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

EIGHTEENTH LOK SABHA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Action Taken by the Government on the observations/recommendations contained in the Twenty Sixth Report of the Committee on External Affairs (17th Lok Sabha) on the subject 'India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) - Contours of Cooperation'

FIRST REPORT



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

DECEMBER, 2024 / Agrahayana, 1946 (Saka)



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Presented to Lok Sabha on 03 December, 2024
Laid on the Table of Rajya Sabha on 03 December, 2024



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

DECEMBER, 2024 / Agrahayana, 1946 (Saka)

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

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3. Shri Vijay Baghel
4. Shri Mitesh Patel Bakabhai
5. Shri Abhishek Banerjee
6. Shri Arun Govil
7. Shri Deepender Singh Hooda
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19. Ms. Bansuri Swaraj
20. Shri Akshay Yadav
21. Vacant

Rajya Sabha

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23. Smt. Kiran Choudhry
24. Smt. Sagarika Ghose
25. Dr. K. Laxman
26. Ms. Kavita Patidar
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30. Vacant
31. Vacant

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| 4. | Shri Anurag Sandil | — | Assistant Executive Officer |

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Committee on External Affairs (2024-25) having been authorized by the Committee to submit the Report on their behalf, present this First Report (18th Lok Sabha) on action taken by the Government on the Observations /Recommendations contained in the Twenty Sixth Report of the Committee on External Affairs (17th Lok Sabha) on the subject 'India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)- Contours of Cooperation'.

2. The Twenty Sixth Report was presented to the Lok Sabha and laid on the Table of the Rajya Sabha on 12 December, 2023. The Action Taken Replies of the Government on all the Observations/Recommendations contained in the Report were received on 14 February, 2024 (English Version) and 23 February, 2024 (Hindi Version).

3. The Committee considered and adopted this Action Taken Report at their Sitting held 25 October, 2024. The Minutes of the Sitting of the Committee have 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 Twenty Sixth Report of the Committee on External Affairs is given at Appendix-II.

NEW DELHI
25 November, 2024
04 Agrahayana, 1946 (Saka)

Dr. Shashi Tharoor,
Chairperson,
Committee on External Affairs

CHAPTER-I

This Report of the Committee on External Affairs deals with the action taken by the Government on the observations/recommendations contained in the Twenty Sixth Report of the Committee on the subject 'India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)- Contours of Cooperation'. The Twenty Sixth Report was presented to Lok Sabha and also laid on the Table of Rajya Sabha on 12 December, 2023.

2. The Action Taken Notes have been received from the Ministry of External Affairs on all the 49 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 , 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48 and 49

**Total-41
Chapter-II**

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

NIL

**Total-NIL
Chapter-III**

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

Recommendation Nos. 39 and 45.

Total-2

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

Recommendation Nos. 5, 19, 21, 25, 27 and 44

Total-6

Chapter-V

3. The Committee desire that the final replies to the comments and observations/recommendations contained in Chapter-I of this Report and recommendations included in Chapter V 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.

EARLY FORMATION OF JOINT WORKING GROUPS

(Recommendation No. 5)

5. The Committee in their 24th Report had observed/recommended as under:

The Committee note that political dialogues between India and GCC have been held over the years. A Memorandum of Understanding on Mechanism of Consultations to institutionalize the political dialogue between India and GCC was signed in September 2022. This MoU also instituted a dialogue at the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) level. The Committee further note that during the first India-GCC Senior Officials Meeting held in March 2023, it was proposed to form five Joint Working Groups in the fields of political and security issues; economic cooperation and trade; cultural, education, youth and sports; health and pharmaceuticals; maritime security and counter terrorism. The Committee welcome the proposal for formation of five mutually

beneficial JWG's and urge the Government to make all out efforts for the finalization of all the groups and start working at an early date.'

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

"The recommendation from the committee is noted and the Ministry is actively following up with the GCC authorities for the finalization of all working groups and for their work to begin at an early date."

