

07

**COMMITTEE
ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(2024-25)**

EIGHTEENTH LOK SABHA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

[Action Taken by the Government on the observations/recommendations contained in the Fourth Report of the Committee on the subject 'Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2024-25']

SEVENTH REPORT



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

August, 2025/Shravana, 1947

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Presented to Lok Sabha on 07 August, 2025
Laid on the Table of Rajya Sabha on 07 August 2025



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

August, 2025/Shravana, 1947

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COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2024-25)

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Chairperson

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2. Smt. D. K. Aruna
3. Shri Vijay Baghel
4. Shri Mitesh Patel Bakabhai
5. Shri Abhishek Banerjee
6. Shri Arun Govil
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Secretariat

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|-----------------|
| 1. | Shri Anjani Kumar | — | Joint Secretary |
| 2. | Smt. Reena Gopalakrishnan | — | Director |
| 3. | Ms. Maya Menon | — | Under Secretary |

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Committee on External Affairs (2024-25) having been authorized by the Committee to submit the Report on their behalf, present this Seventh Report (18th Lok Sabha) on action taken by the Government on the Observations /Recommendations contained in the Fourth Report of the Committee on Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2024-25.

2. The Fourth Report was presented to the Lok Sabha on 03 February 2025 and laid on the Table of the Rajya Sabha on 18 December, 2024. The Action Taken Replies of the Government on all the Observations/Recommendations contained in the Report were received on 04 June, 2025 (English Version) and 16 June, 2025 (Hindi Version).

3. The Committee considered and adopted this Action Taken Report at their Sitting held on 04 August, 2025. 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 Fourth Report of the Committee on External Affairs is given at Appendix-II.

NEW DELHI

07 August, 2025

16 Shravana, 1947 (Saka)

**Dr. Shashi Tharoor,
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 Fourth Report on the subject 'Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2024-25' which was presented to the Lok Sabha on 30 January, 2025 and laid on the Table of the Rajya Sabha on 18 December, 2024.

2. The Action Taken Notes have been received from the Ministry of External Affairs on all the 48 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, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46 and 48.

Total- 40

Chapter-II

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

Recommendation No. 22

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. 20, 21, 31, 32, 37 and 47

Total- 6

Chapter-IV

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

Recommendation No. 26

**Total- 1
Chapter-V**

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.

Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024

(Recommendation No. 20)

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

“Keeping in view the contemporary global migration dynamics and the needs of Indian citizens, the Committee has over the years underscored the pressing need for a comprehensive legislative overhaul to replace the outdated provisions of the Emigration Act 1983. After much delay, the Ministry is seriously considering enacting a new law tentatively titled ‘Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024’. The Ministry has further informed the Committee that the proposed draft is under consultation with line Ministries and will, thereafter, be put up for public consultations. The Committee desire that it should be consulted on the salient features of the Bill and the enactment of a revised act reflecting changed global migration realities should be done in a time bound manner i.e. not later than one year. An update about the progress made in this regard may be submitted to the Committee within three months.

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

“The proposed ‘Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024 seeks to replace the existing Emigration Act, 1983 with an aim of accessing a global workplace for citizens of India by developing a mechanism for safe, legal, orderly and regular mobility for employment and stay abroad through processes provided therein and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. The draft Bill 2024 has been revised in consultations with the relevant authorities, the same is under internal consultations. Thereafter, it will be put for public consultations for 30 days, which will be followed up, by Inter-Ministerial consultations with the relevant line ministries along with the Draft Cabinet Note on the revised draft. The Committee’s observations are duly noted.”

7. The Committee, over the years, in their various reports, have underscored the pressing need for a comprehensive legislative overhaul of the outdated provisions of the Emigration Act 1983. The Committee note that after much delay, the Ministry is now seriously considering enacting a new law tentatively titled ‘Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024. In their original Report, the Committee had desired that they be consulted on the salient features of the Bill and the enactment of a revised act reflecting changed global migration realities in a time bound manner i.e. not later than one year. The Committee, however, note that despite exhorting the need to fast track the legislative reforms and even after a passage of over six months since the presentation of the Report, the draft Bill is still up for internal consultation only and is yet to be put up for public consultation. The Committee are of the considered view that there has been enough delay in the process. The Committee, therefore, while reiterating their earlier recommendation urge upon the Ministry to expedite necessary processes in respect of the enactment to ensure timely implementation of the proposed legislative reforms.

Nalanda University
(Recommendation No. 21)

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

The Committee acknowledge the Government of India's commitment to reviving the ancient seat of learning through the establishment of Nalanda University under the Nalanda University Act, 2010. Despite significant budgetary allocations and the completion of the state-of-the-art Net-Zero sustainable green campus spanning 455 acres, the Committee are concerned to note that the University's establishment has been marred by delays and operational challenges. Although the construction has progressed and the campus was inaugurated in June 2024, delays caused by logistical bottlenecks, the COVID-19 pandemic related disruptions, and a lack of skilled manpower have resulted in significant time overruns.

Despite its mandate under the East Asia Summit framework to be a collaborative global enterprise, the Committee find that financial support from member states and other international donors has been sporadic and insufficient. The Committee recommend that the Ministry of External Affairs, in concert with the Ministry of Education and the Nalanda University Governing Board, should establish a more rigorous framework of oversight to expedite the resolution of pending tasks. Diplomatic channels must be strategically leveraged to secure greater financial and institutional support from East Asia Summit member states and other international partners, commensurate with the University's global mandate. The Committee may also be kept informed about the progress made in operationalization of Nalanda University on a regular basis.

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

"The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Nalanda University continue to take necessary steps to implement the Hon'ble Committee's recommendations

for overcoming challenges in the establishment of Nalanda University. On the establishment of a rigorous oversight framework to address delays and operational challenges, it is submitted that the University has several institutional mechanisms, as per the Act and relevant Statutes, including the Building and Works Committee, the Finance Committee, the Executive Committee, and the Academic Council that conduct regular reviews to oversee progress in infrastructure development, faculty recruitment, academic program expansion, and research initiatives. The delays in the project have been significantly minimized, and the construction work of the University is now in its final stages. To leverage diplomatic channels for greater financial and institutional support, the Nalanda University is in regular contact with various universities of East Asia Summit (EAS) member states, including Japan, South Korea, ASEAN nations, and Australia. Bilateral meetings with ambassadors and diplomats are conducted to foster partnerships, financial contributions, and collaborative academic programs. The University has hosted campus visits by many diplomats of EAS Countries to enhance visibility and understanding. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have been signed with key stakeholders to formalize institutional collaborations. As on date there are 18 participating countries, including India who have signed MoU with the Nalanda University. These 18 Participating Countries are Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. Apart from this, bilateral and multilateral MoUs are in place with various other countries and universities/institutions. As part of the Ministry's efforts to strengthen international engagement, the External Affairs Minister extended Ministry's invitations to diplomats from all Heads of Missions and senior diplomats from the 18 participating countries to attend the inauguration of the new Net Zero Campus of Nalanda University by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on 19 June, 2025."

10. Concerned about the constant delays and operational challenges being faced in the establishment of Nalanda University, the Committee had recommended that the Ministry of External Affairs, in concert with the Ministry of Education and the Nalanda University Governing Board, establish a more rigorous framework of oversight to expedite the resolution of pending tasks. The Committee had further recommended that diplomatic channels be strategically leveraged to secure greater financial and institutional support from East Asia Summit member states and other international partners, commensurate with the University's global mandate. In response the Ministry

have submitted that the University has several institutional mechanisms as per the Act and relevant Statutes, that conduct regular reviews to oversee the progress in infrastructure development, faculty recruitment, academic programme expansion, and research initiatives whereby the delays in the project are significantly minimized, and the construction work of the University is now in its final stages. The Ministry have further cited the various steps taken by them to leverage diplomatic channels for greater financial and institutional support. Considering the fact that the Nalanda University is an institution of national importance, the Committee, while being appreciative of the efforts taken by the Ministry to address the concerns raised by them, feel that there is a need to fast track the action so that the global reputation associated with this great institution is restored. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to coordinate with the Ministry of Education and the Nalanda University Administration and make concerted efforts to smooth over the bureaucratic hurdles for timely completion of the project.

Aid to African Countries

(Recommendation No. 31)

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

After a careful scrutiny of the budgetary allocation under the Head 'Aid to African countries', the Committee observe that the allocation has remained constant at Rs. 250 crore during the last two fiscal years. However, in the current fiscal, the allocation has been reduced to Rs. 200 crore from Rs 250 crore in 2023-24. The basis for reduction under this Head is understood to have stemmed from completion of e-VBAB Network Project by the end of 2024. The Ministry's assertion that Africa is a key foreign policy priority and our engagement has been intensifying, albeit the budgetary allocation speaks otherwise. It is observed that India's partnership with the African countries is

based on four pillars- development partnership, defence and maritime security, trade and investment and people to people ties. The three India Africa Forum Summits (IAFS-I, II and III) in 2008, 2011 and 2015 have further reinforced development partnership with the country. The Ministry has also stated that initiatives in the field of health, education, digital infrastructure` and capacity building have been well received and appreciated by the partner countries. The Committee feel that given the imminent convening of the fourth India Africa Forum Summit in 2025, there is an urgent need to intensify our diplomatic presence in the region and strongly advocate a substantial enhancement in allocation under this Head to strengthen bilateral and multilateral engagements with African countries. The Ministry should also take all requisite steps, including seeking enhanced allocation and effective utilization of funds, for the expeditious implementation of our diverse ongoing projects in Africa.

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

“The budgetary allocation is being sought after assessing funds utilization during the previous years and based on activities proposed to be undertaken. Currently, the major expenditure incurred under the budget head “Aid to African Countries” is for the implementation of “India-Africa Maitri Scholarship Scheme” and other bilateral projects. Approximately 1000 slots are utilized at an estimated expenditure of Rs. 120.00 Cr. annually under the scholarship scheme. All the other projects undertaken (on bilateral basis) including Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) have been completed in the FY 2024-25. Engagement with Africa is priority for India. In order to enhance our diplomatic presence in African continent, India has opened 18 new missions. After opening of the 18 new Missions in Africa, India has resident Missions in 47 out of 54 African countries.

The IAFS-IV Summit is expected to be held in the CFY 2025-26. The expenditure for IAFS-IV will be incurred only after agreement of African Union for hosting of IAFS-IV. In consultation with African Union, this Ministry is exploring various options to hold the IAFS-IV at the earliest. The Ministry will continue to vigorously follow up and review the implementation of projects announced during IAFS-I, IAFS-II and IAFS-III. The following projects were completed in the FY 2024-25:

- Establishment of Entrepreneurship Development Centre (EDC) in Rwanda;
- Establishment of India-Africa Regional Materials Testing Laboratory (RMTL) in Uganda;
- Upgradation of Indo-Zimbabwe Technology Centre in Zimbabwe;

- Quick Impact Project (QIP) “Establishment of a Modern Gymnasium And Enhancement of Current Library at Command and Staff College, Duluti (Tanzania);
- Quick Impact Project (QIP) “Restoration of Roof of Masuku Government Primary School, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe and
- Supply of 01 unit of Advanced TelecobaltBhabhatron-II and Simulator IMAGIN and associated components to Malawi (Ongoing).

13. Having observed the reduction in allocation under ‘Aid to African Countries’ and with a view to intensifying India’s diplomatic presence in Africa, especially in the wake of the imminent fourth India Africa Forum Summit in 2025, the Committee had strongly advocated a substantial enhancement in the allocation under this Head. The Ministry in its action taken reply has submitted that the budgetary allocation is sought after assessing the fund utilization during the previous years and the activities proposed to be undertaken. They have further submitted that engagement with Africa is a priority and follow up and review of the implementation of projects announced during IAFS-I, IAFS-II and IAFS-III shall be vigorously followed up. While appreciating the timely completion of various projects in the region, the Committee, however, note that the Ministry is silent on Committee’s recommendation to seek substantial enhancement for allocation under the Head- ‘Aid to African Countries’. The drooping allocation under this Head is a cause of concern especially in the light of India’s attempts to enhance its footprints in African countries. In the considered opinion of the Committee, the budgetary allocation should be reflective of the importance India attaches to this Region. The Committee, therefore, reiterate their earlier recommendation and again desire that the Ministry actively look into providing adequate fiscal space and significance to Africa in our development cooperation.

Review of Ongoing Projects in African Countries

(Recommendation No. 32)

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

“It is observed that several commitments have been made during the three India Africa Forum Summits in 2008, 2011 and 2015 including capacity building, infrastructure development, digital initiatives such as e-VidyaBharati and e-ArogyaBharati Network Project (e-VBAB) for tele-education and tele-medicine. The Committee note that 22 African countries have so far joined the e-VBAB - project which was approved in 2015 to provide quality education/ medical services through web portals to the students/ doctors/paramedical staff in Africa. The Ministry has also informed that the progress in various projects under India Africa Summits is reviewed regularly in consultation with concerned Ministries and relevant stakeholders including African Union. Moreover, Research & Information Systems for Developing Countries (RIS) has agreed to carry out mid-term evaluation of e-VBAB Network Project on a pro-bono basis. The Committee are concerned at the delay in project implementation and organization of India Africa Forum Summit which has been attributed to delay in deciding the location by host countries, internal conflicts and civil unrest. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Ministry should review all ongoing projects in the African region on priority and based on such an evaluation, frame modalities for future progress in coordination with the partner countries.

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

“The Ministry has taken note of the recommendations of the Hon’ble Committee. The e-VBAB Network project was launched on 7 October 2019 as part of the commitment made by the Prime Minister during the Third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III) to offer 50,000 scholarships to African students, out of which 15,000 to be offered through online education in UG/PG/Diploma Programmes. The e-VBAB Project is a technological up-gradation and extension of the earlier

Pan Africa e-Network Project (PAeNP) implemented between 2009-2017. Twenty-two (22) African countries joined the project and 27 Indian Universities are offering more than 300 online UG/PG/Diploma/Certificate programmes in various disciplines to African students under the project. Research & Information Systems for Developing Countries (RIS) was entrusted to carry out the mid-term evaluation of e-VBAB Network Project on a pro-bono basis.”

16. During the examination of the Demand for Grants of the Ministry, the Committee had been informed that the Research & Information Systems for Developing Countries (RIS) had agreed to carry out mid-term evaluation of e-ArogyaBharati Network Project (e-VBAB) on a pro-bono basis. Concerned about the delays in the projects implementation, the Committee had recommended that the Ministry review all ongoing projects in the African region on priority and based on such an evaluation, frame modalities for future progress in coordination with the partner countries. The Committee are not happy with the reply furnished by the Ministry which seems to be a rehashing of the details already submitted to the Committee during the examination of the Demands for Grants. No concrete action appears to have been taken in the matter and the project seems to be in a limbo. The Committee are of the firm view that e-VBAB project is a key initiative showcasing India's commitment to development and capacity building in Africa. Delays to the project would erode this positive image and diminish India's influence in the region. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Ministry take immediate steps to get the programme evaluated on an urgent basis to identify areas for improvement and thereafter take appropriate corrective actions. The Committee also desire that they be kept apprised of the progress in the matter.

Comprehensive Policy on Diaspora Engagement

(Recommendation No. 37)

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

With over 32 million persons of Indian origin (PIOs) and non-resident Indians (NRIs) spread across the globe, the Committee are of the considered opinion that Diaspora represents a powerful network capable of advancing India's cultural, economic, and strategic interests. Through their economic might, strategic engagement and cultural outreach the Indian Diaspora contributes significantly to India's developmental agenda and soft power projection. It is discerned that the Ministry is exploring new initiatives and ways for active involvement of Diaspora in enhancing India's outreach and influence. The Committee emphasizes that the Indian Diaspora is a unique and valuable asset that can significantly enhance India's global influence. The potential of diaspora academia and scientists to contribute to India's educational, scientific and technological capacities and investment by the diaspora community in Indian startups and innovation also needs to be harnessed. For leveraging the full potential of the Indian Diaspora as an instrument of soft power and fostering economic, scientific and technological development in the country, the Ministry of External Affairs should adopt a proactive approach and formulate a comprehensive Diaspora Engagement Policy in consultation with other line Ministries such as Ministry of Culture, Commerce, etc.

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

"Ministry has a diaspora engagement policy framework in place, which is characterized under the rubric of 4Cs - Care, Connect, Celebrate& Contribute. The Indian diaspora is incredibly diverse, spanning across various countries, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds. Such diversity makes it difficult to formulate a single, tight and unique policy for the Indian diaspora all across the globe. If such a policy is indeed attempted to be formulated, Ministry would then not be able to address the unique needs and aspirations of the diverse sections of the Indian diaspora spread across the world. Therefore, Ministry's policies pertaining to the Indian diaspora have evolved with time on the basis of

feedback received from the latter. Ministry has also tried to update its diaspora engagement schemes based on suggestions from Indian Missions/ Posts abroad from time to time and also those from other line Ministries, as and when required. Ministry has also endeavoured to maintain an 'All-of-Government approach' while engaging with the Indian Diaspora by regularly incorporating suggestions of the wings of the Government that are involved in promoting different aspects of their work under their charge amongst the Indian Diaspora overseas. This Ministry constantly consults, collaborates and supports other Ministries of the Government of India, such as the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Law and Justice and Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship, etc., as well as the State governments, while designing and implementing schemes and programmes for the welfare and engagement of the Indian diaspora. This approach has proved to be very effective."

19. **With a view to leveraging the full potential of the Indian Diaspora as an instrument of soft power and fostering economic, scientific and technological development in the country, the Committee had recommended that the Ministry of External Affairs should adopt a proactive approach and formulate a comprehensive Diaspora Engagement Policy in consultation with other line Ministries. The Ministry in their action taken reply have submitted that the diversity of Indian diaspora makes it difficult to formulate a single, tight and unique policy for the Indian diaspora and if such a policy is formulated, Ministry would not be able to address the unique needs and aspirations of the diverse sections of the Indian diaspora spread across the world. The Committee feel that while diversity within a diaspora can present challenges in formulating a single diaspora policy, it does not inherently make it impossible. Instead, diverse populations within a diaspora can be seen as a source of strength, offering a wider range of skills, experiences, and perspectives that can be leveraged for development and other initiatives. The Committee, therefore, reiterate their earlier recommendation and urge the Ministry to bring out a policy document on Indian**

Diaspora, taking into account its diversity, in tune with their aspirations to serve as a guiding principle for deeper and wider engagement with the Diaspora community

Strategic Foreign Policy Doctrine Document

(Recommendation No. 47)

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

While the PP&R Division has undertaken commendable work in foreign policy planning, the Committee note the absence of a formalized long-term strategic doctrine. The Ministry is encouraged to develop a comprehensive Strategic Foreign Policy Doctrine Document to provide a cohesive and long-term vision for India's diplomacy. Several countries, such as the United States, Japan, Germany, United Kingdom as well as the European Union, have successfully implemented such documents to guide their foreign policy. By adopting a similar approach, India can enhance its capacity to navigate global challenges and maintain its leadership role on international platform. MEA should initiate consultations with relevant stakeholders, including experts, diplomats, policymakers and parliamentary bodies to explore the feasibility and scope of developing a grand strategy document for India's foreign policy. The Committee may be apprised of the action taken in this regard.

