5 Dialogue   | Ananta Aspen Centre                               |
| Raisina Forum for Future of Diplomacy  | Observer Research Foundation                      |
| Study on Connectivity Projects between the North-East India and Neighbouring Countries | NEDFi, Guwahati                                   |
| India-France Track 1.5 Dialogue  | Gateway House                                     |
| Dialogue on “Northeast India and Bay of Bengal in the Indo-Pacific” 2023               | Asian Confluence, Shillong, Meghalaya             |

With an effort to identify and nurture emerging think tanks in North Eastern India as recommended by the esteemed Committee, the recent initiatives undertaken by the Division are placed below. Such efforts would continue to be strengthened going forward.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Study on Connectivity Projects between the North-East India and Neighbouring Countries | NEDFi, Guwahati                                 |
| Kolkata-Dhaka Dialogue 2021  | Bandhan Konnagar                                |
| Virtual symposium on “BIMSTEC: A Vehicle for Growth and Development”                   | Institute of Social & Cultural Studies, Kolkata |

|  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Study on Connectivity Projects between the North-East India and Neighbouring Countries                             | NEDFi, Guwahati                       |
| ‘Act East to Indo-Pacific: Role of northeast Indian States in connecting the connectivities’ (Imphal Dialouge- 200 | Asian Confluence, Shillong, Meghalaya |
| NADI Dialogue on theme ‘Celebrating our Shared Riverine Heritage’ 2022   | Asian Confluence, Shillong, Meghalaya |
| Dialogue on “Northeast India and Bay of Bengal in the Indo-Pacific” 2023   | Asian Confluence, Shillong, Meghalaya |

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 59)**

The Committee desire that the Ministry should maintain closer interaction and more collaboration with the Policy Planning Divisions of other countries, particularly developed countries and continuous efforts for absorption of the outcome of such collaborations in India’s foreign policy making/goals, may be made. As the PP&R Division is also our window for interaction with the Policy Planning Divisions of other countries, it should be reinforced with sufficient manpower and adequate resources.

### **Reply of the Government**

Recommendation noted for compliance. In April-June 2023, The Policy Planning Division has undertaken 4 Policy Planning Dialogues: with Germany, EU, Israel and Vietnam, and would soon participate in the QUAD Policy Planning Dialogue, followed by Policy Planning Dialogue with Armenia, Republic of Korea, etc.

Recommendation noted for compliance.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 61)**

The Committee also desire that the MEA should prepare a programme of engagement with universities across the country including through jan bhagidari. The objective of such an engagement should be twofold: one to broad base the making of the Indian foreign policy; and two, to disseminate Indian foreign policy narratives and priorities into the academia. The progress made in this regard may be communicated to the Committee within three months.

### **Reply of the Government**

Since 2010, XPD Division of the Ministry has been organizing its prestigious Distinguished Lecture Series to address the need to have a regular dialogue with major academic institutions in India and thereby improve the quality of discourse on subjects related to Indian foreign policy. Under this initiative, retired officers of the MEA interact with students from various universities/institutions on foreign policy related issues on a regular basis.

As part of celebrations of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, MEA successfully organized a special lecture series - India@75: Videsh Niti Distinguished Lecture Series, between January 2022 and March 2023. Under this special initiative, lectures on foreign policy by retired Indian diplomats were organized in 75 Universities/institutions spread across India, with the objective of demystifying foreign policy for the youth. The initiative covered a large number of Central/State Universities and institutions including the IITs, IIMs, NITs, NLUs etc.

As part of India's G-20 Presidency, MEA, through RIS, is organizing the G-20 University Connect- a wide range of national seminars in collaboration with 75 Universities and academic institutions across the country- to generate greater awareness on foreign policy issues. These seminars are expected to continue until the end of India's G-20 Presidency in 2023.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 63)**

The Committee note that various Departments within the MEA communicate with other Ministries, Departments and Institutions of the Central and State Governments regarding issues relating to India's foreign relations. The Committee feel that being the principal Ministry in charge of India's Foreign policy, the Ministry should establish an institutional mechanism for consultation and coordination with all other relevant Ministries, Departments and Institutions

and strengthen the mechanism of Inter-Ministerial Meetings for effective management of our foreign affairs.

### **Reply of the Government**

Ministry deeply appreciates the recommendation of the Committee and has to inform that the Parliament & Coordination Division of the Ministry of External Affairs is the nodal Division for coordination related issues within and outside the Ministry including with the Ministries of the Union Government, State Governments, Autonomous Institutions and private entities. In addition, the specialized divisions like UNES for Economic and Social issues of UN related subject matters; UNP for Political and Security Council related issues of United Nations; ED Division for economic related engagements; MER Division for multilateral economic issues, CPV Division for consular and visa issues; PP&R Division for Public Policy & Research issues on Foreign Policy, are designated to do coordination on specialized topics. A wide range of coordination within the Government is carried out through e-Samiksha portal which deals with issues requiring regular updates. The Joint Secretary (Parliament & Coordination) is the focal point for MEA on coordination related issues.

