

19

**COMMITTEE
ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(2022-23)**

SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Action Taken by the Government on the Observations/ Recommendations contained in the Twelfth Report of the Committee on the subject 'Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2022-23'

NINETEENTH REPORT



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

DECEMBER, 2022 /Agrahayana, 1944 (Saka)

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(2022-23)

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Action Taken by the Government on the Observations/ Recommendations contained in the Nineteenth Report of the Committee on the subject 'Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2022-23'

Presented to Lok Sabha on 22 December, 2022
Laid on the Table of Rajya Sabha on 22 December, 2022



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

DECEMBER, 2022 /Agrahayana, 1944 (Saka)

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COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2022-23)

Shri P.P. Chaudhary, Chairperson

Lok Sabha

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

Rajya Sabha

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

Secretariat

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

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Committee on External Affairs (2022-23) having been authorized by the Committee to submit the Report on their behalf, present this Nineteenth Report (17th Lok Sabha) on action taken by the Government on the Observations/Recommendations contained in the Twelfth Report of the Committee on the subject 'Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2022-23'.

2. The Twelfth Report was presented to the Lok Sabha and laid on the Table of Rajya Sabha on 23 March, 2022. The Action Taken Replies of the Government on all the Observations/Recommendations contained in the Report were received on 07 July, 2022 (English Version) and 16 August, 2022 (Hindi Version).

3. The Committee considered and adopted this Action Taken Report at their Sitting held on 19 December, 2022. 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 Twelfth Report of the Committee on External Affairs is given at Appendix-II.

NEW DELHI
19 December, 2022
28 Agrahayana, 1944 (Saka)

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

CHAPTER-I

This Report of the Committee on External Affairs deals with the action taken by the Government on the observations/recommendations contained in their Twelfth Report on the subject 'Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2022-23' which was presented to the Lok Sabha and laid on the Table of the Rajya Sabha on 23 March 2022.

2. The Action Taken Notes have been received from the Ministry of External Affairs on all the 33 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, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 28, 29, 30 and 33.

Total- 26

Chapter-II

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

Recommendation Nos. 26, 27, 31 and 32

Total- 4

Chapter-III

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

Recommendation No. 15, 25

Total- 2

Chapter-IV

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

Recommendation Nos. 23

Total- 1

Chapter-V

3. The Committee desire that final replies to the comments contained in Chapter-I and observation/recommendation 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.

Embassies and Missions

(Recommendation No. 6)

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

‘The Committee note that the budgetary sub-head ‘Embassies and Missions’ which caters to expenditure on India’s representation abroad and functioning of Missions/Posts abroad, have witnessed an upward trend. An allocation of Rs. 2861.06 crore was provisioned during BE 2021-22, which was increased to Rs. 3397.99 crore during RE 2021-22 and further to Rs. 3769.06 crore during BE 2022-23. As per the Ministry, the enhanced allocation has been provided mainly for opening of 3 new Missions in Estonia, Paraguay and Dominican Republic; increase under the Salaries head and Medical Treatment due to increase in medical expenses in view of Covid 19. The Committee note that out of 193 UN

Member countries (including India), India doesn't have resident Missions in 48 countries. The Ministry has informed that it has identified 11 countries where resident Missions can be set up, after obtaining approval from the Cabinet.

The Committee note that the budget allocation for Indian Missions and Posts abroad is a large-scale and comprehensive exercise, wherein fund demands from over 200 Missions and Posts are compiled, assessed and accommodated within the Ministry's overall budgetary constraints. Efforts made by the Ministry for rationalizing the working and expenditure of Indian Missions/Posts are laudable. India aspires to be a permanent member of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and to achieve this objective, our presence in all UN member countries is crucial so as to coordinate our efforts with their Foreign Offices. The Committee, therefore, emphasize the need for having Resident Missions in all UN member countries. The Ministry should chalk out a roadmap for setting up of Indian Missions/Posts in the remaining 48 countries in a timely manner. The Committee also desire to be apprised of the steps taken and progress made in this regard.'

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

“In keeping with the vision of Government of India of maximizing India's diplomatic presence abroad, the Union Cabinet in March 2018 accorded approval for opening of 18 new Indian Missions in Africa in a phased manner between 2018-2021. India has established its presence in 14 Missions in phases in Conakry (Guinea), Djibouti (Djibouti), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Brazzaville (Republic of Congo), Malabo (Equatorial Guinea), Kigali (Rwanda), Yaounde (Cameroon), Asmara (Eritrea), Mbabane (Eswatini), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Sao Tome (Sao Tome and Principe), Lomé (Togo), Monrovia (Liberia) and Nouakchott (Mauritania). Personnel have been deployed to Chad

and are waiting to travel to assume charge. All efforts are being made to operationalise the last 3 Missions viz: Mogadishu (Somalia), Bissau (Guinea-Bissau) and Praia (Cape Verde).

The 3 new Missions in Estonia, Paraguay and Dominican Republic approved by Cabinet in December, 2020 have been made operational in January-February, 2022. Cabinet has also approved opening of new Consulate in Addu, Maldives in May, 2021 and a new Mission in Lithuania in April, 2022 and all efforts including creation of posts of Director & below from Department of Expenditure are underway to operationalize it. Appropriate budgetary provisions are projected as per the expected timeline of operationalization of the Missions, in consultation with the Integrated Finance Division of the Ministry.

Opening of a resident Indian Mission or Post is a time-taking exercise requiring internal planning and approvals for logistics, deployment, infrastructure as well as coordination and liaisoning with the host Government. India has diplomatic engagements with those countries (wherein resident Missions are not currently functional) through concurrent accreditation arrangements. The scope and depth of bilateral relations with these countries are regularly reviewed and Missions are opened in these countries according to need.

List of Missions/Posts are placed at Annexure I.”

7. The Committee had noted that out of 193 UN Member countries (including India), India doesn't have resident Missions in 48 countries. Recognizing the crucial role the Indian Missions/Posts would play in giving impetus to India's aspiration to be a permanent member of United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the Committee had recommended that the Ministry should chalk out a roadmap for setting up of Indian Missions/Posts in the remaining 48 countries in a timely manner. The Committee acknowledge the Ministry's efforts in establishing Indian missions in various counties across the world. The Committee are hopeful that the Missions in Mogadishu (Somalia), Bissau (Guinea-Bissau) and Praia (Cape Verde) shall be made operational soon. The Committee note with satisfaction that Cabinet approval has been granted for opening of

new Consulate in Addu, Maldives in May, 2021 and a new Mission in Lithuania in April, 2022. Though the Committee agree that opening of a resident Indian Mission or Post is a time-taking exercise requiring internal planning and approvals for logistics, deployment, infrastructure as well as coordination and liaisoning with the host Government keeping in sight Government of India's vision of maximizing India's diplomatic presence abroad, however, the Committee reiterate that the Ministry should prepare a roadmap and act sincerely towards establishing Resident Missions remaining in UN member countries and apprise the Committee accordingly.

Passport and Emigration
(Recommendation No. 8)

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

‘The Committee observe that the budgetary allocation under the sub head ‘Passport and Emigration’ has gone down from Rs. 1328.63 crore in BE 2021-22 to Rs. 1056.28 crore in RE 2021-22 and further to Rs.996.67 crore during BE 2022-23. The decreased allocation is primarily due to lesser anticipated expenditure under printing and procurement of travel documents, postal and freight charges for travel documents and service charges for Passport Seva Projects. The Ministry has further stated that requirements of funds, if any, will be considered at the supplementary stage. The Committee note that the Government has planned to issue e-passports to citizens from 2023 and the total anticipated expenditure for rollout of the e-Passport project by NIC is about Rs. 268.67 Crore.

The Committee welcome the use of ICT in improvement of passport issuance system as there is a proposal that the Passport Seva Project will embark on version 2.0 with greater focus on technology adaptation and up- gradation through use of biometrics, Artificial Intelligence, Advance Data Analytics, Chat-bot, Auto response, natural language processing and Cloud Enablement.’

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

“Phase wise budget requirement for e-Passport Project

NIC and NICS I have submitted various project proposals, including Detailed Project Report (DPR), commercial and draft agreements to the Ministry. The total anticipated expenditure for rollout of the e-Passport project by NIC is about Rs. 268.67 Crore. The anticipated expenditure of Rs. 268.67 Crores is primarily for building up Information and Technology Infrastructure for issuance of e-Passport. As per the DPR, readiness of e-Passport setup shall take 6 months from the date of Ministry’s approval of the proposal to NICS I. Once the set-up is ready, the Ministry shall conduct a third party audit after which rollout of issuance of e-Passport for the citizens would be started.

The anticipated expenditure of Rs. 268.67 crores will be incurred over a period of 7 years, the annual breakup of which is given under. The Ministry would be able to manage the e-Passport project within its allocated funds.

(i)	Year 1 -	Rs. 130.58 crores
(ii)	Year 2 -	Rs. 25.03 crores
(iii)	Year 3 -	Rs. 25.03 crores
(iv)	Year 4 -	Rs. 25.03 crores
(v)	Year 5 -	Rs. 25.03 crores
(vi)	Year 6 -	Rs. 24.46 crores
(vii)	Year 7 -	Rs. 13.51 crores"

10. The Committee note that the Government plans to issue e-passports to citizens from 2023 and that the total anticipated expenditure for rollout of the e-Passport project by NIC and NICS I is about Rs. 268.67 Crore. The Committee appreciate that budgetary provisions for a period of 7 years

have been made for the project, the annual breakup of which has also been given by the Ministry. The Committee also welcome Ministry's assurance that it would be able to manage the e-Passport project within its allocated funds every year without any curtailment but they should ensure that the desired fund is also released under the Passport and Emigration head every year. The Committee hope that the Ministry would successfully roll out the issuance of e-passport for citizens after due approval and complete the same within the time frame fixed in this regard. The Committee desire to be kept apprised of the progress in the matter.

Recommendation No. 10

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

‘The Committee note that version 2.0 of the Passport Seva Project will include the issuance of e passports to Indian citizens with embedded chip for ease of international travel. It will be a combined paper and electronic passport with a RFID chip and antenna embedded as an inlay in the back cover While ISP Nashik has finalized the global three-stage tender for procurement of International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)-compliant electronic contactless inlays along with its operating system, the National Informatics Centre Services (NICSI) have been entrusted with the technical responsibilities for issuing the e- Passports.

The Committee welcome the issuance of e-passport from 2023 onwards and are hopeful that it will facilitate ease of travel for Indian citizens, increased security of data and will be in line with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The Committee recommend that the Ministry should take all requisite measures to ensure data privacy and

security of the Indian citizens as contained in the chip. The Committee also desire to be apprised about the progress made with regard to issuance of e-passports.’

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

“The Government is planning to issue e-passports to its citizens, starting in 2022-23. An e-Passport is a combined paper and electronic passport with an embedded Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) chip that contains biometric information that can be used to authenticate the identity of travellers. The Data is written in accordance with the Logical Data Structure (LDS) and secured using the Public Key Interface (PKI) methodology. The personal particulars of the applicants would be digitally stored in the chip which would be embedded in the present form of physical passport booklet. In case, anyone tampers with the chip, the system shall be able to identify it resulting in the failure of the passport authentication.

The data of the citizens for e-Passport would be used for the specific purpose only, i.e. issuance of the passport and related services. There is no secondary use of the data, thereby safeguarding the privacy concerns. Further transaction processes are authenticated by digital certificates and are cryptographically signed. Once captured, the data is stored in a secured repository, i.e. industry standard database. Relevant database security related controls are performed round the clock by Security Operations Centre.

The main benefit of the e-passport is its enhanced ability to maintain the integrity of data. This is expected to increase the level of confidence in the Indian passport. E-passports would also facilitate the ease of travel for Indian citizens, making their interface with immigration authorities much smoother. Since the ICAO has recommended its introduction by member countries, the introduction of e-passports would be in consonance with global best practices.

The Ministry has entrusted National Informatics Centre (NIC) with the technical responsibilities for issuing the e-Passports. Full-scale manufacture and issue will commence with the completion of the technical eco-system and infrastructure.

The e-passports with advanced security features and better printing and paper quality will substantially upgrade existing

passports and service to the citizens. The epassport will provide greater protection against fraudulent practises and tampering. With introduction of this advanced security features, possibilities of forgery of Indian passports will be greatly eliminated. Infrastructure planned to be created for ePassport shall be scalable for enhancing various features in ePassport.

Present Status

Based on the recommendation of Delegated Investment Board, EAM has approved the proposal to implement the e-Passport Project. Tripartite Agreement among MEA, NIC and NICS is being finalized.”

13. The Committee note that version 2.0 of the Passport Seva Project will include the issuance of e-passports to Indian citizens with an embedded Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) chip containing biometric information that can be used to authenticate the identity of travellers. The Committee further note that the personal particulars of the applicants would be digitally stored in the chip which would be embedded in the present form of physical passport booklet. The Committee have been assured that the chip shall be tamper proof and that the system shall be able to identify any tampering of the chip resulting in the failure of the passport authentication thus providing greater protection against fraudulent practises. The Committee are allayed by Ministry’s assurance that the data of the citizens for e-Passport would be used for the specific purpose only, i.e. issuance of the passport and related services and that there is no secondary use of the data, thereby safeguarding the privacy concerns. The Committee are also reassured to note that once captured, the data is stored in a secured repository and that the relevant database security related controls are performed round the clock by Security Operations Centre. The Committee are optimistic that e-passports with its advanced security features shall ensure integrity of data and increase the level of confidence in Indian passports. The Committee have been apprised

by the Ministry that EAM has approved the proposal to implement the e-Passport Project and that the Tripartite Agreement among MEA, NIC and NICS I is being finalized. The Committee urge the Ministry to expedite the finalization of Tripartite Agreement among MEA, NIC and NICS I to ensure a timely completion of version 2.0 of the Passport Seva Project. The Committee also desire to be kept apprised of the progress in the matter.

(Recommendation No. 11)

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

‘The Committee note that the shortage of personnel in the Central Passport Organization has been a recurrent challenge in Passport Seva Project (PSP). As on 1 March, 2021, the sanctioned strength of Central Passport Organisation is 2741 and the actual working strength of the Central Passport Organisation (CPO) Cadre is 1723. The Ministry has apprised the Committee about the corrective measures that are being taken to address this challenge. These include promotion of eligible officers to the next grade, deputation from Central Government employees, conducting of Direct Recruitments/Limited Departmental Competitive Examinations (LDCE) by Staff Selection Commission, etc. The Committee also recall that staffing study of CPO by the Staff Inspection Unit (SIU) of the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance has been pending since 2019.

The issue of human capital has been a major area of concern and has been part of the Committee’s recommendations over the years. Taking serious cognizance of this matter, the Committee strongly recommend that the Ministry should take up this issue with Department

of Personnel and Training (DoPT) at the highest level and ensure that the vacant positions are filled up in the shortest possible time. The Committee would also like to be apprised about the status of the pending staffing study of CPO.

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

“The Sanctioned Strength of Central Passport Organisation is 2741 and the actual working strength of the Central Passport Organisation (CPO) cadre is 1746 as on 01.05.2022. In addition, 21 posts (including 15 Technical and 6 supporting staff) were sanctioned by the Union Cabinet for the Project Management Unit (PMU) of the Passport Seva Project. The break of the vacancies is as under:

Sl. No.	Group 'A'		Group 'B' Gazetted		Group 'B' and Group 'C' non-Gazetted	
	Sanctioned Strength	Working Strength	Sanctioned strength	Working strength	Sanctioned strength	Working strength
Total	226	161	565	351	1950	1234
Net Vacancy	65		214		716	

Ministry has taken the following steps to fill up the existing vacancies at the Passport Offices:

The regular placement of indents for recruitment of Office Assistant(MTS), Junior Passport Assistant, Assistant Superintendent, Junior Translation Officer and Stenographers with Staff Selection Commission (SSC). 368 posts at various levels have been indented to SSC. Out of which, 92 dossiers were received recently from SSC and appointment letters have been issued to the candidates. Further, there are 123 vacancies pertaining to different vacancy years to be filled up from the respective feeder posts as per Recruitment Rules through Limited Departmental Competitive Examination (LDCE) being conducted by SSC for which SSC has been requested persistently. For 96 vacancies of Assistant Superintendents to be filled through LDCE, “No Objection Certificate” (NOC) to conduct the examination by the Ministry of External Affairs itself has been obtained from SSC. Accordingly, EdCIL, a PSU under Ministry of Education has been

hired to conduct the said examination which will be conducted in the ensuing months.

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

To fill up the existing vacancies at the Passport Offices, regular meetings of the Department Promotion Committees (DPCs) have been held for the promotion of eligible officials to the next grade.

The Ministry is appointing the officers on deputation basis as per Recruitment Rules of Deputy Passport Officer and Passport Officer.

2. As regards to the proposal submitted to D/o Expenditure, Ministry of Finance to carry out the Physical Inspection & Staffing Study of CPO, it is mentioned that the Ministry of Finance has recently advised the MEA, in November, 2021, to carry out the review of the Cadres under them for which they are Cadre Controlling Authority as per extant guidelines on the subject and thereafter it may be referred to M/o Finance with the recommendations of Financial Adviser and with the approval of Minister-in-Charge. Accordingly, a fresh Committee to review all the Cadres of Central Passport Organisation under Ministry of External Affairs is being constituted with due approval of Minister-in-Charge.”

16. The Committee have year after year raised concerns regarding the issue of shortage of staff in the Central Passport Organisation (CPO) cadre. The committee are appalled to note that despite repeated appeals to the Ministry to address the issue of shortage of personnel in the Central Passport Organization on priority basis, the reply furnished by the Ministry reflects a shortfall of 996 personnel in the working strength of the Central Passport Organisation (CPO) cadre as on 01.05.2022 i.e nearly 36 % vacancy in the cadre strength of CPO. While the Committee acknowledge that the Ministry is taking plethora of corrective measures to address the issue, the Committee are disappointed in the undue delay in the process of filling of such large number of vacancies. The Committee also

note that the staffing study of CPO by the Staff Inspection Unit (SIU) of the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance has been pending since 2019. It is disparaging to note that after nearly two years, the Ministry of Finance has advised the MEA to carry out the review of the Cadres under them as per extant guidelines on the subject and thereafter refer the same to M/o Finance with the recommendations of Financial Adviser and with the approval of Minister-in-Charge. The Ministry has apprised the Committee that a fresh Committee to review all the Cadres of Central Passport Organisation under Ministry of External Affairs is being constituted with due approval of Minister-in-Charge. The Committee urge the Ministry to fast track the constitution of the Committee seek their recommendation in the shortest possible time and make more concerted efforts to fulfill the vacancies. The Committee also desire to be apprised of the recommendations of the Review Committee and the steps being taken to implement their recommendations.