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

"While there is no single overarching and formalized strategic document delineating a roadmap for India's foreign policy apparatus, the underlying principles of India's foreign policy are long established and enduring. The Ministry continually assesses and refines its diplomatic stance and policies in response to evolving global challenges. India's positions on relevant issues and its interests, in the context of these principles, have been articulated through various platforms.

These principles include safeguarding India's sovereignty and security, protecting and promoting India's national interests, enabling India's domestic economic transformation, ensuring peaceful, secure and stable regional and global environment that is conducive to India's growth and development and building influence in global forums through bilateral, multilateral and regional efforts. This pragmatic and outcome-

oriented foreign policy orientation has revitalized India's traditional ties, re-energized strategic, commercial, and economic relations with new partners and re-connected India with its Diaspora abroad. It has provided a foundation for dealing with the new and fast-changing realities of the world.

22. The Committee have, over the years, in various reports, urged the Ministry to bring out a strategic document delineating a roadmap for India's foreign policy. The Committee, noting the absence of a formalized long-term strategic doctrine had urged the Ministry yet again to develop a comprehensive Strategic Foreign Policy Doctrine Document to provide a cohesive and long-term vision for India's diplomacy. In the action taken reply, the Ministry has submitted that while there is no single overarching and formalized strategic document, the underlying principles of India's foreign policy are long established and enduring. The Ministry has maintained that India's positions on relevant issues and its interests, in the context of these principles, have been articulated through various platforms and this pragmatic and outcome-oriented foreign policy orientation has revitalized India's traditional ties, re-energized strategic, commercial, and economic relations with new partners and re-connected India with its Diaspora abroad as also provided a foundation for dealing with the new and fast-changing realities of the world. The Committee are, however, of the opinion that a formalized strategic doctrine for India's foreign policy could contribute to strategic clarity and permit greater coherence in foreign policy actions. Without a clearly defined doctrine, long term goals of India's foreign policy may not be well understood by other nations particularly our neighbours. The Committee, therefore, reiterate their recommendation and urge MEA to initiate consultations with relevant stakeholders to explore the feasibility and scope of developing a grand strategy document for India's foreign policy.

CHAPTER-II

OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT

(Recommendation (Sl. No.1)

An outlay of Rs. 22154.67 crore has been provisioned for the Ministry of External Affairs during BE 2024-25, which is 23 % higher *vis-a-vis* BE 2023-24. The Ministry has informed that the enhancement in allocation was to cater to RBI mandated provisioning requirements for India's Line of Credit (LoC) to various countries. The Foreign Secretary during the Committee's deliberations has submitted that the LoC provisioning and notional expenditure of Rs. 4383.40 crore represent an accounting exercise and not a productive expenditure. Without the notional expenditure of Rs. 4383.40 crore, the productive allocation for MEA during BE 2024-25 is Rs. 17,771 crore only. Upon scrutiny of MEA's budget during the past ten years, it is observed that the percentage share of MEA's budget allocation to the GOI budget has hovered below 1%. Even though the inadequacy of funds is clearly evident, the Ministry, in written replies, have asserted that the allocated budget reflect a fair evaluation of our current international obligations, predicted spending growth and realistic assessment of our requirements.

Despite their repeated recommendations and India's rising global profile, the Committee note that the allocation being made to MEA over the years has remained sub-optimal. The Committee emphasize the need to reflect the demands of India's dynamic foreign policy environment in the MEA's budget. A robust financial commitment is not only a requisite for fulfilling India's aspirations as a global leader but also a strategic investment in safeguarding our national interests and contributing to a stable, multipolar world order. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommend a phased increase of at least 20% annually in the MEA budget over the next five years to address resource deficits and alignment with long-term goals. The Ministry of External Affairs should ensure that the imperative of adequate funding is communicated firmly and rationally to the Ministry of Finance during the upcoming budget cycle.

Reply of the Government

Ministry has been following the Hon'ble Committee's advice to take up with the Ministry of Finance, the requirement of optimum allocation of funds. The Committee has recommended a phased increase of at least 20% annually in the Ministry's budget over the next five years. In an effort towards this target, sustained engagement with the Ministry of Finance has resulted in an increased budgetary allocation to the Ministry for BE 2025-26 of Rs. 20516.61Cr. There is an increase of Rs. 2744.91 Cr i.e. 15.45% from productive BE 2024-25 i.e. BE 2024-25 minus LOC provisioning. The Ministry continues to engage with the Ministry of Finance at all levels to emphasize the importance of providing adequate budgetary allocations so that there is no shortage of funds for the Ministry in the pursuit of India's international commitments.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 2))

Observing disparities between Budget Estimates (BEs) and Revised Estimates (REs) over the years, the Committee have been recommending that adequate and timely financial allocation is essential for the functioning of the Ministry of External Affairs. India's growing stature on global arena requires consistent and predictable investments in diplomatic, economic and cultural engagements. Budgetary instability and fluctuations undermine India's credibility as a partner in bilateral and multilateral initiatives. Notwithstanding this fact, the trend of BE-RE differential persists. The Committee lay stress on the need for consistent and predictable financial allocations to MEA and recommend that the BE-RE differentials be minimized and key areas be protected from budgetary cuts. Further, MEA should work with the Ministry of Finance to create a dedicated contingency reserve fund for emergency, diplomatic or humanitarian situations.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry continually engages with the Ministry of Finance at all levels to emphasize the importance of providing adequate budgetary allocations and consistent and predictable financial allocations to MEA with minimal BE-RE differentials. Budgetary demand and allocation is a dynamic exercise aided by regular assessment of Ministry's expectation of expenditure progress in a financial year. Instruments of re-appropriation of budget, Supplementary demands etc., allow re-prioritisation, and re-allocation of funds for full and efficient allocation of budgetary resources. The Ministry's Quarterly Budget Management Meetings aid in analysis of expenditure utilization and assessment of budget resources and the useful repurposing of budgetary distribution as per Ministry's international commitments.

During FY 2024-25, the Ministry received an augmentation of Rs 3122.56 Cr in the first Supplementary and additional Rs 300 Cr in the second Supplementary. In FY 2024-25, Aid to Disaster Relief budget was augmented to Rs 63.3 Cr against the initial BE allocation of Rs 10 Cr. Further, BE allocation for FY 2025-26 under Aid to Disaster Relief has been kept at Rs 64 Cr.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 3))

In pursuance of the Committee's recommendation over the years, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) has carried out an inter-Ministerial as well as cross-country comparison of budgetary allocation for foreign affairs of different countries. The findings of the Report titled 'Analysis of Trends of MEA Budgetary Allocation' are revealing and reinforce the necessity for substantive budgetary support to MEA to meet its expanding responsibilities and advance India's global aspirations effectively. A granular analysis of the cross-country comparative budgetary allocations show that many of our global counterparts allocate higher budget to foreign affairs ministries, enabling more robust and extensive global outreach.

The Committee underscores the growing importance of the Ministry of External Affairs in addressing India's multifaceted global engagements, including diplomacy,

trade, security, cultural exchange and developmental partnerships. The Ministry is strongly urged to use this comparative empirical data on budgetary allocations to foreign affairs ministries to highlight the need for enhanced resources. A compelling case supported by cross-country statistics should be made to the Ministry of Finance so that MEA is well- equipped to navigate the dynamic global landscape. The Committee would like to be apprised of the response of the Ministry of Finance in this regard.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry put forward a compelling case to the Ministry of Finance at the FY 2024-25 RE allocation stage. As a result, Ministry received an augmentation of Rs 3122.56 in the first Supplementary and additional Rs 300 Cr in the second Supplementary. Sustained engagement with the Ministry of Finance has resulted in an increased budgetary allocation to the Ministry for BE 2025-26 of Rs. 20516.61Cr. There is an increase of Rs. 2744.91 Cr i.e. 15.45% from productive BE 2024-25 i.e. BE 2024-25 minus LOC provisioning. Ministry accords utmost priority to effective budgetary allocation and resource prioritization. The Ministry continues to hold extensive discussions with Ministry of Finance at all stages of the budgetary cycle to convince and impress upon the need for judicious allocation of funds, within the overall constraints of Government finances.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 4)

In addition to cross-country comparison, RIS Report titled 'Analysis of Trends of MEA Budgetary Allocation' contains data on inter-ministerial budgetary allocation across the GOI. With a ranking of 18th, MEA has been categorized as a Ministry with middle-sized allocation of resources amongst sample Ministries/Departments. The Committee note that the reason for higher allocation to a Ministry is determined by its potential for asset creation. The Committee are of the considered opinion that MEA is underrepresented in resource allocation. The MEA operates at the intersection of multiple sectors such as trade, technology, education, defence, culture and so on. Hence, enhanced budgetary allocation to MEA can amplify India's ability to coordinate inter-Ministerial efforts and strengthen international partnerships. Recognizing that MEA plays a pivotal role in advancing India's interests globally, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should leverage this statistics on inter-ministerial budgetary allocation across the GOI to make a strong case for increased funding in BE 2025-26.

Reply of the Government

In line with the Hon'ble Committee's recommendations, Ministry made a strong case for increased funding to the Ministry of Finance for the FY 2025-26. As a result, Ministry has received BE 2025-26 of Rs. 20516.61 Cr, which is an increase of Rs. 2744.91 Cr i.e. 15.45% from productive BE 2024-25 i.e. BE 2024-25 minus LOC provisioning. Further, the Ministry had also received an augmentation of Rs 3122.56 in the first Supplementary and additional Rs 300 Cr in the second Supplementary for FY 2024-25.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 5))

The Committee is aware that the budget classifications of MEA are in terms of Revenue and Capital heads and Scheme and Non Scheme heads. While the Scheme section constitutes the Ministry's Central Sector Schemes *i.e.* towards development partnership with other countries, the Non scheme section on the other hand, caters to establishment costs, assistance to autonomous institutions, passport, emigration, welfare of Diaspora, international cooperation, etc. Out of the total budgetary allocation to MEA during 2024-25, Rs. 5667.56 and Rs. 16487.11 crores are allocated under Scheme and Non scheme sections, respectively. While both the heads are important and funding should be enhanced in both, the Committee have continuously maintained that in light of its global implication, the Scheme section should be kept immune from any budgetary cuts. The Committee, however, observe that the percentage share under the Scheme section has reduced from 42 % in 2021-22, 39 % in 2022-23, 32 % in 2023-24 to 26 % in 2024-25. The justification put forth by the Ministry for this downward trend is unconvincing. Development partnerships being central to fostering goodwill, strengthening bilateral ties and enhancing global standing as a reliable and responsible partner, the Committee strongly recommend that the Scheme section of MEA should be appropriately funded and under no circumstance be subjected to budgetary cuts during resource allocation or fiscal rationalization exercises.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry has noted the advice of Hon'ble Standing Committee regarding budgetary allocation to the Scheme section of MEA. Ministry's scheme commitments have ranged between 32-43% of the Ministry's overall budget for the last few years, reflecting steadfast prioritization of our development partnership with international partners. Ministry received an overall enhancement of Rs 3422.53 Cr in the Supplementary Demand for grants in FY 2024-25 out of which Rs 1714.45 Cr (increase of 30.25% from BE 2024-25) was fully utilized under the Scheme section. For BE 2025-26, the allocation towards the Ministry's schemes is Rs. 6750 crore, comprising 33% of overall budget. This is an increase of 19.10% (Rs. 1082 crore) over the previous year's allocation of Rs. 5667 crore, which is in alignment with foreign policy objectives as well as the Committee's recommendation to aim for 20% annual increase in budget.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 6))

Upon a careful scrutiny of the budget documents and replies furnished by the Ministry, the Committee observe a smooth and balanced pace of expenditure during each quarter of the Financial Year 2023-24. The expenditure pattern of MEA during the past three years has been 88.58%, 98.47% and 99.65%. The Committee note that in order to ensure optimum utilization of budgetary resources, expenditure is closely and regularly monitored by the Financial Advisor in consultation with Divisional Heads, including through quarterly budget management and expenditure review meetings. The Ministry has also submitted that the regular submission of data under Estimated Committed

Liabilities (ECL) in Ministry of Finance Portal has further streamlined the utilization pattern. It is satisfying to note that the plethora of initiatives and mechanisms has resulted in effective budgetary utilization during the past three years. While acknowledging the prudent and optimum utilization pattern of MEA for BE 2023-24, the Committee urge the Ministry to continue its focused approach towards sharper monitoring and expenditure management through its review meetings. The Ministry should also make use of its budgetary utilization pattern effectively to make a convincing case for enhanced budgetary allocation during RE 2024-25 as well as BE 2025-26.

Reply of the Government

Ministry has made full efforts to ensure optimum utilization of the available budgetary allocation evenly throughout the year. Budgetary demand and allocation is a dynamic exercise aided by regular assessment of Ministry's expectation of expenditure progress in a financial year. Instruments of re-appropriation of budget, Supplementary demands etc., allow re-prioritization, and re-allocation of funds for full and efficient allocation of budgetary resources. The Ministry continues to strive for more rigorous budget planning, sharper monitoring and expenditure management through its regular quarterly budget review meetings. The Ministry's Quarterly Budget Management Meetings aid in analysis of expenditure utilization and assessment of budget resources and the useful repurposing of budgetary distribution as per Ministry's international commitments.

Over the past decade, the Ministry's budget utilization, apart from the Covid year of 2021-22, has consistently crossed 95%. Most recently, for FY 2022-23 Ministry utilization was 98.30%; for FY 2023-24, utilization was 99.59% and in FY 2024-25, Ministry budget utilization was 99.84%.

The Ministry has been following the suggestion of the Hon'ble Committee to make use of budgetary utilization pattern effectively and to make a convincing case to Ministry of Finance for enhanced budgetary allocation. Sustained engagement with the Ministry of Finance has resulted in increased budgetary allocation to Ministry for BE 2025-26 of Rs. 20516.61Cr (increase of Rs. 2744.91 Cr i.e. 15.45% from productive BE 2024-25 i.e. BE 2024-25 minus LOC provisioning). Further, Ministry has received an augmentation of Rs 3122.56 in the first Supplementary and additional Rs 300 Cr in the second Supplementary for FY 2024-25.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 7)

The persistent under-staffing and gap between the sanctioned and actual cadre strength in the Ministry of External Affairs has been a source of significant concern. Against the sanctioned strength of 8697, the actual working strength of MEA is 7630. The Committee observe that vacancies in the Ministry are filled through a combination of direct recruitment through the Civil Services Examination conducted by UPSC, examinations conducted by SSC and promotion from feeder cadres as per extant Rules. The

Committee note that the Ministry has taken proactive steps, such as placing increased indents with the UPSC and SSC; implementing the 5th Cadre Review (2023-2027); reinforcing technical capacity by taking officers with domain expertise on deputation from Line Ministries and Departments of Governments and engaging Consultants with expertise in various fields.

Given India's expanding diplomatic footprint and its engagement in critical global issues, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should work closely with Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and Staff Selection Commission (SSC) to streamline recruitment cycles and reduce the time lag between the creation of posts and their fulfillment. Filling up critical vacancies in Group A, B and C posts, both at Headquarters and in Missions abroad should be prioritized. Further, the Ministry should continue to create cadre/ induct expertise from other Ministries, academia, think tanks and the private sector, as needed, to supplement its human resource with relevant domain expertise.

Reply of the Government

The recommendations of the Hon'ble Committee have been duly noted. The Ministry is currently implementing the Fifth Cadre Review, which is expected to be implemented by 2027. The sanctioned strength of the Ministry has also been increased since inputs were previously sent for the Fourth Committee on External Affairs Report. As of 01 February 2025, the current sanctioned strength of the Ministry stands at 9034, which previously stood at 8697. Out of this, 53.38 percent are located in Missions and Posts abroad. These positions span various cadres within the Ministry, such as the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), IFS General Cadre, Branch B, Stenographers Cadre, Interpreters Cadre, Legal and Treaties Cadre. Missions/Posts abroad also consist of a local cadre strength of 3119.

Ministry of External Affairs also takes officers with specialized skills from other Departments/ Ministries on deputation. The Ministry also engages consultants/experts with relevant skillsets in key areas of functioning of the Ministry such as counter terrorism, project management, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, international law, consular and disarmament related work.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 8)

The Committee are happy to note that the number of women recruited into the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) is steadily growing and in the recent IFS batch women constituted around 40%. At present, 15 female officers are serving as Heads of Missions abroad. However, the under-representation of women in senior leadership roles, especially in key posts or in high-profile capital missions is noticeable. Though the percentage of women recruits have increased over the years, the structural and cultural barriers, if any, in ensuring equal opportunities for women's advancement and leadership need to be addressed. Since the Committee feel that prioritizing women in diplomacy can strengthen India's soft power and better reflect the values and strengths of a modern India on the world stage, they desire for proactive measures towards this end.

Reply of the Government

The recommendations of the Committee have been duly noted. Induction of women IFS Officers has also significantly increased in the last 14 years. In the 2010 batch, women representation was 24%, which increased to 39.39% for the 2024 batch.

Further, there is significant representation of women in senior leadership roles. Currently, IFS officers from batches 1988 to 2005 are eligible to head Missions/Posts abroad or become Head of Department in Ministry HQ. In the batch of IFS officers from 1988 to 2005, there are total 203 IFS Officers serving in the Ministry either at HQs or Mission/Posts abroad. Among the 203 officers in 1988-2005 batches there are 33 women IFS Officers. Among them, 23 women IFS officers are either serving as Heads of Mission as Ambassador/High Commissioner or as JS (Joint Secretary) at the HQs. Other women officers are also heading important offices in MEA Headquarters or other Ministries on deputation. MEA will continue to encourage more gender equality and equal opportunities for women's advancement and leadership.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 9))

The Committee note that the SushmaSwaraj Institute of Foreign Service (SSIFS) is providing comprehensive training to Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers, non-diplomatic staff, and foreign diplomats. The range of programmes, such as the Mid-Career Training Programme (MCTP), Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats (PCFD), and specialized courses like IMAS and IVFRT, reflects a commitment to enhancing both functional and domain-specific expertise. The Ministry has taken efforts to align training with the National Standards for Civil Service Training Institutions (NSCSTI) and have partnered with global institutions and organizations such as the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, IAEA and UN bodies. The practice of collecting and analyzing feedback from trainees is also followed. While appreciating the initiatives taken and efforts made by the Ministry, the Committee find scope for further improvement in ensuring that MEA personnel are well-equipped to meet evolving global challenges and operational demands and urge the SSIFS to accelerate the digitization of training delivery and integration with advanced technologies such as e-learning platforms, virtual simulations and artificial intelligence to make training more efficient, transparent and accessible. The global collaborations should focus on exchanging best practices, designing innovative training modules and organizing joint capacity-building initiatives. The Committee also desire that the Ministry should institutionalize a mechanism to periodically review and adapt training content based on feedback to address emerging needs and improve the learning experience.

