

COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

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Introduction

In modern times, Parliaments all over the world have been assuming added responsibilities in response to the growing hopes and aspirations of the people. Their roles and functions have increased manifold with unprecedented growth in the range, magnitude and complexity of governmental activities.

The Parliament of India transacts a great deal of its business through Committees which are, in fact, microcosms and extensions of the Houses. The Committees have contributed a great deal in making the Parliament more effective in exercising control over and giving direction to the executive functioning and thereby making the executive more accountable. Apart from facilitating consideration of complex and technical issues in a non-partisan manner, which the House as a whole may find difficult to discuss, the Committee may provide to the Members additional time for detailed deliberation on the legislative and financial business of the House.

The Committee system in the Indian Parliament consists of various categories of Committees. Foremost among those are the Parliamentary Committees which are appointed or elected by the House or nominated by the Speaker, Lok Sabha or Chairman, Rajya Sabha. These Committees work under the overall directions of the Presiding Officers and as per Rules of Procedure framed from time to time, present their Reports to the concerned House or the Presiding Officer. The Secretariat is provided by one of the two Secretariats of Parliament.

The Departmentally-related Standing Committee (DRSC) system in Indian Parliament came into force in August, 1989 with the setting up of three Subject Committees on Agriculture, Science & Technology and Environment & Forests. The successful functioning of these Committees led to the constitution on 8 April, 1993 of 17 DRSCs related to the Ministries/Departments of Agriculture, Information Technology, Defence, Energy, External Affairs, Finance, Food, Civil Supplies and Public Distribution, Labour and Welfare, Petroleum and Chemicals, Railways, Urban and Rural Development, Commerce, Home Affairs, Human Resource Development, Industry, Science and Technology, Environment & Forests, and Transport and Tourism. Members of the Standing Committees are nominated by the Speaker, Lok Sabha and the Chairman, Rajya Sabha. The setting up of the DRSCs has been the result of years of study of similar experiments in foreign Parliaments of USA, UK, Australia etc. and extensive deliberations at various Parliamentary fora. After watching the working of the DRSC system for over a decade, the system was re-structured in July, 2004 wherein the number of DRSCs was increased from 17 to 24.

The functions of DRSCs are as follows:

- (a) To consider the Demands for Grants of the concerned Ministries/Departments and make a report on the same to the Houses. The report shall not suggest anything of the nature of cut motions;
- (b) To examine such bills pertaining to the concerned Ministries/Departments as are referred to the Committee by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha or the Speaker, as the case may be, and make report thereon;
- (c) To consider Annual Report of Ministries/Departments and make report thereon;
and
- (d) To consider national basic long term policy documents presented to the House, if referred to the Committee by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha or Speaker, as the case may be, and make reports thereon.

The Standing Committee on External Affairs is one of the 17 DRSCs, which has been constituted to examine matters pertaining to the Ministry of External Affairs and the institutions/organisations falling under its purview.

Composition, Chairmanship and Tenure

The Standing Committee on External Affairs consists of 31 members out of which 21 members are nominated by the Hon'ble Speaker from amongst the Member of Lower House (Lok Sabha) and 10 Members are nominated by Chairman, Rajya Sabha from amongst the Members of the Upper House (Rajya Sabha). List of Members of the Standing Committee on External Affairs from the year 1993 till date is reproduced separately under the Membership (1993 onwards).

A Minister is not eligible to be nominated as a Member of the Standing Committee. If a Member is appointed a Minister, he or she ceases to be Member of the Committee.

The Chairperson of the Standing Committee on External Affairs is appointed by the Speaker, from amongst the Members of the Committee representing Lok Sabha *i.e.* House of people. The tenure of the Standing Committee on External Affairs is one year from the date of its constitution, unless the Lok Sabha is dissolved earlier.

Appointment of Sub-Committee/Study Group

The Chairperson of a Standing Committee may appoint Study Groups/Sub-Committees from amongst the members of the Committee with a view to making detailed Study/examination of subjects selected by the Committee.

Association of Technical experts/consultants *etc.*

The Standing Committee on External Affairs may also, if necessary, avail of the expert opinion or the public opinion while examining subjects selected for examination and Bills/Policy as referred by Speaker, Lok Sabha or Chairman, Rajya Sabha.

Procedure relating to the examination of Demands for Grants and Bills

After the presentation of the Budget in Lok Sabha, the Houses are adjourned for a fixed period. The Committee consider the Budgetary provisions of the Ministry of External Affairs presented before the House in the form of Demands for Grants and submit their Report within the aforesaid period without seeking any extension of time.

The Demands for Grants are considered by the House in the light of the Report of the Committee.

As regards bills, the Committee consider only the bills which are referred to them by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha or the Speaker, Lok Sabha after these are introduced in either of the House as the case may be. The Committee can examine the general principles and clauses referred to them and make Report thereon within the given time. So far, the Standing Committee on External Affairs have examined Haj Committee Bill, 2000, The Piracy Bill, 2012, The Nalanda University (Amendment) Bill, 2013 and The Constitution (One Hundred and Nineteenth Amendment) Bill, 2013 and presented the Reports. The Bills have since been passed by both the Houses of Parliament.