India's Development Partnership
(Recommendation No. 15)

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

‘The Committee note that the extent, magnitude and scope of India’s international development cooperation have expanded significantly in recent years. The Ministry has submitted that the developmental aid and assistance projects, including capacity building assistance are implemented with the long- term goal of generating goodwill and thereby creating positive influence or leverage to derive foreign policy objectives. The Committee are aware about the plethora of challenges faced in implementation of projects abroad. The Committee

have also taken note of the institutionalized review mechanism for monitoring of technical aid and development assistance projects. Expressing concern over the unpredictable budgetary demands and allocation under this Head, and reiterating their opinion, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should frame a developmental aid/cooperation policy and a separate aid disbursal body should be established for smooth and effective implementation of international aid projects.’

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

“IFD response based on previous years’ reply –

India’s development partnership cooperation is integral part of India’s foreign policy. The inalienable component of our development cooperation is “partnership”. India’s economic cooperation through development partnership is demand driven. For example, India’s Grants-in-aid projects and capacity building programs are demand driven and are based on local demand/priority of the partner countries. Through development cooperation, Government aims to give fillip to South-South Cooperation.

Development assistance is offered on the request of the host government, which is scrutinized by the Ministry in consultation with concerned Territorial Division from foreign policy perspective and also the line ministries. Feasibility study/DPR is undertaken by the project implementation agency, which is vetted by the line ministries. Physical and financial progress is monitored at various levels, including our Missions abroad as well as Project Monitoring Committees (PMC) constituted for this specific purpose. Additionally, expert advice of consultants and technical advisors on deputation from other specialized organizations outside the Ministry is also taken regarding implementation of these projects. Moreover, period reviews of the development assistance programs, viz., comprehensive review of ITEC, CEITs, etc are undertaken to attune these programs from impact and outcome perspective. Budgetary outlays are pre-fixed and payments are released on milestone basis.

As regards Hon'ble Committee's recommendation of instituting a separate aid disbursal body, the Ministry is fully seized of the matter and is periodically reviewing all aspects of development cooperation and aid delivery."

19. In view of significant expansion of extent, magnitude and scope of India's international development cooperation the Committee have been continuously recommending the Ministry to frame a development aid/cooperation policy and establishment of a separate aid disbursal body for smooth and effective implementation of international aid projects. While the Committee appreciate that the progress of development assistance offered to the host governments is being closely monitored by the Ministry, the Committee are of the considered view that establishment of a separate aid disbursal body shall fast track the scrutiny and disbursement process. The Committee strongly feel that framing a development aid/cooperation policy shall in the long run help in achieving the Ministry's aim to give fillip to South-South Cooperation. The Committee are not satisfied by the arguments put forth by the Ministry in the matter and, therefore, reiterate their recommendation and desire that the Ministry should explore the feasibility of framing a development aid/cooperation policy and establishing a separate aid disbursal body for smooth and effective implementation of international aid projects.

Overseas Indian Affairs
(Recommendation No. 23)

20. The Committee in their report had observed/recommended as under:
- ‘The erstwhile Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MoIA), which was primarily responsible for protection and welfare of overseas Indians, was merged with the Ministry of External Affairs in 2016. Since then, the Overseas Indian Affairs Division within the MEA has been dealing with

issues relating to engagement with Indian Diaspora. Observing a general trend of ad hocism and arbitrariness in budgetary allocation to schemes and programmes related to welfare and protection of the overseas Indians, the Committee had been steadily recommending the Ministry to accord requisite fiscal space and importance to such a critical aspect of its responsibility. The Committee are disappointed to note that budgetary allocation for schemes/programmes related to welfare of overseas Indians during the current fiscals has either been reduced or kept constant. The Ministry's assertion that COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions and lockdowns have hampered the execution of programmes & schemes in India & in Missions abroad have been duly noted. The Committee observe that a Working Group has been constituted under the Chairmanship of Secretary (CPV&OIA) for evaluation of various Schemes and Programmes for the welfare of the Indian Diaspora. The Committee welcome the creation of a new budget head for the Nirbhaya Fund with an allocation of Rs. 5 Crore for empowerment, safety and security of women and girl children. In this regard, the Ministry has informed that the guidelines to be followed by the Missions/Posts abroad for establishment and operation of the One Stop Centre are also being worked upon.

Taking a serious view of the unpredictability and low budgetary allocation for Overseas Indians, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should prepare a vision for reaching out to all Indians abroad in a more committed manner and project improved budgetary allocations for the same. The Committee would like to be apprised about the findings of the Report of the Working Group in six months. With regard to the newly created Nirbhaya Fund, the Committee desire that guidelines

for establishing the One Stop Centres are chalked out without any further delay so that the disbursal from the fund does not suffer.

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

“Due to Covid-19 pandemic, travel restrictions and lockdowns hampered the execution of programmes & schemes throughout FY 2020-21. Ministry will be holding the next Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in January, 2023, which would increase the budgetary expenditure/allocations substantially. Other schemes which were in abeyance because of COVID will also be executed this year, which will also increase the budgetary allocation for the Diaspora related activities. The next meeting of the Working Group expected to be held soon. The outcome of the same shall be apprised to the Committee. Further, it is informed that the guidelines for establishing the One Stop Centres have already been formulated and vetted by the competent authority in the Ministry.”

22. On the issue of budgetary allocation for schemes/programmes related to welfare of overseas Indians, the Committee had recommended that the Ministry should prepare a vision for reaching out to all Indians abroad in a more committed manner and project improved budgetary allocations for the same. Ministry’s assurance that holding of the next Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in January, 2023, and execution of other schemes kept in abeyance because of COVID Pandemic would entail increase in the budgetary allocation for the Diaspora related activities is duly noted, however, committee do not find any reason for delay in preparation of vision for reaching out to all Indian abroad. The Committee also hope the next meeting of the Working Group will be scheduled without further delay. The Committee should be kept apprised of the outcome of the same and the progress in preparation of a vision. The Committee also desire to be apprised of the approved guidelines to be followed by the Missions/Posts abroad for establishment and operation of the One Stop Centres.

Recommendation No. 25

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

‘In view of the number and spread of overseas Indians, there is a high possibility of them getting stranded in a crisis situation. The recent political crisis in Afghanistan and conflict in Ukraine is a gross reminder about the implications on safety and security of Indian nationals in such a volatile situation. The role played by the Ministry in Afghanistan and Ukraine in the recent past has been commendable. The Committee, therefore, feel that evacuation preparedness has emerged as a significant issue. The Committee are aware that during outbreak of conflict or any other exigencies, the evacuation of Indian citizens is planned on a case-to-case basis and evacuation is dependent on a number of factors. The Committee desire that a database of Indian nationals abroad may be prepared and updated on a regular basis for emergency situations. Furthermore, a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for evacuation of Indian nationals stranded in exigencies must also be chalked out and the same may be made available at all Indian Missions/Posts abroad. The Committee would like to be kept informed about steps taken in this direction.’

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

“The Ministry has been keeping a record of Indian Diaspora abroad and keeps updating the same. Separate databases are being maintained in respect of NRIs, PIOs and Students. However collation of such data is dependent on voluntary registration by our diaspora living abroad.

A Rapid Response Cell (RRC) has been created in the Ministry to deal with exigencies and emergency situations similar to the recent Ukraine crisis, where more than 22 thousand stranded Indians were evacuated by the Government in “Operation Ganga”.

The Rapid Response Cell in the Ministry handled SOP for the Control Room set up during the evacuation process. Based on the event report sent by the Indian Mission in Kyiv after Operation Ganga, recommendations for implementation/inclusion of evacuation procedures in MEA's existing Crisis Management Plan is already under consideration.”

25. On the issue of evacuation preparedness for stranded Indian Diaspora abroad, the Committee had desired that a database of Indian nationals abroad may be prepared and updated on a regular basis for emergency situations. The Committee acknowledge the Ministry's submission that it has been keeping a record of Indian Diaspora abroad and keeps updating the same. Separate databases are being maintained in respect of NRIs, PIOs and Students. The Committee also appreciate that a rapid response Cell has been created in the Ministry to deal with exigencies and emergency situations abroad. The Committee, however, note that the Ministry's reply is silent on the issue of chalking out of Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for evacuation of Indian nationals stranded in exigencies and the making the same available at all Indian Missions/Posts abroad. Lives of thousands of distressed/stranded Indian Nationals is dependent on the quick and decisive actions taken by the Ministry and Indian Missions/Post abroad. A set of Standard Operating Procedure would go a long way in assisting the staff of the Indian Mission/Posts abroad in taking proactive steps to ensure timely and safe evacuations of stranded Indian Diaspora abroad. As such the Committee reiterate their earlier recommendation that a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for evacuation of Indian nationals stranded in exigencies may be chalked out by the Ministry at the earliest and the same may be made available at all Indian Missions/Posts abroad.

CHAPTER II
OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN
ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT

Recommendation (Sl. No. 1)

The Committee observe that MEA's budgetary allocation for FY 2022-23 is Rs. 17, 250 crore which is 4.98% less than BE 2021-22 allocation and 7.81% more than RE 2021-22 allocation. The Committee also observe that despite an increase in the overall budget allocation of the Government of India, the allocation made to MEA in percentage terms has witnessed a downward turn during the last four years and during 2022-23 it is only 0.44 % of the Government of India's overall Budget.

The Committee do not find such allocation in consonance with the country's rising aspirations and growing global stature. The Committee are rather dismayed by the fact that the budgetary allocation made to MEA at the BE stage is lowest in both absolute as well as relative terms. In Committee's view in connection with India's rising global profile, engagement and footprint, the allocations made to MEA are evidently insufficient. The Committee are not satisfied with the reply of the Ministry that the issue of provisioning of adequate funds has been vigorously taken up with the Ministry of Finance at various levels but with adverse results. The Committee hope that with the subsiding of the Covid Pandemic, regular activities of the Ministry will resume and more funds will be needed to pace up the delayed projects and exchanges. The Committee, therefore, would like that the allocations made to MEA should be increased substantially and be brought at least at the level of one per cent of GoI's overall Budget every year. The Committee, strongly urge the Ministry to make a compelling case for enhanced allocation at the RE stage and also continue its constructive engagement with the Ministry of Finance for the same.

Reply of the Government

Ministry has been making concerted efforts to engage with the Ministry of Finance at the level of Minister, Secretary and Financial Advisor. These efforts to engage with and apprise the Ministry of Finance of our requirement of funds has been ongoing and will be continued. This engagement has been positive and constructive, as indicated by the decreasing gap between Ministry's demand and allocation of funds. As recommended by the Hon'ble Committee, Ministry will endeavour to effectively utilize its budgetary allocation so that a compelling case for adequate resources can be made to the Ministry of Finance at the RE stage.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 2)

While examining the Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs, the mismatch between the budgetary demand and actual allocations has been an issue that has drawn considerable attention of the Committee. The Committee have noted that the RE 2021-22 allocation of Rs. 16,000 crore is 87.79 % of MEA's demand and BE 2022-23 allocation of 17,250 crore is 83.30 % of MEA's demand. The Ministry's assertion that Ministry's RE and BE demand-allocation differential has reduced indicating realistic projections and constructive appreciation of Ministry's requirements by Ministry of Finance as indeed financial value principle of Zero Based Budgeting brings. In terms of numbers, the reduction in the gap has been generous. However, at a substantive level it appears that the improvement is due to lower demand sought by MEA and not better allocation given by the Government. The Committee, therefore, exhort the Ministry to make projections based on India's widening and deepening engagement with the world as adequate finances only will allow the Ministry to perform optimally in this regard.

Reply of the Government

Ministry would like to submit that the decreasing gap between demand and allocation of budget at the BE and RE stages may be seen as a reflection of Ministry's concerted efforts to formulate budgetary demands with greater rigor of Zero based budgeting and constructive appreciation by Ministry of Finance of Ministry's demands. Further, the aspect of zero based budgeting has also been an integral part of the Hon'ble Committee's recommendations to the Ministry over the years and efforts have been made to imbibe the same in its budgetary projections. This has led to a realistic and budgetary projections and allocation based on realistic expectation of budgetary utilization.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 3)

The Committee are pleased to note that the Ministry has incorporated the underlying principles of Zero Based Budgeting in their budgetary process. The Ministry has stated that in consonance with Zero-Based Budgeting, that no head both in Scheme or Non-Scheme heads are given fixed or rigid budgetary resource allocation/management, but, each head is assessed for respective demands considering a base of Zero. Moreover, allocations for Aid heads are made after undertaking a realistic spending assessment based on project implementation cycles, local conditions and physical progress for on-going projects, schemes and programmes; and based on project implementation timelines and cost estimates for planned projects, schemes and programmes.

The availability of requisite funds is critical for effective and smooth functioning of the Ministry of External Affairs that has been mandated with the task of conducting India's foreign policy. It is, therefore, imperative to have a meticulous budgetary exercise so that allocations are sought on the basis of realistic assessment and valid justifications. With an objective of further streamlining of the budgetary process, the Ministry should continue making

efforts to realize credible budgetary demands justified by past efficient utilization of funds and objective assessment of anticipated expenditures based on implementation progress. Good budgetary process needs to be backed by constructive engagement with the Ministry of Finance. The Committee would recommend that the Ministry should strongly reach out to the Ministry of Finance for better appreciation of their fund requirements.

Reply of the Government

As per recommendations of Hon'ble Standing Committee and best practices of budgetary management, Ministry continues to strive to formulate budgetary demands with greater rigor of Zero based budgeting. Therefore, unit based expenditure plans based on anticipated progress in ongoing projects, likely new initiatives, challenges being faced in individual projects etc, all form part of comprehensive consideration of budgetary demand and allocation.

Ministry would also like to assure the Hon'ble Committee that it will continue its efforts to engage with the Ministry of Finance at all levels to ensure better appreciation of our fund requirements.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 4)

The Committee are aware that the past two years have been unusual due to the COVID-19 Pandemic related disruptions across the globe. Notwithstanding this fact, the Ministry of External Affairs has been an effective spender and a perusal of their quarterly expenditure during the last three financial years are a testimony to it. During the FY 2021-22, in consonance with the Cash Management Guidelines of Ministry of Finance, the cumulative quarterly expenditure has been 14 %, 37% and 55%. The Committee note that regular monitoring of expenditure by the designated mechanism has been a catalyst in ensuring smooth and even pace of expenditure. The Committee also note that all

instructions contained in various Circulars of the Ministry of Finance towards economy measures, rationalization of expenditure, etc., are being scrupulously followed by the Ministry. The Committee are optimistic that the Ministry will continue making efforts to ensure optimum and even pace of expenditure in the upcoming year. The Ministry should showcase its prudent and effective utilization pattern as a strong basis for seeking enhanced allocations from the Ministry of Finance during both RE as well as BE stages.

Reply of the Government

Ministry would like to thank the Hon'ble Committee for appreciating its efforts to effectively monitor and ensure even pace of expenditure in all quarters of the previous financial year (2021-22), as also our efforts to follow instructions issued by Ministry of Finance towards economy and rationalization of expenditure. Ministry will continue making efforts to ensure optimum and even pace of expenditure in the Current Financial Year. As advised by the Hon'ble Committee, Ministry will apprise the Ministry of Finance and showcase its utilization of funds as a strong basis for seeking enhanced allocations from the Ministry of Finance during both RE as well as BE stages.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 5)

Over the past five years, the Committee have been recommending that the Ministry should carry out cross-Ministry as well as cross-country (of Ministries/Departments with the mandate of managing foreign affairs) comparative analysis of budgetary allocations. During the last Demands for Grants Report, the Ministry was asked to submit the findings of the study within three months. Since 2019, the Ministry has been furnishing the same reply that the preliminary report of the study conducted by Research and Information System for Economic Development (RIS) is under examination. Further, this

year, the Ministry has submitted that the RIS has been requested to expand the mandate of the study to include more number of countries and more number of Ministries within the Government of India for a more accurate comparative analysis and the Report is in its final stages and will be completed in this financial year.

The Committee are disappointed by the casual approach of the Ministry on such a significant matter. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommend that the comparative study must be finalized in the current financial year, without fail. The Committee also desire that the findings of this study should be used to strengthen the case for making more budgetary demands so that Indian foreign policy is carried out in alignment with its expanding mandate and activities.

Reply of the Government

Ministry would like to apprise the Hon'ble Committee that the Report on the cross- Ministry and cross-country comparative study of budgetary allocations of Ministries /Departments with the mandate of managing foreign affairs, being prepared by Research and Information System for Economic Development (RIS), is in the final stages of its completion. As submitted earlier, RIS was requested to expand the mandate of the study to include more number of countries (representing a good mix of developed and emerging economies) and more number of Ministries within the Government of India (representing a cross section of key/ big and similarly placed Ministries) for a more accurate comparative analysis. As the Report is in its final stages, Ministry is confident of achieving its stated target of completion of the Report in the current financial year.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 6)

The Committee note that the budgetary sub-head ‘Embassies and Missions’ which caters to expenditure on India’s representation abroad and functioning of Missions/Posts abroad, have witnessed an upward trend. An allocation of Rs. 2861.06 crore was provisioned during BE 2021-22, which was increased to Rs. 3397.99 crore during RE 2021-22 and further to Rs Rs. 3769.06 crore during BE 2022-23. As per the Ministry, the enhanced allocation has been provided mainly for opening of 3 new Missions in Estonia, Paraguay and Dominican Republic; increase under the Salaries head and Medical Treatment due to increase in medical expenses in view of Covid 19. The Committee note that out of 193 UN Member countries (including India), India doesn’t have resident Missions in 48 countries. The Ministry has informed that it has identified 11 countries where resident Missions can be set up, after obtaining approval from the Cabinet.