7. Welcoming the proposal for formation of Five mutually beneficial Joint Working Groups in the fields of political and security issues; economic cooperation and trade; cultural, education, youth and sports; health and pharmaceuticals; maritime security and counter terrorism between India and GCC, the Committee had urged the Government to make all out efforts for finalization and early working of these Groups. Though the Ministry has stated that it is actively following up with the GCC Authorities in its Action Taken Reply furnished to the Committee, the progress achieved so far, details of meetings held, challenges faced and steps taken to overcome such challenges, etc. have not been mentioned at all. The Committee, hence desire to be apprised of the renewed efforts made and the outcome of such efforts as well as action plan contemplated for early finalization of the modalities for formation and operationalization of these JWG's to usher in greater cooperation between India and GCC countries in all spheres.

TALKS FOR JOINING ISA

(Recommendation No. 13)

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

'The Committee note that Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman and Bahrain have joined the International Solar Alliance while two GCC countries namely, Kuwait and Qatar are yet to join the ISA. The Committee desire that all the GCC countries should be brought under the ISA as India is already having cooperation with GCC countries in the energy sector. The Committee, therefore, urge the Government to make extra efforts to persuade Kuwait and Qatar to join the Alliance at an early date.'

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

"The Government of India is actively engaging encouraging GCC countries to become a member of ISA as well as CDRI. 4 out of 6 GCC countries including UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are members of the ISA while Qatar and Kuwait are yet to join the ISA. However, with the concerted efforts of our Missions, both Kuwait and Qatar have expressed their interest and are in further talks to join ISA."

10. The Committee had urged the Government to make extra efforts to bring Kuwait and Qatar under the International Solar Alliance to have a comprehensive cooperation with all GCC countries in the energy sector. The Ministry, in its action taken reply, has stated that with the concerted efforts of our Missions, both countries have expressed their interest and are in further talks to join ISA. The Committee are of the view that entry of Kuwait and Qatar under the ISA would greatly enhance energy cooperation between India and GCC and augment India's energy security. The Committee,

therefore, urge the Ministry as well as Indian Missions to pursue these countries and make renewed efforts for early conclusion of the said talks and intimate the progress achieved in this regard.

IDENTIFICATION OF TOP UNIVERSITIES FOR PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL COLLABORATIONS

(Recommendation No. 18)

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

'The Committee note that the education sector has emerged as a strong area of cooperation between India and the GCC countries. As a matter of policy, collaboration between educational institutions in India and countries abroad is encouraged. Indian Missions also facilitate collaborations in education sector. There is an ongoing process of identifying 40 top universities globally in which Indian diaspora are playing a role in the form of faculty members or senior researchers as a part of educational and cultural collaborations with universities across the world. The Committee also note that an MoU was signed in July 2023 to establish an IIT campus in the UAE. The Committee feel that educational collaborations between India and GCC countries should be enhanced and urge the Government to explore more avenues for partnerships in this sector so that more MoUs for facilitating higher and technical education would be signed. Indian Missions abroad may be pursued to play a more proactive role in facilitating educational collaborations between institutions in India and in the GCC countries. The Committee also urge the Ministry to complete the exercise regarding identification of top universities having involvement of diaspora at the earliest for promotion of educational and cultural collaborations.'

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

“As a matter of policy, we encourage collaboration between educational institutions in India and countries abroad. Our Missions also facilitate collaborations in education sector with GCC countries. It is may be noted that important exams such as the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), and other similar exams are concurrently conducted in Gulf countries alongside India. The collaboration between India and GCC countries in the education sector has a longstanding and robust. Recently, Memorandum of Understanding between the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Dhofar University, for establishing chair in Hindi language was signed in December 2023. Additionally, possibility of signing a Letter of Understanding (LoU) between ICCR and Sultan Qaboos University for the establishment of chair in economics is also being explored. It may be noted that leading Indian Universities like BITS Pilani, AMITY, Manipal etc have also established their campuses in UAE. Our Mission is also facilitating discussions of other universities with the UAE authorities, to set-up their campuses in UAE. Kuwait College of Science and Technology is being run in active collaboration with IIT Delhi. In order to promote collaborations between India and Bahrain in the field of education, Mission has facilitated meetings of Bahrain Institute of Banking & Finance (BIBF) with IIT Mumbai and IIM Ahmadabad to help them start joint courses for mid-level executive training. Discussions in respect of establishment of IIT campus and other private Indian Institutions interested in setting up campus in Bahrain such as Rajagiri Group have been facilitated by the Mission. Our Mission in Qatar continues to engage with the Qatar side for greater educational collaboration between Indian and Qatari institutions as well as provision of higher education courses by Indian universities. Since 2022, Savitribai Phule University has started providing some courses to students in Qatar. Our Mission in Saudi Arabia is actively working with Saudi Ministry of Education to deepen collaboration in the higher education sector. During the recent visit of Crown Prince to India in 2023, it was agreed that direct relations between universities and scientific & educational institutions would be encouraged. ”