Reply of the Government

As per the National Standards for Civil Service Training Institutions (NSCSTI) recommended by Capacity Building Commission (CBC), SSIFS has aligned all its activities in the framework of eight pillars. This specifically required a special effort in the pillar of digitalization and training

delivery where SSIFS had for the first time launched a Learning Management Software (LMS) Platform through a protected part on its website, which allows the training since January 2025 to become paperless, efficient, transparent, and therefore more effective. This learning platform allows online conduct of quizzes and exams, sharing of reference materials, and submission of assignments, all digitally. Assessment process has also become realtime and trainees could now see their assessments on weekly basis, thereby giving them continuous information & motivation in the areas where efforts are needed to improve further. SSIFS will use this platform to introduce new pedagogical methods using technology to make learning processes more efficient and smarter, including using AI tools. The results of Officer Trainees learning curve in just two months of 2025 after launch of LMS have shown marked improvements in their use of digital tools to improving on time management and in presenting their thoughts and ideas in more captivating manner to the audience.

Another new thing that SSIFS has introduced in its training methods and learning assessment for Indian officers, has been the competencies based framework, which involves focusing on Behavioural, Functional, and Domain specific competencies. This is now incorporated in already functional Learning Management platform.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 10)

The Committee note that the increased allocation for ‘Embassies and Missions’ in the Revised Estimates (RE) 2023-24 and Budget Estimates (BE) 2024-25 is primarily due to the operationalization of new Missions and Posts and inflationary pressures. The Committee also take note of the criteria for establishing new Missions, focusing on economic partnerships, strategic cooperation, diaspora engagement and multilateral diplomacy. The Committee acknowledge the establishment of new Embassies in Tirana (Albania), La Paz (Bolivia), Tbilisi (Georgia), Riga (Latvia), Dili (Timor Leste), and Libreville (Gabon), as well as new Consulates in Brisbane (Australia), Marseille (France), Barcelona (Spain) and Auckland (New Zealand). The Committee have also been informed about ongoing efforts to operationalize Missions in other strategic locations such as Fukuoka (Japan), Kazan (Russia) and Yekaterinburg (Russia) and future plans for opening five Missions in Europe and Latin America and Caribbean regions.

The Committee further note that India currently lacks resident Missions in 42 countries. While acknowledging the challenges involved in establishing new Missions, the Committee recommend accelerating efforts to bridge these gaps, particularly in countries where India has significant economic or strategic interests or a large Diaspora presence. The Committee note that the Ministry is leveraging concurrent accreditation arrangements effectively in countries where resident Missions have not been operationalized. Despite the Ministry’s assurance that the allocated funds are adequate to account for inflationary pressures and currency fluctuations, the Committee urge that the Ministry is be prepared for addressing any unforeseen shortfalls promptly through supplementary grants to ensure uninterrupted functioning of Embassies and Missions.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry of External Affairs from time to time formulates proposals for opening of resident Missions in countries where there are no Indian Missions. The objective of India's foreign policy is to build a conducive environment for India's growth and development through partnerships with friendly countries. India's Missions and Posts across the world serve as conduits of its relations with partner countries. The decision to open new Indian Missions is to expand India's footprint in various regions and broaden international support for its interests.

In 2024, 10 new Missions and Posts have been operationalized. As on 01 Feb 2025, there are 41 countries where India does not have resident Missions. Ministry is working to operationalize more Missions in countries where India currently does not possess a diplomatic Mission.

Approval has been received for operationalizing five new Missions in Europe and, Latin America and Caribbean region. Additionally, new Consulates are also being opened by the Ministry in view of India's increasing diplomatic engagement. New Consulates have been operationalized in Belfast (UK), Manchester (UK) and Fukuoka (Japan). The Consulates in Los Angeles (USA), Boston (USA), Kazan (Russia) and Yekaterinburg (Russia) are expected to be operationalized in FY 2025-26.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 11))

The Committee recognize the importance of an effective monitoring mechanism to ensure the optimal performance of Indian Missions and Posts abroad. It is observed that Performance Evaluation and Monitoring System (PEMS) which was established in 2016, has been revamped in 2021 to make the evaluation of Mission/Posts more comprehensive. While noting the improvement in performance scores across Missions and Posts, the Committee find that certain areas still require consistent compliance, such as updating web pages, maintaining verified social media accounts and adhering to communication guidelines.

Acknowledging the efforts of the Ministry towards making the PEMS interface more user-friendly, the Committee recommend that periodic feedback surveys from Missions and Posts should be conducted to identify scope for further improvements in the portal's functionality and reduce time spent on submissions. To encourage higher performance, the Committee also recommend instituting a system of incentives for Missions/Posts that consistently achieve high scores in PEMS evaluations. This can include recognition, additional resource allocation or capacity-building opportunities for staff.

Reply of the Government

With reference to the recommendations of the Hon'ble Committee contained, it is submitted that Mission/Posts routinely raise their queries/concerns pertaining to functioning of PEMS portal and PEMS questionnaire. The queries/concerns are promptly addressed and are kept in consideration during periodic revamping of the PEMS portal to ensure continuous improvement

and enhance user experience. The questionnaire for PEMS is also revised every year to keep it relevant to the functionality of Missions/Posts and to address the queries/concerns of Missions/Posts related to applicability and scope of questions.

A circular message is sent to all Missions/Posts after completion of PEMS evaluation, providing a brief overview of the outcomes of evaluation. The circular also highlights the list of 10 top performing Missions/Posts based on their PEMS score. This, in addition to recognizing the top scorers for their commendable performance, sets a benchmark for other Missions/Posts and encourages them to improve their performance in future.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 12))

In view of recent developments, the Committee feel that that the security of Indian Missions and Posts abroad is paramount for ensuring the safety of personnel, the protection of sensitive information and the continuity of diplomatic functions. The Ministry has informed that safety and security of our Missions/Posts is continuously reviewed. The Committee recommend that the Ministry should conduct a comprehensive security assessment of all Missions/Posts taking into account the geopolitical situation, potential threats and vulnerabilities in host countries. Adequate resources should also be allocated for protection of physical and digital infrastructure of our Missions.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry places high importance to the safety of personnel and security of Missions/Posts. The security situation varies from country to country and the threat scenario are dynamic in nature. The Ministry in consultation with security agencies and feedback from Missions/Posts categorizes Missions/Posts abroad on the basis of type and magnitude of security threats. This exercise is carried out at regular intervals and forms the basis for allotment of security resources, tailoring different training and briefing modules, etc. While safety and security of Missions/Posts is primarily the responsibility of the host governments as per the Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations, the Ministry coordinates with Missions/Posts to put in required physical security/access control measures, etc. Any threat to Diplomatic establishments is immediately taken up by Indian Missions/Consulates with the concerned authorities of the host governments for taking pre-emptive steps as well as for providing security. Host governments and its authorities are also requested to undertake appropriate action as per their national laws and international obligations. The Ministry is pro-actively working with Missions/Posts to put adequate measures in place.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 13))

The Committee note that India's Missions and Posts abroad operate with a sanctioned strength of 5721 India-based posts and 2976 local posts as of March 2024. In light of the increasing responsibilities of Missions and the growing scope of India's foreign policy

objective, the Ministry should ensure that all sanctioned positions are filled promptly to avoid any disruption in diplomatic functions. The Committee also desire that vacancies be reviewed and filled on a priority basis through expedited recruitment processes in collaboration with the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and Staff Selection Commission (SSC). Highlighting the importance of local staff in supporting Missions' operational efficiency, the Committee urge the Ministry to allocate adequate resources for retaining skilled local staff, including competitive remuneration and benefits to attract and retain talent in host countries.

Reply of the Government

The recommendations of the Committee have been duly noted. The Ministry regularly reviews the requirement of manpower at various levels in Embassies and Consulates abroad and takes appropriate action, including recruitment of additional Officers and Staff, through placement of requisite indents with the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), respectively. 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 SSC. Since 2014, 374 officers have joined the Indian Foreign Service by direct recruitment through the Civil Services Examination. For the year 2024 and 2025, 110 vacancies have been indented to UPSC. Ministry will also work towards creation of more posts and filling them in a time-bound manner to ensure that Indian Missions and Posts abroad as well Headquarters are sufficiently staffed. Ministry is also reinforcing its technical capacity by taking officers with domain expertise on deputation from Line Ministries and Departments of Government as well as specialized Civil Services such as Railways, Forest, Customs, Revenue, Economic Service, Civil Accounts Service, Central Police Organizations, Ordinance Factory Service, Central Secretariat Service and from Armed Forces etc. Ministry is also engaging Consultants as subject matter experts or Knowledge Partners, including experienced retired government officials as well as from the open market. Consultants are also engaged by the Ministry for bringing in specific skillsets, which are necessary in key areas of functioning of the Ministry.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 14)

The Committee acknowledge the significant strides made by the Ministry of External Affairs in enhancing passport services through the expansion of the Passport Seva Programme, including the establishment of 93 Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) and 434 Post Office Passport Seva Kendras (POPSKs) in collaboration with the Department of Posts. The integration of all 193 Indian Missions/Posts abroad into the Passport Seva Portal is commendable and reflects the commitment of the Ministry to streamline and digitize passport services globally. The Committee observe that the substantial revenue generated from passport-related services, including Rs. 3543.66 crore in passport fees during FY 2023-24, highlights the increasing public demand for these services.

However, the Committee expresses concern over the steep reduction in the budgetary allocation for passport and emigration services from Rs. 1792.14 crore at the RE 2023-24 stage to Rs. 970.66 crore in BE 2024-25. This reduction appears incongruous with the rising demand for passport services, expansion of the Passport

SevaProgramme and the higher anticipated expenditure on travel document printing, freight charges, and service charges for the Passport Seva Project. The Ministry should ensure that budgetary provisions for passport services align with the growing demand and the significant revenue generated through passport fees. Given the steep decline in BE 2024-25, it is imperative that adequate funds be allocated at the Supplementary or Revised Estimate stage to address anticipated shortfalls. To further enhance the utilization of passport services, the Committee recommend that MEA should undertake widespread awareness campaigns regarding POPSKs, online application processes and e-passports. Special focus should be given to remote and underserved regions to ensure equitable access to these services.

Reply of the Government

As observed by the Hon'ble Committee, the funds allocated in BE 2024-25 was Rs. 970.66 Cr for Passport & Emigration. More funds were allocated at RE/FE stages. The final Estimates were Rs. 1955.75 Cr. The additional funds were mainly provided under service charges head, printing and procurement of travel documents and payment to States/UTs for Police incentives. With the augmentation of funds, the Ministry was able to make payments to various service providers of PSP viz TCS, DoP, ISP Nashik and Police department.

As regards widespread awareness campaign, the Ministry has published the required information related to passport services for the citizens in the PSP website available across geography. A 24X7 call centre operating in 13 languages has been made operational for providing passport related information to the citizens. To reach to the remotest part of the country, Passport SevaKendras (PSKs)/Post Office Passport SevaKendras (POPSKs) have been made operational across the country including difficult terrains. The Ministry is also in the process of rolling out Mobile VAN for Passport services under PSPV2.0 to cater to remote areas. Under each Regional Passport Office (RPO), one mobile VAN has been provisioned taking the total to 37 Mobile VAN. The PSP system is also integrated with more than 5 Lakh Common Services Centre (CSCs) of MeitY to bridge the digital divide and for widespread coverage of passport services across geography. Time to time awareness campaigns were undertaken by respective Regional Passport Offices in their jurisdiction for providing information related to passport services, online application etc.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 15)

The Committee note that the expansion of Passport SevaKendras (PSKs) and Post Office Passport SevaKendras (POPSKs) has enhanced accessibility for citizens across the country. In the opinion of the Committee, the introduction of e-Passports as part of the PSP Version 2.0 is a forward-looking initiative aligned with global best practices and the “Digital India” mission. The pilot issuance of e-Passports at RPO Nagpur and RPO Bhubaneswar with 65,000 e-Passports issued as of October 2024 and the efforts to ensure one PSK/POPSK in every Lok Sabha constituency are highly appreciable.

While recognizing that the issuance of passports as one of the most visible and citizen-centric statutory services rendered by the MEA, the Committee discern challenges in infrastructure, manpower and the implementation timeline for critical

advancements such as PSP Version 2.0 and e-Passports which warrant immediate attention. The Committee also express concern over the delay in the rollout of PSP V2.0, which is now scheduled for April 2025. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to closely monitor and ensure strict adherence to the revised timeline by the Service Provider, M/s TCS. As regards the pending establishment of POPSKs in 40 constituencies, the Ministry is urged to focus on inter-departmental coordination and periodic reviews to operationalize these POPSKs at the earliest.

Reply of the Government

The Pilot launch of PSP V2.0 started in April 2024 under two Regional Passport Offices (RPOs) i.e. RPO Bhubaneswar and RPO Nagpur and PSKs/POPSKs under them. Thereafter, five more RPOs (Goa, Jammu, Shimla, Raipur and Amritsar) and PSKs/POPSKs under them were added to the Pilot sites for larger coverage and complete flow including load and performance evaluation of PSPV2.0. As part of roll out, the Ministry further added 5 RPOs (Jaipur, Chennai, Hyderabad, Ranchi and Surat) and PSKs/POPSKs under them to PSPV2.0 and completed before 10 March 2025, thus taking the tally to 12 RPOs. Five more RPOs i.e. Ghaziabad, Tiruchirappalli, Srinagar, Lucknow and Coimbatore and PSKs/POPSKs under them are scheduled to be added to PSPV2.0 by 21 April 2025.

The Ministry is closely monitoring and having continuous review with the Service Provider, M/s. TCS to complete the roll-out across PAN India at the earliest and not later than June 25.

It is also submitted that the Ministry is taking due steps and weekly review with the Service Provider, M/s. TCS to close the issues being reported from the RPOs migrated to PSPV2.0 and making the system error free and seamless. In parallel, the Ministry has also engaged the third-party audit agency, STQC, Meity, for testing of functional, security and performance of the PSPV2.0 application/platform and the observations submitted by STQC are being reviewed and Service Provider, M/s. TCS is directed to take corrective measures.

As on date, 446 POPSKs have been set up across the country. There are currently 37 Lok Sabha Constituencies without a PSK or POPSK. Opening of POPSK in these LSCs are also in process and shall be opened in a phased manner, subject to provision of suitable space by DoP. Regular follow-up with DOP is being done for provision of suitable space for the remaining Lok Sabha Constituencies.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 16)

The Committee note that the centralized database, PRIDE has been integrated with the Ministry of Home Affairs' (MHA) systems, such as BOI and NATGRID, which enhances inter-agency coordination. The Ministry's efforts to ensure data confidentiality, integrity and availability through a robust Information Security Management System (ISMS) Policy, layered security measures and adherence to zero trust principles to address evolving cyber-security threats has also been noted. The Committee recommend that the Ministry should further strengthen the existing data protection framework by conducting

periodic audits of the Passport Seva Project's security infrastructure to proactively identify and mitigate vulnerabilities. Additionally, the Committee emphasize the importance of raising public awareness about data privacy measures undertaken by the Ministry to enhance citizens' confidence in the system.

Reply of the Government

Ministry has taken the following measures for data protection in the Passport Seva Program:

1. **Data Encryption as part of Data Security Measure:** Encrypting Personally Identifiable Information (PII) both at rest and in transit ensures that unauthorized access to data is minimized.
2. **Access Control (RBAC):** Implementing strict access controls, such as role-based access through PAM, ensures that only authorized personnel can access data as per role, additionally video logging is provisioned.
3. **Incident Response Plan:** Having a robust plan in place to respond to data breaches or unauthorized access incidents.
4. **Data Leak Prevention (DLP) Solutions:** Using DLP tools to monitor and prevent unauthorized data transfers.
5. **Principle of Least Privilege (POLP):** Ensuring that employees have access only to the data necessary for their roles that to on the need to know basis.
6. **Continuous Monitoring:** 24x7 Monitoring systems for unusual activities or potential breaches.
7. **Periodic Audit:** The Ministry has engaged STQC, MeitY, as a third party audit agency for the audit of entire PSP system and also for annual audit.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 17))

It is noted that with the implementation of the mPassport Police App, the average time for Police Verification Reports (PVRs) has been significantly reduced from 45 days to 15 days nationally. The Committee observes that the app has not been rolled out in 13 States/UTs. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the MEA, in consultation with the Ministry of Home Affairs and State/UT governments, should prioritize the nationwide rollout of the app by April 2025, ensuring its adoption across all police stations before the launch of PSP Version 2.0 in April 2025. To facilitate this, the Ministry should provide technical and financial support to address IT infrastructure gaps in these regions and establish a dedicated task force to monitor progress and address implementation challenges. The Committee further recommend the enhancement of training and capacity-building programs for police personnel to ensure efficient app usage.

Reply of the Government

It is mentioned that 25 States/UTs covering more than 9425 Police Stations across the country have already launched mPassport Police App. The Ministry and the concerned RPOs are

coordinating with the States/UTs where mPassport Police App has not yet launched. It is also submitted that the Ministry is providing all technical support to States/UTs including the application support, training and hand-holding to police personnel (before and after the launch of mPassport Police App) through the Service Provider of Passport Seva Program, M/s. TCS. Post deployment, all technical support is also provided to State/UTs regarding police verification and submission. It may be noted that the roll out of mPassport Police App at States/UTs depends on the readiness of IT infrastructure at the concerned State/UT for which the Ministry is also providing financial support to each State/UT, per application processed by them and for verification and submission of Police Verification Report (PVR)

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 18))

The Committee note with concern the significant gap between the sanctioned strength (2737) and actual working strength (1751) of the Central Passport Organization (CPO), resulting in a vacancy of 986 posts, including 272 Gazetted and 714 Non-Gazetted posts. The shortfall of workforce is further exacerbated by a high attrition rate (over 40%) in key direct entry grades such as Junior Passport Assistant (JPA) and Assistant Superintendent, primarily due to better career prospects and pay scales elsewhere. While the Ministry has made efforts, such as outsourcing staff, expediting promotions and hiring on a deputation basis, the Committee observe that these are interim measures and stress the need for long-term solutions to address this persistent issue. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Ministry should expedite recruitment by engaging closely with the Staff Selection Commission (SSC) to ensure timely inclusion of vacancies in upcoming examinations. They also urge the Ministry to address the root causes of attrition by revising pay scales, improving career progression opportunities, etc. Additionally, to meet the manpower demands of 440 Post Office Passport SevaKendras (POPSKs) and ensure efficient functioning of Passport Offices, the Ministry should formulate a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry is working closely with the Staff Selection Commission (SSC) and has indented vacancies for all posts to be filled on direct recruitment basis in Central Passport Organization (CPO) viz. 63 posts for Assistant Superintendent (AS); 15 posts for Junior Translation Officer (JTO); 07 posts for Stenographer Grade 'D'; 301 for Junior Passport Assistant (JPA) and 61 for Office Assistant (OA) for the year 2024. SSC has recently declared the results for these posts except for the post of JTO. Posting of the said officials in the Passport Offices will shortly start after completion of administrative formalities. As regards the post of JTO, SSC is likely to declare results shortly.

As regards attrition, it is stated that though there is adequate career progression in CPO, in as much as even the officials appointed in the Level 2 of the cadre were recently appointed in grade of Level 12 on promotion basis in the CPO. However, the attrition in the cadre is primarily due to better exposure, higher grades and absence of all India transfer liability in other services.