The Committee note that the budget allocation for Indian Missions and Posts abroad is a large-scale and comprehensive exercise, wherein fund demands from over 200 Missions and Posts are compiled, assessed and accommodated within the Ministry’s overall budgetary constraints. Efforts made by the Ministry for rationalizing the working and expenditure of Indian Missions/Posts are laudable. India aspires to be a permanent member of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and to achieve this objective, our presence in all UN member countries is crucial so as to coordinate our efforts with their Foreign Offices. The Committee, therefore, emphasize the need for having Resident Missions in all UN member countries. The Ministry should chalk out a roadmap for setting up of Indian Missions/Posts in the remaining 48 countries in a timely manner. The Committee also desire to be apprised of the steps taken and progress made in this regard.

Reply of the Government

In keeping with the vision of Government of India of maximizing India's diplomatic presence abroad, the Union Cabinet in March 2018 accorded approval for opening of 18 new Indian Missions in Africa in a phased manner between 2018-2021. India has established its presence in 14 Missions in phases in Conakry (Guinea), Djibouti (Djibouti), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Brazzaville (Republic of Congo), Malabo (Equatorial Guinea), Kigali (Rwanda), Yaounde (Cameroon), Asmara (Eritrea), Mbabane (Eswatini), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Sao Tome (Sao Tome and Principe), Lomé (Togo), Monrovia (Liberia) and Nouakchott (Mauritania). Personnel have been deployed to Chad and are waiting to travel to assume charge. All efforts are being made to operationalise the last 3 Missions viz: Mogadishu (Somalia), Bissau (Guinea-Bissau) and Praia (Cape Verde).

The 3 new Missions in Estonia, Paraguay and Dominican Republic approved by Cabinet in December, 2020 have been made operational in January-February, 2022. Cabinet has also approved opening of new Consulate in Addu, Maldives in May, 2021 and a new Mission in Lithuania in April, 2022 and all efforts including creation of posts of Director & below from Department of Expenditure are underway to operationalize it. Appropriate budgetary provisions are projected as per the expected timeline of operationalization of the Missions, in consultation with the Integrated Finance Division of the Ministry.

Opening of a resident Indian Mission or Post is a time-taking exercise requiring internal planning and approvals for logistics, deployment, infrastructure as well as coordination and liaisoning with the host Government. India has diplomatic engagements with those countries (wherein resident Missions are not currently functional) through concurrent accreditation arrangements. The scope and depth of bilateral relations with these countries are

regularly reviewed and Missions are opened in these countries according to need.

List of Missions/Posts are placed at Annexure I

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 7)

Recognizing the significance of evaluation and monitoring in improvement of the overall functioning of the various Mission/Posts abroad, the Committee had persistently called up on the Ministry to expedite the launching of Revamped (Performance Evaluation and Monitoring System) Portal. The Committee are satisfied to learn that PEMS 2.0 portal, a centralized online monitoring mechanism to evaluate the functioning of our Missions/Posts abroad on an annual basis, was launched in 2021. The Ministry has submitted that the monitoring is being done through evaluation of the responses of the Missions/Posts of a comprehensive questionnaire that includes questions related to political, economic, cultural, administrative and financial processes and consular responsibilities. It is discerned that provisional evaluation has been completed in respect of almost all the 193 Missions/Posts and final evaluation has also been done in respect of more than 90% of these Missions//Posts. The findings of evaluation done through PEMS 2.0 Portal vary from Mission to Missions and remedial measures, where necessary have been suggested. While appreciating the revamped monitoring mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of Mission/Posts abroad, the Committee desire that the Ministry should continue to regularly follow up on the actions being taken by each Mission.

Reply of the Government

Ministry would like to confirm that it continues to follow up with respect to action being taken by the various Missions/Posts as recommended by the

Committee. Ministry would also like to inform that it has launched PEMS 3.0 questionnaire to conduct annual evaluation of Missions/Posts for Financial Year 2021-22.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 8)

The Committee observe that the budgetary allocation under the sub head 'Passport and Emigration' has gone down from Rs. 1328.63 crore in BE 2021-22 to Rs. 1056.28 crore in RE 2021-22 and further to Rs.996.67 crore during BE 2022-23. The decreased allocation is primarily due to lesser anticipated expenditure under printing and procurement of travel documents, postal and freight charges for travel documents and service charges for Passport Seva Projects. The Ministry has further stated that requirements of funds, if any, will be considered at the supplementary stage. The Committee note that the Government has planned to issue e-passports to citizens from 2023 and the total anticipated expenditure for rollout of the e-Passport project by NIC is about Rs. 268.67 Crore.

The Committee welcome the use of ICT in improvement of passport issuance system as there is a proposal that the Passport Seva Project will embark on version 2.0 with greater focus on technology adaptation and up-gradation through use of biometrics, Artificial Intelligence, Advance Data Analytics, Chat-bot, Auto response, natural language processing and Cloud Enablement.

Reply of the Government

Phase wise budget requirement for e-Passport Project

NIC and NICS I have submitted various project proposals, including Detailed Project Report (DPR), commercial and draft agreements to the Ministry. The total anticipated expenditure for rollout of the e-Passport project by NIC is about Rs.

268.67 Crore. The anticipated expenditure of Rs. 268.67 Crores is primarily for building up Information and Technology Infrastructure for issuance of e-Passport. As per the DPR, readiness of e-Passport setup shall take 6 months from the date of Ministry's approval of the proposal to NICSI. Once the set-up is ready, the Ministry shall conduct a third party audit after which rollout of issuance of e-Passport for the citizens would be started.

The anticipated expenditure of Rs. 268.67 crores will be incurred over a period of 7 years, the annual breakup of which is given under. The Ministry would be able to manage the e-Passport project within its allocated funds.

- (i) Year 1 - Rs. 130.58 crores
- (ii) Year 2 - Rs. 25.03 crores
- (iii) Year 3 - Rs. 25.03 crores
- (iv) Year 4 - Rs. 25.03 crores
- (v) Year 5 - Rs. 25.03 crores
- (vi) Year 6 - Rs. 24.46 crores
- (vii) Year 7 - Rs. 13.51 crores

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 9)

The Committee note that Passport Seva Project, was started in 2012 in a Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode and during all these years various measures have been undertaken by the Ministry for qualitative as well as quantitative improvements in delivery of passport services. The Committee has been informed that Passport Seva Project is embarking on Version 2.0 with the selection of new Service Provider and renewed focus on technology upgradation and adaptation.

Furthermore, a passport database named Passport Related Information Data Exchange (PRIDE) and a Public Grievance Redressal Cell has been active. For smooth police verification process, mPassport Police App was launched.

The Committee are happy to learn that 177 Indian Missions/Posts have been integrated into the Passport Seva Project and in integration in the remaining are in progress. The Ministry has, however, apprised the Committee that lack of connectivity and unavailability of multiple Internet Service Providers (ISP) and difficult geographical terrain are the technical constraints for integration of PSP system online with the District Police/Police Station in North East States and J&K region.

Passport Seva Project has emerged as the most citizen centric initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs with expansive network of Passport Seva Kendras (PSK) and Post Office Passport Seva Kendras (POPSK). The Committee understand that due to COVID 19 Pandemic the average time to issue passports had slightly increased in the last two years, however, the Committee are hopeful that with the easing of Covid 19 relaxations, issuance of passport will be expedited. In the opinion of the Committee, police verification process requires further streamlining and States/UTs should be encouraged to link the verification process with mPassport Police app. The Ministry should also strive to overcome the technical constraints faced by District Police/Police Stations in North East States and UTs of J&K and Ladakh.

Reply of the Government

As recommended by the Committee, Ministry has advised all the Passport Offices to coordinate with the Police authorities for expeditious launch of mPassport Police app. As on date, the mPassport Police app has been launched in 22 States/UTs (Total 8275 Police Stations) in the country. The Ministry is providing required technical support/training and hand holding to smoothly operationalize mPassport Police app across the country.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 10)

The Committee note that version 2.0 of the Passport Seva Project will include the issuance of e passports to Indian citizens with embedded chip for ease of international travel. It will be a combined paper and electronic passport with a RFID chip and antenna embedded as an inlay in the back cover While ISP Nashik has finalized the global three-stage tender for procurement of International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)-compliant electronic contactless inlays along with its operating system, the National Informatics Centre Services (NICSI) have been entrusted with the technical responsibilities for issuing the e- Passports.

The Committee welcome the issuance of e-passport from 2023 onwards and are hopeful that it will facilitate ease of travel for Indian citizens, increased security of data and will be in line with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The Committee recommend that the Ministry should take all requisite measures to ensure data privacy and security of the Indian citizens as contained in the chip. The Committee also desire to be apprised about the progress made with regard to issuance of e-passports.

Reply of the Government

The Government is planning to issue e-passports to its citizens, starting in 2022-

An e-Passport is a combined paper and electronic passport with an embedded Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) chip that contains biometric information that can be used to authenticate the identity of travellers. The Data is written in accordance with the Logical Data Structure (LDS) and secured using the Public Key Interface (PKI) methodology. The personal particulars of the applicants would be digitally stored in the chip which would be embedded in the present form of physical passport booklet. In case, anyone tampers with the chip, the system shall be able to identify it resulting in the failure of the passport authentication.

The data of the citizens for e-Passport would be used for the specific purpose only, i.e. issuance of the passport and related services. There is no secondary use of the data, thereby safeguarding the privacy concerns. Further transaction processes are authenticated by digital certificates and are cryptographically signed. Once captured, the data is stored in a secured repository, i.e. industry standard database. Relevant database security related controls are performed round the clock by Security Operations Centre.

The main benefit of the e-passport is its enhanced ability to maintain the integrity of data. This is expected to increase the level of confidence in the Indian passport. E-passports would also facilitate the ease of travel for Indian citizens, making their interface with immigration authorities much smoother. Since the ICAO has recommended its introduction by member countries, the introduction of e-passports would be in consonance with global best practices.

The Ministry has entrusted National Informatics Centre (NIC) with the technical responsibilities for issuing the e-Passports. Full-scale manufacture and issue will commence with the completion of the technical eco-system and infrastructure.

The e-passports with advanced security features and better printing and paper quality will substantially upgrade existing passports and service to the citizens. The epassport will provide greater protection against fraudulent practises and tampering. With introduction of this advanced security features, possibilities of forgery of Indian passports will be greatly eliminated. Infrastructure planned to be created for ePassport shall be scalable for enhancing various features in ePassport.

Present Status

Based on the recommendation of Delegated Investment Board, EAM has approved the proposal to implement the e-Passport Project. Tripartite Agreement among MEA, NIC and NICSI is being finalized.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 11)

The Committee note that the shortage of personnel in the Central Passport Organization has been a recurrent challenge in Passport Seva Project (PSP). As on 1 March, 2021, the sanctioned strength of Central Passport Organisation is 2741 and the actual working strength of the Central Passport Organisation (CPO) Cadre is 1723. The Ministry has apprised the Committee about the corrective measures that are being taken to address this challenge. These include promotion of eligible officers to the next grade, deputation from Central Government employees, conducting of Direct Recruitments/Limited Departmental Competitive Examinations (LDCE) by Staff Selection Commission, etc. The Committee also recall that staffing study of CPO by the Staff Inspection Unit (SIU) of the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance has been pending since 2019.

The issue of human capital has been a major area of concern and has been part of the Committee's recommendations over the years. Taking serious cognizance of this matter, the Committee strongly recommend that the Ministry should take up this issue with Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) at the highest level and ensure that the vacant positions are filled up in the shortest possible time. The Committee would also like to be apprised about the status of the pending staffing study of CPO.

Reply of the Government

The Sanctioned Strength of Central Passport Organisation is 2741 and the actual working strength of the Central Passport Organisation (CPO) cadre is 1746 as on 01.05.2022. In addition, 21 posts (including 15 Technical and 6 supporting staff) were sanctioned by the Union Cabinet for the Project Management Unit (PMU) of the Passport Seva Project. The break of the vacancies is as under :

Sl. No.	Group 'A'		Group 'B'		Group 'B' and Group 'C' non-Gazetted	
	Sanctioned Strength	Working Strength	Sanctioned strength	Working strength	Sanctioned strength	Working strength
Total	226	161	565	351	1950	1234
Net Vacancy	65		214		716	

Ministry has taken the following steps to fill up the existing vacancies at the Passport Offices:

- I. The regular placement of indents for recruitment of Office Assistant(MTS), Junior Passport Assistant, Assistant Superintendent, Junior Translation Officer and Stenographers with Staff Selection Commission (SSC). 368 posts at various levels have been indented to SSC. Out of which, 92 dossiers were received recently from SSC and appointment letters have been issued to the candidates. Further, there are 123 vacancies pertaining to different vacancy years to be

filled up from the respective feeder posts as per Recruitment Rules through Limited Departmental Competitive Examination (LDCE) being conducted by SSC for which SSC has been requested persistently. For 96 vacancies of Assistant Superintendents to be filled through LDCE, “No Objection Certificate” (NOC) to conduct the examination by the Ministry of External Affairs itself has been obtained from SSC. Accordingly, EdCIL, a PSU under Ministry of Education has been hired to conduct the said examination which will be conducted in the ensuing months.

- II. The Ministry has also hired 347 Data Entry Operators (DEOs) and 51 Multi Tasking Staffs (MTSs) from Outsourced Agency as an interim measure to fill the gap against the vacant non-Gazetted posts for smooth functioning of the Passport Offices.
- III. To fill up the existing vacancies at the Passport Offices, regular meetings of the Department Promotion Committees (DPCs) have been held for the promotion of eligible officials to the next grade.
- IV. The Ministry is appointing the officers on deputation basis as per Recruitment Rules of Deputy Passport Officer and Passport Officer.

2. As regards to the proposal submitted to D/o Expenditure, Ministry of Finance to carry out the Physical Inspection & Staffing Study of CPO, it is mentioned that the Ministry of Finance has recently advised the MEA, in November, 2021, to carry out the review of the Cadres under them for which they are Cadre Controlling Authority as per extant guidelines on the subject and thereafter it may be referred to M/o Finance with the recommendations of Financial Adviser and with the approval of Minister-in-Charge. Accordingly, a fresh Committee to review all the Cadres of Central Passport Organisation under Ministry of External Affairs is being constituted with due approval of Minister-in-Charge.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 12)

The Committee observe that the budgetary allocation for the construction of South Asian University (SAU) has decreased from Rs. 314.00 crore in BE 2021- 22 (Rs. 94 crore at RE stage) to Rs. 128.00 crore in BE 2022-23. The reduction in allocation at BE 2022-23, is based on the physical progress of work and projected expenditure towards operational costs. It is noted that out of the total land allotted for the construction of the permanent campus, construction is ongoing only on approximately 50% of the land. Due to a combination of factors, including land encumbrances, delays in obtaining statutory approvals, frequent bans on construction activity in NCR and COVID-19 Pandemic the construction work has been delayed. No construction work has commenced on the remaining part of the land due to various reasons viz court cases, geomorphological ridge, etc.

The Committee are dismayed to note that despite their repeated recommendation, the progress in construction of South Asian University has been unsatisfactory. The Committee are hopeful that with the appointment of a full-time President, the University will make rapid strides. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommend that the Ministry should take all necessary measures, including establishment of a monitoring Committee, to overcome these challenges and ensure that the construction work (including in the remaining 50 per cent of the land) is completed at the earliest. The Committee also desire to be kept informed about the progress made in this regard

Reply of the Government

The construction of the South Asian University (SAU) campus had slowed down due to various factors including COVID-19 pandemic. The work has resumed with the return of labour and the contractor to the project from

February 2022. The construction of five buildings under Package-II is physically complete and the landscaping and art work is ongoing to initiate the process of obtaining the occupancy certificate for the Package-II completed buildings. With the resumption of construction work, the seven buildings under Package-III are expected to be physically complete by this year end.

Ministry is making efforts to expedite the settlement of the legal cases on the allotted land parcels. Once the legal issues are resolved, the process of construction of Package-IV will be initiated. The appointment of the regular President expected to be completed in a couple of months got delayed due to postponement of the South Asian University Governing Board Meeting (the appointing authority) as requested by one of the Member States.

Ministry has appointed Chief Liaison Officer at SAU for coordinating / liaising with various local authorities, pursuing of pending legal issues, facilitate obtaining statutory approvals relating to the construction project. Ministry further monitors the project through regular meetings with the University management. Ministry accords high priority for timely completion of the SAU construction project.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 13)

Nalanda University was established with the overarching objective of emerging as “international institution for pursuit of intellectual, philosophical, historical and spiritual studies”. An outlay of Rs. 250.00 crore was provisioned for Nalanda University at BE 2021-22, which was increased to Rs. 350 crore at RE stage. The allocation at BE 2022-23 has been reduced to Rs. 200 crore. The Committee find that the progress in construction of this University has been satisfactory. Over 90 per cent of the infrastructure comprising of all Academic blocks, Administrative buildings, Laboratories, Auditoriums, campus amenities, utility structures including the site development works etc has been completed.

Moreover, the construction of the student hostel blocks and residences for the faculty & staff that commenced in end of 2018 has seen 70% progress. The Committee are happy to note that the Governing Board, Academic Council, Board of Schools and Centres provide the institutional framework for setting academic standards for the University and the Nalanda University is fully functional at the new campus. The Committee desire that the remaining construction work related to residential buildings should be completed in a time bound manner and academic credentials of the University are upheld.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry takes due note of the recommendation of the Committee to complete all infrastructural development of Nalanda University (NU). The Ministry has recently (in March 2022) extended the Government of India funding to NU till FY 2025-26. The infrastructure development of NU approved by the Cabinet is likely to be completed by FY 2025-26.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 14)

The Committee note that out of MEA's budget of Rs. 17250 crore, an outlay of Rs. 6043.77 crore (35.03%) has been provisioned for 'Technical and Economic Cooperation' that caters to Indian's aid and assistance programme. The Committee note that the funds under this sub head are proposed after undertaking a realistic assessment of needs & spending patterns, project implementation cycles, local conditions and physical progress for on-going projects, schemes and programmes. As per the Ministry, the issue of adequate provisioning of funds under this sub head is regularly taken up with the Ministry of Finance and the response of the latter has been 'positive' and 'constructive'. The Committee, however, are not satisfied with MEA's assertion as the budgetary allocation under this head has not only been reduced but is the lowest in terms of percentage vis-a-vis last five years.