13. The Committee had felt the need for enhancing educational collaboration between India and GCC countries and had urged the Government to explore more avenues for partnerships in the sector and signing of more MoUs for facilitating higher and technical education. The Ministry was also urged to complete the exercise regarding identification of top 40 universities having involvement of diaspora at the

earliest for promotion of educational and cultural collaborations. The Ministry, in its Action Taken Reply, has highlighted the steps taken to encourage, promote and deepen collaborations in the education sector as well as collaborations facilitated by Indian Missions and Mou/LoU between ICCR and universities in GCC countries, but is silent on the issue of identification of 40 top universities having involvement of diaspora. The Committee, hence, reiterate this aspect of their recommendation and urge the Ministry to complete the exercise of identifying the 40 top universities having involvement of diaspora without further delay for promotion of educational and cultural collaborations.

INTEGRATION OF UPI WITH PAYMENT PLATFORMS OF GCC COUNTRIES

(Recommendation No. 19)

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

‘On the adoption of India’s Digital Public Infrastructure by GCC countries, the Committee note that the Rupay card is already functional in UAE while MoUs for the same have also been signed with Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain. India and UAE are also engaged in discussions on possible integration of the UPI platform with UAE payment platform. India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. Moreover, proposals related to trade in local currencies and UPI connectivity are being pursued with Kuwait. The Committee understand that besides promoting digital transactions, integration of the UPI platform with the payment platforms of GCC countries would go a long way in fostering closer economic cooperation through enhanced bilateral trade

as well as tourism and at the same time, reduce the cost of cross border payments. The Committee, therefore, urge the Government to pursue the GCC countries and enter into constructive talks with UAE, Kuwait and others for an early finalization of India's UPI connectivity and its integration with the payment Platforms of the GCC countries. Efforts made and success achieved in this regard may be communicated to the Committee.'

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

“UPI is not merely a Real Time Payment system providing Person to Person Payment system but it is a comprehensive payment scheme where the online transaction processing, Interbank settlements and Customer dispute life cycle management are encompassed holistically. At present, Indians who visit different countries have to pay for any expenses via international cards. With the introduction of UPI, Indians will now be able to use multiple bank accounts to make payments via a single mobile application. UAE has accepted India's UPI interface. While talks are ongoing with the Central Bank of Oman for technical integration of UPI. The implementation of UPI in overseas markets is a significant step towards promoting digital transactions and fostering closer economic cooperation between India and foreign countries. With UPI's user-friendly and secure interface, Indian tourists will be able to make payments seamlessly, eliminating the need for currency exchange. This will enhance our bilateral trade as well as tourism. Internationalization of UPI will also help in reducing the cost of cross border payments. NPCI (I) is the nodal agency under the Ministry of Finance. MEA works as an interface to promote Unified Payment Interface in other countries. In this regard, we have been facilitating NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL controlled by RBI which is under Department of Financial Services, MoF) interactions with Banks of respective countries through our Missions. The details country wise are as follows:

i. United Arab Emirates (UAE)- Al Etihad Payments (AEP), an indirect subsidiary of Central Bank of UAE (CBUAE) and NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL) signed a strategic framework agreement on for Domestic Card Scheme (DCS) implementation based on NPCI's RuPay stack. Also, Mercury is Middle East's first domestic payment scheme, headquartered in the United Arab Emirates, which enable member institutions to issue cards under the Mercury brand that function securely at large number of ATMs and merchant outlets across the UAE. Mercury connects consumers, banks, the government entities and businesses to facilitate payments in the region. NIPL has signed definitive agreement with Mercury for seamless integration to ensure acceptance of RuPay cards in UAE. Rupay cards have been accepted in the UAE since