Further, the Ministry is aware of the shortage of officials in the Post Office Passport Seva Kendras (POPSK) and proposing to appoint officials from other government services on deputation basis to reinforce the existing availability of staff in the cadre.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 19)

The Committee take cognizance that emigration process in India is governed by the Emigration Act of 1983, administered by MEA through the Protector General of Emigrants (PGE). The Ministry has informed that the Protector General of Emigrants (PGE) oversees the functioning of all Protector of Emigrants (PoE) offices across India. As of now there are 14 offices of the Protector of Emigrants (POEs) located at Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Cochin, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur, Raebareli, Patna, Bengaluru, Guwahati and Ranchi. In order to expand the outreach of the PoEs, the Ministry has established additional PoE offices in Patna, Bengaluru and Guwahati, which are fully functional. Additional offices are being planned in Tripura, Bhubaneswar and Ahmedabad. The Committee desire that establishment of PoE offices in States where such offices do not exist currently and additional PoE offices in migration hotspots including States like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, etc. should be expedited to ensure better outreach and support for emigrants. Realizing an urgent need for spreading awareness about safe migration, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should collaborate with local civil society groups, media outlets in the most affected regions to ensure that emigrants are fully informed about their rights, processes involved and the risks of illegal migration. In addition, the Committee urge that all citizens departing India should be given basic information at the immigration counters.

Reply of the Government

Currently there are 16 Offices of Protector of Emigrants (POE) located at Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Cochin, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur, Lucknow, Patna, Bengaluru, Guwahati, Ranchi, Bhubaneswar and Agartala. For better coordination with state governments in the matters of emigration, Ministry has been exploring the possibility of opening of POE offices in those states, where such offices currently do not exist. POE Offices in Odisha, Jharkhand and Tripura have been opened recently. The Division is in the process of opening POE Offices in Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Gujarat in near future. As far as opening of additional POE Offices in migration hotspot states like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab is concerned, the POE Offices in Lucknow and Chandigarh are currently fully functional and catering to the need of those states, respectively. Ministry would consider opening of additional POE Offices in these states based on the need and demand analysis.

Ministry issues advisories through eMigrate portal, social media handles and other modes of publicity about the perils of fake job rackets and ways to prevent the same. Till February 2025, a total of 3,281 unregistered agents in country against whom grievances have been received, have been notified on the eMigrate portal. The awareness campaign on safe and legal migration through eMigrate portal has been carried out by the Ministry and POEs across the country by conducting workshops, trainings, information sessions, digital campaigns for media

groups, police officials and law enforcement agencies, local administration, aspiring recruiting agents, entrepreneurs and general public. During these sessions awareness on emigration regulations, schemes beneficial for emigrants like PravasiBharatiyaBimaYojana (PBBY), Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT), eMigrate portal and various advisories issued by Indian Embassies are brought to the notice of all stakeholders.

During the recently organized Recruiting Agents Conclave on 11 March 2025, Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs Shri KirtiVardhan Singh launched a PravasiBhartiyaSahayata Kendra social media channel, which provides information on safe and legal migration on real time basis.

The POE Offices also closely work with the State Government officials, and media to raise awareness about safe and legal channels of migration. For example, POE Office in Chennai made significant effort to raise awareness about safe and legal migration through the "PaathuPonga" campaign, during which a walkathon was organized in Chennai in February 2025. Other POEs are also engaging with the State Government and civil society stakeholders within their respective jurisdictions in this regard.

Ministry of External Affairs in collaboration with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) is imparting one-day training programme on soft skills, called 'Pre-Departure Orientation and Training (PDOT)'. PDOT programmes, which commenced in 2018, are aimed at enhancing the soft skills of Indian migrant workers largely going to the ECR countries, in terms of culture, language, tradition and local rules and regulations of the destination country. This one day long training also sensitizes migrant workers about pathways to safe and legal migration and various government programmes for their welfare and protection. Handbooks for migrant workers have also been developed in eight languages i.e. Hindi, English, Bangla, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Punjabi and Urdu. Presently, these handbooks are distributed to prospective migrant workers attending One-Day PDO Training at all PDOT centres. The Ministry launched online PDOT in April 2021 to reach out to prospective emigrants who live far away from PDOT centres. This initiative proved quite useful in delivering training for more and more migrants especially during the pandemic when classroom training almost stopped.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 23))

The Committee observe that as a key instrument of our foreign policy, the scope and magnitude of developmental partnership has expanded from our immediate and extended neighbourhood to countries in South East Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific Island. However, the declining trend of budgetary allocation under this Head is particularly concerning. Despite repeated emphasis by the Committee about the imperative of provisioning adequate and predictable budgetary provisions under this Head as it directly hinges on our global standing and image, the Committee are surprised to note that the percentage share under this important Head has plummeted from 42 per cent in 2021-22, 39 per cent in 2022-23, 32 per cent in 2023-24 to 25.58 per cent this year. Justifying the reduction, the Ministry submitted that allocations for various Aid Heads are done through careful prioritization within available resources

to ensure that none of our developmental work suffers any setback and all our commitments are implemented smoothly and speedily. The Committee find the Ministry's justification untenable as a well-funded development partnership is pivotal to furthering bilateral relations and strengthening bonds of friendship, respect and mutual trust with partner countries and enhancing India's global standing. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommend a significant increase in allocation for development partnerships with a focus towards key regions such as neighbourhood, Africa, South East Asia, Indo-Pacific and so on. Accordingly, the Ministry should make budgetary demands for 2025-26 putting forth a convincing case before the Ministry of Finance.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry's anticipation of expenditure progress 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. Ministry's scheme commitments have ranged between 32-43% of the Ministry's overall budget for the last few years, reflecting steadfast prioritisation of India's development partnership with international partners. For BE 2025-26, the allocation towards overseas development partnership portfolio is Rs. 6750 crore, comprising 33% of our overall budget. This is an increase of about 20% (Rs. 1082 crore) over the previous year's allocation of Rs. 5667 crore, which is in alignment with India's foreign policy objectives as well as the Committee's recommendation to aim for 20% annual increase in budget. To streamline the financial allocation and execution of projects to ensure targeted and impactful utilization of resources in the 14 Pacific Island Countries (PICs), a new sub head for Aid to Pacific Island Countries has been created in the Detailed Demands for Grants of the Ministry for the year 2025-26.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 24))

The Committee note that in order to deal with the unique logistical and practical challenges faced in project execution, the Ministry has devised a robust review mechanism for handling all aspects of project implementation, including project formulation, appraisal, execution, monitoring, review and evaluation. The review mechanism exists at multiple levels including a review at the level of Prime Minister (through the PRAGATI mechanism) as well as the External Affairs Minister. Accordingly, the Committee urge the Ministry to ensure that regular monitoring, impact assessments and accountability measures are instituted and strictly followed to achieve the intended outcomes. In this regard, the Committee would encourage the Ministry to explore the possibility of having a dedicated 'international aid review and monitoring cell' tasked with overseeing the planning, execution and evaluation of all international aid projects.

Reply of the Government

In pursuance of the recommendation, an MoU has been signed between IIFCL Project Ltd. (IPL) and Ministry of External Affairs on February 21, 2025. This MoU outlines the framework and agreement for the establishment of the Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) for implementation of Government of India aid projects. This PMU would assist in contract & project monitoring including critical paths, advising corrective measures and mitigative actions etc. Additionally, institutional mechanisms such as Joint Project Monitoring Committees (JPMC) regularly review and monitor all major projects to iron out issues hindering smooth implementation.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 25))

India's aid programmes have been a visible instrument for furthering people-to-people ties, cultural exchanges and fostering strong bilateral ties. Some of the notable projects include Gyaltsuen Jetsun Pema Mother and Child Hospital in Bhutan, construction of 60,000 houses for internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka, National Police Academy in Nepal, Civil Services College in Mauritius and connectivity projects such as Akhaura-Agartala Rail Link in Bangladesh, integrated check-post at Nepalgunj in Nepal, etc. However, the Committee note that despite the enormous impact and importance, these projects have limited domestic as well as global visibility. Recognizing the need to prioritize publicity for these projects, the Committee suggest that MEA should proactively evolve a set approach to global and domestic promotion through usage of digital platforms and social media, engaging Indian diaspora and launching awareness campaigns.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry has taken several measures to increase visibility of India's aid programs among domestic and global audiences.

MEA's Performance Smart Board/Dashboard: The MEA's Performance Smartboard created on key target areas, captures all major schemes, programmes and initiatives of the Ministry. Information on iconic projects undertaken by Ministry of External Affairs in various countries and the Grants and Loans extended as Development Assistance to countries abroad are available on the Performance Smart Board. The performance Board has been integrated with Ministry's website for enhanced visibility and easy access.

Media Engagement: External Publicity Division of the Ministry engaged and briefed the local and international media on India's development partnerships abroad. This helped in disseminating India's aid program and also provided a larger context to its efforts. Capsules providing key facts or insights on developmental cooperation with countries, especially during Prime Minister's visits abroad, were designed for electronic media to ensure broader audience about India's aid programs.

The Ministry organized interactions of visiting foreign media delegations, especially from the Global South, with senior officials of Ministry, on India's development partnership initiatives and its impact.

Short films, documentaries and videos: The Ministry commissions short films and documentaries for dissemination of information among Indian and global audiences about India's development programmes, its approach to the global south and various aspects of Indian foreign policy. In the recent past, the External Publicity and Public Diplomacy Division of the Ministry commissioned short films on India-BIMSTEC, India & Africa, 'Nalanda University', 'Restoration of temples in Vat Phou', 'Restoration of temples in ASEAN countries' 'What MEA did', 'Forum for India Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC)', 'Marching together- India's Development Co-operation Initiatives', 'Operation Dost', etc., which also covers India's aid programs in these regions. In addition, documentary "India and Global South" highlighting India's developmental partnership with countries of Global South is under process. The documentary will cover information on India's people centric projects and their impacts in more than 25 countries in India's neighbourhood and around the globe.

Ahead of each visit of a foreign leader to India or during President, Vice President or Prime Minister's visit abroad, videos are made for publicity. These contain detailed information and visuals of our development assistance and projects.

Commissioning of articles by experts and former Ambassadors: The Ministry commissioned articles on various themes authored by retired Indian diplomats and eminent experts, which were published across the world through Indian Missions/Posts. Ministry also requested Ambassadors to regularly write articles on India's development cooperation with other countries.

Social media engagements: The Ministry has strong social media presence with more than 7.5 million followers on several digital platforms i.e. X, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, Youtube, LinkedIn, etc. External Publicity & Public Diplomacy of the Ministry amplifies information related to the progress of aid programs in other countries, through Ministry's social media platforms - X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. The Division also gives due visibility to the posts from Indian Missions and Posts by reposting, sharing, retweeting among others. The Division amplifies news reports and content, related to India's aid programs, from private media, freelancers, influencers, experts on its social media platforms. The Division utilizes several modern tools such as infographics, stories, highlights, reels among others to ensure larger appeal and visibility of India's programs. In extraordinary situations like HADR operations, the Division provides regular updates of efforts by other Government of India agencies such as NDRF, Indian Army, Indian Air Force among others.

Familiarization Visits & Influencer Engagements: The Ministry organizes familiarization visits of foreign journalists and Social Media Influencers as a part of India's public diplomacy and media outreach efforts. A total of 306 Journalists and Content Creators from 114 countries visited India during 2024-25 and were exposed to different facets of Indian foreign policy, including visibility of India's aid programs through interactions with senior officials of the

Ministry. Additionally, interactions with organizations such as CDRI, ISA, IFC-IOR, RIS, FICCI, PSUs among others, also provide them an opportunity to gain insights on India's aid and developmental assistance to other countries. During and after the visit, participants create posts, reels, stories, blogs etc. on social media platforms to share their experiences and learnings with their audiences and followers. External Publicity Division remains in continuous touch with the alumni of such visits for amplification of specific posts and more visibility of India related content, including those related to India's aid programs.

Dissemination of information among regional press: The Ministry regularly disseminated information on India's foreign policy initiatives, including aid programs to over 100 regional/vernacular media outlets in a time bound manner. Besides, the Division also gets stories on aid programs written and placed in regional media, with special focus on tier 2 and tier 3 cities.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 27))

In view of our unique and time-tested relationship, Bhutan has consistently been the largest recipient of India's aid programmes. India's aid and assistance programmes in Bhutan are currently covered under both Revenue and Capital Heads with Grants coming under Revenue, and Loans coming under Capital sections of the budget. In the BE 2024-25, an allocation of Rs. 2068.56 crore has been made under this Head, reaffirming Bhutan's importance to India's foreign policy. The Committee note that India is supporting Bhutan in areas such as hydroelectric development (Punatsangchhu-I and II), infrastructure connectivity, education, power transmission lines and greenfield projects. The Committee recommend that MEA should not only ensure that all ongoing projects in Bhutan are completed expeditiously but should also expand cooperation in new areas such as renewable energy, health care, space technologies and so on.

Reply of the Government

The projects in Bhutan are monitored periodically through bilaterally agreed mechanisms so that they remain on track and are completed on time. Status update of all the ongoing projects in Bhutan are as follows:

S. No.	Project Category under Development Cooperation	Plan Period of Bhutan	Number of Projects approved till date	Approved amount (in INR Crore)	Status of the project
1	Project Tied Assistance (PTA)	13 th FYP (2024-2029)	61	4957.9	Under implementation; INR 432 Cr have been released till date
2	High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP)/Small	13 th FYP (2024-2029)	283	417.191	Under implementation; INR 375 Cr have been released till date

Development Projects (SDP)				
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Sl. No.	Name of the hydroelectric project	Approved Cost (in INR crore)	Status of the project
1	Punatsangchhu – I HEP	9375.575 at December 2013 Price Level (1 st RCE)	Under implementation
2	Punatsangchhu – II HEP	9445.68 (cost to completion as vetted by CEA)	Under implementation. Likely to be fully commissioned by the end of year 2025.

In the 13th FYP projects, India and Bhutan cooperation has been expanding in new areas like renewable energy, healthcare enhancement, space technology, sports and youth, environment and climate change. In addition to this, connectivity and trade infrastructure development projects are also being actively pursued.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 28))

Under the Head ‘Aid to Nepal’, the budgetary allocation has witnessed a 27 % increase from Rs. 550 crore during BE 2023-24 to Rs. 700 crore for BE 2024-25. The increased allocation is on account of earthquake reconstruction, supply of defense stores, scholarship, HICDPs, SiliguriJhapa pipeline, Nepal Police Academy, Jaynagar-Bardibas Rail Link Project, Integrated check posts at Bhairahawa, etc. The Committee are happy to note that the Integrated Check Post (ICP) Nepalgunjhas been completed on 31 March 2024 and handed over to the Government of Nepal. While welcoming the enhanced allocation under this Head, the Committee urge the Ministry to ensure that all ongoing projects are completed in a time bound manner.

Reply of the Government

Under the Head ‘Aid to Nepal’, the Government of India is undertaking various development projects in Nepal, encompassing education, healthcare, earthquake reconstruction, cross-border connectivity (including ICPs and railway links), scholarships, and training initiatives. In 2024, the Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Nepalgunj was completed and handed over to the Government of Nepal. Additionally, India gifted 200 kidney dialysis machines to Nepal in 2023, and the reconstruction of 71 educational institutions was completed in 2024. Several major projects are in advanced stages of completion. These include ICP Bhairahawa and the Nepal Police Academy, both scheduled for completion in 2025. Since 2003, India has implemented over 570 High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs), of which approximately 500

are complete. Remaining are being executed in coordination with Nepalese implementing agencies. The Ministry, through Mission in Nepal, continues to monitor and coordinate closely with all stakeholders to ensure timely completion of ongoing projects, proactively addressing challenges throughout the project lifecycle.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 29))

The budgetary allocation under the sub-head 'Aid to Sri Lanka' has increased from Rs 150.00 crore (BE 2023-24) to Rs. 245.00 crore (BE 2024-25). The increased allocation is for meeting the funds requirements for six ongoing projects, namely Indian Housing Project (Phase III and IV), SLUDI Project, development of fishing harbor at Point Pedro and implementation of three island projects. The Ministry has informed that the GOI has successfully completed and handed over Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, several houses under Phase III of Indian Housing Project and few HICDPs in Sri Lanka. Given Sri Lanka's ongoing economic recovery and its importance for maintaining regional stability, the Committee are pleased to note the 63.33% increase in allocation under this Head. While welcoming the enhanced allocation, the Committee expects that the corpus of fund will be utilized appropriately and optimally during the year.

Reply of the Government

India is a preferred development partner for Sri Lanka. Under our development assistance, several projects are being implemented including Phase IV of Indian Housing Project, Sri Lanka Unique Digital Identity project, 3-island project and several other projects under various stages of implementation. In addition, India is committed to support the projects, which were to be implemented under LoC assistance and have now been converted to grant assistance to ensure continuity in development partnership. During the State Visit of President of Sri Lanka to India in December 2024, India announced extension of grant assistance for rehabilitation of Kankesanthurai Port, provision of 22 diesel locomotives to Sri Lankan railways among others. Separately, during the Prime Minister's visit to Sri Lanka, India extended financial assistance for development of Thirukoneswaram and Sita Eliya temples, Sacred City project in Anuradhapura and capacity building program for 700 Sri Lankans per year. With several above-mentioned projects being implemented, the allocated budgetary support will be utilized appropriately.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 30))

The Committee note that the budget allocation under the Head 'Aid to Myanmar' has dropped from Rs 400 crore during BE 2023-24 to Rs. 250 at RE stage and to Rs. 370 crore during BE 2024-25. This downward revision is due to the slow pace of project implementation owing to the ensuing political turmoil and security situation in Myanmar. The Committee further note that the progress in our key connectivity projects like the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport (KMMTT) and Trilateral Highway in Myanmar have

been adversely impacted. While the waterway component (Sittwe port) of KKMTT project is operational since May 2023, the physical progress of the road component of the project is 10 percent. The Committee understand that the slow pace of ongoing projects in Myanmar is due to the current political environment, but desire that the Ministry should continue diplomatic engagements with all stakeholders for expeditious and timely progress of ongoing projects, particularly the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport (KMMTT) and India-Myanmar Thailand Trilateral Highway.