In Committee's view, Development Partnership Initiatives have positive impact on India's relationship with the partner countries in a multi-faceted way. Over the years, the Committee have categorically recommended that this sub head must be kept immune from budgetary cuts as India's global image and credentials directly hinges on it. The Committee are distressed to note that neither the Ministry of External Affairs nor the Ministry of Finance has paid desired attention. The Committee, therefore, recommend that this issue should be treated with utmost priority and the Ministry should make earnest efforts to impress upon the Ministry of Finance to have a better appreciation of our technical and development cooperation and associated fund requirements. The Committee also desire to be apprised of the steps taken and the outcome thereof.

Reply of the Government

Ministry remains committed to ensuring that our international development commitments are adequately funded and implemented in a timely manner, in keeping with our foreign policy objectives. To this end, Ministry will continue reviewing the administrative processes and arrangements, and making the necessary requisitions for additional funds as and when required. As far as development cooperation policy & separate aid disbursement body is concerned, India's development partnerships are guided by mutual respect for partner countries under the broad principles of South-South cooperation. India's approach to development cooperation is one of partnership and not a donor-donee relationship.

The issue of provision of adequate allocation of funds is regularly taken up with the Ministry of Finance at various levels, including at the level of Minister, Secretary and Financial Advisor, apart from regular interaction at other levels. Ministry will continue making a dynamic and realistic assessments of funds for the Aid heads, in line with Committee's recommendation, and if required will

seek additional funds from Ministry of Finance, including Supplementary grants or enhanced RE 2022-23 allocation.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 16)

The Committee observe that India's development projects in neighbouring countries cover a range of sectors from infrastructure development, including construction, roads & bridges, waterways and transmission lines as also power generation, agriculture, capacity building, education, health, rural development etc. The Ministry has made the submission that the Government of India attaches high priority to our relationship with our neighbouring countries and has a well articulated policy of 'Neighbourhood First' with a focus on creating mutually beneficial, people-oriented, regional frameworks for stability and prosperity. The Committee, however notices that there has been reduction in allocation under 'Aid to Nepal', 'Aid to Bhutan', and 'Aid to Afghanistan'. In view of the increasing Chinese outreach and presence in India's neighbourhood, the Committee feel that India needs to review and enhance their developmental diplomacy. The Committee, therefore, desire that a strategy/vision should be formulated to expand our developmental partnership, particularly capacity building and knowledge sharing, to effectively counter the presence of other regional powers in our neighbourhood.

Reply of the Government

The primary orientation of India's foreign policy remains its immediate neighbourhood, under the Neighbourhood First Policy. The overarching philosophy is to ensure that our partners in the region draw benefits and values from the growth, development and rise of India and on this basis, all countries in our region work towards developing equitable partnerships with each other. This is a logical extension of the Government's policy of *Sabka Saath, Sabka*

Vikas, aur Sabka Vishwas into the foreign policy arena. Prime Minister outlined the principles of engagement in the neighbourhood in the form of *Samman* (respect), *Samvad* (dialogue), *Shanti* (peace), and *Samriddhi* (prosperity).

A wide range of agreements have been concluded with our neighbourhood countries for partnering in areas of infrastructural linkages via rail, road, ports, inland waterways connectivity, energy cooperation, standardisation of commercial and trading practices, widening broadening people to people contacts and cultural cooperation. Some of the key projects completed in recent years include the Afghan Parliament building, the Afghan-India Friendship Dam, Agartala-Akhaura rail link with Bangladesh, India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline, Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) at Birgunj and Biratnagar in Nepal, fish processing plants in Addu Atoll, Maldives, and Jaffna Cultural Centre in Sri Lanka and other projects. Work is ongoing on several projects wherein India has extended grants and LOCs to enhance infrastructural connectivity.

India accorded its immediate neighbourhood the highest priority when it came to coordinated efforts against COVID-19. At the Video Conference of SAARC Leaders on combating COVID-19 in March 2020, a USD 10 million COVID-19 Emergency Fund was announced, which became operational to deliver urgent medical supplies, equipment and humanitarian assistance to the SAARC neighbours. We are using e-ITEC network to share expertise on COVID-19 with healthcare professionals from SAARC countries. We have also developed a 'SAARC COVID19 Information Exchange Platform (COINEX)' for exchange of specialized information and tools on COVID-19 among health professionals in the region.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 17)

The Committee observe that there has been an increase in budgetary allocation made under the sub-head 'Aid to Bangladesh' from Rs. 200 crore during BE 2021-22, to Rs. 300 crore BE 2022-23. Some of the important ongoing projects in Bangladesh includes Akhaura-Agartala Rail Link Project, India Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline, Dredging in Indo-Bangladesh Inland Water Transit & Trade Protocol Connectivity (Sirajganj- Daikhawa & Ashuganj-Zakiganj), High Impact Community Development Projects, humanitarian aid etc. The Committee are happy to note that despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, considerable progress have been made on the development cooperation initiatives with Bangladesh. The Committee note that in the financial year 2021-22, three projects have been completed under the High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP). Also, the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline project is scheduled to be operationalized in the year 2022. The Foreign Secretary has informed about three major projects (the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline; the Rampal Power Plant; and the Khulna-Mongla rail line) are expected to be inaugurated this year. The Ministry has also informed that Bangladesh portion of the Akhaura Agartala Rail Link project has achieved physical progress of 50% and financial progress of 40% due to several reasons including disruption caused by Covid-19 pandemic and prolonged and heavy monsoon rainfall resulting in short working period in project area.

While the Committee are satisfied with the pace of implementation of most projects in Bangladesh, the tardy progress of Akhaura Agartala Rail Link Project remains a cause of concern. The Ministry should use its good offices to overcome the challenges emanating from the Bangladesh portion of the project. The Committee are optimistic that the three projects that are expected to be operationalized in this fiscal year will be completed within the stipulated time.

Reply of the Government:

Akhaura-Agartala:

The recommendation of the Committee to overcome the challenges in the completion of the Bangladesh portion of the Akhaura-Agartala rail project has been taken note of. **MEA is engaging extensively with Government of Bangladesh to improve the Akhaura-Agartala project progress and their timely completion.** Ministry is committed to the completion of this critical cross-border connectivity project at the earliest. Multiple review meetings and site visits have been conducted to review progress of the project and expedite implementation. The most recent joint review of the project was conducted by

officials of High Commission of India, Dhaka and Bangladesh Railway along with consultant and contractor on 07 April 2022. The physical progress as on date is approximately 55% and financial progress is approximately 40.54%.

India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline

The 129.5 km pipeline for supply of high speed diesel is being constructed from Siliguri in West Bengal to Parbatipur in Bangladesh. The project is being executed under a G2G MoU between GoI and Government of Bangladesh. The project has achieved a physical progress of 90.30% as on April 30, 2022 and is expected to be commissioned this year.

Rampal Power Plant project

The work on the Maitri thermal power plant at Rampal being implemented under Concessional Financing Scheme is progressing on schedule and is expected to be commissioned this year.

Khulna-Mongla Rail Line:

All efforts are underway for the early completion of the 53 Km Khulna -Mongla rail line currently being implemented under GoI Lines of Credit. The 5.13 km Rupsha bridge, which is part of the rail line, is almost complete and the progress on the rest of the rail line is being continuously monitored for timely completion.

High Impact Community Development Projects :

In addition to the three High Impact Community Development projects mentioned in the inputs given to the Standing Committee in February 2022, one more additional project” Construction of single storied Multipurpose Community Hall” in Sri Sri Kendriyo Loknath Mandir at Ganeshtala, Dinajpur has been completed during the last financial year. As on date 72 projects have been completed and 16 projects are ongoing.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 18)

The Committee note that there has been a drastic reduction in budgetary allocation under the sub head ‘Aid to Bhutan.’ The Ministry has informed that fund requirements have been lower as all Projects have been affected by COVID- 19 related restrictions and strict lockdown in Bhutan, etc. leading to supply chain issues, labour shortages, etc. The Committee note that about 82

projects under Project tied assistance and 524 under High Income Community Development Projects are being implemented that virtually cover all areas of socio-economic development, including agriculture, infrastructure, ICT, health, education, capacity building and culture. The Committee also note that India has provided extensive assistance in the form of vaccines, essential medicines, medical supplies, test kits, X-ray machines, etc., in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The Committee are aware that India shares unique and special relation with Bhutan and the same is reflected in the extensive developmental partnership. Since the COVID-19 situation appears to be normalizing, aid projects are likely to get back on track; it should be ensured that no project is delayed due to lack of fund requirements. The Ministry should seek additional fund requirement, if any, at the RE stage.

Reply of the Government

The recommendations of the Hon'ble Committee have been noted for compliance. Bhutan is entering Phase – II of the COVID – 19 pandemic under which restrictions on movement of labour and material within the country have been removed. The Royal Government of Bhutan has also reduced the quarantine for international arrivals from 14 days to 5 days. With the easing of restrictions on the movement of labour and material, the supplies of Cement, Steel, HSD and POL, and chemicals etc. for Hydropower Projects (Punatsangchhu I and II, Kholongchhu HEPs) are being restored to normal levels. The Punatsangchhu – II Project is facing shortage of 1700 workers, and the Project has, after consultation with the Royal Government of Bhutan, given an induction plan to bring in 1500 workers by end of June 2022.

The fund disbursement of India's Committed Plan Assistance of Rs. 4500 crores for the 12th Plan of Bhutan is progressing smoothly. There are several bilateral mechanisms at various levels to monitor and review the progress of the GoI assisted projects in Bhutan, including the Plan Talks & the Project Monitoring Committee (PMC) mechanism.

The fund releases for Plan Assistance would continue to be disbursed based on the assessment of individual project progress reports and bilaterally agreed modality for the Project. Based on Budget utilization and projected expenditure, additional fund requirement, if any, would be submitted at the RE stage.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 19)

The Committee note that the allocation under the sub head 'Aid to Nepal' is Rs. 750.00 crore for BE 2022-23, which is 24% less than BE 2021-22. The reason for decline in allocation under this head during both RE as well as BE stage is that the physical progress of most of the ongoing projects was slow due to COVID-19 Pandemic. The Ministry has informed that under GoI Earthquake reconstruction assistance, 50000 houses in Gorkha and Nuwakot districts of Nepal were completed and handed over to beneficiaries in November 2021. Further, the Jaynagar- Kurtha segment of Jayanagar-Bardibas cross border rail link has been completed and taken over by Government of Nepal on October, 2021. While understanding the Covid induced delays in implementation of project, the Committee are hopeful that there will be a renewed focus on completing ongoing projects and undertaking new projects of mutual interest in the coming year. The Ministry should ensure smooth, expeditious and timely execution of various ongoing projects in Nepal.

Reply of the Government

Honourable Committee's recommendations are noted. Government of India has allocated INR 750 crores under Aid to Nepal budget head for various development assistance and infrastructure projects in Nepal in the current financial year 2022-23. There are oversight mechanisms at various levels to monitor and review the progress of the GoI assisted and funded projects in Nepal. These include high-level mechanism at Ministerial level as well as working level mechanism at senior officials' level. There are also Joint Project Monitoring Committees held with Government of Nepal. The purpose of these mechanisms is to regularly oversee and ensure smooth and expeditious implementation of projects and achievement of targets within specified timelines.

COVID-19 has had a debilitating effect on the projects' implementation and their execution. Now with the situation improving, a renewed thrust is being placed on completion of all projects in a timely manner. In the same spirit, project reviews and Joint Project Monitoring Committee (JPMC) are taking place after a long time. It is expected and efforts will be made so that projects are completed within the stipulated timelines. It may be added that Jaynagar-Kurtha rail link has recently become operational and was jointly inaugurated by the Prime Ministers of both India and Nepal in April 2022. Bids have been invited for construction of Nepal Police Academy Project in Nepal. The pace of work in various projects is improving now which hitherto was being impeded by COVID-19 challenges.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 20)

The budgetary allocation under the head 'Aid to Afghanistan' has seen a downward trend from Rs. 350 crore in BE 2021-22 to Rs. 200 crore in BE 2022-23. The Committee note that India's development partnership with Afghanistan includes more than five hundred projects spread across each of the 34 provinces of the country in critical areas of power, water supply, road connectivity, healthcare, education, agriculture and capacity building. In the given political scenario in Afghanistan, majority of countries, including India, have halted their projects in Afghanistan. The Committee are happy to note that India has been steadily providing humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people including foodgrains and medical assistance. The Ministry should continuously monitor the situation and continue providing humanitarian assistance to Afghan people.

Reply of the Government

Ministry has noted the observations of the Hon'ble Committee and will work towards the same. Several proposals in this regard are already under process. Due to the political and security situation in Afghanistan, projects implementation has suffered setbacks.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 21)

The Committee notice that an improved allocation has been provisioned for expenditure on the budget sub head 'Aid to Myanmar.' The allocation during BE 2021-22 was Rs. 400.00 crore, which was increased to Rs. 600 crore during RE 2021-22. BE 2022-23 has also been pegged at Rs. 600 crore. The stated reason for enhanced allocation is based on realistic assessment of physical progress in pace of expenditure in ongoing projects such as construction/upgradation of Kalewa-Yargi road, road & waterways component of Kaladan project, construction of bridges on TKK Road, Coastal Surveillance System, Border Area Development programs, training and scholarships.

While noting that the ongoing political turmoil in Myanmar has impacted the pace of implementation of aid projects, the Committee are pleased to observe that the Ministry has remained in constant touch with the concerned authorities in Myanmar to secure their support for ensuring smooth and expeditious implementation of our projects. The Ministry, therefore, should continue making earnest efforts in expeditious completion of ongoing projects in Myanmar, particularly the much delayed Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport (KMMTT).

Reply of the Government

Despite the ongoing political situation in Myanmar, GoI has completed and handed over two Capacity Building institutions, Myanmar Institute of Information Technoogy (MIIT) in Mandalay and Advanced Centre for Agricultural Research and Education (ACARE) at Yezin Agricultural University in Nay Pyi Taw in March this year. Both these are amongst the premier institutes in their respective fields in Myanmar and are contributing to building a highly skilled and well-qualified cadre of IT professionals and agricultural research scientists respectively.

On the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport project, the waterways component has been completed. A port operator jointly appointed by the Governments of India and Myanmar, has started maintenance of the Port since February 2020. Efforts are underway to operationalise the Sittwe Port by this year. Progress on construction work of the road component has been slow, mainly due to the security situation on the Myanmar side and the delay caused due to COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, a new Project Executing Agency has been appointed for early completion of the road portion of the project.

Given the current security and political situation in Myanmar, implementation and execution of the above projects have been met with numerous challenges. Kalewa-Yargi road section projects on trilateral highway is under construction and the current physical progress is 40%. The DPR for 69 Bridges has been updated and NHAI has been appointed as new Project Executing Agency on 28.02.2022 for their construction.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 22)

The budgetary allocation under the sub head 'Aid to African Countries' has been abridged from Rs. 300.00 crore (BE 2021-22) to Rs. 250.00 crore (BE 2022-23). The Ministry has proffered two broad reasons for this reduced allocation - suboptimal utilisation of funds and various challenges like delay in decision making by host institutions, sub-optimal choice of location by host countries, lack of funds with host countries to provide land/building/running cost as per agreement, internal conflicts and civil unrest faced in implementation of projects. The Committee note that the three India-Africa Forum Summits [IAFS I, II & III] in 2008, 2011 and 2015 have further reinforced the development partnership with the Continent. The Ministry has informed that the initial period of e-VidyaBharati and e-AarogyaBharati Network Project (e-VBAB) which was 5 years from 2016-21. However, due to technological and regulatory changes from time to time, the project could be launched only in October 2019 and the actual implementation started in January 2020. The Committee note that a regular and high-level review of projects undertaken under various IAFS is carried out in consultation with all concerned stakeholders and policy decisions are taken accordingly.

Keeping in mind the geographical extent and significance of the Africa region, the Committee are disappointed with the drooping allocation and the slow pace of progress in projects under this budget sub-head. The Committee are dissatisfied with the reasons furnished by the Ministry for the reduction in allocation under this sub head. In the considered opinion of the Committee, the budgetary allocation should be reflective of the importance India attaches to this Region. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommend that enhanced allocation must be provisioned for this head and based on a feasibility study, physical and financial targets should be established for completion of all ongoing projects in Africa.

Reply of the Government

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

2. India has maintained a vibrant relationship with African countries, which is evident with 34 outgoing visits since 2014 [President (13), Vice President (12) and Prime Minister (9)] and around 100 incoming visits at ministerial level. The 10 guiding principles enunciated by the Prime Minister in Uganda in 2018, have continued to guide India-Africa relations and to take our engagement to the next higher level. These guiding principles have been given 'top priority' in various areas including digital & IT, agriculture, trade & investment, development partnership, especially designed people-centric projects, enhance local capacity and assist African youth, capacity building, climate change, cooperation in terrorism & maritime issues, international cooperation for representative world order, etc. The Ministry is in a continued process of taking these elements forward in a focused manner. This is reflected in the range of important events completed in previous years and/or planned between India and Africa in near future.

3. In order to enhance our diplomatic presence in African continent, GOI has opened 18 new Missions. Missions in Republic of Guinea, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Togo, Sao Tome & Principe, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Mauritania have already been operational and the Missions in Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde and Chad may be operational within this year. After opening of the 18 new Missions in Africa, India will have resident Missions in 47 out of 54 African countries.

4. The IAFS-IV was expected to be held in September 2020 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the run up of the Summit, 1st India-Africa Defence Ministers' Conclave was held in February 2020 in Lucknow. However, various other scheduled events since then were postponed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry endeavors to hold the IAFS-IV at the earliest suitable opportunity.

5. During the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, India provided around 150 tonnes of medical aid in the form of HCQ tablets and 16 other life-saving drugs worth US \$ 5.3 million (Rs. 40 crore) to 33 African countries as a gift. Since January 2021 till now, we have supplied a total of 37.60 million doses of Made-in-India COVID-19 Vaccine to 42 African countries as a Grant, under COVAX initiative and on commercial basis. We have also vigorously pursued signing of MoUs in mutual recognition of the COVID-19 Vaccine certificates issued by India and respective African countries.

6. In the light of the last wave of COVID-19 pandemic world over in December 2021, we expressed our solidarity with Africa through highlighting our readiness to supply essential life-saving drugs, test kits, gloves, PPE kits and medical equipment as ventilators, as may be required. India also announced to consider favourably cooperation in genomic surveillance and virus characterization related research work with our African counterparts. India and South Africa took initiative in WTO to seek exemption on IPR to produce Vaccines to fight COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative was supported by a large number of countries including the USA.