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## **CHAPTER-III**

### **OBSERVATION/RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH THE COMMITTEE DO NOT DESIRE TO PURSUE IN VIEW OF THE REPLIES OF THE GOVERNMENT**

#### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 31)**

The Committee note that the 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention, organised from 8-10 January 2023 in the physical format after a gap of four years has witnessed enthusiastic participation of more than 3500 overseas Indians from about 70 countries. The participants included more than 800 businessmen, 500 professionals and a sizeable number of unskilled workers. Moreover, for the first time, a delegation of over 200 students and 100 blue collar workers from companies in the UAE participated in the said Convention. The exact number of the most vulnerable section of migrant workers who participated in PBD has not been disclosed. Similarly, the Committee also note that the number of blue collar workers who participated in the Convention is, however, far too little, i.e., a mere 2.86 % of the total and confined to workers from the UAE only. It has always been the desire of the Committee to see the maximum participation of the most vulnerable sections of the Indian Diaspora from various countries in the PBD events. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to ensure the participation of skilled/unskilled/blue collar Indians workers, in greater number, in the upcoming PBD celebrations and events. The feasibility of holding PBD celebrations and events annually may also be explored as it would also contribute to promotion of trade, investment and tourism in the country.

#### **Reply of the Government**

The Ministry makes efforts to encourage the participation of all sections of Indian diaspora, including the unskilled and blue collar workers, in the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Conventions. However, participation of blue collar workers is limited by many factors, including taking time out of their working commitments and monetary factor. The Committee would appreciate that in most cases, the employer or diaspora association will have to sponsor the visit of the worker to India to participate in the Convention. In context of these limitations, participation of 100 blue collar workers from UAE is a significant achievement. Blue-collar workers were also part of diaspora participation from other Gulf countries in 17<sup>th</sup> PBD Convention, although not at same scale as from UAE.

It was Ministry's considered decision to revise the format of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention in 2015 to celebrate Pravasi Bharatiya Divas once every two years and to hold theme-based PBD Conferences during the intervening period with participation from overseas diaspora experts, policymakers, and stakeholders

## **CHAPTER- IV**

### **OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPECT OF WHICH FINAL REPLIES OF THE GOVERNMENT HAVE NOT BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE COMMITTEE**

#### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 16)**

The Committee note that an amount of Rs 3528.85 crore has been allocated in the BE 2023-24 under the Head 'Embassies and Missions' which is even lesser than the BE 2022-23 outlay of Rs. 3769.06 crore. The Ministry has stated that the allocated funds seem to be adequate to ensure the smooth operation of Missions and Posts abroad. The Committee have also been apprised those proposals for expanding India's diplomatic presence in important partner countries including in the neighbourhood, the Latin Americas and Caribbean region, the Pacific Island region and Europe are under process. In the opinion of the Committee, opening of resident Indian Missions in these countries is in line with the broad foreign policy vision of the Government to maximise India's presence abroad in the most optimal manner and to achieve our foreign policy objective of building a conducive environment for India's growth and development through partnerships with friendly countries. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to expedite the process involving logistics, deployment, and creation of infrastructure as well as coordination and liaison with the host Governments so that resident Indian Missions are opened in these countries at the earliest.

#### **Reply of the Government**

The recommendation of the Standing Committee is duly noted. The scope and depth of the bilateral relations with the countries where India does not have a resident Mission or Post are regularly reviewed, and Mission/Post are opened in these countries accordingly.

#### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 17)**

The Committee note that 181 Indian Missions/Posts have so far been integrated into the Passport Seva Programme through the Global Passport Seva Project (GPSP). This integration, the Committee understand, will enable centralised passport issuance for our citizens in India and Diaspora abroad. The Committee desire that the process of integration of the remaining Missions/posts in to the GPSP applications should be completed at the earliest for smooth, expeditious and

transparent delivery of passport services. The status of integration may be communicated to the Committee within three months.

### **Reply of the Government**

The total number of Indian Missions/Posts integrated into the PSP through GPSP is 181. This covers practically all our Missions/Posts except few countries striven by civil strife, newly opened Missions/Posts etc.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 53)**

The Committee also note that there are 11 operational Chairs of ICCR on different subjects in the universities in Croatia, Mauritius, Jamaica, Tajikistan, Papua and Guinea, Cambodia, Poland, Bangladesh, Iceland and UK. In addition to them, 17 Chairs have already been established and are in the process of being operationalized. Further, the proposals for setting up of 09 more Chairs are under consideration. The Committee, while according top priority and importance to the task of projecting cultural heritage of India through ICCR, recommend that a review of the functioning of the academic chairs instituted by ICCR in foreign universities may be done with a view to assessing their achievements against the objectives of instituting them. The Committee may be apprised of the findings of such a review within three months of the presentation of this Report.