Reply of the Government

While acknowledging the challenges posed by the prevailing political and security situation in Myanmar, the Ministry is conscious of the importance of ensuring progress on key infrastructure projects like the Kaladan Road project and the India Myanmar Trilateral Highway project. Ground-level difficulties are being addressed through coordination with various stakeholders involved in implementation of the project; work is continuing in segments where access is available.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 33))

The Committee note that the allocations under the sub-head 'Aid to Afghanistan' has been kept constant for the past two fiscals and the current fiscal at Rs. 200 crore in view of the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan. The Committee note that our engagement with Afghanistan was primarily focused on providing humanitarian assistance, health/ aid material and assistance in the field of education, particularly of women. The Committee further understand that the changed political situation in Afghanistan has adversely impacted our developmental partnership with them. However, as a reliable development partner for the Afghan people, the Committee desire that the Government should continue making persistent efforts to utilize the allocated funds in the best possible manner, without diluting our national priorities, particularly relating to empowerment of women to the extent feasible. In addition, MEA should coordinate with multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and World Food Programme to maximize the impact of our humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

Reply of the Government

India and Afghanistan have a strong relationship based on historical links, cultural relations and strong people-to-people ties. Since August 2021, India has sent several shipments of humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan including partnership with international/ multilateral organizations with a focus on women empowerment. These include:-

- (a) India supplied COVID Vaccine comprising of 5,00,000 doses for the people of Afghanistan

(b) In the wake of tragic earthquake that struck Afghanistan on June 22, 2022 causing massive destruction and loss of precious lives, the Government of India, as a true first responder, dispatched 28 tons of emergency relief assistance for the people of Afghanistan

(c) In January 2024, India supplied 40,000 litres of Malathion, a pesticide, to counter locust menace in Afghanistan. The supply of Malathion ensured crop protection and food security in Afghanistan and other central Asian countries.

(d) Since 2021, India has donated more than 300 tons of Medicines and surgical items to the people of the Afghanistan.

(e) India has also partnered with the UNODC in Afghanistan, to provide assistance for the welfare of the Afghan drug-user population, especially women. Under this partnership, India supplied 11,000 units of female hygiene kits, baby food, general-use hygiene kits, blankets, clothing, footwear, medical aid and 32 tons of social support items. These items are being distributed by UNODC's drug treatment centers across Afghanistan.

(f) Supply of Wheat in collaboration with UN and World Food Programme (WFP). Since 2021, due to the deteriorating humanitarian situation and increasing food insecurity in Afghanistan, Government of India sent 50,000 MTs of wheat and other assistance to Afghanistan through WFP

(g) Education and capacity building programmes are an important aspect of India's development partnership with Afghanistan. Since academic year 2023, the ICCR has provided online scholarships for 2000 Afghan students through e-VidyaBharti portal in the academic. Of these, nearly 580 are girls/women. India continues to offer online scholarships for Afghan students in agriculture-related fields, in collaboration with the Afghan National Agricultural Science and Technical University (ANASTU).

(h) India has also extended assistance in terms of 500 units of winter clothing, 650 GI tagged Channapatna toys and 1.2 tonnes of stationery kits to Habibia High School, Kabul.

The Ministry has made persistent efforts to utilize the funds allocated under 'Aid to Afghanistan' budget head to meet the priorities of Afghan people. In these efforts, India has also partnered with UN agencies and WFP to maximize the impact of India's humanitarian assistance.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 34))

Expressing concern over the relatively low prioritization of assistance to Latin American countries which stood at Rs 30 crore in BE 2024-25, the Committee feel that India's aid to Latin America is disproportionately low compared to its assistance to other regions such as Africa and South Asia. The potential to leverage aid for deepening economic and strategic partnerships in Latin America remains underutilized. Recognizing the growing strategic importance of the Latin American region for India's economic, political, and diplomatic interests, the Committee highlight the need for enhanced budgetary support to deepen India's engagement in the region. The Committee,

therefore, recommend a significant increase in budgetary allocation for Latin American countries to ensure meaningful engagement through development aid and capacity-building initiatives. Further, platforms like BRICS, G20, and CELAC should be leveraged to enhance India's strategic influence in the region and strengthen South-South cooperation.

Reply of the Government

During 2024-25, the budgetary allocation for the Latin American countries increased from Rs 30 crore to Rs 90 crore, following multiple proposals for HADR support from countries beset with natural disasters and because of updated payment schedules in respect of ongoing projects. BE 2025-26 (Rs.60 crore) is twice the amount allocated in BE 2024-25 (Rs.30 crore). Enhanced allocation is expected at RE stage in 2025-26 considering various commitments, including the implementation of announcements made by Hon'ble Prime Minister during the second India-CARICOM summit in Georgetown in November 2024, for which additional funds of Rs. 200 Cr have been requested during FY 2025-26. Scope of development partnership, developmental aid and capacity building projects are directly proportional to the capacity of the partner to absorb the aid. The Ministry will accordingly suitably calibrate the funding.

India has emerged as an influential global player and a consistent, balanced and reliable partner in the G20. During its Presidency of the G20 in 2023, India seized the opportunity to highlight the priorities and concerns of the developing world, including the LAC region and emerged as a leader of the Global South. Under its G20 Presidency, India delivered ambitious, action-oriented, decisive and inclusive outcomes such as on Accelerating Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, Green Development and LiFE, tripling of Renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency globally by 2030, Food Security and Nutrition, role of Traditional and Complementary medicine, Women-led Development, Technological Transformation and Digital Public Infrastructure, reform of Multilateral Institutions including for better, bigger and more effective Multilateral Development Banks. India successfully carried forward and cemented the ambition and outcomes from its Presidency to the Brazilian G20 Presidency in 2024, which was reflected in the G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration, and continues to take forward these priorities, placing it in a unique position as an effective bridge and unifying force between the East and the West, and between the developing and developed countries.

BRICS has emerged as an important multilateral forum since its inception in 2006. It reflects the common concern of its members and seeks to make global debates and leadership more representative and inclusive. The Leaders of BRICS countries meet regularly at the BRICS Summit, which is held under the rotating chairship of its member countries. While originally founded with four members (Brazil, Russia, India and China), it added South Africa in 2010. Thereafter, BRICS has expanded to comprise currently of 11 members and 9 partner countries. The current members are: **Brazil**, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Indonesia. The partner countries are: Belarus, **Bolivia**, **Cuba**, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda and Uzbekistan. Latin American Countries

are represented through founding member Brazil and partner countries, Bolivia and Cuba. Brazil which is an emerging player in the LAC region has assumed the BRICS Chairship on 1 January 2025 under the theme '**Strengthening Global South Cooperation for a more Inclusive and Sustainable Governance**'. Flagship priorities of the Brazilian Chairship includes (i) Global Health Cooperation – Cooperating to mitigate vulnerabilities, (ii) Trade, Investment, and Finance (iii) Climate Change – A bridge to COP-30 (iv) AI Governance – Fostering inclusive and responsible management of AI (v) Reform of the Peace and Security Multilateral System (vi) Institutional Development – Streamlining BRICS structure and functioning. India as a founding member of BRICS supports the priorities set by Brazil that promote mutual economic development and cooperation.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 35))

The Committee note that the budgetary allocation under the Head 'Chabahar Port' has remained stagnant at Rs. 100 crore in BE 2023-24, RE 2023-24 and BE 2024-25 as the long-term main contract for the development of the Port was under negotiation. On 13 May 2024, the long-term main contract for equipping and operating Shahid Beheshti Port Terminal, Chabahar was signed between India Ports Global Limited (IPGL) and Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) of Iran with India's enhanced investment commitment of USD 120 million and revised Line of Credit of USD 250 million. The provisions of main contract also stipulates that IPGL will remit the full amount of money required for the procurement and installation of port equipment to account(s) provided by PMO in UAE within one month of agreeing on the prices by the Joint Procurement Committee (JPC) of the project. Accordingly, PAI Division of the MEA has proposed Rs. 375 crore in RE 2024-25 and Rs. 466 crore for BE 2025-26. The Committee realize the potential of the Chabahar Port as a more economical and stable route for landlocked Central Asian countries of the region to reach India and the global market. While conscious of the challenging environment in which the Ministry is operating given the prevalent sanctions, the Committee emphasize the need for expedited completion of the project and fulfillment of India's commitment under the main contract and recommend an upward revision of the budgetary allocations and proposals under the Head. The Committee also urge the Ministry to work closely with India Ports Global Limited (IPGL) and the Ports and Maritime Organisation (PMO) of Iran to finalize and implement the procurement of remaining port equipment within a time-bound framework. The Joint Procurement Committee may be facilitated to expedite cost approvals and ensure that all equipment is delivered and installed by mid-2025.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry has duly noted the observations of the Hon'ble Committee. The Joint Procurement Committee (JPC) in its meeting held in September 2024, finalized the price of two types of port equipment. While India is providing funds to Iran for the purchase of equipment, the responsibility for procurement of this equipment lies with the Iranian side. India has already provided Rs. 450 crore for the procurement of the equipment.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 36))

The Committee observe that during 2024-25 an allocation of Rs. 59.21 crore has been earmarked for schemes and programmes aimed at welfare of Indian Diaspora and engagement with them. A series of Schemes and programmes such as Know India Programme, Promotion of Cultural Ties with Indian Diaspora, Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC), Celebration of PravasiBharatiya Divas, Pre-Departure Orientation and Skill Upgradation of Emigrant Worker (PDOT), PravasiBharatiyaBimaYojna (PBBY), Legal Assistance to Women facing problems in NRI Marriages, Evacuation of Indian due to War/Civil Disturbance and other are being implemented by MEA.

Keeping in mind the expanse, magnitude and depth of our Diaspora across the globe, the Committee are of the view that that the existing allocations made to various schemes and programmes for the welfare of Overseas Indians is arbitrary, unchanged and inadequate. While expressing concern over the stagnant allocation to welfare schemes for Indian citizens overseas, the Committee desire that additional funds should be sought during the next financial year. An increase in budgetary allocation and the establishment of a robust, responsive mechanism during crisis will not only enhance India's ability to protect its citizens but also reinforce its global standing as a nation committed to the well-being of its people. The Committee further desire to be apprised of the outcome of the Joint Working Group constituted to analyze the objectives, working and challenges of various programmes/initiatives/schemes for welfare of Indian diaspora and the extent of reach and delivery of such schemes, so far. It should be the endeavour of the Ministry to conduct continuous review of the performance of its existing programmes/schemes so that the reach and impact can be used as leverage for an enhanced budgetary allocation.

Reply of the Government

This Ministry constantly monitors and evaluates the different welfare and engagement programmes for the overseas Indians, and allocates resources based on the evolving needs and interests of the diaspora. The allocation of funds to these schemes and programmes has steadily grown in the recent years. The Diaspora Engagement Division had sought an enhancement in the budget for schemes it operates for engaging with the diaspora in the FY 2025-26 that added up to 84 crores under the various budgetary heads. The BE 2025-26 for various heads operated by DE Division for 2025-26 has been approved for Rs. 77 crore, which is a significant increase over the previous years (BE 2024-25 was Rs. 44 crores). Additionally, Indian Missions/Posts are encouraged to explore stakeholder partnerships for implementing diaspora engagement schemes in their respective countries of accreditation, such as for organising events under the Promotion of Cultural Ties with the Diaspora scheme of Ministry. Indian Missions/Posts abroad are encouraged to secure private sponsorships, partnership

stakes with diaspora associations and local authorities in order to promote diaspora-led initiatives and the concept of janbhagidaari.

The Joint Working Group (JWG) was constituted under the Chairmanship of Secretary (CPV & OIA) and HODs of the erstwhile OIA-I, OIA-II (now Emigration Policy & Welfare and Diaspora Engagement Divisions, respectively), CPV, PSP and OE&PGE Divisions as members of the Working Group. The Working Group met on 22.12.2021 to carry out a comprehensive review of all the existing schemes and programmes, as well as new initiatives undertaken by MEA since transition of these Divisions from erstwhile Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) to MEA. The Working Group had recommended inclusion of medical courses under the Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC) Scheme of Ministry and provision of 50% reservation of seats for women under SPDC. Both these recommendations have been implemented since then. It was found that since Secretary(CPV & OIA) chairs weekly meetings with the Heads of respective divisions (who are also members of the JWG) under his charge to discuss issues in their respective domains and regularly monitors the progress of various schemes, further continuation of the Working Group would be redundant. As the purpose of the Working Group had been achieved, it was subsequently dissolved.

The **Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT) Programme** was launched by the Ministry of External Affairs in January, 2018 under the PravasiKaushalVikasYojana (PKVY) with an aim at enhancing soft skills of Indian migrant workers largely going to the Gulf and other ECR Countries. Under this programme, the emigrant workers are given free-of-cost one-day orientation training to enable them to understand the culture, language, tradition and local rules and regulations of the destination country. The orientation training also help to sensitize the migrant workers about pathways to safe and legal migration and various government programmes for their welfare, safety and protection such as ICWF, MADAD, PBBY etc. Since inception of the PDOT programme, a total of 1,90,362 emigrant workers have been imparted training through 41 PDOT Centres as on 28 February 2025. Proposal to open another 51 new P-DOT centres within the next one year is under implementation.

The PDOT training is imparted under two models –

- PDOT Centres operated by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) empanelled training partners under the PravasiKaushalVikasYojna (PKKY), a joint collaboration under anMoU between Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and a grant of Rs. 10 crore was extended by MEA to MSDE.
- The second model is PDOTCentres managed by State Government agencies. Ministry has been granting funds to State Governments to conduct PDOT Training to emigrant workers @ Rs. 500/- per candidate for in-person training and Rs. 100 for online training.

The Ministry has been making concerted efforts to expand the PDOT outreach to promote safe, legal and orderly migration. Towards this end, Ministry has reached out to all concerned State Governments/agencies to send their proposal for allocation of funds to carry out PDOT andoperationalise the new PDOT centres approved by the Ministry. In this regard, letters have

been written to the Chief Secretaries/Principal Secretaries of the concerned States seeking their intervention for promotion of PDOT programme and early operationalisation of new PDOT Centres in their States. The matter is being followed up directly with the State Governments as well as through the PoEs in these States. Ministry is working in close coordination with all relevant stakeholders to expand the P-DOT outreach.

The **PravasiBharatiyaBimaYojana (PBBY)**, a mandatory insurance scheme for Emigration Check Required (ECR) category workers going to ECR countries for overseas employment, provides an insurance cover of 10 lakh in case of accidental death or permanent disability and some other benefits at a nominal insurance premium of Rs. 275/ Rs. 375 for a period of two/three years. The Scheme was comprehensively revamped and has become effective from August 1, 2017. The scheme now provides for global coverage irrespective of employer and location and has facility for online renewal. The revised scheme is simpler and more beneficial for emigrant workers and is aimed at ensuring an expeditious settlement of claims. No budgetary allocation is provided for the scheme, since it is a user-paid scheme.

The funds under the budget head '**Evacuation of Indians due to War/Civil Disturbance**' are being used for safe evacuation of stranded Indian Nationals from foreign countries during crises that arise due to conflict/war/civil disturbances. The expenditure under this budget head is by definition uncertain and depends upon evolving situations abroad that necessitate evacuations. During FY 2024-25, three evacuation operations were conducted, Op. Indravati from Haiti, Evacuation from Syria to neighbouring country and evacuation of Indian Embassy personnel from Bangladesh to India. Expenditure on Op. Indravati was incurred from Budget head 'Evacuation of Indians due to War/Civil Disturbance'. During FY 2023-24, the allocated fund of Rs. 60 Crore was booked upto more than 90%, however, in FY 2024-25 the expenditure could be booked upto only 3% out of allocated funds of Rs. 10 crore. For BE 2025-26, Rs. 10 crore has been received under the budget head.

Government accords highest priority to the safety, security and well-being of Indian nationals abroad. Indian Embassies and Missions keep close watch on the situations especially in the war and conflict zones. Through various means viz. advisories, social-medial platforms, Government of India caution Indian nationals to avoid unnecessary travel and follow safety guidelines issued by local authorities and remain in touch with the Indian Missions. Depending on the situation, the Government launches evacuation operations to safely evacuate Indian nationals. Government remains in constant touch with its counterparts through diplomatic channels for safety and security of Indians during evacuation process. 24x7 Control Rooms are operated at headquarters and abroad to facilitate the evacuation process.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 38))

The Committee are aware that women residing overseas often face unique challenges, including spousal abandonment, marital disputes, workplace exploitation, human trafficking, forced labour etc. These vulnerabilities necessitate a targeted approach to ensure the safety, dignity and well-being of Indian women. The Ministry has informed that the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) provides financial and legal assistance

to Indian women abroad who have been abused, cheated, or abandoned by their foreign or NRI/PIO spouse. In addition, One Stop Centre (OCS) scheme under Nirbhaya Fund is proposed to be established for safety, security and well being of distressed Indian women in countries abroad. The Committee are happy to learn that the Ministry of Women and Child Development has provided clearance for extending the One Stop Centre under Nirbhaya Fund and accordingly the Missions/Posts are working out budgetary proposals to roll out this scheme. The Committee are hopeful that adequate budget would be sought for the Scheme during the upcoming budget session. The Committee also urge the Ministry to launch awareness campaigns to educate Indian women abroad about their legal rights, local laws and resources available through Indian Missions/Posts abroad.

Reply of the Government

Based on the inputs from the concerned nine Indian Missions/Posts in which the One Stop Centres are proposed to be established, this Ministry has proposed an expenditure of Rs. 9.5 Crores for setting up and operationalization of the One Stop Centres (OSC) of the Government of India under the Nibhaya Fund for FY 2025-26. The Centers would be established and operationalised in the current financial year as soon as the aforesaid budget is allocated by the Department of Economic Affairs from the Nirbhaya Corpus. Meanwhile, Indian Missions/Posts abroad continue to conduct open sessions for counselling and educating Indian women abroad about their legal rights, local laws and the role that Missions/Posts could play to assist them to resolve their problems. All Indian Missions/Posts have also disseminated these measures taken by them for the welfare of Indian nationals, particularly, Indian women in distress through their official websites and social media for the awareness and education of the Indian diaspora abroad.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 39))

The Committee are aware that Autonomous bodies and institutions under the Ministry of External Affairs, such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) and Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), significantly contribute to India's cultural diplomacy, regional cooperation and research capabilities. While the budgetary allocation for this Head has shown incremental growth, it remains insufficient to meet the expanding mandates of these institutions and would have led to scaling down of critical activities. With India's increasing global engagement, the Committee feel that these institutions require additional resources to expand their research, cultural and diplomatic initiatives, particularly in strategic regions such as Africa, Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific. The Committee, therefore, recommend that a significant increase in budgetary allocation may be made under 'Assistance to Autonomous Bodies and Other Institutions' at both Revised Estimates (RE) and Budget Estimates (BE) stages. This would enable these entities to expand their initiatives and meet growing international expectations. The Ministry should also actively promote partnerships and Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models, encouraging autonomous bodies to collaborate with domestic and international

organizations to leverage additional resources and expertise. Enhanced budgetary support, coupled with improved oversight and innovative funding models, will empower these entities to deliver more impactful outcomes.

Reply of the Government

The recommendations of the Hon'ble Committee have been duly noted. There has been an increase of INR 20 crore in ICCR's Budget allocation for the current Financial Year 2025-26 (INR 351.25 crore as against INR 331.25 crore in the last FY). Also, there has been an increase in the budget allocations of RIS and ICWA for the current Financial Year 2025-26 (INR 19.51 crore and INR 15.48 crore as against INR 18 crore and 15.47 crore in last FY).