7. The Ministry, with the budgetary allocation of Rs. 250 crore for the financial year 2022-23 provisioned under the Head "Aid to African Countries", would continue to focus on catering to the setting up of Institutes; various

Scholarships/Training programmes including under IAFS-III; ICCR Scholarships; Food Aid, Medical aid including for equipment; humanitarian aids to fight natural disasters; Books; Vehicles; organising Events/Seminars/Studies/Visits; Cash Grants; development assistance projects; etc. in order to further strengthen our friendly relations with various African countries. The Ministry will continue to vigorously follow up and review the projects announced during IAFS-I, IAFS-II and IAFS-III which are presently at various stages of setting up to have these implemented within the shortest possible time. In order to augment our development partnership with the friendly African countries, India would continue to extend LoCs and Grants to various African countries as per their need basis within the parameters prescribed.

8. The Ministry would also like to emphasize that the high priority and importance accorded to Africa in our Foreign Policy is sought to be reflected in the development cooperation context. The Ministry will ensure effective utilisation of funds for expeditious implementation of our diverse ongoing projects in Africa and seek enhanced allocation under the budgetary Head “Aid to African countries” at Revised Estimates (RE) stage, if necessary; and/or on finalisation of the dates of the IAFS-IV. We have noted Hon’ble Committee’s observations on the drooping allocation and the slow pace of progress in projects under this budget sub-head. During the fiscal year 2021-22, we made utmost efforts to spend the funds allocated under the budgetary Head “Aid to African Countries” in spite of the COVID-19 induced restrictions. Nevertheless, due to the prevailing restrictions on international travel out of India, many of our aid projects in Africa could not make optimal progress. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided and the situation is returning to normal, we will move ahead on our grant projects with renewed focus in Africa.

9. The Ministry has taken a note of all the recommendations of the Hon'ble Committee and will seek to address them suitably.

10. As far as the e-VidyaBharati & e-AarogyaBharati Network project is concerned, the Cabinet approved period of the project expired in 2021 and hence enrollments to academic sessions of July 2021 and January 2022 could not be carried out. This resulted in low budget utilization. However, 'in-principle' approval of Hon'ble EAM has been obtained for the extension of the project beyond 2021 till December 2024 clearly indicating the physical and financial targets for the project. Process for appraisal and approval of Delegated Investment Board has also been initiated.

Once the extension of the project is approved, the utilization of the budget would be optimal. Division would be vigorously pursuing to ensure that the physical and financial targets of the project are achieved.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

(Recommendation Sl. No. 24)

The Committee note that the Ministry of External Affairs through Indian Missions and Posts abroad regularly engages with the Indian diaspora in seeking its time, expertise and investment to develop a strong bond between the members of the diaspora and their origin country. Also, there exists a robust institutional framework for the welfare, safety and protection of Indian migrants working abroad, which inter alia includes e-Migrate system, Pre-Departure Orientation Programme, MADAD portal, Indian Community Welfare Fund, Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendras, help lines at Indian Missions and Posts, Shelter Homes, etc. The Ministry has informed that Protectorate of Emigrant offices have been opened in 11 cities with the aim of gradually covering all States. The Committee note that to facilitate return of Indian nationals stranded

in various countries due to restriction imposed in the wake of Covid pandemic, the Vande Bharat Mission was started on 7th May, 2020. Around INR 45.78 crores were utilized from ICWF to extend assistance to more than 1,73,618 Indians till end December, 2021. SWADES (Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support) initiative was launched to conduct a skill mapping exercise of the returning citizens under the Vande Bharat Mission.

The Committee applaud the efforts made by the Ministry to proactively help distressed/stranded Indian nationals during the COVID-19 Pandemic. As the Pandemic has created significant uncertainties for a certain section of Overseas Indians, particularly migrant workers and students, the Committee are hopeful that the Ministry will coordinate with other line Ministries and ensure that such Indians are suitably rehabilitated and assisted in their future career options. The Committee also desire that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should be used proactively for wider dissemination of various schemes and programmes that are being implemented by the Ministry for welfare of Indians abroad.

Reply of the Government

The acknowledgement and appreciation of Ministry's efforts to proactively help distressed/stranded Indian nationals during the COVID-19 Pandemic by the Hon'ble Committee is duly noted. Further, the following updates are submitted

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i. At present, 13 Protectorate of Emigrant Offices are working full-fledged in 13 different cities of the country for welfare, safety and protection of Indian migrants. These offices provided assistance to emigrants related to their employment abroad, contract, payment, living conditions, Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojana etc. With the aim of gradually covering all States, opening of 4 new Protectorate of Emigrant Offices are in advanced stage.

ii. Ministry of External Affairs provides Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT) aimed at enhancing soft skills of Indian migrant workers largely going to the Gulf region and Malaysia in terms of culture, language, tradition and local rules and regulations of the destination country, to sensitize migrant workers about pathways to safe and legal migration and various government programmes for their welfare and protection. As on 28th February, 2022, 1,12,212/- migrant workers have undergone PDO Training. Shri V. Murleedharan, Minister of State for External Affairs addressed the special event on reaching of land mark figure of one lakh participants. During this special event, MOS has also launched PDOT portal-<http://pdot.mea.gov.in>.

The Ministry also launched the first online Pre-departure Orientation Training (PDOT) Programme on 7 April 2021 with an objective to provide pre-departure orientation training to prospective migrants who are not in a position to attend the training in-person.

iii. The Awareness Generation and Training of Trainers (TOT) Workshops were organized by the Ministry in collaboration with India Centre for Migration (ICM) and State Governments aimed at generating awareness and to sensitize participants about the benefits of safe, orderly and regular migration and welfare and protection measures of the Ministry for the migrant workers. Awareness Generation and Training of Trainers (TOT) Workshops have been conducted in nine States i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, Rajasthan, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal in coordination with the concerned Departments of the State Government.

iv. E-books of PDO Manuals for Master Trainers and Handbooks for emigrant workers with a standardized content have been developed in Hindi, English, Bangla, Malayalam, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu languages under the

aegis of India Centre for Migration (ICM). These E-books have been updated time to time and uploaded on e-Migrate and ICM website for wider public dissemination.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

(Recommendation Sl. No. 25)

In view of the number and spread of overseas Indians, there is a high possibility of them getting stranded in a crisis situation. The recent political crisis in Afghanistan and conflict in Ukraine is a gross reminder about the implications on safety and security of Indian nationals in such a volatile situation. The role played by the Ministry in Afghanistan and Ukraine in the recent past has been commendable. The Committee, therefore, feel that evacuation preparedness has emerged as a significant issue. The Committee are aware that during outbreak of conflict or any other exigencies, the evacuation of Indian citizens is planned on a case-to-case basis and evacuation is dependent on a number of factors. The Committee desire that a database of Indian nationals abroad may be prepared and updated on a regular basis for emergency situations. Furthermore, a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for evacuation of Indian nationals stranded in exigencies must also be chalked out and the same may be made available at all Indian Missions/Posts abroad. The Committee would like to be kept informed about steps taken in this direction.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry has been keeping a record of Indian Diaspora abroad and keeps updating the same. Separate databases are being maintained in respect of NRIs, PIOs and Students. However collation of such data is dependent on voluntary registration by our diaspora living abroad.

A Rapid Response Cell (RRC) has been created in the Ministry to deal with exigencies and emergency situations similar to the recent Ukraine crisis,

where more than 22 thousand stranded Indians were evacuated by the Government in “Operation Ganga”.

The Rapid Response Cell in the Ministry handled SOP for the Control Room set up during the evacuation process. Based on the event report sent by the Indian Mission in Kyiv after Operation Ganga, recommendations for implementation/inclusion of evacuation procedures in MEA’s existing Crisis Management Plan is already under consideration.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 28)

The Committee are aware that Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service (SSIFS) conducts in service training for Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers and other MEA personnel, courses for foreign diplomats and other professional training course. The budgetary allocation under the sub-head was Rs. 25.76 crore during BE 2021-22, and has been marginally reduced to Rs. 23.48 crore during BE 2022-23. It is understandable that the COVID-19 pandemic–induced lockdowns and international travel restrictions have resulted in a decline in expenditure incurred under this sub head since FY 2020-21. The Committee note that measures have been taken for incorporating feedback from the trainees. The Committee observe that despite an increase in demand for training, the allocation under this sub-head has remained stagnant and can adversely impact our capacity building measures. The Committee are hopeful that with the easing down of Covid related restrictions, training of foreign diplomats will increase and the budgetary allocation to Ministry of External Affairs should also be enhanced adequately.

Reply of the Government

Various training programmes for foreign diplomats are under consideration and will be worked out in consultation with the Foreign Offices of the concerned countries and the concerned Territorial Division of MEA. Augmentation of budgetary resources as and when required will be provisioned for.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 29)

As a pre-eminent organization of Ministry of External Affairs with a mandate of India's soft power abroad, ICCR's activities are spread across the globe ranging from providing scholarships to organizing exhibitions to performing arts and visuals arts programme. The Committee note that there has been a marginal increase in allocation to ICCR from Rs. 300 crore (BE 2021-22) to Rs. 320 crore (BE 2022-23). Enhanced allocation has been provisioned for Incoming Exhibitions, Distinguished Visitors Programme, Academic Visitors Programme, Incoming Cultural Delegation, Bust & Statue, Gen Next Democracy Network. All ICCR's activities, including those conducted through its extended arms like Indian Cultural Centers, the Chairs of Indian Studies in Foreign Universities, and the foreign students' scholarships programme, are conducted in close coordination with MEA and Indian Missions/Posts in the concerned country. The Committee note that barring a small and insignificant amount (on account of fee receipt from local students) from Indian Cultural Centress abroad, ICCR has no other source of extra-budgetary funding. While the activities of ICCR have expanded, there has been no improvement in budgetary allocation. The Committee, therefore, recommend that the Government should further increase the budgetary allocation for ICCR at RE 2022-23 and BE 2023-24 stage justifying the increasing significance of soft power projection of the country and central role of ICCR in it. The Ministry should explore the possibility of

Partnership and PPP Models for ICCR where the partners also put in resources for executing projects.

Reply of the Government

ICCR is fully funded by MEA through Grants-in-Aid. Apart from a small and insignificant amount from ICCs abroad on account of fee receipt from local students, ICCR has no other source of funding and therefore, adequate budgetary allocations for carrying out ICCR's objectives including soft power projection.

As recommended by the Committee, ICCR will seek enhanced budget from MEA at the stages of RE 2022-23 and BE 2023-24. ICCR will also explore avenues for generating additional fund in future by organizing events on PPP Model, renting its infrastructural spaces etc.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 30)

Indian Cultural Centres are instruments of India's cultural outreach abroad. The Ministry has informed that ICCR is now operating 37 Indian Cultural Centres (ICCs) abroad and is in the process of opening its two new centres in Washington and Paris. The Committee note that the renovation work of both the centres is ongoing and slated for completion shortly. The Ministry has recently conducted a performance audit of its cultural centres abroad and appropriate action to implement requisite changes is underway.

The Committee are relieved to learn that the much delayed establishment of cultural Centres in two significant places like Washington and Paris are expected to be completed. The Committee desire that the Cultural Centres in Washington and Paris are operationalized by the end of this year.

The Committee would like to be apprised about the findings of the audit of CulturalCentres.

Reply of the Government

With respect to findings of the audit of cultural centres it is mentioned that the audit of ICC is conducted by Embassy Audit of C&AG at the time of conducting audit of Missions. These audit reports are available with the O/o C&AG, Missions and respective ICCs. The performance audit of the cultural centres has mentioned issues such as (i) Need of enhanced Coordination between ICC and Embassy; (ii) Re-devising of the soft power projection process; (iii) Reorganizing of ICCs and (iv) To re-visit the selection process of Directors of ICCs. Appropriate action to implement the recommendations is under way.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 33)

The Committee are aware that Covid-19 has spread to every corner of the globe and has caused disruptions in every aspect of life. This has led to realignment in India's foreign policy in the short term. The Committee are contented to note that during such global crisis India has acted as a responsible international actor by providing Covid-related medical supplies to over 154 countries, more than half of which were grants to our partners in the developing world. Moreover, development and production of Covid vaccines in India, and their export highlighted India's position as a responsible and reliable stakeholder in global health supply chains. The challenges imposed to diplomatic communication and interaction was adapted by usage of virtual tools. The Committee note that various multilateral, plurilateral and bilateral meetings took place using virtual platforms and voice communications. Vande Bharat Mission,

the largest repatriation operation was successfully conducted to facilitate safe travel of international travel of more than 3 million stranded & distressed people during global shutdowns in the wake of the pandemic. The Committee desire to put it on record that the resilience, vigour, prudence displayed by the Ministry during such a crisis has been exemplary and laudable and should keep preparedness for taking a leading role in any such adverse situation.

Reply of the Government

Ministry would like to thank the Hon'ble Committee for appreciation of Ministry's efforts in the times of global crisis such as Covid 19 and its repatriation efforts through the Vande Bharat Misison. As advised by the Hon'ble Committee, the Ministry is fully committed and prepared for India to play a leading role during any such global crisis situation arising due to Covid-19 pandemic.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

CHAPTER-III

OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH THE COMMITTEE DO NOT DESIRE TO PURSE IN VIEW OF THE GOVERNMENT'S REPLY

Recommendation (Sl. No. 26)

Over the years, the Committee have highlighted the issue of human resource constraints within the Ministry of External Affairs. The Ministry has informed that sanctioned strength of the Ministry is 4474 out of which, one third of the manpower is deployed in Headquarters and are assigned different divisions from time to time, based on functional requirements. As regards the number of female employees in the Ministry, the percentage is 19.65 % at Gazetted level and 14.21% in Non Gazetted level. The Committee also note that only 15 woman officers are posted as Head of Missions. On further probing, the Ministry informed that there is no gender based reservation in direct recruitment to IFS or in induction and promotion to IFS from the feeder grade.

The Committee find that the data relating to sanctioned strength of MEA appears to be inconsistent. As per the Ministry, the sanctioned strength was 8951 in 2020 and 4474 in 2021. The Ministry is advised to be meticulous and cautious in furnishing replies. Over the issue of skewed gender representation within MEA, the Committee would reiterate its earlier recommendation that the Ministry should ensure improvement in internal practices on occupational equality including careers progression, promotion, training and appointments to higher ranks. The Ministry should also undertake a thorough and comparative cross-service analysis of the reason behind the skewed gender intake ratio and apprise the Committee about the findings of the same.

Reply of the Government

The sanctioned strength of the Ministry is 4474. However there are other Subordinate Offices/attached offices/Autonomous Bodies/Statutory bodies such as Central Passport Organization, Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), Office of Principal Chief Controller of Accounts (CCoA), Cabinet Secretariat etc, whose strength, when added sums upto 8946.

The recruitment of IFS officers is via a competitive examination conducted by UPSC. There is no gender based reservation in direct recruitment to IFS or in induction and promotion to IFS from the feeder grade of Grade I of IFS Branch B. The Service has been open to both men and women in equal measure since its inception and have proper representation of women and more and more women officers are entering the Service in the recent years. Ministry has ensured equal opportunities for all the personnel and promotion & appointments of female Officers to higher ranks are based on seniority of the Officers. Gender equality is more a common practice than an exception as far as the IFS is concerned. Similarly, recruitment to General Cadre of IFS 'B', Stenographers' Cadre of IFS 'B' and other cadres in the Ministry is done via competitive examination conducted by UPSC/SSC and there is again non gender based reservation in direct recruitment or in promotion.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 27)

The Committee had welcomed the decision to the Ministry to utilize external expertise in form of subject specialist Consultants since 2015. The Committee note that currently there are 58 Consultants engaged by the Ministry and they carry out research activities as per the functional requirements of the respective Division where they are deployed in. However, the Ministry has informed that

there is no provision/way to absorb these consultants in the Ministry. In the considered opinion of the Committee, having subject specialist Consultants has been a progressive step as it will lead to both quantitative as well as qualitative productivity. The Committee feel that the absence of provision for absorbing the subject specialist Consultants within the MEA will act as a constraining factor in getting senior experts. The Committee, therefore desire that the Ministry should explore the possibility of absorption of some of the subject specialist experts for attracting quality experts and also opening of better career opportunities for senior experts within it.

Reply of the Government

Consultants engaged in the Ministry carry out research/specific activities as per functional requirements of the respective Division where they are deployed. The process of hiring of consultants is governed by the relevant sections of the General Financial Rules, 2017 (Rules Nos. 177-196), provisions of “Manual for Procurement of Consultancy and other Services 2017’ and Order issued on the subject by Department of Personnel & Training and Department of expenditure, Ministry of Finance, from time to time.

2. As per rules, engagement of consultant is to be undertaken for specific jobs which meet the following criteria:

- (i) The assigned job is time-bound, with well defined targets and is not of routine nature,
- (ii) The engagement would result in optional efficiency and economy for Ministry/ Government,
- (iii) The domain knowledge that the Consultant is expected to bring.

3. Consultants are selected for specialized jobs for implementation of various projects within the Ministry and a defined job profile, targets and time lines. The Consultants are engaged for short term contracts for specific tasks and specific term. The requirements may vary from time to time and it would be beneficial to attract skilled manpower to meet such requirements from the open market as and when the need arises.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 31)

The Committee observe that Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) and Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) play an important role towards the promotion of India's foreign policy goals in the field of regional and international trade, finance, development, science, technology and innovations. An allocation of Rs. 14.81 crore and Rs. Rs. 14.59 crore has been earmarked on expenditure for ICWA and RIS, respectively for the FY 2022-23. On an in-depth analysis of the mandate, organizational structure and activities undertaken by ICWA and RIS, the Committee are of the opinion that there is significant overlapping of activities conducted by the two autonomous bodies. In an increasingly interdependent global order, there cannot be a segregation of foreign policies issues into economic and non economic. The Committee, therefore, suggest that the Ministry should make an assessment study of revamping and merging these two research organizations with a greater budgetary outlay, clear mandate and focused research outputs.

Reply of the Government

It is pertinent to understand the origin of both RIS and ICWA, in order to better comprehend the diverse nature of functions that they perform.