Examination of Long Term Government Policy Documents and Annual Reports/Subjects

The Standing Committee on External Affairs may also examine long term policy documents of the Government as and when referred to them.

The Committee may also select any other subject for examination arising out of the Annual Report of the Ministry of External Affairs. The Committee may take-up detailed examination of some of such selected topics, subject to availability of time. So far, the Standing Committee on External Affairs have presented their Reports on the following subject:-

1. Passport Facilities;
2. Situation prevailing in Pakistan occupied Kashmir and Northern Areas;
3. Indian Council for Cultural Relations;
4. India's role in United Nations with particular reference to her claim for permanent Membership of Security Council.

5. Issues relating to Overseas Indians.
6. Problems relating to Overseas Indian Marriages: Schemes for providing legal/financial assistance/rehabilitation to Indian women deserted by their Overseas Indian spouses.
7. Passport Seva Project – Targets and Achievements
8. Recruitment, structure and capacity-building of IFS Cadre, including need for a separate UPSC examination for cadre, mid-career entry and in-service training and orientation.
9. India's Soft Power Diplomacy including role of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Indian Diaspora.
10. Indo-Pak Relations.

Drafting and presentation of Reports/Minutes, Action Taken Reports and Statements on Action Taken

After examination of a subject, the Committee prepare a Report which, after its adoption by the Committee and factual verification by the Ministry of External Affairs, is presented by Chairperson of the Committee to the Lok Sabha and laid on the Table of Rajya Sabha by a Member of the Committee belonging to that House. Minutes of Sittings of the Committee are laid on the Table of the House along with the relevant Report. So far ninety six reports on various subjects have been prepared and presented by the Standing Committee on External Affairs. A List of all the Reports is reproduced separately under the title List of Reports (1993 onwards).

In respect of Reports on Demands for Grants and other subjects, the Ministry of External Affairs are required to take action on the Observations/ Recommendations contained in the Reports and furnish action taken replies thereon with a period of three months.

Action Taken Notes received from the Ministry are examined by the Committee and Action Taken Reports thereafter are finalized and presented to the Houses.

After the presentation of the Action Taken Reports of the Committee, the Ministry of External Affairs are required to take action on the Recommendations contained in Chapter I and furnish the final replies to the recommendations contained in

Chapter V of the Report at the earliest. The replies so received are consolidated in the form of a Statement and after Chairperson's approval, laid on the table of the House.

Briefing by Government Officials

The Committee are generally briefed by the officials of the Ministry of External Affairs and other Ministries, if so required, on important issues/developments concerning the respective Ministries. Some of the important issues on which the Committee have been briefed so far are - Dual citizenship for Indian Diaspora; Illegal Human Trafficking from India; Problems of workers in Gulf countries; implications of evolving situation in West Asia and India's response thereto; Problems and protection of Migrant workers, professionals and students abroad; Indo-US relations; India's relation with Pakistan and India's role and engagement with Afghanistan post-2014; India's commitments regarding United Nations Sustainable Development Goal and Climate Change Targets; Recent developments in Nepal and its implications for India and Status of India's trade partnerships as well as pending Free Trade Agreements with various countries/blocs.

Interaction with Foreign Delegations/Dignitaries

From time-to-time Hon'ble Chairperson and Members of the Standing Committee on External Affairs meet various Foreign Parliamentary delegations visiting India to facilitate meaningful interaction and understanding on global and bilateral issues.

Such regular and useful interactions between the Chairperson and Members of the Committee and Foreign delegations have led to greater appreciation of each other's viewpoints and extensive deliberations on issues of mutual interest thereby adding further momentum to our bilateral cooperation and understanding with as many friendly countries as possible.

A List of Foreign delegations/dignitaries who have met Hon'ble Chairperson and Members of the Committee so far is available separately under the title Meetings with Foreign Delegations.

Study Tours undertaken by the Standing Committee

The Standing Committee/Study Groups of the Committee may with prior permission of the Speaker, Lok Sabha, undertake, if necessary, on-the-spot study visits of

various institutions and establishments falling within the purview of Ministry of External Affairs and connected with the subjects under consideration. A Study Group of Standing Committee on External Affairs visited four Gulf countries *i.e.* Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and UAE for on-the-spot study of the role of Indian Missions in Gulf countries and met the Heads of the States/Government/Foreign Missions/Committee of Foreign Relations and Members of Indian community there.

The Study Groups of the Committee on External Affairs have also visited various Regional Passport Offices/ Protector of Emigrants Offices/ Regional Centers of Indian Council for Cultural Relations for on-the-spot study of their functioning. While examining the subject 'Recruitment, structure and capacity building of IFS Cadre including need for separate UPSC examination for Cadre, mid-career entry and in-service training and orientation', the Committee visited the Foreign Service Institute at New Delhi to acquaint themselves with the training being imparted to the IFS Officers. Similarly, the Committee visited Regional Passport Offices/Passport Seva Kendras at Bengaluru, Bhopal, Gurgaon and Delhi during the examination of the subject 'Passport Seva Project – Targets and Achievements'. The first hand impressions gathered during such study visits have proved to be of immense value while drafting the Reports of the Committee on the relevant subjects.