The increase in ICCR's budget will enhance the scale and impact of its activities in line with India's rising global profile. The enhanced outlay will enable ICCR to scale up its following core activities:

- (i) 21 Scholarship schemes for foreign students
- (ii) Welfare activities for foreign students
- (iii) Alumni Activities and Awards
- (iv) Incoming Cultural Delegations (ICD)
- (v) Outgoing Cultural Delegations (OCD)
- (vi) Festivals abroad
- (vii) Incoming and Outgoing Exhibitions
- (viii) Bust & Statue installations abroad
- (ix) Conferences & Seminars
- (x) Indian Cultural Centres abroad
- (xi) International Day of Yoga (IDY – 2025)
- (xii) ICCR Chairs abroad
- (xiii) Distinguished Visitors Programmes
- (xiv) Running 38 Indian Cultural Centres

ICCR is also actively promoting Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) and innovative funding models in carrying out the above activities through Indian Embassies/ Consulates/ Indian Cultural Centres abroad. For instance:

- i. ICCR has circulated policy guidelines for our Diplomatic Missions abroad to collaborate with local authorities, community organizations and diaspora in organizing cultural events abroad. Depending on the quantum of financial contribution by the local entity, ICCR is offering specific categories of incentives to them including, scholarships, travel grants, and visits to India.
- ii. ICCR is encouraging establishment of new cultural centres in a PPP model on the lines of CASA-de-la India in Valladolid (Spain).
- iii. Nearly half of the Teachers of Indian Culture (TICs), teaching Yoga, Indian music, dance, languages, etc. abroad, are now local residents of foreign countries who are hired on contracts as Local Resource Persons (LRPs)

ICCR is also improving its oversight mechanisms and innovative funding mechanisms through the following initiatives:

- i. Since 2018, ICCR has been administering all its 21 scholarship schemes wholly digitally through the Admissions-to-Alumni (A2A) portal. All financial disbursements to universities and foreign students studying under the scholarship schemes are now made digitally through the GyanSetu portal.
- ii. Since May 2023, ICCR Headquarters and its 9 Zonal Offices in India conduct all their activities/ work online through an e-Office system which ensures accountability, transparency, adherence to timeline and more digital outreach.
- iii. In November 2023, ICCR set up the Activity Information Management System (AIMS) digital portal which enables 24*7 monitoring of the activities, accounts and Budget utilization of all ICCR's Cultural Centres abroad. In addition, all our Mission now upload their Annual Plan of Action for cultural activities on the AIMS portal in the coming FY in advance, enabling ICCR to plan ahead and schedule activities in a transparent and consultative process. It does this through:
 - (a) monthly activity report
 - (b) monthly receipt/expenditure report
 - (c) performance assessment survey based on a 30-point questionnaire

(Recommendation (Sl. No.40))

As the principal agency for India's soft power and cultural diplomacy, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) undertakes a wide range of global activities, including providing scholarships, promoting Indian languages, organizing exhibitions, instituting rewards and hosting performing and visual arts programmes. The Committee note that a budgetary provision of Rs. 331.25 crore has been allocated for ICCR in BE 2024-25, compared to Rs. 315.21 crore in BE 2023-24. The Ministry has indicated that the increased allocation is intended for expanding research/academic activities, expanding scope of cultural diplomacy, revision in scholarship rates, cultural hospitality norms, etc. On the issue of extra-budgetary resources of ICCR, the Ministry informed that apart from a modest fee from local students, ICCR is fully funded by it through Grants-in-Aid. Despite the limited allocation, the Committee found that the budget was not fully utilized.

Keeping in view the broad spectrum of activities undertaken by ICCR, the Committee feel that the budgetary allocation for ICCR is inadequate. ICCR's work is a cornerstone of India's cultural diplomacy, contributing to national interests in a highly competitive global environment. The Committee desire that the Ministry should examine the reasons for the underutilization of the budget and draft a policy which will enable it to scale up its operations, enhance India's soft power and contribute meaningfully to the nation's diplomatic objective. This will require a significant increase in ICCR's budgetary allocation. The Committee, therefore, recommend an increase in the budgetary allocation for ICCR in BE 2025-26 justifying the increasing salience of soft power projection of the country and the central role of ICCR in it. Furthermore, ICCR should

establish a mechanism to improve its pace of expenditure to ensure optimal utilization of allocated funds, strengthening its case for higher budgetary demands in the subsequent fiscal year, subject to the Ministry providing a satisfactory explanation of its underutilization.

Reply of the Government

- ICCR has set for itself a declared target of Full Utilization of Budget (FUB) since April 2021. Since then, ICCR has been striving to achieve the FUB target every year by adopting a robust mechanism of monthly monitoring and evaluation of expenditure by all spending units and nudging spending units towards FUB. As a result, both the utilization level and the spending capacity of ICCR have been increasing over the years, with 99.99% utilization of BE 2024-25 of Rs. 331.25 crore in the last financial year. Using these tools, ICCR is confident about FUB in respect of BE 2025-26 of Rs. 351.25 crore in the current FY, which will be another milestone in ICCR's history in terms of utilization and spending capacity.
- ICCR is simultaneously expanding its cultural, academic and public outreach activities and will accordingly scale up its budgetary projections. For instance, ICCR has launched 50 new Quad STEM scholarships and is working on a new DAKSHIN scholarship scheme for the global South. ICCR has also launched an annual global dance competition for foreigners and is institutionalized the award of Annapurna Certificates to authenticate Indian restaurants abroad. ICCR also proposed to undertake annual theme-based activities to promote specific aspects of Indian culture like Buddhism, North-east India, Indian Epics, etc. and conduct 3-4 signature cultural events in premier global events and international festivals. This year, ICCR plans to launch a fresh empanelment process to make a panel of Indian performing artists. ICCR has also signed MoUs with 25 Indian States and will be sending 75 folk art troupes (3 from each State) to perform abroad.
- ICCR will also organise fresh editions of new foreign visitors programme like the Gen Next Democracy Programme (in which 272 young leaders from 77 democracies participated), Knowledge India Visitors Programme (where 87 Indologists participated from 36 countries) Buddha BhoomiVandanYatra (23 young scholars from 11 countries), Hindi VishwaYatra (31 young foreigners excelling in Hindi), Vaishali Festival of Democracy celebrated at Nalanda University, etc.
- In order to use digital technologies for culture promotion, ICCR now runs online classes in Indian arts, handicrafts and culture for over 4000 learners in 51 countries. ICCR now has a digital database of over 500 Indian artists of different genres under its Artist Management System (AMS) portal set up in May 2024.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 41)

The Committee are aware that Indian Cultural Centres (ICCs) are principal institutional instruments mandated for cultural outreach abroad and projecting India's cultural

diplomacy through a wide range of cultural, academic intellectual activities, promoting, *inter alia*, knowledge, information and understanding of various aspects of Indian culture including Indian Dance, Music, Yoga, Languages, Food, Festivals, History, Ethos & Traditions and contemporary issues. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations works with its 38 Indian Cultural Centers (ICCs) abroad and 11 Zonal Offices. The Ministry has informed that in honour of renowned Indian poet and author, ICCR will be setting up Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre (TVCC) in a few select locations abroad including Singapore, Paris and Jaffna. The Committee would like to be apprised about the progress made regarding establishment of the Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre as well as the plans for opening other Cultural Centres. The Committee also desire that ICCR should make persistent efforts to empanel artists and performers from the widest possible range of Indian languages, dialects, and cultural backgrounds to showcase the rich and diverse cultural heritage of India globally and regionally.

Reply of the Government

Status of establishment of Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre (TVCC) in Jaffna

- The Cultural Centre in Jaffna was renamed as Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre in honour of the great Tamil poet-philosopher Thiruvalluvar, at a ceremony held on 18 January 2025. Minister of Buddhasasana, Religious and cultural Affairs Hon'ble Hiniduma Sunil Senevi from Sri Lanka was present on the occasion.

Status of establishment of Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre in Singapore

- Hon'ble Prime Minister announced the establishment of Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre (TVCC) in Singapore on September 5, 2024. **Mission is in the process of identifying a suitable property.**

Status of establishment of Cultural Centre in Paris

- The new cultural centre in Paris was announced by former EAM, Smt. SushmaSwaraj on June 2018 and was named as Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre (SVCC). The operationalisation of SVCC is at an advanced stage. The construction work is complete and work on 'Indianisation' (incorporating Indian cultural motifs in the building), installing of signage, etc. is underway. The Mission has sought necessary approvals from Local Municipal Authorities for starting activities at the Centre. Approvals are awaited. Since the Cultural Centre has already been named formally, no change of name is proposed.

Status of empanelment of artists and performers

- ICCR follows a defined SoP for empanelment of artists involving expert sub-committees and feedback from our Missions after the performances.

- Along with digitization, ICCR is looking at innovative ways of including fresh and young talent. This year, ICCR plans to launch a fresh empanelment process to make a panel of Indian performing artists.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 42))

The Committee acknowledge the important role of ICCR scholarship programs in strengthening India's cultural and educational diplomacy and promoting goodwill, long-lasting ties with partner countries and enhancing India's soft power. The Committee note that the Ministry has launched A2A (Admission to Alumni) portal in 2018 to manage admissions of foreign students. However, the scholarship slots have not been fully utilized due to factors such as lack of awareness, language barrier, mismatched academic requirements between Indian Universities and foreign students, etc. The Ministry has taken corrective measures like online application mode through A2A portal, increasing the number of universities students can apply to, providing airfare to students under Atal Bihari Vajpayee General Scholarships Scheme (GSS) and wider dissemination through the Missions abroad. While appreciating the streamlining of admission and selection process, the Committee notice that limited outreach, administrative delays, lack of follow-up with alumni, and inadequate support for scholars during their stay in India are some of the barriers to the program's effectiveness. The Committee, therefore, desire that targeted awareness campaigns, leveraging digital platforms and collaborating with Missions abroad should be undertaken by ICCR to ensure maximum visibility of scholarship opportunities. In addition, a robust global alumni network which can serve as a platform for cultural diplomacy, advocacy, and strengthening bilateral ties should be established to maintain long-term engagement with former scholars. The Committee further desire that the budgetary allocation for ICCR scholarships should be enhanced to provide adequate support for scholars and accommodate more students from developing and strategically important countries, particularly in Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Indo-Pacific region.

Reply of the Government

- ICCR scholarships for foreign nationals are an important tool to encourage them to study and appreciate Indian arts, heritage and culture. This is also a way to create outreach, a feeling of goodwill and promote India's influence across the world.
- The A2A portal (2018) and GyanSetu (2023) have significantly improved transparency and efficiency, increasing scholarship slot utilization from 46.53% (2018–19) to 90.76% (2024–25). In 2024-25, 3960 scholarships were offered and 3594 were utilised, compared to 2018-19, when 3937 slots were offered and only 1832 slots were utilised.
- ICCR has launched 12 new cash prizes to be awarded to foreign ICCR scholars to recognize and encourage the best social media influencers promoting India (ICCR YuvaMitra) and those learning Indian arts and promoting them (ICCR Kala Sadhak).

- ICCR intends to scale up its publicity campaigns including through its website, social media and digital platforms while collaborating more actively with Missions abroad. This year, ICCR has expanded its scholarship portfolio a new Quad STEM scholarship scheme that offers 50 scholarships to students from the Indo-Pacific region to pursue a four-year Bachelor's Degree in Engineering at 9 select institutes/universities.
- ICCR is also enhancing its outreach and publicity of its scholarship schemes by sharing information with Resident Foreign Diplomatic Missions in Indian and wider publicity through its social media handles.
- With regard to alumni engagement, ICCR launched the A-2-A portal to reconnect with its alumni spread all over the world. As on date, 15290 ICCR scholars are registered on the Alumni Portal and ICCR is working on enhancing this to its target figures of 30,000 ICCR alumni.
- In order to stay connected with ICCR scholars and leverage them as India's Cultural Ambassadors abroad, ICCR organised the 'Exit Engagement Evening 2024' in 8 Indian cities for foreign students who were returning to their countries after completion of their status. Various GoI Ministries/ Departments also participated in the events and exhorted the students to promote Ayurveda, Khadi, Indian Tourism and culture in their own countries and worldwide.
- ICCR is also endeavouring to enhance its support to foreign scholars during their stay in India through initiatives like:
 - a) Stopping the deduction of monthly stipends during ex-India overseas trips by foreign scholars, if permission has been obtained.
 - b) Shifting the Delhi Zonal office Hqs. to ICCR Hqs. in Azad Bhawan to enable smoother interaction with approximately 2000 ICCR scholars.
 - c) Conducting surprise inspections of hostel/ food/ living conditions in colleges/ universities.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 43))

The Committee appreciate the important role of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) in promoting informed discourse on international affairs, fostering bilateral and multilateral relations, and enhancing India's global presence through research, publications and intellectual exchanges. While the budgetary allocation for ICWA has seen an increase in BE 2024-25 to Rs. 15.47 crore , the Committee observe that this increase is primarily attributed to salaries and capital expenditures. The Committee note the collaborative efforts of ICWA with institutions in countries such as South Korea, Poland and Vietnam. The ICWA's efforts to increase awareness of foreign policy through university collaborations and conferences are commendable. To meet the growing scope and scale of ICWA's research, outreach, and policy-related activities, the Committee recommend a further enhancement of budgetary allocation of ICWA. The Committee desire that ICWA should be scaling up joint research initiatives with other countries to foster cross-pollination of ideas and strengthen India's intellectual diplomacy. The Committee also urge ICWA to expand its partnerships with academic

institutions and think-tanks across India, especially in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, to ensure equitable access to its programs.

Reply of the Government

Esteemed Committee's recommendation regarding increased budgetary allocation to ICWA is deeply appreciated. There has been a consistent rise and steady improvement in the quantum and content of ICWA's activities over the last few years. ICWA has enhanced its joint research activities with its international partner institutions through joint publications and contributions in each other's journals and website commentaries. Besides South Korea, Vietnam, and Poland, ICWA is coming out with joint publication with its MoU partner in Morocco. It will soon come out with a joint publication on Malta.

ICWA has published articles by foreign researchers from Japan, Mongolia, UAE, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Madagascar, Seychelles, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mauritius including from International Partner institutions in its Guest column and Special Publications. ICWA's publications programme is growing; more than 100 books and special publications have been published over the last three years. These include works by senior academics, former diplomats and upcoming scholars.

At the National level, ICWA has expanded its partnerships with think tanks and academic communities across the country. Its national MoU partners have increased to 68 at present. It has scaled up its outreach activities with universities and think tanks across the country, including tier 2 and tier 3 cities, through its foreign policy awareness scheme, internship program and Young Scholars Conference.

In the year 2024, ICWA organized thirty outreach activities with Universities and colleges in Nagpur (Maharashtra), Khalilabad (UP), Patiala (Punjab), Aligarh (UP), Jaipur (Rajasthan), Koni, Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh), Barasat, Kolkata (West Bengal), Cuttack (Odisha), Mumbai (Maharashtra), Kanpur (UP), Nalanda, Rajgir (Bihar), Gorakhpur (UP), Dharamshala (HP), Jhajjar (Haryana), Mathura (UP), Bangalore (Karnataka), Sambalpur (Odisha), Aligarh (U.P), Ranchi (Jharkhand), Pilani (Rajasthan), Aizawl (Mizoram), Ballia (U.P), Chandigarh (Punjab), Puducherry, New Delhi. These included conferences organized in Hindi. At all these conferences, ICWA support and participation received valuable positive feedback.

Apart from national outreach, which is an area of key focus, ICWA is also looking at increasing presence of ICWA Research Faculty at international conferences on international relations and foreign policy especially those organized/facilitated by Indian Missions abroad.

ICWA has been regularly receiving students for internship from its national partners such as Christ University, Bangalore, Pondicherry University, Manipal University, Shiv Nadar University, OP Jindal University, RakshaRashtriya University, Gujarat, Delhi University. Similar to last year, ICWA is going to host the next Young Scholar Conference on 11 March 2025, which will involve early career research scholars from universities and think tanks across the country.

Regular Dialogues are being held with International Partners to exchange perspectives on global and regional issues and on prospects for bilateral relations. Some recent ones have included Vietnam, Germany, Saudi Arabia, New Zealand and forthcoming ones include Finland, Russia, China, Qatar, etc.

Discussions at ICWA have a steady momentum. Some recent panel discussions have included on UN Summit of the Future, Crisis of International Liberal Order, China's Global Initiatives, Sri Lanka, Ongoing Crisis in Pakistan, Afghanistan under Taliban 2.0, India and Antarctica and those scheduled in the coming weeks include Advancing Sub-Regional Approaches in Neighbourhood First, Instability in Bangladesh, Syria, Iran, etc. SCO Centre at ICWA will also host the SCO Forum of Think Tanks in the coming months of which India is the Chair for the current year.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 44))

The Committee commend the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) for its consistent efforts in providing evidence-based policy research and its substantial contribution towards advancing India's foreign policy objectives. Recognizing the increasing complexities of global geopolitics and geoeconomics, the Committee underscores the need to further strengthen RIS's institutional capacity and broaden its engagement with national and international stakeholders. The Committee note RIS's role in organizing Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues. The University Connect Programme is a valuable initiative to engage youth and academia in foreign policy discussions. The budgetary allocation for RIS has also been increased from Rs. 16.64 crore in 2023-24 to Rs. 18.00 crore in 2024-25. While appreciating the increase in allocation for RIS, the Committee desire that the Government should continue progressive enhancement of RIS's financial resources to enable it to expand its research capacity and activities, particularly in emerging areas like the Blue Economy, climate change and digital transformation, cyber security, artificial intelligence etc. RIS should continue its work in promoting regional connectivity through initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and ASEAN-India multi-modal connectivity. The Committee also urge the MEA to work towards integration of the specialized programme of RIS within the Ministry for timely absorption of research outputs into policy formulation.