Origins of RIS:

- The concept of a ‘Research and Information System’ (RIS) of Non-aligned and other developing countries was mooted by NAM Ministerial Conference 1975 and the decision to establish it was taken by the Colombo Summit in 1976.
- The first meeting of the system was held in Belgrade in January 1979 and ICSSR was designated as the focal point in India.
- At 7th Non-aligned Summit in New Delhi in 1983, the decision to hold its second meeting in India was reiterated. Considering India’s chairmanship of the Non-aligned Movement during the year, it was decided to establish a focal point at the national level to give a definitive shape to the work of the RIS.
- On recommendations made during two meetings of the Committee of Secretaries(COS), led by the Cabinet Secretary, it was decided to establish a society entitled ‘Research and Information System of Non-aligned and other Developing Countries’.
- COS felt that the RIS would be a useful mechanism with its independent back-up facilities to assist the developing countries in their dialogue with the developed countries. It also recommended that RIS should be established as a registered society in order to make it a “legal entity” entitled to receive and utilize funds and to enter into contracts and providing the necessary flexibility, as in the case of ICSSR and ICCR.
- In order to give the new institution required freedom of action and degree of independence for its operational effectiveness and efficiency,

RIS was established as a Society with the Registrar of Societies in Delhi on 30 May 1983. It was also given the power to generate funds by way of “Consultancy fee and like charges” by conducting specialized studies and programmes for its partner institutions and bodies within the country or abroad.

- It is always important for Governments, both emerging or major powers, to have some policy research institutions working as think tanks, bodies or agencies to influence global opinion in favour of their policy postures or to defend and promote their national interests in this new age. The advantage of having such institutions, like RIS as a registered Society, is that it amplifies government’s advice in an unvarnished manner without attributing it to by virtue of its reach among key national and international institutions and bodies dealing with policy issues. Such independent institutions normally share ongoing trends, impressions and findings on important issues with the government as such key inputs are not easily available to policy makers and shapers to holistically examine the various dimensions of the policy options available before important policy announcements are made. Further, as part of their role to conduct track 1.5 or 2 consultations with policy makers or leading or influential scholars of other countries on vital issues, such independent bodies ascertain and share their feedback and reaction with the government which is imperative for the proper conduct of important policy. As such, the formation of RIS as a Society was consciously done by our policy makers.
- Accordingly, several eminent academics, intellectuals and senior Government officials were appointed as Members of RIS and Shri G. Parthasarathi, Chairman ICSSR, was appointed as its President and Prof.

S. Chakravarthy as the Vice-President. FS and Secretary (ER), MEA; Secretary, DoE, and Secretary (DST) were appointed as the ex-officio members to give the required economic heft to the institution.

Origin of ICWA:

ICWA is not an autonomous body per se but is a statutory body. Unlike RIS which came into being in 1984 (RIS), ICWA was established in 1943 by a group of eminent intellectuals with the principal objective of creating an Indian perspective on international relations and to act as a repository of knowledge and thinking on foreign policy issues. It is India's oldest foreign policy think tank and possibly the first institution of its kind in Asia. As such its institutional heritage is important. It is also the institution where serious study of International Affairs in India began. ICWA Act of 2001 and the ICWA (Amendment) Act, 2003 designated the Council as an institution of national importance with the Hon'ble VP of India as its President.

Effects of proposed revamping or merger of RIS and ICWA:

It may be noted that the nature and focus of the activities carried out by both of the institutes ICWA and RIS are very different. RIS's activities are not focused on 'Area Studies', or on issues of geopolitics, foreign policy and security which is the core focus of ICWA. Moreover, to look at both the institutes only on the basis of the binaries of economic and non-economic thrust areas may not be appropriate, as each of these aspects are of a special nature. The fact is also that both institutes are different in their vision, mandate, objectives, institutional identity, history and standing. In order to have focused research outputs and policy outcomes, both institutes working separately on their respective domain areas will bring value through analyzing of global issues impacting national interest. The impact of proposed

revamping or merger with regard to RIS and ICWA is enumerated separately in a detailed manner:

Impact of revamping or merger on RIS:

- The pioneering work RIS has done on issues relating to economic, social, scientific and technological matters in general and South-South and Triangular Cooperation in particular to defend and promote the interests of the developing countries would get seriously affected.
- Against the overarching mandate of ICWA, issues relating to specialized knowledge domains of RIS, which are gaining far higher tracking at global level than ever before, would stand marginalized depriving its partner institutions in the developing countries of its cutting edge knowledge and policy research. Similarly, the role of RIS as critical inputs provider on important issues to the MEA and line Ministries and institutions would get impacted.
- RIS produces evidence based policy research studies in consultation with some of our key Ministries and Departments of the Government and provides them with vital policy inputs on a regular basis. Similarly, RIS also interacts closely with several inter-governmental organizations and is invited by them to contribute to their policy formulation processes on key issues affecting the developing countries, which may not be the case under its new governance structure.
- As RIS is able to get across institutions beyond the national governments, including CSOs and NGOs globally on critical issues, it would not be

possible for the new set up to do so because of the government ownership of the new system which is normally confined to predefined parameters.

- The unique character of RIS as a registered Society would gradually wane the moment the research work under the new set up comes under the provisions of an institution working under an Act of Parliament. It would have incalculable impact on the working of the wide body of platforms RIS has already created over the years as part of its outreach and networking among developing countries as most of these institutions are not run by their respective governments or work under their national government set up and act on their own with a fairly reasonable degree of independence in their operations and would not like to be dealing with government run structures and promote the spirit of plurality of views on critical matters.
- The idea of segregation of economic and non-economic issues in the foreign policy is rightly based on the premise that most of the front line economic issues require specialized knowledge and expertise by subject experts and renowned academia in this highly dynamic and volatile world where new trade and economic architectures perpetuating the domination of the rich countries are emerging in an unabated manner in new forms and have to be deftly dealt with to defend and promote the interests of the developing countries for which RIS was visualized by its founding members. It would be best if the distinct character of RIS as a specialized institution is maintained.
- The larger ambit of the new set up may make it unwieldy in terms of handling economic and non-economic issues and primacy to geo-political issues would be at the cost of trade, economic and development issues,

which are seriously impacting the core interests of the Indian economy in general with the emergence of new generation issues being touted by the Western countries to erect a multitude of barriers to prevent the self-reliance of developing countries, including India.

- It may prove to be difficult for the new set up to come up with credible research studies covering political and strategic dimensions of the issues involved, along with analytical and policy research on trade and development related issues as both these streams are dealt with by separate domain experts.

RIS has been designed as a forum for intellectual debate on international economic issues with the support of the network of institutions which it has developed and nurtured over the years in other countries beyond the ambit of national governments and through its wide network, it has created a number of specific platforms globally to effectively put across India's standpoint on issues of critical importance, including Global Development Centre, FITM, Science Diplomacy network, NeST, FITM, FIDC etc. GDC, which is currently being funded by the UK Government through FCDO, has also entered into a multi-year partnership agreement with Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to promote replication of India's best development practices within and outside the country. Further, the German think tank GIZ IN is entering into a two year partnership agreement with RIS in the field of South-South Cooperation, including their participation in the Delhi Process, and detailed studies on Triangular Cooperation. It is quite possible that under the new set up these networks may lose their effectiveness in the absence of the engagement of RIS with them as their incubator.

- In the recent years, RIS has been able to enlarge its footprint globally by dint of its credible evidence based policy research capabilities and potential. A large number of funding agencies, including FCDO, European Commission, JAICA, B&MGF, USAID, IFPRI, UNDP, UNOSSC and so on have entered into research and cooperation partnership agreement with RIS which has enabled RIS to generate substantial income on its own through commissioned projects studies and programmes thereby reducing its reliance on government funding while promoting India's core economic interests. Similarly, a large number of Government Departments have also entered into partnership agreements with RIS to conduct specific research studies on their behalf including Department of Science & Technology, Ministry of Ayush, and Ministry of Commerce etc.
- While RIS acts as India's national focal point for co-ordination of trade and economic research activities among developing countries and advises the Government on issues relating to multilateral economic issues to safeguard and promote the interests of developing countries, the new set up may not be able to immediately move forward to take up such important responsibilities during these turbulent and critical times where time is of essence and any of such disruption would have serious repercussions on countries' interests. It is not clear as to how effectively the new set up would be able to provide specialized knowledge and evidence based research to the Global South and our government. It would also be difficult to maintain the depth of its regional and global networks and partner institutions through its unique convening power to present multi-disciplinary multi-dimensional perspectives on issues critical to developing countries.

- It would not be easy for the new set up to maintain the momentum and dynamism of the ongoing work programme of RIS on South-South and Triangular Cooperation, which is gaining far higher global traction now than ever before due to the substantial pioneering research work done by RIS. Over the years, RIS has developed the expertise to promote multi-stakeholder consultations on vital issues concerning the developing countries, including South Cooperation, under which it brings together the North and the South for maximum possible convergence on development issues and for the promotion of collaborative and cooperative endeavors between the two sides. RIS hosts annual Delhi Process dialogue with the strong support of MEA on international development cooperation with the participation of international development experts.
- While RIS has been working steadfastly for the attainment of aims and objectives enshrined in its MoA, which was signed in 1983, there is a perceptible change in the global landscape with the emergence of new challenges governing international trade, finance, technology and economic relations. In addition, the emergency of Covid has reset the entire global economic and financial landscape and posed unimaginable challenges in dealing with issues such as multilateralism, globalization, singular reliance on particular nation states in global value chains of essential goods and services. Threats to the sovereignty of developing countries in name of infrastructure development by some states using their funds for geo-political purposes, and the question of the relevance of existing global governance institutions and weaponization of financial and economic sanctions unilaterally thereby seriously impacting the developing countries. The fact that current emphasis by the rich nations on labour standards, sustainability, responsible governance, human and

religious rights, gender issues, growing inequalities and greater use of clean technologies in the name of climate change to make productivity in developing countries expensive are all seriously threatening India's efforts towards Atmanirbhar Bharat. These vital questions would have to be taken note of before taking any decision about the fate of RIS.

- Similarly, it has been well-established that commerce is central to global prosperity and well-being. As a result, international commercial diplomacy has gained primacy in international relations. It is vividly evident from the trends that during the visit of Heads of States of major industrialized countries abroad, their main objective is to clinch low hanging fruits or favourable trade deals for their industries. As we share a common future, we intend to share trade and economic partnerships for a better future. Therefore, strong trade relations are being developed the world over. During the past decades the convergence of economies of developed and developing countries has promoted the spirit of globalization which is now under serious threat and requires constant monitoring and analysis to safeguard India's core trade and economic interests .
- Further, industrialized countries are also encouraging developing countries to cut taxes, carry out administrative and financial reforms to create conducive and warm business environment in the name of structural reforms to attract greater investments for the creation of jobs in their countries and building their better future. Some of them are openly calling on the developing countries to strengthen their Intellectual Property protection and cut tariffs on manufacture and agricultural goods and break down the barriers to the investors and market access to facilitate the entry of their multinationals in their economies which India

has steadfastly resisted and their pressure is now mounting again in the new economic world we are witnessing. They are also deliberately mixing up the issue of immigration by professionals with refugees and economic migrants to stall the movement of qualified professionals to the developed world. It is well-established that qualified professionals are not only job creators and promoters but also knowledge bearers and innovators. India has to some extent overcome these challenges in its new set of deals with some of them but inherently their intent of dominating developing countries remains undiminished. Focused policy research on such issues is being done by RIS.

- Furthermore, the major challenges before the developing countries, including India, is the declining faith in the spirit of multilateralism in the industrialized world, rise of protectionism, and introduction of new issues, including non-tariff barriers, standards, intellectual property right and labour issues, to stall the flow of imports and movement of qualified professionals from the developing countries to the developed world. RIS has done considerable policy research in these sectors which is of great importance towards national policy making on these issues.
- India has always believed and stood for global well-being and has partnered with the global community for the success of an inclusive, equitable, democratic and rule based system of international relations. India engagement with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change is an excellent model of innovative multilateralism consistent with respect for national sovereignty of its partner countries. Terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking, poverty, climate change, deforestation and epidemic diseases underline the imperatives of multilateral actions by the international community.

- The convergence of economies of developed world and developing world brought about by the spread of globalization has reduced global inequality for some time and the redistribution of wealth at national, regional and global scale has also seriously impacted by the devastating effects of Covid pandemic. However, Covid pandemic has taught everyone the devastating consequences of dependencies on a single nation state in value chains that can threaten the survival of everyone and as a result the Western countries are looking for alternative approaches to deal with these threats.
- Over the past decade RIS has expanded its research and outreach portfolio in such a manner that overall dependence of RIS on MEA has started gradually going down. For instance, in 2012-13 the total expenditure of RIS was Rs. 7.01 crore and percentage contribution of MEA was 76 per cent.
- In 2015-16, the total expenditure of RIS was Rs. 13.16 crore and the share of MEA was 44 per cent. Likewise, in 2016-17 the total expenditure was Rs. 12.56 crore and the share of MEA was 55 per cent. The same trend evolved further with MEA share in total expenditure was 53 per cent in 2018-19 and 60 per cent in 2019-20.
- RIS has succeeded in creating several new parallel trajectories which have immensely helped in the Track 1.5 diplomacy. RIS is also closely linked with neighbouring countries through their think-tanks, experts, research institutions and in some cases even the civil societies. In this way, though RIS functions within the government, still as a registered

society it has emerged as an independent think-tank and research institution.

- Though, it is only MEA that extends grant-in-aid to RIS, the Governing Council and General Body is constituted in such a manner that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry; Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance; and Ministry of Science and Technology are also on the Board for multiple engagements by RIS. As a result, the Institute now runs different forums for advancing government policy initiatives including handling the onerous responsibility of the G20.
- RIS will be a key knowledge partner during the Indian Presidency of G20 in 2023. By anticipating well in advance as a responsible policy research institution from India, RIS has consolidated its G20 programme in 2019 on its own without any funding support from MEA or any other external sources. Besides scaling up and providing a direction to the RIS G20 work that was happening since 2012, the programme served as a strong institutional foundation for soon after its launch. By creating 10 dedicated subject verticals within RIS in with the Task Forces of T20, a leading Engagement Group of G20; launching a peer-reviewed journal called ‘G20 Digest’ and establishing a Coalition of Engagement Groups (COEG) with CII for Business 20 (B20) and Indian National Science academy (INSA) for Science 20 (S20), RIS kickstarted with a series of seminars and brainstorming sessions that formed a solid support for MEA at early stages of its preparatory work for G20.
- By contributing policy briefs and serving as Co-Chairs to various task forces of T20, RIS faculty has developed networks within G20/T20 fraternity which could help build India’s positions on important global issues and mould public opinion through seminars, conferences and other forms of academic and policy interactions. RIS now serves as the

Knowledge Partner for MEA and Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare, created G20 Research Forum with ERIA and University of Indonesia to work, beyond Indian presidency, with Brazil and South Africa. It reflects RIS's self-initiated endeavours to support the cause of India's leadership on developing country priorities.

- RIS has also created platforms, which are sector specific and bringing in industry specific stakeholders and other actors together for meaningful conversations. For instance, Ayush Ministry has funded a mega project to run the Forum for Indian Traditional Medicine (FITM) at RIS. The Ministry of Science and Technology has funded the Forum for Indian Science Diplomacy (FISD). With Ministry of Earth Sciences, RIS is closely working on Blue Economy Forum. With the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) of MEA and with 21 other civil society institutions and experts, RIS is running the Forum for Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC). In partnership with United Nations Office of South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) and 12 think tanks from other southern economies, RIS is also leads the Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST).

In view of the above, it is our considered view that it would be in our interest to retain the exclusive identity of RIS as a credible policy research institution on trade and development issues without in any way altering its unique character as a registered Society for its operational efficiency and effectiveness. Such an approach would be in consonance with the aims and objectives of the institution, particularly since its inception RIS has played an extremely important role to defend and promote the core interests of the country and its growing importance and footprint clearly testifies it.

The impact of proposed revamping or merger on ICWA:

The Council has been able to undertake numerous activities and initiatives towards the fulfillment of its stated mandated objectives to promote the study of Indian foreign policy and international affairs. The activities were carried out under its three pillars-(a) Research and Publications (b) Policy debates and discussions and (c) Outreach.

- (a)** With regard to research and publication, the Council has addressed issues of foreign policy agenda through its range of publications and articles by in-house as well as outside experts. With its "Area Studies" focus it has increased its research output by commissioning books, monographs, and special studies from eminent experts and scholars on emerging issues having implications for foreign and security policy in various geographies. In the past three years, the Council has published books focusing on areas such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Europe, Africa, West Asia, South Caucasus, Central Asia, South East Asia and Indo - Pacific, thus contributing to knowledge creation in these areas. The Council has also fulfilled the requirements of the Ministry by undertaking special studies and research projects on Africa, Nepal, UN and Latin America in the domain of politics, diplomacy and security. ICWA journal 'India Quarterly' has appeared regularly since the 1940s and remains the oldest, one of the most sought after and important Indian journal in the field of Area Studies and Foreign Policy.
- (b)** Regarding policy debates the Council has been proactive in providing forum for debate and discussion on major issues of foreign and security policies through Seminars, Round Table discussions, Lectures, Dialogues in both the Track 1.5 and Track II format. It has provided a platform for visiting leaders to publicly articulate their views on issues of national and international importance. Many world dignitaries,

intellectuals, diplomatic community have addressed the Council in the past years

(c) With regard to Outreach ICWA has been regularly holding various bilateral dialogues with its national and international MoU partners.

- At the national level ICWA has supported seminars/ conferences organized by Universities and its MoU partners across India on foreign policy and international relations in order to promote and strengthen foreign policy thinking and discourse. This contributes to enhance understanding of issues of topical importance across various States among students, scholars and general public.
- At the international level the Council has MoU partners with counterparts in several countries including Nepal, Russia, Poland, Hungary, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, China, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Colombia. The Council holds regular dialogues with its partners which have been very fruitful in terms of exchange of perspectives/ views on global, regional and bilateral issues.
- It is pertinent to note here that our international MoU partners also have similar Foreign Policy and geo-political and geo-strategic focus and objectives. Some of them are directly under their Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In several countries one can see think tanks/ research institutes with only International relations, foreign and security policy focus and also other think tanks with exclusive international economy focus. One example is South Korea with whom ICWA and RIS have 2+ 2 MoU arrangement with KNDA and KIEP. Similarly, in case of Germany, ICWA and RIS engaged with GIGA and SWP.
- ICWA's unique institutional identity, gives India the advantage of having Think tank with a long historical record, and one which has

been recognised as an Institute of national importance by an Act of Parliament. Merger of this vertical in a single identity would not thus achieve any great synergy or optimum utilisation of the Council's history and international standing. It would on the other hand, erode its standing built in last 8 decades.