2021. Today Rupay Cards have 98% Point of Sale acceptance coverage in the UAE. Similarly, UPI has also been active in UAE since 2022. Recently, Phonepe [a UPI App] went live in the UAE. Indians visiting the UAE can now do UPI transactions through UAE NeoPay. In addition to the above, an MoU was signed on July 15, 2023 for interlinking UPI and UAE's instant payment platform. Discussions are underway to complete this integration soon.

ii. Saudi Arabia- NPCI and Saudi Arabia Monetary Authority (SAMA) have already signed an NDA. RBI has proposed a MOU/TOR to SAMA and their response is awaited on the same.

iii. Oman- NDA and MOU were signed between Central Bank of Oman and NPCI international Payments Limited on 4th October 2022 for enabling acceptance of UPI QR and RuPay cards. Also, NDA and MoU signed between NIPL and Bank Muscat for enabling Real-time crossborder remittance between Oman and India using UPI rails. Discussion on technical integration and definitive agreement are still in progress between teams of NIPL and Bank Muscat.

iv. Kuwait- Knet is a Kuwaiti national company providing electronic banking services to all the banks in Kuwait. NIPL and Knet signed an Memorandum of Agreement. Discussion on technical Specifications and integration are still in the pipeline. Mission is following up the matter of trade in local currencies as well as UPI connectivity with the Kuwaiti authorities. Central Bank of Kuwait and K-Net are already in touch with NPCI on UPI connectivity.

v. Bahrain and Qatar- Discussions are on-going with Bahrain and Qatar side on Technical integration and definitive agreements are still in progress.”

16. The Committee had urged the Government to pursue the GCC countries for an early finalization of India's UPI connectivity and its integration with the payment platforms of the GCC countries for enhanced bilateral trade, tourism and reduction in the cost of cross border payments. In its Action Taken Note furnished to the Committee, the Ministry has informed that UAE has accepted India's UPI interface while discussion are underway for interlinking UPI and UAE's instant payment platform. In respect of the remaining GCC countries, discussion on technical integration and definitive agreements are still in progress. The Committee emphasize the need for complete integration of India's UPI platform with the payment platforms of

the GCC countries at the earliest for deeper economic ties and trading in local currencies and urge the Government to make all out efforts so that the ongoing talks and discussions are brought to a fruitful conclusion soon. The progress achieved in this regard may also be communicated to the Committee.

MoU/MoC ON CYBER SECURITY

(Recommendation No. 21)

17. The Committee in their 24th Report had observed/recommended as under:

'The Committee note that India and GCC countries continue to exchange information and best practices on cyber security in various defence and security related dialogues. MoUs on cyber security cooperation are also being discussed between India and various Gulf countries. The MoUs on Cyber Security cooperation between CERT-In and its equivalent organisation in GCC countries are currently under discussions at various stages. The Committee are of the view that MoUs on cyber security between India and GCC countries are long overdue especially in the backdrop of severe challenge posed by cyber terrorism globally. They, therefore, desire that the Government should make concerted efforts to evolve a mechanism for cooperation with GCC countries through MoUs/Agreements on cyber security expeditiously. The Committee also urge the Ministry to facilitate the ongoing discussion on MoUs regarding cyber security cooperation between CERT-In and its equivalent organisation in GCC countries for its early and successful conclusion.'

18. In their Action Taken Reply, the Ministry of External Affairs submitted as under:

"Ministry has been actively taking initiatives in facilitating discussion/negotiation for signing of MoU/MoC on cooperation in the area of Cyber

Security between CERT-In and its counterparts in GCC Countries to enhance cyber security for India. MEA has taken initiative in this respect with Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. However, CERT-In has recently informed that they are awaiting for the clarity and clearance on the standard CERT to CERT draft MoU for cooperation in the area of cyber security from NSCS.”