Reply of the Government

As part of its intensified evidence-based policy research programme with increased funding from the Ministry, RIS organized a large number of meaningful interactions, dialogues, meetings, seminars and conferences at the national, regional and international level with the participation of Indian, regional and global experts on areas of core interest to the country. Officials concerned from the Ministry also actively took part in these interactions and benefited from the wide spectrum of views expressed by subject scholars on issues of interest to the government and utilized their inputs in policy formulation in line with India's foreign policy

priorities and objectives. The key events organized by RIS between April 2025 till January 2025 are as follows:

- Round Table on India-Indonesia Cooperation on Ayush and Jamu Relevance of Sustainable Bioresource Management on 23 January, 2025
- Sustainable Agriculture and Agro-Ecological Approaches in the Global South on 22 January, 2025
- Maritime Knowledge Lecture Series An Inspiring Heritage of Ship Building in India on 14 January, 2025
- Trade, Tariff and Trump on 31 December, 2024
- Seminar on Illicit Financial Flows Package Leveraging G-20 Presidency with the Global South on Monday, 30 December, 2024
- Inequality, Economic Growth and Inclusion on 13 December, 2024
- Strengthening India-Japan Economic Relations Opportunities and Challenges in Context of Changing Global Order on 20 November, 2024
- Eighth Roundtable of ASEAN-India Network of Think-Tanks (AINTT) on 7 November, 2024
- Global perspectives on the Caribbean Development and Diplomacy on 21 October, 2024
- Second Indo-Pacific Economic Conclave (IPEC), Kolkata 26-27 September 2024 on 26 September, 2024
- Capacity Building Programme on Triangular Cooperation on 19 September, 2024
- DAKSHIN Workshop Digital Technologies in Agriculture for the Global South on 30 August, 2024
- Policy Dialogue on 75 Years of India-Indonesia Diplomatic Relationship on 27 August, 2024
- DAKSHIN Workshop Digital Public Infrastructure and Financial Inclusion on 22 August, 2024
- DAKSHIN Workshop Telehealth - Transformative Digital Health Solution on 8 August, 2024
- India-New Zealand Relations Trade Potentials and Prospect on 7 August, 2024
- Seminar on Infrastructure Spillover and Green Finance on 29 July, 2024
- South Asia Group on Energy (SAGE) Discussion Meeting on 29 July, 2024
- GALERI Side Event Transformation Towards Life Economy | Addressing Challenges of Inequality and Climate Change on 17 July, 2024
- Sixth EAS Conference on Maritime Security Cooperation on 4 July, 2024
- Regional Workshop on Transforming Cross Border Electricity Trade and Regional Electricity Market for an Energy Secure South Asia on 1 July, 2024
- BIMSTEC Synergies in Agriculture Trade Promoting Regional Growth 25 June, 2024
- School Education for the Future of Work on 1 June, 2024
- Interaction with chief Economic Advisor "Future of Work" on 9 May, 2024
- ERIA-RIS Roundtable Discussion on Current Dynamics of ASEAN-India Economic Relations Challenges and Opportunities for Cooperation in Digital Domain on 30 April, 2024
- Brainstorming Session on Triangular Cooperation New Modality and New Hope on 24 April, 2024
- Quad and Indo-US Relations Implications for the Indo-Pacific Region on 10 April, 2024
- STIP Lecture Connecting the unconnected in 5G and Beyond on 9 April, 2024

In addition, the faculty members of RIS took part in a number of events organized by its national, regional and global partner institutions to assimilate fresh ideas and trends on issues of key interest to the country and reflected their new knowledge in following policy oriented

research studies and reports which provided valuable inputs to the Ministry in the formulation of its policy postures on issues of critical importance to the country:

- BIMSTEC Synergies in Agricultural Trade: Promoting Regional Growth, RIS, New Delhi, 2024
- International Conference on Bay of Bengal and India-Japan Economic Relations (Outcome Document), RIS, New Delhi, 2024
- India-Indonesia Partnership: A Renewed Understanding, New Opportunities and Critical Steps Ahead, RIS, New Delhi, 2024
- Exploring Cooperation in Sustainable Agriculture and Value Addition in BIMSTEC Region, RIS-IFPRI, New Delhi, 2024
- Thirty Years of ASEAN-India Relations, Post COVID-19 Recovery: Regional Cooperation Agenda for ASEAN-India Partnership, RIS-AIC, New Delhi, 2024
- Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Roadmaps for India, RIS, New Delhi, 2023
- The Grand Success of G20 Bharat Presidency, RIS, New Delhi, 2023
- G20 University Connect Engaging Young Minds, RIS, New Delhi, 2023
- Propelling India's Maritime Vision Impact of Government Policies, RIS-CMEC, New Delhi, 2023
- Wellbeing, Values and Lifestyles, Towards a New Development Paradigm, RIS, New Delhi, 2023
- Investing in Early Years in Human Capital for Future Resilience: For an Inclusive and Equitable World, RIS-UNICEF, New Delhi, 2023

During the period under review, RIS Faculty, led by the Director General, also took part in the following events to put forward India's standpoint on their thematic issues, gather critical and new information and knowledge on issues of profound interest to RIS for its research studies and projected them in the publications brought out by RIS and also shared the same with the government. The vital inputs were also widely shared in the media by RIS to advance the core trade and economic interests of the country in the backdrop of the evolving global scenario:

- Brainstorming Meeting on "Science, Technology and Innovation as drivers for Viksit Bharat @2047 organised by NITI Aayog, 9 April 2024.
- Second Research School of ICASSSD organised by International Centre for Applied Systems Science and Sustainable Development (ICASSSD), Delhi School of Economics, 20 April 2024.
- CII Global Innovation and Intellectual Property Summit on 'Building the synergy among Innovation, IP and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for futuristic growth, 'organised by CII on 23 April.
- Global Solutions Summit 2024 organised by the China-West Dialogue in Berlin on 5 May 2024
- Roundtable at the GSI Summit on 'Ensuring G20-T20 Climate Action and Sustainable Development Continuity' organized by Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) in Berlin on 6 May 2024.
- Council for Global Problem-Solving (CGP) Annual Meeting in Berlin on 7 May 2024
- Task Force 4 Meeting on Science and Digitalization for a Better Future Digitalisation during the T7 Italy Summit on the G7 and the World: Rebuilding Bridges organised jointly with the

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), in cooperation with LUISS University on 14 May at Rome.

- Symposium on Strengthening Atmanirbhar: Securing Domestic Industry & Technology on 16 May 2024, IIT Delhi.
- Seminar on LDC Graduation in challenging times needs a rethink organised by OECD Development Centre on 21 May 2024, Paris.
- Future of ODA Workshop organized jointly by Center for Global Development (CGD) and Agence Française du Développement (AFD) on 23 May 2024, Paris.
- Road to Platinum Jubilee of the Asian-African Conference on “Asia Africa We Want: Empowering the Global South by Leveraging the Bandung Spirit” organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia in Jakarta on 6 June 2024
- Spring Meeting 2024 of Paris Peace Forum (PPF), co-organised with the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P) on 9-10 June at Ben Guerir, Morocco.
- NDB Seminar on Navigating New Horizons organized by New Development Bank (NDB) on 11-12 June 2024 in Cairo.
- Panel discussion on ‘The Changing Dynamics of International Institutions in an Era of Multiple Crisis’ on 12 June 2024 in Cairo
- 42nd Annual Convocation organized by the Mangalore University on 15 June 2024 at Mangalore.
- Annual Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Forum 2024 organized by UNESCO in Paris on 17 June 2024.
- Panel on Envisioning Desirable Futures Across Climate, Digital and Economic Landscape organized by UNESCO on 17 June 2024, Paris
- MOST Programme organised by UNESCO on 18 June 2024, Paris
- BIMSTEC Online Meeting on the Future Directions organised by BIMSTEC Secretariat with Eminent Persons Group (EPG), appointed by the BIMSTEC Secretariat on 25 June 2024
- Discussion-Meeting of India Chile Joint Study Group, organised by the Department of Commerce, on 23 April 2024, New Delhi.
- Discussion meeting on Reforming Statistical System in India organised jointly with Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on 17 June 2024, New Delhi
- International Conference on BIMSTEC Synergies in Agricultural Trade: Promoting Regional Growth along with IFPRI, PRCI and Michigan State University on 25 June 2024, New Delhi

- Meeting to discuss action plan for improvement of Trade Statistics, organised by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) under the chairpersonship of Secretary on FTA Negotiations and Trade Data Gaps on 28 June 2024, New Delhi.
- One week research methodology and data science course for PhD / PDF scholars in social science, organised by IndiraGandhi National Tribal University on 3 April 2024.
- International conference on ‘The Future of industrialization in Kenya: Path way to Industrialization in Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda,organised by KIPRA, 26 June 2024.
- Multi-stakeholder convening - “The Rockefeller Foundation “AsiaXchange 2024”organized by Rockefeller Foundation on 1 October 2024 at Bangkok.
- G20 Technical Meeting on Trilateral Cooperation organized by The Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) in collaboration with collaboration of Camões – Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua, I.P., under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Portugal, and the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD), on 7 October 2024 at Lisbon.
- 8th International Meeting on Triangular Cooperation: Linking Global Processes to Create Local Impact organised by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Portugal and the OECD Development Cooperation Directorate (DCD) on 8 October 2024 at Lisbon
- 3rd Kautilya Economic Conclave “The Indian Era” organized by Institute of Economic Growth on 4 October 2024 at New Delhi.
- BRICS Think-Tank Network for Finance meet organised by Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation on 9 October 2024 at Moscow.
- RBI@90 High-Level Conference on “Central Banking at Crossroads”, organised by RBI on 13-14 October 2024 at New Delhi.
- 3rd Special Course for Central Asia Countries organisedby MEA on 17 October 2024 at New Delhi.
- 23rd IASSI Annual Conference organised by Institute for Human Development on 26 October 2024 at Ranchi.
- Roundtable discussion on “Expectations from G20 Brazil Summit” organised by Vivekananda International Foundation on 28 October 2024 at New Delhi.
- T20 Summit Side Event on ‘Global cooperation on Sustainable Development after the 2024 election year’ by IDOS, IPEA, T20 Brazil, MGG and PRODIGEES on 13 November 2024.
- High level workshop in support of G20 Brazil on ‘Innovative Strategies for Disaster Resilience: Fortifying Global South Economies Through Dynamic Governance Solutions’, co-organized by Brazilian High Studies Institute of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, IPEA, ERIA, MIGA-GSRC, CSIS, RIS, SIIA and NEPAD, on 13 November 2024, Rio.

- T20 side-event on Launching Soecial G20 edition of journal, G20 Challenges and the Pro-Tempore Brazilian Presidency' by IPEA on 13 November 2024 at Rio.
- Ministerial Roundtable with global Think Tank community at the Sagarmanthan: The Great Oceans Dialogue organised jointly by ORF and Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways on 18 November 2024, New Delhi.
- 17th All India Conference of China Studies conference on Understanding China in a Turbulent World: Geopolitical Contestation and Cooperation organised by Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi and MAHE, Manipal on 23 November 2024, Manipal.
- CPD Journey: Commemorating CPD's 30th Anniversary organised by the CPD Online on 1 December 2024 .
- International Conference on Deciphering Transversality of Water-Energy-Environment Nexus organised by India Water Foundation, 5 December 2024, New Delhi.
- 8th edition of the Global Boardroom, Financial Times' flagship virtual event on 4 December 2024, New Delhi.
- 23rd Anniversary of Prabhasakshi on 6 December 2024, New Delhi.
- 'Anna Chakra', PDS Supply Chain OptimisationTool and SCAN Portal organised by Department of Food and Public Distribution on 5 December 2024, New Delhi.
- Fifteenth South Asia Economic Summit (SAES XV) titled "Unleashing an equitable green transformation in South Asia" organised by SAWTEE, 12 December 2024, Kathmandu.
- Hearing in the framework of the online European Economic and Social Committee opinion on EU-India Strategic Partnership, organised by EESC, 12 December 2024.
- 107th Annual Conference of the Indian Economic Association (IEA) organised by Maharishi Markandeshwar University on 21 December 2024 at Ambala, Haryana.
- Regional Agri-food Trade Dissemination event organised by International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) along with CGIAR, Washington and made a presentation on Agriculture Trade and Investment in the BIMSTEC Region, at Bangkok, Thailand on 3 October, 2024.
- Review meeting to discuss action taken/progress made for improvement of trade statistic made discussion presentation and on Trade Data Gaps organised by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), at New Delhi on 7 October 2024.
- 8th Roundtable of the ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks (AINTT), jointly organized by the ASEAN-India Centre at RIS and the ISEAS-Yusoflihak Institute, Singapore on 7 November 2024.

- 17th All India Conference of China Studies (AICCS) on Understanding China in a Turbulent World: Geopolitical Contestation and Cooperation, I Academy of Higher Education (Institution of Eminence) at Manipal, Karnataka on 23 November 2024.
- RIN Annual Meeting at Bangkok on 27 November 2024.
- 4th Indo-German Dialogue held in Berlin on 19-20 November 2024.
- Brainstorming session on Purvodaya states held at NITI Aayog on 12 November 2024.
- 8th ASEAN-India Network of THINK Tanks (AINTT) Conference held at Singapore on 7-8 November 2024.
- BRICS Think Tank Network for Finance Conference held at Moscow on 9 October 2024.
- Korea-India Forum Northeast Region Development held at New Delhi on 1 October 2024.
- 4th Indo-German 1.5 Track Strategic Dialogue on 20 November 2024, Berlin, Germany
- Comprehensive review of India Nepal Treaty of Trade at the Ministry of Commerce on 17 December 2024.
- India- Malaysia Trade Conference 2024, held at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 45))

The Committee acknowledge the crucial role played by the Policy Planning & Research Division in shaping and strengthening India's foreign policy apparatus through strategic outreach, policy research and engagement with academia, think-tanks and international partners. The Ministry has also undertaken new initiatives such as setting up of DAKSHIN, a Global South Centre of Excellence under RIS; Strategic Outreach Fund (SOF) to provide budgetary support to Political Wings of Indian Missions for conducting strategic outreach activities as well as commissioning short term research projects with think-tanks and Niti Shakti, whereby Divisions within the Ministry can identify specific research requirements and commission them. The Committee are hopeful that these initiatives would scale up the quantum and quality of research and outreach activities and provide valuable inputs for foreign policy planning and formulation. The Ministry is also urged to fast-track these initiatives with greater transparency in the selection and funding of proposals from think tanks, universities and institutes.

Reply of the Government

Since its launch in June 2024, Strategic Outreach Fund (SOF) initiative has seen enthusiastic participation of Missions across Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America, undertaking a wide variety of strategic outreach activities focusing on a number of key areas of interest to India, including: India's foreign policy; strengthening India's bilateral ties with the respective host countries including political, economic, military and technology cooperation; invest cooperation, regional connectivity and global supply chains etc. During FY 2024-25, 43 proposals have been

granted NOC for incurring an expenditure of Rs. 4.33 crore (approximately) till date. Under the Niti Shakti Initiative, the Ministry has commissioned two research studies and a few more research proposals are under process. As recommended by the esteemed Committee, the Ministry would continue to make efforts to fast track these initiatives.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 46))

The Committee find that the Policy Planning Division's has taken efforts to expand its footprint beyond Delhi through NADI Dialogue and regional seminars, which they find quite commendable. To further enhance the reach and effectiveness of such initiatives, the Committee urge the Ministry to organize more regional dialogues in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and also ensure greater representation of the North-East region. The Committee also desire that policy planning dialogues conducted by the Division with the Foreign Offices of countries as well as multilateral policy planning dialogues held with key groups like EU, BRICS and QUAD should be institutionalized into annual frameworks with a dedicated mechanism for follow-ups and tracking of outcomes for more impactful engagements.

Reply of the Government

In continuation of its efforts to take the foreign policy outreach initiatives beyond Delhi, the Policy Planning & Research Division of the Ministry, in recent years, has undertaken various initiatives in Tier-2/Tier-3 cities. Some of them are the India-Japan Intellectual Conclave 'Kizuna' (Agartala, Shillong and Guwahati), International Conference 'Purvodaya Perspectives' (Bhubaneswar), Maharana Pratap Annual Geopolitics Dialogue (Udaipur, Jaipur), Asian-African Treaty Law and Practice Conference (Gandhinagar), Track 1.5 'Health Diplomacy Dialogue' (Gandhinagar) and Track 1.5 Kochi Dialogue (Kochi). A list of all strategic outreach initiatives undertaken by the Ministry outside Delhi since 2023 may be seen at **Annexure I**.

With regard to establishment of Policy Planning Dialogues, the Ministry has noted the recommendation of the esteemed committee on institutionalizing them into annual frameworks.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 48))

The Committee note that the present staffing of the Policy Planning and Research Division comprises of 20 personnel from the Ministry, 08 external consultants and 03 ex-cadre officers. The Ministry has been utilizing external expertise in the form of subject specialist consultants with specialized knowledge in areas such as international law, maritime security, outer space, climate change, arctic geopolitics, etc. The Committee note that these consultants have enriched the Division's work by providing in-depth research and analysis on a wide range of contemporary and emerging issues, aligning with India's strategic and diplomatic objectives. At present, consultants are engaged on a one-year renewable contract basis as per extant guidelines of the Department of Expenditure, with no proposal for absorption into the Ministry. While this arrangement

allows for flexibility, it risks losing valuable institutional knowledge when contracts end. In view of this, the Committee desire that various options should be explored to utilize the experience and expertise of the Consultants, including that of engaging them in the research institutes/think tanks, etc. that the Ministry of External Affairs collaborate with. The Ministry should inform the Committee expeditiously of the manner in which it contemplates to utilize their expertise and experience.

Reply of the Government

At present, the Policy Planning and Research Division of the Ministry has nine (09) personnel from the Ministry and eleven (11) external consultants. Within the scope/ambit of extant guidelines on engagement of consultants, including those laid down by Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, the Ministry is making all possible efforts to utilize the expertise of consultants working with Policy Planning & Research Division.

CHAPTER-III

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

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 22)

Despite its strategic importance as a flagship initiative under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), slow progress in the establishment and operationalization of the South Asian University (SAU) is disappointing. The Committee note that the construction of SAU's permanent campus has been severely delayed, with Phase I remaining incomplete and Phase II yet to commence. While Packages I and II have been completed, Package III is only 96% complete and Package IV, including essential infrastructure such as hostels and sports facilities, remains pending. As per the replies furnished by the Ministry, these delays are attributed to land encumbrances, forest clearance issues, National Green Tribunal (NGT) bans and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also observed that India contributes 57.49% to the operational budget of SAU, in addition to its overwhelming capital contribution. However, other member states have failed to fulfill their assessed contributions, with a cumulative outstanding amount of USD 15.80 million as of June 2024.

While acknowledging the Government of India's substantial financial contribution and continued commitment to SAU, the Committee are of the considered opinion that the protracted delays and recurring challenges in the project's implementation should be resolved. SAU is a symbol of regional cooperation and academic excellence envisioned under the SAARC framework. The tardy progress and lack of commitment by certain member states dilute its strategic significance and undermine India's substantial investment in the project. The Committee desire that all the stakeholders should demonstrate the resolve necessary to complete the project without further delay and to fulfill the vision of SAU as a premier institution fostering regional integration and academic collaboration, while coming to a conclusion about the continued interest of foreign countries in contributing to this process. In view of the non-payment of assessed contribution by other SAARC countries, the Committee urge the Government to explore the option of developing this University on its own by assuming a principal role in administrative and academic matters. Those foreign countries who make contributions may be assigned an appropriate seat at the advisory or governing board.

Reply of the Government

Government of India is committed to develop the University premises as envisaged. However, the delay in construction is due to frequent NGT bans and court cases because of land encumbrances. All efforts are being made to resolve these issues.

As regards the non-payment of contributions by other SAARC countries, Government of India follows up with these countries on a regular basis. However, there is no commitment from the member states to pay their pending dues. Only Nepal has recently cleared its dues in February 2025. Pakistan and Bangladesh have not paid their dues.

Further, as regards exploring the option of governing the University on its own by India the Government of India is bound to follow the Inter-Governmental Agreement on South Asian University signed in 2007. As per the Inter-Governmental Agreement, the University is governed by a Governing Board, composed of members from all member states, which is the supreme decision making body of the University. There is no flexibility to unilaterally alter the Governance structure of the University.