- Finally, it can be said that in a vast country like India there are very few think tanks which specialize in the domain of foreign policy, geopolitics /geo-strategy, and international relations. Hence, merging an existing one with another think tank may not be appropriate. Both these organizations have exclusive identities and have been performing various functions as per their mandates. Based on the assessment, we feel that both these organizations contribute to the shaping of our foreign policy in their unique manner.
- Based on above keeping ICWA and RIS, separate, is in overall interest of the Nation

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 32)

The Policy Planning Division is the nodal division of the Ministry of External Affairs for policy planning and public diplomacy initiatives with the strategic and academic community. The Committee note that the primary objectives of India's foreign policy are to protect and promote India's national interests, defend territorial integrity and sovereignty and ensure peaceful, secure and stable regional and global environment that is conducive to India's growth and development. The Ministry has informed that high priority is accorded to engaging academics based in universities and think tanks and utilizing their expertise in the preparation of research papers and policy briefs. The Committee

are pleased to know that in pursuance of their recommendation, the Ministry has carried out survey of 171 countries to ascertain the international practice regarding publication of official grand strategy/foreign policy documents. On the basis of the findings of the study, the Ministry has informed that India's practice of articulation of foreign policy through Annual Reports, Parliament discussions, statements of high functionaries etc. is, therefore, in line with international practice of the vast majority of foreign offices. While appreciative of the Ministry's informed reply, the Committee notice that the 23 countries (excluding EU) that publish comprehensive strategy documents about strategic and foreign policy objectives include countries with remarkable global standing such as USA, UK, EU, Russia and others.

The Committee desire that the Ministry should continue its constructive engagement with academicians, domain experts, think tanks and other stakeholders. There is a dire need for wider dissemination of the publications of Reports, Briefs and compendia of the Ministry and its network of think tanks and autonomous bodies. The Committee also desire that the Ministry should reach out to established think tanks in partner countries for a deeper exchange of ideas and policies. In the opinion of the Committee, India as a rising power should publish an official foreign policy document in the form a White Paper or Strategy.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry of External Affairs is happy to note that the Parliamentary Committee is satisfied with its justification for not releasing a grand strategy document. The Committee's recommendation about having a foreign policy document, if not a grand strategy, that clearly delineates the guiding framework for our foreign policy engagements, is also duly noted. However, the Ministry has certain concerns regarding the publication/ release of such a foreign policy

document. Some of these concerns have already been mentioned in our previous response and would like to state the following:

- India's foreign policy is articulated in accordance with precedent, law and parliamentary rules in documents that are available in the public domain. These include the Annual Report of the Ministry, replies to Parliamentary Questions, submissions to the Parliamentary Committee, media briefings, and bilateral and multilateral documents containing a public expression of our foreign policy priorities.
- Public statements by the President, Vice President, Prime Minister, Minister of External Affairs, and the Ministers of State and senior officials of the Ministry of External Affairs provide comprehensive and clear-cut guidelines for foreign policy on various issues while adhering to the rules of a parliamentary democracy. For example, the Prime Minister announced the objectives of our Climate Change policy by offering 'Panchamrit' promises at the recently concluded COP26 Summit in Glasgow. India's commitment to an open, free and rules based order in the Indo-Pacific region was reiterated at the G20 and Quad summits. The importance of 'Neighbourhood First', 'Act East' and 'Think West' to our foreign policy is regularly asserted.
- Continuity and change have been the defining characteristic of India's foreign policy. The ends of our foreign policy are deeply intertwined with national developmental priorities. Correspondingly, the means and strategies devised to achieve those ends have been attuned such that there is maximum convergence between India's global diplomatic engagement and domestic development. In effect, India's foreign policy strategy is aimed to diversify and expand the country's political, economic, and geo-strategic options to ensure that India continues moving on an upward trajectory as a fast-growing inclusive economy, with a rising profile in global affairs.

- Each country has a different strategic culture and needs to be dealt with taking the historical, geographical, cultural, economic and political context into account. While the harmonisation of ends and means through a foreign policy document is appealing, it is our considered view that such a document will be of limited practical value because different countries are guided by different belief systems. Moreover, a dynamic diplomatic strategy is essential for responding to constantly evolving global challenges.
- The Ministry holds the view that a context specific approach is better suited to meeting our foreign policy objectives than adhering to one overarching and formalised foreign policy document.
- No single overarching policy document can capture all aspects of India's foreign policy. However, the principles of India's diplomatic strategy are long-established and enduring. The underlying principles and priorities have been disseminated by the Ministry through various channels of public communication.
- A grand strategy or a single Foreign Policy document outlining foreign policy carries with it the risk of oversimplification of India's deeply historical and richly diverse statecraft. Further, our foreign policy apparatus works in close cooperation with various other Ministries and institutions such as the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, National Security Council Secretariat, and the Prime Minister's Office.
- India's Foreign Policy is not restricted to the realm of the Ministry of External Affairs. It involves the participation of multiple actors at various levels. Considerations of defence, economy, science and technology, law, intelligence, climate change, tourism, health and the prevailing domestic environment have to be taken into account. The United Kingdom, for instance, released an integrated security, defence, development and

foreign policy document in July 2021, which had a foreword by their Prime Minister. Australia's foreign policy white paper in 2017 was collaboration between the foreign affairs office and the trade, tourism and investment office. It also included an introduction by their Prime Minister.

- Foreign policy documents are more relevant for the scholarly and academic community whose objective is to connect the dots in a country's past behaviour in order to predict future trends. This method helps aid academia's understanding of the inner workings of the government better. Such a method may not be ideal for practitioners of foreign policy to formulate actual strategy as they pose the risk of making a country's approach to Foreign Policy inflexible and rendering it susceptible to outside influence.
- Ministry's practice of articulation of foreign policy through Annual Reports, Parliament discussions, statements of high functionaries, etc., is therefore in line with international practice of the vast majority of foreign offices.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

CHAPTER- IV

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

Recommendation (Sl. No. 15)

The Committee note that the extent, magnitude and scope of India's international development cooperation have expanded significantly in recent years. The Ministry has submitted that the developmental aid and assistance projects, including capacity building assistance are implemented with the long-term goal of generating goodwill and thereby creating positive influence or leverage to derive foreign policy objectives. The Committee are aware about the plethora of challenges faced in implementation of projects abroad. The Committee have also taken note of the institutionalized review mechanism for monitoring of technical aid and development assistance projects. Expressing concern over the unpredictable budgetary demands and allocation under this Head, and reiterating their opinion, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should frame a developmental aid/cooperation policy and a separate aid disbursement body should be established for smooth and effective implementation of international aid projects.

Reply of the Government

IFD response based on previous years' reply –

India's development partnership cooperation is integral part of India's foreign policy. The inalienable component of our development cooperation is "partnership". India's economic cooperation through development partnership is demand driven. For example, India's Grants-in-aid projects and capacity building programs are demand driven and are based on local demand/priority of

the partner countries. Through development cooperation, Government aims to give fillip to South-South Cooperation.

Development assistance is offered on the request of the host government, which is scrutinized by the Ministry in consultation with concerned Territorial Division from foreign policy perspective and also the line ministries. Feasibility study / DPR is undertaken by the project implementation agency, which is vetted by the line ministries. Physical and financial progress is monitored at various levels, including our Missions abroad as well as Project Monitoring Committees (PMC) constituted for this specific purpose. Additionally, expert advice of consultants and technical advisors on deputation from other specialized organizations outside the Ministry is also taken regarding implementation of these projects. Moreover, period reviews of the development assistance programs, viz., comprehensive review of ITEC, CEITs, etc are undertaken to attune these programs from impact and outcome perspective. Budgetary outlays are pre-fixed and payments are released on milestone basis.

As regards Hon'ble Committee's recommendation of instituting a separate aid disbursal body, the Ministry is fully seized of the matter and is periodically reviewing all aspects of development cooperation and aid delivery.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

Recommendation (Sl. No. 25)

In view of the number and spread of overseas Indians, there is a high possibility of them getting stranded in a crisis situation. The recent political crisis in Afghanistan and conflict in Ukraine is a gross reminder about the implications

on safety and security of Indian nationals in such a volatile situation. The role played by the Ministry in Afghanistan and Ukraine in the recent past has been commendable. The Committee, therefore, feel that evacuation preparedness has emerged as a significant issue. The Committee are aware that during outbreak of conflict or any other exigencies, the evacuation of Indian citizens is planned on a case-to-case basis and evacuation is dependent on a number of factors. The Committee desire that a database of Indian nationals abroad may be prepared and updated on a regular basis for emergency situations. Furthermore, a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for evacuation of Indian nationals stranded in exigencies must also be chalked out and the same may be made available at all Indian Missions/Posts abroad. The Committee would like to be kept informed about steps taken in this direction.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry has been keeping a record of Indian Diaspora abroad and keeps updating the same. Separate databases are being maintained in respect of NRIs, PIOs and Students. However collation of such data is dependent on voluntary registration by our diaspora living abroad.

A Rapid Response Cell (RRC) has been created in the Ministry to deal with exigencies and emergency situations similar to the recent Ukraine crisis, where more than 22 thousand stranded Indians were evacuated by the Government in “Operation Ganga”.

The Rapid Response Cell in the Ministry handled SOP for the Control Room set up during the evacuation process. Based on the event report sent by the Indian Mission in Kyiv after Operation Ganga, recommendations for

implementation/inclusion of evacuation procedures in MEA's existing Crisis Management Plan is already under consideration.”

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

CHAPTER V

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

Recommendation (Sl. No. 23)

The erstwhile Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MoIA), which was primarily responsible for protection and welfare of overseas Indians, was merged with the Ministry of External Affairs in 2016. Since then, the Overseas Indian Affairs Division within the MEA has been dealing with issues relating to engagement with Indian Diaspora. Observing a general trend of ad hocism and arbitrariness in budgetary allocation to schemes and programmes related to welfare and protection of the overseas Indians, the Committee had been steadily recommending the Ministry to accord requisite fiscal space and importance to such a critical aspect of its responsibility. The Committee are disappointed to note that budgetary allocation for schemes/programmes related to welfare of overseas Indians during the current fiscals has either been reduced or kept constant. The Ministry's assertion that COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions and lockdowns have hampered the execution of programmes & schemes in India & in Missions abroad have been duly noted. The Committee observe that a Working Group has been constituted under the Chairmanship of Secretary (CPV&OIA) for evaluation of various Schemes and Programmes for the welfare of the Indian Diaspora. The Committee welcome the creation of a new budget head for the Nirbhaya Fund with an allocation of Rs. 5 Crore for empowerment, safety and security of women and girl children. In this regard, the Ministry has informed that the guidelines to be followed by the Missions/Posts abroad for establishment and operation of the One Stop Centre are also being worked upon.

Taking a serious view of the unpredictability and low budgetary allocation for Overseas Indians, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should prepare a vision for reaching out to all Indians abroad in a more committed manner and project improved budgetary allocations for the same. The Committee would like to be apprised about the findings of the Report of the Working Group in six months. With regard to the newly created Nirbhaya Fund, the Committee desire that guidelines for establishing the One Stop Centres are chalked out without any further delay so that the disbursal from the fund does not suffer.

Reply of the Government

Due to Covid-19 pandemic, travel restrictions and lockdowns hampered the execution of programmes & schemes throughout FY 2020-21. Ministry will be holding the next Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in January, 2023, which would increase the budgetary expenditure/allocations substantially. Other schemes which were in abeyance because of COVID will also be executed this year, which will also increase the budgetary allocation for the Diaspora related activities. The next meeting of the Working Group expected to be held soon. The outcome of the same shall be apprised to the Committee. Further, it is informed that the guidelines for establishing the One Stop Centres have already been formulated and vetted by the competent authority in the Ministry.

(File No. AA/Parl/125/23/2022) dated 07/07/2022)

NEW DELHI
19 December, 2022
28 Agrahayana, 1944 (Saka)

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

ANNEXURE I**List of Missions/Posts**

Sl No	Name of Mission
AFRICA	
1	Embassy of India, Abidjan
2	Embassy of India, Addis Ababa
3	Embassy of India, Algiers
4	Embassy of India, Antananarivo
5	Embassy of India, Asmara
6	Embassy of India, Bamako
7	Embassy of India, Lome
8	Embassy of India, Brazzaville
9	Embassy of India, Cairo
10	Embassy of India, Conakry
11	Embassy of India, Dakar
12	Embassy of India, Djibouti
13	Embassy of India, Freetown
14	Embassy of India, Juba
15	Embassy of India, Khartoum
16	Embassy of India, Kigali
17	Embassy of India, Kinshasa
18	Embassy of India, Luanda
19	Embassy of India, Malabo
20	Embassy of India, Monrovia
21	Embassy of India, Niamey
22	Embassy of India, Nouakchott
23	Embassy of India, Ouagadougou

24	Embassy of India, Rabat
25	Embassy of India, Sao Tome
26	Embassy of India, Tripoli (resident in Tunis)
27	Embassy of India, Tunis
28	Embassy of India, Yaoundé
29	High Commission of India, Abuja
30	High Commission of India, Accra
31	High Commission of India, Dar Es Salaam
32	High Commission of India, Gaborone
33	High Commission of India, Harare
34	High Commission of India, Kampala
35	High Commission of India, Lilongwe
36	High Commission of India, Lusaka
37	High Commission of India, Maputo
38	High Commission of India, Mbabane
39	High Commission of India, Nairobi
40	High Commission of India, Port Louis
41	High Commission of India, Pretoria
42	High Commission of India, Victoria (Mahe)
43	High Commission of India, Windhoek
44	Consulate General of India, Cape Town
45	Consulate General of India, Durban
46	Consulate General of India, Johannesburg
47	Consulate General of India, Saint Denis
48	Consulate General of India, Zanzibar
49	Consulate General of India, Lagos
50	Assistant High Commission of India, Mombasa

ASIA	
51	Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi
52	Embassy of India, Amman
53	Embassy of India, Ashgabat
54	Embassy of India, Astana (Nur-Sultan)
55	Embassy of India, Baghdad
56	Embassy of India, Manama, Bahrain
57	Embassy of India, Bangkok
58	Embassy of India, Baku
59	Embassy of India, Beijing
60	Embassy of India, Beirut
61	Embassy of India, Bishkek
62	Embassy of India, Damascus
63	Embassy of India, Doha
64	Embassy of India, Dushanbe
65	Embassy of India, Hanoi
66	Embassy of India, Jakarta
67	Embassy of India, Kabul (temporarily closed)
68	Embassy of India, Kathmandu
69	Embassy of India, Kuwait City
70	Embassy of India, Manila
71	Embassy of India, Muscat
72	Embassy of India, Phnom Penh
73	Embassy of India, Pyong Yang (temporarily closed)
74	Embassy of India, Riyadh
75	Embassy of India, Sanaá (resident in Djibouti)
76	Embassy of India, Seoul

77	Embassy of India, Tashkent
78	Embassy of India, Tehran
79	Embassy of India, Tel Aviv
80	Embassy of India, Thimphu
81	Embassy of India, Tokyo
82	Embassy of India, Ulaan Baataar
83	Embassy of India, Vientiane
84	Embassy of India, Yangon
85	Embassy of India, Yerevan
86	High Commission of India, Bandar Seri Begawan
87	High Commission of India, Colombo
88	High Commission of India, Dhaka
89	High Commission of India, Islamabad
90	High Commission of India, Kuala Lumpur
91	High Commission of India, Male
92	High Commission of India, Singapore
93	ASEAN Mission in Jakarta
94	Consulate General of India, Bali
95	Consulate General of India, Bandar Abbas
96	Consulate General of India, Birgunj
97	Consulate General of India, Chiangmai
98	Consulate General of India, Dubai
99	Consulate General of India, Erbil
100	Consulate General of India, Guangzhou
101	Consulate General of India, Hambantota
102	Consulate General of India, Herat (temporarily closed)
103	Consulate General of India, Ho Chi Minh City

104	Consulate General of India, Hong Kong
105	Consulate General of India, Jaffna
106	Consulate General of India, Jalalabad (temporarily closed)
107	Consulate General of India, Jeddah
108	Consulate General of India, Kandahar (temporarily closed)
109	Consulate General of India, Mandalay
110	Consulate General of India, Mazar e Sharif (temporarily closed)
111	Consulate General of India, Medan
112	Consulate General of India, Osaka Kobe
113	Consulate General of India, Phuentsholing
114	Consulate General of India, Shanghai
115	Consulate General of India, Sittwe
116	Consulate General of India, Vladivostok
117	Consulate General of India, Zahidan
118	Assistant High Commission of India, Chittagong
119	Assistant High Commission of India, Khulna
120	Assistant High Commission of India, Kandy
121	Assistant High Commission of India, Rajshahi
122	Assistant High Commission of India, Sylhet
123	Representative Office of India, Almaty
124	Representative Office of India, Ramallah
EUROPE	
125	Embassy of India, Ankara
126	Embassy of India, Athens
127	Embassy of India, Belgrade
128	Embassy of India, Berlin
129	Embassy of India, Berne

130	Embassy of India, Bratislava
131	Embassy of India, Brussels
132	Embassy of India, Bucharest
133	Embassy of India, Budapest
134	Embassy of India, Copenhagen
135	Embassy of India, Dublin
136	Embassy of India, The Hague
137	Embassy of India, Helsinki
138	Embassy of India, Kyiv
139	Embassy of India, Lisbon
140	Embassy of India, Ljubljana
141	Embassy of India, Madrid
142	Embassy of India, Minsk
143	Embassy of India, Moscow
144	Embassy of India, Oslo
145	Embassy of India, Paris
146	Embassy of India, Prague
147	Embassy of India, Reykjavik
148	Embassy of India, Rome
149	Embassy of India, Sofia
150	Embassy of India, Stockholm
151	Embassy of India, Tallinn
152	Embassy of India, Vienna
153	Embassy of India, Warsaw
154	Embassy of India, Zagreb
155	High Commission of India, Nicosia
156	High Commission of India, London

157	High Commission of India, Valletta, Malta
158	Permanent Mission of India, Geneva
159	Permanent Delegation of India, Paris
160	Consulate General of India, Birmingham
161	Consulate General of India, Edinburgh
162	Consulate General of India, Frankfurt
163	Consulate General of India, Geneva
164	Consulate General of India, Hamburg
165	Consulate General of India, Istanbul
166	Consulate General of India, Milan
167	Consulate General of India, Munich
168	Consulate General of India, St Petersburg
NORTH AMERICA	
169	Embassy of India, Guatemala City
170	Embassy of India, Havana
171	Embassy of India, Mexico City
172	Embassy of India, Panama City
173	Embassy of India, Santo Domingo
174	Embassy of India, Washington
175	High Commission of India, Kingston
176	High Commission of India, Ottawa
177	High Commission of India, Port of Spain
178	Permanent Mission of India, New York
179	Consulate General of India, Atlanta
180	Consulate General of India, Chicago
181	Consulate General of India, Houston
182	Consulate General of India, New York

183	Consulate General of India, San Francisco	
184	Consulate General of India, Toronto	
185	Consulate General of India, Vancouver	
OCEANIA		
186	High Commission of India, Canberra	
187	High Commission of India, Port Moresby	
188	High Commission of India, Suva	
189	High Commission of India, Wellington	
190	Consulate General of India, Melbourne	
191	Consulate General of India, Perth	
192	Consulate General of India, Sydney	
SOUTH AMERICA		
193	Embassy of India, Asuncion	
194	Embassy of India, Bogota	
195	Embassy of India, Brasilia	
196	Embassy of India, Buenos Aires	
197	Embassy of India, Caracas	
198	Embassy of India, Lima	
199	Embassy of India, Paramaribo	
200	Embassy of India, Santiago	
201	High Commission of India, George Town	
202	Consulate General of India, Sao Paulo	

Missions/Posts that have been sanctioned by the Cabinet		
203	Embassy of India, N'Djamena	Africa
204	Embassy of India, Bissau	Africa

205	Embassy of India, Mogadishu	Africa
206	Embassy of India, Praia	Africa
207	Embassy of India, Vilnius	Europe
208	Consulate General of India, Addu, Maldives	Asia

Institutional initiatives taken by RIS during the recent past are:

India-ASEAN Centre(AIC)

- India-ASEAN relations have improved considerably over the years. RIS has been engaged in the process of promoting and strengthening ASEAN-India partnership since 1993. The institute has a rich treasure of in-house research on East Asia and ASEAN countries. Following the recommendations of the Eminent Persons' Group, the Government of India has established the ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS. AIC undertakes research on various dimensions of India-ASEAN relations and conducts seminars, conferences and meetings in India and the ASEAN.