19. In the backdrop of severe challenge posed by cyber terrorism globally, the Committee had desired that the Government should make concerted efforts to evolve a mechanism for cooperation with GCC countries through MoUs/Agreements on cyber security expeditiously and had also urged the Ministry to facilitate the ongoing discussion on MoUs regarding cyber security cooperation between CERT-In and its equivalent organisation in GCC countries. The Ministry, in its Action Taken Reply, has submitted that MEA has been actively taking initiatives in facilitating discussion/negotiation for signing of MoU/MoC on cooperation in the area of Cyber Security between CERT-In and its counterparts in respect of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. However, CERT-In has recently informed that they are awaiting for the clarity and clearance on the standard CERT to CERT draft MoU for cooperation in the area of cyber security from NSCS. In view of the increasing use of cyber space by global terrorists, the Committee stress the urgency for concluding MoU/MoC on cyber security cooperation with GCC countries and the need to finalize the standard CERT to CERT draft MoU without delay. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to take up the matter with the NSCS at the Highest level so that the requisite clearance is obtained and MoU/MoC on cyber security cooperation are

signed with the GCC countries at the earliest for enhanced cooperation on cyber security.

FINALIZATION OF THE FTA BETWEEN INDIA AND GCC

(Recommendation No. 25)

20. The Committee in their 24th Report had observed/recommended as under:

'The Committee note that commencement of negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement between India and GCC was approved in 2005 and two rounds of negotiations were subsequently held in 2006 and 2008. However, in 2011, GCC announced deferral of FTA negotiations with all countries and economic groups. GCC Secretariat again welcomed the resumption of FTA negotiations in November 2019 and followed it up in 2021. After the constitution of Joint Working Group and preliminary virtual meeting of the Joint Working Group held in February 2022, the intent to pursue negotiations on the India-GCC FTA was announced in November 2022. As of now, the technical teams have been constituted and the modalities and terms of reference are being worked upon. The Ministry has also stated that the recent delay was due to the non-appointment of Chief Negotiator from the GCC side. GCC Secretariat has now informed that a new Chief Negotiator from the GCC is in place. The Committee feel that the process of negotiation and finalization of the FTA between India and GCC has been delayed for long and in view of the prospects of substantial increase in trade between India and GCC countries as well as India's integration into the global value chain through the signing of the FTA, urge the Government to maintain close coordination with the GCC Secretariat so that formal negotiations on the India-GCC FTA commence soon for its early conclusion.'

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

“Upon appointment of Chief Negotiator from the GCC side, a meeting at that level took place in August 2023 to take forward the discussions and Terms of References were exchanged. While the GCC is keen on including investment protection as a chapter, Indian side has suggested to follow the India-UAE CEPA text and instead include a chapter of investment promotion. GCC side has sought time to respond to the suggestions made by Indian side upon consultation with its member countries.”

22. In view of the long delay in the process of negotiation and finalization of the FTA between India and GCC and the prospects of substantial increase in trade between both the countries as well as India’s integration into the global value chain through the signing of the FTA, the Committee had urged the Government to maintain close coordination with the GCC Secretariat so that formal negotiations on the India-GCC FTA commence soon for its early conclusion. In its Action Taken Reply furnished to the Committee, the Ministry has informed that GCC side has sought time to respond to the suggestions made by Indian side upon consultation with its member countries. In view of this development, the Committee feel the need for closer coordination with the GCC Secretariat and member countries individually, if needed, and urge the Government to keep all channels of communication open for GCC.

MoUs ON BILATERAL TRADE SETTLEMENT IN LOCAL CURRENCIES
(Recommendation No. 27)

23. The Committee in their 16th Report had observed/recommended as under:

'The Committee note that MoUs were signed between India and UAE on establishment of a framework for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies - the Indian rupee and the Emirati Dirham for cross-border transaction and interlinking payment and messaging system of both countries. With the operationalization of the MoUs, exporters and importers in both the countries can invoice in their local currencies. India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. The proposals related to trade in local currencies and UPI connectivity are being pursued with Kuwait. The Committee understand that bilateral trade settlement in local currencies and interlinking payment and messaging systems of India and GCC countries will greatly enhance the economic engagements between the countries resulting in increased trade and FDI inflow and urge the Ministry to facilitate the signing of such MoUs with all the GCC countries at an early date.'