### **Reply of the Government**

The observations/ recommendations of the committee with regard to establishment of Chairs abroad are noted.

## **CHAPTER-V**

### **OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPECT OF WHICH FINAL REPLIES OF THE GOVERNMENT ARE STILL AWAITED**

#### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 60)**

The Committee lay great emphasis on the role of research inputs on foreign policy as well as on economic, social, scientific and technological issues, etc. The Committee understand that apart from ICWA and RIS, the Ministry is collaborating with research institutes, think tanks and has also started outreach to universities through its Policy Planning Division. In the opinion of the Committee, research in the field of funding requirement, allocation and spending is one area the MEA needs to work upon. The global trends in this regard would enable the Ministry to make a realistic assessment of our present needs and what we lacked. The Committee are also of the view that universities possessing the academic expertise and talent are most suited to carry out research in this field and desire that the Ministry should move towards direct interaction with universities and provide appropriate funding for research. For this purpose, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should open/create a new Budget Head for research funding to universities in the country.

#### **Reply of the Government**

Recommendation noted for compliance.

### **Recommendation (Sl. No. 62)**

The Committee observe that under the Ministry's Flagship Conference, the Raisina Dialogue, there has been increase in high level foreign participation year on year. Besides the participation of global policy makers including heads of States, Cabinet Ministers and local Government officials, the Dialogue also welcomes major private sector executives as well as members of the media and academia. The Committee feel that the Raisina Dialogue is an appropriate forum for debate, dialogue and sharing of ideas between the domestic strategic community and international participants and desire that the scale and scope of the Conference should be expanded. The outcome of conferences and dialogues held and publications brought out may be utilized by the Ministry in further policy formulation.

### **Reply of the Government**

Recommendation noted for compliance.

**NEW DELHI**  
**4 December, 2023**  
***13 Agrahayana, 1945 (Saka)***

**P.P. CHAUDHARY,**  
***Chairperson,***  
***Committee on External Affairs***

**MINUTES OF THE SEVENTH SITTING OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL  
AFFAIRS (2022-23) HELD ON 4 DECEMBER, 2023**

The Committee sat on Monday, 4 December, 2023 from 1500 hrs. to 1515 hrs. in Committee Room No. '1', Parliament House Annexe, Extension Building, New Delhi.

**PRESENT**

**1. Shri P.P. Chaudhary, Chairperson**

**Lok Sabha**

2. Shri Dileshwar Kamait
3. Smt. Preneet Kaur
4. Smt. Poonam Pramod Mahajan
5. Shri P. C. Mohan
6. Smt. Queen Oja
7. Shri K.C. Patel
8. Smt. Navneet Ravi Rana
9. Shri Manne Srinivas Reddy
10. Dr. Harsh Vardhan

**Rajya Sabha**

11. Shri Anil Desai
12. Shri Abdul Wahab
13. Shri Prakash Javadekar
14. Dr. Ashok Kumar Mittal

**Secretariat**

- |    |                          |   |                  |
|----|--------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. | Dr. Ram Raj Rai          | - | Joint Secretary  |
| 2. | Smt. Reena Gopalakrishna | - | Director         |
| 3. | Ms. K. Muanniang Tunglut | - | Deputy Secretary |
| 4. | Ms. Maya Menon           | - | Under Secretary  |

2. At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the Members to the Sitting of the Committee.
3. The Committee took up for consideration the draft Report on Action Taken by the Government on the Observations /Recommendations contained in the Twentieth Report of the Committee on Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2023-24.
4. The Chairperson invited the Members to offer their suggestions, if any, for incorporation in the draft Report. The Members suggested some minor modifications. The Committee adopted the draft Report with these minor modifications.
5. The Committee then authorized the Chairperson to finalize the Action Taken Report incorporating the suggestions made by the Members and present the same to Parliament.

*The Committee then adjourned.*



**(Vide Para 4 of Introduction of Report)**

**ANALYSIS OF ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT ON THE OBSERVATIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THE TWENTIETH REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (17<sup>TH</sup> LOK SABHA)**

- (i) Total Number of Recommendations**
- (ii) Observations/Recommendations which have been accepted by the Government.**

Recommendation Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 63.

**Total-57**

**Percentage: 90.48 %**

- (iii) Observations/Recommendations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the Government's replies.**

Recommendation No. 31

**Total- 01**

**Percentage: 1.59%**

- (iv) Observations/Recommendations in respect of which replies of Government have not been accepted by the Committee and require reiteration.**

Recommendation Nos. 16, 17 and 53

**Total-03**

**Percentage: 4.76 %**

- (v) Observation/Recommendation in respect of which final reply of Government is still awaited.**

Recommendation Nos. 60 and 62.

**Total- 02**

**Percentage: 3.17%**