- **Global Development Centre (GDC)**

Established at RIS, the GDC aims to contribute to the evolving alternative development paradigm that goes beyond the doctrines of Anglo-Saxon Model and promotes the virtues of inclusiveness and sustainability. Developing countries have recently witnessed significant improvement in poverty alleviation, women empowerment, financial inclusion, energy transition and other areas which need to be properly analysed, assimilated and shared among other countries for wider adoption and replication. With deeper understanding of theories and practices, GDC intends to promote this newly acquired knowledge from India's successful programmes and initiatives among partner countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and facilitate learning from other country experiences through empirical research, sharing of skills, expertise

and best practices, and exchange of human resources. In the spirit of collective understanding and partnership, the Centre along with its partner institutions, agencies and governments commits to promote equity and accessibility based on multidisciplinary and multi-functional approaches.

- Founded with the financial support of erstwhile DFID, GDC is currently being funded by FCDO. In addition, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) has also entered into a multi-year partnership with GDC to promote the aims and objectives of GDC within and outside the country. It has become only possible as in the case of GDC due to the unique character of RIS, which is far away from the shadow of the government structures.

- **Forum for Indian Science Diplomacy (FISD)**

RIS, in collaboration with the National Institute of Advanced Study (NIAS), Bangalore and the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India has established the Forum for Indian Science Diplomacy (FISD) in May 2018 as part of its programme on Science Diplomacy. FISD aims to harness the full potential and synergy between science and technology, diplomacy, foreign policy and development cooperation in order to meet India's development and security needs and to strengthen its engagement with the international system and on key global issues involving science and technology.

- **Blue Economy Forum (BEF)**

Blue economy has emerged as a commonly acceptable development paradigm which has effectively blended economic

growth with sustainable development. Blue Economy Forum (BEF) aims to serve as a dedicated platform for fostering dialogue on promoting the concept in the Indian Ocean and other regions. The forum focuses on conducting studies on the potential, prospects and challenges of blue economy; providing regular inputs to practitioners in the government and the private sectors; and promoting advocacy for its smooth adoption in national economic policies. The forum facilitates linkages between the policy makers, academicians and business community in the Indian Ocean and other regions.

- **Forum on Indian Traditional Medicine (FITM)**

The Ministry of AYUSH has established the Forum on Indian Traditional Medicine (FITM) at RIS as a common platform for all actors and stakeholders to come together to contribute to policy making in the area of Indian Systems of Medicine (ISMs) across systems like Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Yoga, which provide alternatives in healthcare to almost 75 per cent of the Indian rural population. With growing global interest in medicinal and aromatic plants and compounds derived from them, FITM also explores challenges in domestic and global promotion of ISMs covering regulatory frameworks, pharmaceutical standards and Intellectual Property Rights.

- **Science Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) Forum**

RIS, in collaboration with India Habitat Centre (IHC), and other prominent institutions working on S&T issues, including The Energy Research Institute (TERI), Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), Indo-French Centre for the Promotion of

Advanced Research (IFCPAR/CEFIPRA) and Vigyan Prasar has launched the Science Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) Forum. STIP Forum aims to promote informed debate on various aspects of Science, Technology and Innovation Policy and bridge gap between science and society through dissemination of information on developments in S&T.

- **South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS)**

As part of its work programme, RIS has been deeply involved in strengthening economic integration in the South Asia region. It has been working closely with the SAARC Secretariat and other partner think tanks associated with SAARC. In this context, the role of the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS) is very important. SACEPS is a network organization engaged in addressing regional issues of common concerns in South Asia.

- **BRICS Academic Forum**

The BRICS Academic Forum is a Track 2 platform for academics from the five countries to deliberate on issues of crucial importance to BRICS and come up with ideas and recommendations. Such Academic Fora have been held before every BRICS Summit so far. The Forum usually invites scholars from each member nation to speak on themes of importance. In addition, a large number of scholars from all countries participate in the deliberations. RIS has been participating in the deliberations of the BRICS Fora. In 2016, RIS co-hosted BRICS Academic Forum held in Goa. In 2020-21, RIS and ORF jointed organized

in BRICS Academic Forum under India's Presidency of the BRICS.

- Of all the BRICS Academic Forum Dialogues, three dialogues were organised by RIS on the following topics:

I. Dialogue on Traditional Medicine Cooperation, 12 May 2021

The first Dialogue on Traditional Medicine Cooperation was held on 12 May 2021. Dr. Rajesh Kotecha, Secretary, Ministry of Ayush, Government of India delivered the inaugural address. There were two sessions. The session I was on 'Restoring Wellness Strategies and Wellness Indicators for BRICS'. The Session II was on 'Promoting Trade in Medicinal Products and Services; Digital Sequencing Information (DSI); Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS)'. It was chaired by Dr André de Mello e Souza, Coordinator (IPR specialist), International Cooperation and Exchange, Institute of Applied Economic Research, Brazil.

II. SDGs and Strengthening the Means of Implementation, 20-21 May 2021

The second dialogue on SDGs and Strengthening the Means of Implementation was held on 20-21 May 2021. The Day I started with the inaugural address by Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Vice-Chairman, NITI Aayog, and Government of India. Session I was on 'National Strategies and Decade of Action for SDGs'. The session II was on Science, Technology & Innovation (STI) for SDGs. Dr. Arabinda Mitra, Scientific Secretary, and Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India chaired. Session III on day 2

was devoted to ‘Consolidation of Development Finance for SDGs’. It was chaired by Dr. Paulo Esteves, Director, and BRICS Policy Center, Brazil.

III. Reviving Trade and Investment for Recovery: Focus on Resilience, Inclusion and Sustainability, 20 July 2021

Prof. S K Mohanty, Professor, RIS, gave the welcome remarks. Professor Manoj Pant, Director, IIFT, chaired and the panel discussion.

● **BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks (BNPTT)**

BNPTT was established subsequent to the decision taken at the Second BIMSTEC Summit which was held in New Delhi, India on 13 November 2008. The current members of the BNPTT are Bangladesh - Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD); Bhutan- Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS); India - Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS); Myanmar - Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS); Nepal -Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA); Sri Lanka – Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS); Thailand - Indian Studies Center of Chulalongkorn University (ISCCU). Since inception of BIMSTEC, RIS has been providing important inputs for its work programme.

● **ASEAN India Network of Think Tanks (AINTT)**

AINTT was formed following a decision taken by the leaders of ASEAN and India at their first summit held in November 2002. It serves as a forum for interaction among think-tanks and also provides a platform for sharing views, ideas and

proposals and strengthening ASEAN-India relationships. As part of its work programme, RIS organises roundtables of AINTT to generate new ideas and suggestions for strengthening ASEAN-India partnership. Roundtables aimed to bring policy makers, scholars and others together to bridge the knowledge gap.

- **IBSA Academic Forum**

IBSA Academic Forum is a Track 2 platform for Academics from India, Brazil and South Africa to exchange knowledge and insights on the potential for this unique trilateral partnership and reinforce its relevance for the promotion of multilateralism, South-South Cooperation and inclusive global order. Strong democratic foundations of domestic polity offer IBSA unique strength in terms of leadership in taking up global issues of concern. RIS has been participating in the deliberations of the IBSA Academic Forum in the past and has hosted the Forum in India. RIS convened the Sixth IBSA Academic Forum on 3-4 May 2019 in Kochi, India.

- **Seventh IBSA Academic Forum, 11-12 August 2021**

The RIS organised the two-day long 7th IBSA Academic Forum on 11-12 August 2021, on wide ranging issues and identified several important areas of cooperation among the IBSA countries. The two roundtables and three plenary sessions of 7th IBSA Academic Forum discussed several important themes. The Forum was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs, Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh. The Forum featured a conversation with IBSA Sherpas on the future of economic partnerships and the need for strengthening intra-IBSA cooperation on issues of trade, technology, resilient value chains, and

accelerating the digital transition processes for inclusive social development. Other pressing issues like pandemic preparedness, reform of the UN Security Council, rise of vaccine nationalism and the need for strengthening manufacturing sector for the manufacture of vaccines and diagnostic tools, were also brought to attention.

- **Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST)**

Background

Though existing for decades as one of the elements of the international development cooperation, South-South Cooperation (SSC) has grown into prominence due to a rise both in quantum as well in diversity in approaches and delivery in development partnerships. There has been a growing consensus among the partners that the SSC has often been poorly understood. It has many knowledge and evidence gaps. While North-South cooperation has evolved over 50 years, the SSC needs a common platform among South-South partners for exchange and systematization of knowledge and development. Knowledge generated endogenously among the Southern partners can help in consolidation of stronger common issues at different global policy fora. Consequent to the consensus reached on many of these issues at the High-Level Conference of Southern Providers in Delhi (March 2013) and establishment of the subsequent Core Group on the SSC within the UNDCF (June 2013), the Network of Southern Think-Tanks (NeST) was formally launched at the Conference on the South-South Cooperation, held at New Delhi during 10-11 March 2016.

Objective

The purpose of the NeST is to provide a global platform for Southern Think-Tanks for collaboratively generating, systematising, consolidating and sharing knowledge on SSC approaches for international development.

The different work programmes that NeST plans to take forward are as follows:

- Theorising operationally successful models of SSC;
- Impact assessment of SSC; and
- Documentation of SSC.

● **Regional Initiatives of the NeST**

China International Development Research Network, China

The China International Development Research Network (CIDRN) is an informal association of Chinese research centres, institutes and university departments, created and developed by scholars and researchers interested in China's role in international development, and more particularly in China's engagement with other developing countries. It aims to provide a platform for sharing and dissemination of international development knowledge and experiences among academic institutions, international organisations, government agencies and individuals. Such a platform for enhancing knowledge exchange and cooperation among Chinese researchers and between Chinese and international development communities, supporting knowledge-based policy development, can assist in formulation of China's international development policy.

NeST Africa, South Africa

The NeST Africa chapter was established as a multi-stakeholder platform to discuss issues, challenges and opportunities for development cooperation in Africa and it highlights the role of South Africa and other emerging donors, and contribution of the SSC in the development of the continent. The work of NeST Africa spans analytical frameworks and toolkits, evidence-based field research, capacity-building and training services, policy support and improving data quality and availability for the SSC. The NeST Africa provides inputs for global and regional debates, the African Platform for Development Effectiveness (AP-Dev), Africa Vision 2063, the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Financing for Development (Ffd), and BRICS/IBSA Summits.

NeST Mexico

The Mexican chapter of the Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST) was launched in December 2017. The NeST Mexico chapter aim to provide a multi-stakeholder platform to support the Mexican and Latin American debate on international development policy, by generating evidence, better understanding and systematising knowledge on the Mexican development cooperation, and how this relates to the approach of other Southern providers and traditional donors.

NeST Brazil

NesT Brazil was launched in February 2015. It aims to carry out research activities, offering empirical evidence and conceptual

bases for debate on the SSC and Brazilian cooperation. In particular, NeST Brazil seeks to: (a) identify and elaborate Brazil's specific approach to the international development cooperation, how the approach relates to other emerging countries and the OECD, and how it would contribute to the Global NeST network; (b) articulate with pre-existing networks and initiatives working with the international development cooperation at the national and regional levels; (c) develop a common and if possible consensual understanding of stakeholders on the nature, concepts, principles, approaches and indicators of the development cooperation in Brazil and Latin America; (d) improve availability and accessibility of data and information on the activities of Brazil and Latin American countries and their partners in the cooperation; and (e) organize meetings, workshops and seminars on the subject periodically with Brazilian and foreign researchers and other desiring parties. At the same time, NeST Brazil would also contribute to articulate creation of a regional network of NeST Latin America by identifying and interacting with institutions engaged in research on the international development cooperation in the region.

NeST Argentina

The Argentine chapter is the latest entrant to the Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST). A number of Argentinean think-tanks and universities have decided to establish the chapter and be a part of the global movement to advance knowledge and experiences around South-South cooperation. It aims to contribute to the development of ideas and knowledge around SSC that promotes an interregional perspective.

FIDC

The Forum for Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC) has been launched to explore various facets of Indian development cooperation policy with its partner-countries. The objective is to encourage debate and analytical research on all broad constituents of India's development partnership spectrum to bolster policy-making process in the field of critical importance. Thrust of the forum is to substantially contribute in facilitating an informed debate on policy framework of India and other developing countries. The Forum is engaged in establishing dialogue with the relevant government agencies, academia and civil society organisations focusing on the South-South Cooperation. FIDC is working towards raising the awareness about various dimensions of the development cooperation policies through seminars, discussion meetings and publications and contributes towards developing a conceptual framework for SSC.

Details of the income generated by RIS

Details of funds received by RIS from MEA & other funding agencies				
Sr . N o.	Financial Year	Grant in Aid	Sponsored Project Receipt	% of Project
1	2014-15	5,28,00,000	3,31,71,689	63%
2	2015-16	5,85,00,000	3,79,35,967	65%
3	2016-17	6,90,00,000	7,03,54,456	102%
4	2017-18	8,65,00,000	6,86,23,246	79%
5	2018-19	12,00,00,000	8,64,22,961	72%
6	2019-20	12,00,00,000	9,51,52,633	79%
7	2020-21	11,47,96,000	3,65,51,373	32%
8	2021-22	22,84,00,000	12,62,88,640	55%

MINUTES OF THE EIGHTH SITTING OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2022-23) HELD ON 19 DECEMBER, 2022

The Committee sat on Monday, 19 December, 2022 from 1515 hrs. to 1705 hrs. in Committee Room 'C', Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

PRESENT

1. Shri P.P. Chaudhary, Chairperson

Lok Sabha

2. Smt. Harsimrat Kaur Badal
3. Shri Kalyan Banerjee
4. Shri E. T. Mohammed Basheer
5. Shri Dileshwar Kamait
6. Smt. Poonam Pramod Mahajan
7. Shri Ritesh Pandey
8. Dr. K. C. Patel
9. Smt. Navneet Ravi Rana
10. Shri Vishnu Datt Sharma

Rajya Sabha

11. Shri Abdul Wahab
12. Dr. Ashok Kumar Mittal

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

- | | | | |
|----|------------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1. | Shrii Vinay Kwatra | : | Foreign Secretary |
| 2. | Shri Anurag Srivastava | : | JS (North) |
| 3. | Ms. Smita Pant | : | JS (BM) |
| 4. | Dr. Sumit Seth | : | JS (PP & R) |

Secretariat

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

2. At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the Members to the Sitting of the Committee.

3. XXX XXX XXX

4. XXX XXX XXX

5. XXX XXX XXX

6. Thereafter the Committee took up for consideration the draft Report on action taken by the Government on the observations/recommendations contained in the Twelfth Report of the Committee on Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 2022-23.

7. The Chairperson invited the Members to offer their suggestions, if any, for incorporation in the draft Reports. The members suggested some minor modifications. The Committee adopted the draft Report with these minor modifications.

8. The Committee then authorized the Chairperson to finalize the Action Taken Report incorporating the suggestions made by the Members and present the same to Parliament.

9. XXX XXX XXX

10. XXX XXX XXX

11. XXX XXX XXX

12. XXX XXX XXX

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 TWELFTH REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

- (i) Total Number of Recommendations 33**
- (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, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 28, 29, 30 and 33.
Total- 26
Percentage:78.79%
- (iii) Observations/Recommendations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the Government's replies:-**
Recommendation Nos. 26, 27, 31 and 32
Total- 4
Percentage:12.12%
- (iv) Observations/Recommendations in respect of which replies of Government have not been accepted by the Committee and require reiteration: -**
Recommendation No. 15, 25
Total- 2
Percentage:6.06%
- (v) Observations/Recommendations in respect of which final replies of Government are still awaited: -**
Recommendation Nos. 23
Total- 1
Percentage:3.03%