CHAPTER- IV

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

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 20)

Keeping in view the contemporary global migration dynamics and the needs of Indian citizens, the Committee has over the years underscored the pressing need for a comprehensive legislative overhaul to replace the outdated provisions of the Emigration Act 1983. After much delay, the Ministry is seriously considering enacting a new law tentatively titled 'Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024'. The Ministry has further informed the Committee that the proposed draft is under consultation with line Ministries and will, thereafter, be put up for public consultations. The Committee desire that it should be consulted on the salient features of the Bill and the enactment of a revised act reflecting changed global migration realities should be done in a time bound manner *i.e.* not later than one year. An update about the progress made in this regard may be submitted to the Committee within three months.

Reply of the Government

The proposed 'Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024 seeks to replace the existing Emigration Act, 1983 with an aim of accessing a global workplace for citizens of India by developing a mechanism for safe, legal, orderly and regular mobility for employment and stay abroad through processes provided therein and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. The draft Bill 2024 has been revised in consultations with the relevant authorities, the same is under internal consultations. Thereafter, it will be put for public consultations for 30 days, which will be followed up, by Inter-Ministerial consultations with the relevant line ministries along with the Draft Cabinet Note on the revised draft. The Committee's observations are duly noted.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 21)

The Committee acknowledge the Government of India's commitment to reviving the ancient seat of learning through the establishment of Nalanda University under the Nalanda University Act, 2010. Despite significant budgetary allocations and the completion of the state-of-the-art Net-Zero sustainable green campus spanning 455 acres, the Committee are concerned to note that the University's establishment has been marred by delays and operational challenges. Although the construction has progressed and the campus was inaugurated in June 2024, delays caused by logistical bottlenecks, the COVID-19 pandemic related disruptions, and a lack of skilled manpower have resulted in significant time overruns.

Despite its mandate under the East Asia Summit framework to be a collaborative global enterprise, the Committee find that financial support from member states and other international donors has been sporadic and insufficient. The Committee recommend that the Ministry of External Affairs, in concert with the Ministry of Education and the Nalanda University Governing Board, should establish a more rigorous framework of oversight to expedite the resolution of pending tasks. Diplomatic channels must be strategically leveraged to secure greater financial and institutional support from East Asia Summit member states and other international partners, commensurate with the University's global mandate. The Committee may also be kept informed about the progress made in operationalization of Nalanda University on a regular basis.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Nalanda University continue to take necessary steps to implement the Hon'ble Committee's recommendations for overcoming challenges in the establishment of Nalanda University. On the establishment of a rigorous oversight framework to address delays and operational challenges, it is submitted that the University has several institutional mechanisms, as per the Act and relevant Statutes, including the Building and Works Committee, the Finance Committee, the Executive Committee, and the Academic Council that conduct regular reviews to oversee progress in infrastructure development, faculty recruitment, academic program expansion, and research initiatives. The delays in the project have been significantly minimized, and the construction work of the University is now in its final stages. To leverage diplomatic channels for greater financial and institutional support, the Nalanda University is in regular contact with various universities of East Asia Summit (EAS) member states, including Japan, South Korea, ASEAN nations, and Australia. Bilateral meetings with ambassadors and diplomats are conducted to foster partnerships, financial contributions, and collaborative academic programs. The University has hosted campus visits by many diplomats of EAS Countries to enhance visibility and understanding. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have been signed with key stakeholders to formalize institutional collaborations. As on date there are 18 participating countries, including India who have signed MoU with the Nalanda University. These 18 Participating Countries are Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. Apart from this, bilateral and multilateral MoUs are in place with various other countries and universities/institutions. As part of the Ministry's efforts to strengthen international engagement, the External Affairs Minister extended Ministry's invitations to diplomats from all Heads of Missions and senior diplomats from the 18 participating countries to attended the inauguration of the new Net Zero Campus of Nalanda University by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on 19 June, 2025.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 31)

After a careful scrutiny of the budgetary allocation under the Head 'Aid to African countries', the Committee observe that the allocation has remained constant at Rs. 250

crore during the last two fiscal years. However, in the current fiscal, the allocation has been reduced to Rs. 200 crore from Rs 250 crore in 2023-24. The basis for reduction under this Head is understood to have stemmed from completion of e-VBAB Network Project by the end of 2024. The Ministry's assertion that Africa is a key foreign policy priority and our engagement has been intensifying, albeit the budgetary allocation speaks otherwise. It is observed that India's partnership with the African countries is based on four pillars- development partnership, defence and maritime security, trade and investment and people to people ties. The three India Africa Forum Summits (IAFS- I, II and III) in 2008, 2011 and 2015 have further reinforced development partnership with the country. The Ministry has also stated that initiatives in the field of health, education, digital infrastructure` and capacity building have been well received and appreciated by the partner countries. The Committee feel that given the imminent convening of the fourth India Africa Forum Summit in 2025, there is an urgent need to intensify our diplomatic presence in the region and strongly advocate a substantial enhancement in allocation under this Head to strengthen bilateral and multilateral engagements with African countries. The Ministry should also take all requisite steps, including seeking enhanced allocation and effective utilization of funds, for the expeditious implementation of our diverse ongoing projects in Africa.

Reply of the Government

The budgetary allocation is being sought after assessing funds utilization during the previous years and based on activities proposed to be undertaken. Currently, the major expenditure incurred under the budget head "Aid to African Countries" is for the implementation of "India-Africa Maitri Scholarship Scheme" and other bilateral projects. Approximately 1000 slots are utilized at an estimated expenditure of Rs. 120.00 Cr. annually under the scholarship scheme. All the other projects undertaken (on bilateral basis) including Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) have been completed in the FY 2024-25. Engagement with Africa is priority for India. In order to enhance our diplomatic presence in African continent, India has opened 18 new missions. After opening of the 18 new Missions in Africa, India has resident Missions in 47 out of 54 African countries.

The IAFS-IV Summit is expected to be held in the CFY 2025-26. The expenditure for IAFS-IV will be incurred only after agreement of African Union for hosting of IAFS-IV. In consultation with African Union, this Ministry is exploring various options to hold the IAFS-IV at the earliest. The Ministry will continue to vigorously follow up and review the implementation of projects announced during IAFS-I, IAFS-II and IAFS-III. The following projects were completed in the FY 2024-25:

- Establishment of Entrepreneurship Development Centre (EDC) in Rwanda;
- Establishment of India-Africa Regional Materials Testing Laboratory (RMTL) in Uganda;
- Upgradation of Indo-Zimbabwe Technology Centre in Zimbabwe;
- Quick Impact Project (QIP) "Establishment of a Modern Gymnasium And Enhancement of Current Library at Command and Staff College, Duluti (Tanzania);

- Quick Impact Project (QIP) “Restoration of Roof of Masuku Government Primary School, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe and
- Supply of 01 unit of Advanced TelecobaltBhabhatron-II and Simulator IMAGIN and associated components to Malawi (Ongoing).

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 32)

It is observed that several commitments have been made during the three India Africa Forum Summits in 2008, 2011 and 2015 including capacity building, infrastructure development, digital initiatives such as e-VidyaBharati and e-ArogyaBharati Network Project (e-VBAB) for tele-education and tele-medicine. The Committee note that 22 African countries have so far joined the e-VBAB - project which was approved in 2015 to provide quality education/ medical services through web portals to the students/ doctors/paramedical staff in Africa. The Ministry has also informed that the progress in various projects under India Africa Summits is reviewed regularly in consultation with concerned Ministries and relevant stakeholders including African Union. Moreover, Research & Information Systems for Developing Countries (RIS) has agreed to carry out mid-term evaluation of e-VBAB Network Project on a pro-bono basis. The Committee are concerned at the delay in project implementation and organization of India Africa Forum Summit which has been attributed to delay in deciding the location by host countries, internal conflicts and civil unrest. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Ministry should review all ongoing projects in the African region on priority and based on such an evaluation, frame modalities for future progress in coordination with the partner countries.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry has taken note of the recommendations of the Hon’ble Committee. The e-VBAB Network project was launched on 7 October 2019 as part of the commitment made by the Prime Minister during the Third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III) to offer 50,000 scholarships to African students, out of which 15,000 to be offered through online education in UG/PG/Diploma Programmes. The e-VBAB Project is a technological up-gradation and extension of the earlier Pan Africa e-Network Project (PAeNP) implemented between 2009-2017. Twenty-two (22) African countries joined the project and 27 Indian Universities are offering more than 300 online UG/PG/Diploma/Certificate programmes in various disciplines to African students under the project. Research & Information Systems for Developing Countries (RIS) was entrusted to carry out the mid-term evaluation of e-VBAB Network Project on a pro-bono basis.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 37)

With over 32 million persons of Indian origin (PIOs) and non-resident Indians (NRIs) spread across the globe, the Committee are of the considered opinion that Diaspora represents a powerful network capable of advancing India’s cultural, economic, and

strategic interests. Through their economic might, strategic engagement and cultural outreach the Indian Diaspora contributes significantly to India's developmental agenda and soft power projection. It is discerned that the Ministry is exploring new initiatives and ways for active involvement of Diaspora in enhancing India's outreach and influence. The Committee emphasizes that the Indian Diaspora is a unique and valuable asset that can significantly enhance India's global influence. The potential of diaspora academia and scientists to contribute to India's educational, scientific and technological capacities and investment by the diaspora community in Indian startups and innovation also needs to be harnessed. For leveraging the full potential of the Indian Diaspora as an instrument of soft power and fostering economic, scientific and technological development in the country, the Ministry of External Affairs should adopt a proactive approach and formulate a comprehensive Diaspora Engagement Policy in consultation with other line Ministries such as Ministry of Culture, Commerce, etc.

Reply of the Government

Ministry has a diaspora engagement policy framework in place, which is characterized under the rubric of 4Cs - Care, Connect, Celebrate& Contribute. The Indian diaspora is incredibly diverse, spanning across various countries, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds. Such diversity makes it difficult to formulate a single, tight and unique policy for the Indian diaspora all across the globe. If such a policy is indeed attempted to be formulated, Ministry would then not be able to address the unique needs and aspirations of the diverse sections of the Indian diaspora spread across the world. Therefore, Ministry's policies pertaining to the Indian diaspora have evolved with time on the basis of feedback received from the latter. Ministry has also tried to update its diaspora engagement schemes based on suggestions from Indian Missions/ Posts abroad from time to time and also those from other line Ministries, as and when required. Ministry has also endeavoured to maintain an 'All-of-Government approach' while engaging with the Indian Diaspora by regularly incorporating suggestions of the wings of the Government that are involved in promoting different aspects of their work under their charge amongst the Indian Diaspora overseas. This Ministry constantly consults, collaborates and supports other Ministries of the Government of India, such as the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Labour& Employment, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Law and Justice and Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship, etc., as well as the State governments, while designing and implementing schemes and programmes for the welfare and engagement of the Indian diaspora. This approach has proved to be very effective.

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 47)

While the PP&R Division has undertaken commendable work in foreign policy planning, the Committee note the absence of a formalized long-term strategic doctrine. The Ministry is encouraged to develop a comprehensive Strategic Foreign Policy Doctrine Document to provide a cohesive and long-term vision for India's diplomacy. Several countries, such as the United States, Japan, Germany, United Kingdom as well as the European Union, have successfully implemented such documents to guide their foreign

policy. By adopting a similar approach, India can enhance its capacity to navigate global challenges and maintain its leadership role on international platform. MEA should initiate consultations with relevant stakeholders, including experts, diplomats, policymakers and parliamentary bodies to explore the feasibility and scope of developing a grand strategy document for India's foreign policy. The Committee may be apprised of the action taken in this regard.

Reply of the Government

While there is no single overarching and formalized strategic document delineating a roadmap for India's foreign policy apparatus, the underlying principles of India's foreign policy are long established and enduring. The Ministry continually assesses and refines its diplomatic stance and policies in response to evolving global challenges. India's positions on relevant issues and its interests, in the context of these principles, have been articulated through various platforms.

These principles include safeguarding India's sovereignty and security, protecting and promoting India's national interests, enabling India's domestic economic transformation, ensuring peaceful, secure and stable regional and global environment that is conducive to India's growth and development and building influence in global forums through bilateral, multilateral and regional efforts. This pragmatic and outcome-oriented foreign policy orientation has revitalized India's traditional ties, re-energized strategic, commercial, and economic relations with new partners and re-connected India with its Diaspora abroad. It has provided a foundation for dealing with the new and fast-changing realities of the world.

CHAPTER-V

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

(Recommendation (Sl. No. 26))

The Committee find that the budgetary allocation under the sub-head 'Aid to Bangladesh' has come down from Rs. 200 crore in BE 2023-24 to Rs. 120 crore in BE 2024-25. The Ministry has stated that the downward trend is due to the completion of large infrastructure projects such as India Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline (IBFPL), supply of 20 BG locos and the ongoing political and security situation in Bangladesh. The Committee note that the Akhaura-Agartala Rail project is nearing completion and is expected to be handed over in 2024. Considering Bangladesh's critical importance as a neighbouring country and key partner in India's regional diplomacy, the Committee are hopeful that with resumption of normalcy, projects will pick up pace and additional funds, if required, be sought at the RE stage.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry is closely monitoring the developments and remains engaged with the interim government of Bangladesh. In this context, the Ministry will prioritize and evaluate proposals that are found to be strategically important, and desirable in terms of socio-economic impact and for generation of goodwill for India.

NEW DELHI
07 August, 2025
16 Shravana, 1947 (Saka)

Dr. Shashi Tharoor,
Chairperson,
Committee on External Affairs

Annexure I (Recommendation No. 46)

[Note: The Track 1.5/2.0 dialogues held in Tier 2/3 cities are mentioned in bold]

Strategic Outreach Initiatives	Think Tank/University	Theme	Dates/Venue
07 th Asia Economic Dialogue 2023	Pune International Centre	Asia and the Emerging World Order	Pune/February 2023
02 nd Maharana Pratap Annual Geopolitics Dialogue	Usanas Foundation	India's role in the changing world order	Udaipur/March 2023
3 rd India-Japan Intellectual Conclave 2023	Asian Confluence	Northeast India and Bay of Bengal in the Indo Pacific	Agartala/April 2023
9 th International Relations Conference 2023	Symbiosis International University	Revisiting Indian Strategic Thought and Culture	Pune/November 2023
01 st International Conference 'Purvodaya Perspectives' 2023	The Energy Forum	India's connectivity diplomacy: Purvodaya as the regional anchor	Bhubaneswar/ December 2023
04 th India-Japan Intellectual Conclave 'Kizuna' 2024	Asian Confluence	North-east India, Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal in the Indo-Pacific: The Way Forward	Shillong/February 2024
08 th Asia Economic Dialogue 2024	Pune International Centre	Geo-economic challenges in an era of flux	Pune/Feb-Mar 2024
Asian African Treaty Law Conference 2024	Rashtriya Raksha University	Asian – African Treaty Law and Practice	Gandhinagar/February 2024
03 rd Maharana Pratap Annual Geopolitics Dialogue 2024	Usanas Foundation	Navigating the Turbulence, Turmoil and Uncertainty: Defining India's Role as Vishwamitra	Udaipur/March 2024
1 st Track 1.5 Polar Dialogue 2024	National Institute of Advance Studies, Bengaluru	Climate Change, S&T and Polar Regions; Polar Regions and International Frameworks;	Bengaluru/August 2024

		India and the Polar: The Road Ahead; Creation of Indo-Arctic Network	
India Indonesia Track 1.5 Dialogue 2024	Gateway House, Mumbai	Defence, Maritime Security, Trade, Energy Transition and Cyber Security.	Mumbai/September 2024
1 st GTS Innovation Dialogue 2024	Carnegie India	Tech focused discussions on DPI and AI	Bengaluru/October 2024
2 nd International Conference on 'Purvodaya Perspectives' 2024	The Energy Forum	Reclaiming India's Maritime Heritage- Perspectives, Prospects, and Prognosis	Bhubaneswar/December 2024
1 st Track 1.5 Kochi Dialogue 2025	Centre for Public Policy Research	India's Look West Policy in Action: People, Prosperity and Progress	Kochi/January 2025
1 st Health Diplomacy Dialogue 2025	Indian Institute of Public Health and Governance, Gandhinagar	Navigating Health System Challenges: India's Health Diplomacy in Global South	Gandhinagar/January 2025
01 st Technology Dialogue 2025	IISc, Bengaluru	Exploring New Frontiers in Technology Diplomacy	Bengaluru/ January 2025
04 th Maharana Pratap Annual Geopolitics Dialogue 2025	Usanas Foundation	Building Tomorrow: Shaping the Future	Jaipur/February 2025
5 th India-Japan Intellectual Conclave 'Kizuna' 2025	Asian Confluence	Co-creating Ecosystems for change – Technology, Education, and Logistics	Guwahati/February 2025
09 th Asia Economic Dialogue 2025	Pune International Centre	Economic Resilience and Resurgence in an Era of Fragmentation	Pune/February 2025

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY FIFTH SITTING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2024-25) HELD ON 04 AUGUST, 2025

The Committee sat from 1600 hrs. to 1630 hrs. in Committee Room 'C' Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

Present

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Chairperson

Lok Sabha

- 2 Smt. D. K. Aruna
- 3 Shri Vijay Baghel
- 4 Shri Mitesh Patel Bakabhai
- 5 Shri Deepender Singh Hooda
- 6 Shri Navaskani K.
- 7 Shri Brijendra Singh Ola
- 8 Shri Sanatan Pandey
- 9 Dr. Pradeep Kumar Panigrahy
- 10 Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad
- 11 Smt. Aparajita Sarangi
- 12 Shri Arvind Ganpat Sawant
- 13 Ms. Praniti Sushilkumar Shinde
- 14 Shri Naveen Jindal

Rajya Sabha

- 15 Dr. John Brittas
- 16 Dr. K. Laxman
- 17 Ms. Kavita Patidar
- 18 Shri A. D. Singh
- 19 Shri Ratanjeet Pratap Narain Singh
- 20 Dr. Sudhanshu Trivedi

SECRETARIAT

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. | Mr. Anjani Kumar | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. | Smt. Reena Gopalakrishnan | - | Director |
| 3. | Ms. Rachna Saxena | - | 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 Fourth Report of the Committee on Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2024-25.

4. The Chairperson invited the Members to offer their suggestions, if any, for incorporation in the draft Report. After some deliberations, the Committee adopted the draft Report with some modifications.

5. The Committee then authorized the Chairperson to present the Report 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 FOURTH REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (18TH LOK SABHA)**

- | | | |
|-------|---|---------------------------|
| (i) | Total Number of Recommendations | 48 |
|
 | | |
| (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, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46 and 48. | |
| | | Total-40 |
| | | Percentage: 83.3 % |
|
 | | |
| (iii) | Observations/Recommendations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the Government's replies. | |
| | Recommendation No. 22 | |
| | | Total-01 |
| | | Percentage: 2.1 % |
|
 | | |
| (iv) | Observations/Recommendations in respect of which replies of the Government have not been accepted by the Committee and require reiteration. | |
| | Recommendation Nos. 20, 21, 31, 32, 37 and 47 | |
| | | Total- 6 |
| | | Percentage: 12.5% |
|
 | | |
| (v) | Observations/Recommendations in respect of which final replies of the Government are still awaited. | |
| | Recommendation No. 26 | |
| | | Total- 01 |
| | | Percentage: 2.1 % |