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

"India has held discussions related to the UPI platform with various Gulf countries. The Rupay card is already functional in UAE and MOUs for the same have also been signed with Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain. India and UAE are also engaged in discussions on possible integration of the UPI platform with UAE payment platform. Similarly, India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. RBI is open to signing such MoU with GCC countries based on the (i) willingness and cooperation of the Central Banks and authorities in these countries, (ii) their macro-financial and macroeconomic parameters and (iii) geo strategic concerns with the overall concurrence of the Government."

25. With a view to enhancing the economic engagements between India and GCC countries for increased trade and FDI inflow, the Committee had urged the Ministry to facilitate signing of MoUs on bilateral trade settlement in local currencies and interlinking payment and messaging systems at an early date. The Ministry, in its action taken reply, has stated that India is engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. RBI is open to signing such MoU with GCC countries based on certain parameters. The Committee are of the view that the potential for trade with GCC countries and increased FDI inflow can be realized through bilateral trade settlement in local currencies and urge the Ministry to take further initiatives and facilitate the talks/discussions proactively.

FACILITATING EMPLOYMENT ABROAD FOR FEMALE DSWs

(Recommendation No. 35)

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

'The Committee note that recruitment of Indian female Domestic Sector Workers is regulated through the provisions of the Emigration Act, 1983. To safeguard the interests of female DSWs, the process of their recruitment for employment abroad has been restricted only through 10 State run Recruiting Agencies. The Committee understand that regulating the recruitment for female DSWs is necessary for their safety, security and well being but at the same time, care should be taken to ensure that restricting the recruitment process through only ten State run RAs do not deprive them of the opportunity to find means of livelihood abroad. The Committee urge the

Ministry to maintain a fine balance between strict regulation and employment opportunities abroad and make all efforts to facilitate the migration of such workers through authorized RAs.'

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

“The Government accords highest priority to the safety, security and well-being of Indian nationals abroad, particularly Indian female Domestic Sector Workers (DSWs). To protect DSWs from exploitation/harassment in the destination country, the Ministry has made process of issue of EC for female workers going for employment in 18 ECR countries mandatory only through state-run recruiting agencies. Recently, with addition of a new state-run recruitment agency in Bihar; the number of state-run recruitment agencies has become 11.”

28. The Committee had urged the Ministry to maintain a fine balance between strict regulation and employment opportunities abroad in respect of Indian female domestic sector workers and make all efforts to facilitate the migration of such workers through authorized RAs. In its Action Taken reply, the Ministry has informed that issuance of EC for female workers in 18 ECR countries has been made mandatory only through state-run recruiting agencies for protection from exploitation/harassment in the destination country. Moreover, a new state-run recruitment agency has been added in Bihar recently, taking the number of such recruitment agencies to 11. While acknowledging the steps taken for safety, security and well being of these vulnerable workers, the Committee also desire that workers who have travelled to Emigration Check Not Required (ECNR) countries should be included in the ambit of the Ministry's efforts and the female domestic sector workers should be facilitated to find means of livelihood abroad.

STUDY ON HARMONIZATION OF EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT PLATFORMS

(Recommendation No. 39)

29. The Committee in their 24th Report had observed/recommended as under:

'The Committee note that the Government is working with the GCC countries to harmonise employee recruitment platforms so that Indian workers are provided with better and more transparent working conditions. However, the extent to which the Ministry and the Government have been successful in achieving these objectives is not known. The Ministry has also not mentioned whether any specific MoU or Agreement have been signed with the GCC countries in this regard. Keeping in view the security and well being of the migrant workers at the forefront, the Committee urge the Ministry to commission a study on harmonization of employee recruitment platforms and working conditions of migrant workers in the Gulf. The Committee also urge the Ministry to ensure better and more transparent working conditions for Indian workers as well as prospective emigrant workers in GCC countries.'

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

"Labour and Manpower Cooperation MoUs/Agreements are in place with the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates) and Jordan that provide the overarching framework for cooperation on labour and manpower related issues. In accordance with the Labour and Manpower Cooperation/Agreement, Joint Working Group (JWG) meetings are held on regular basis to discuss various labour related issues so that to ensure that India migrant workers in these countries have better and transparent working conditions. Further, to safeguard the specific interest of domestic workers in GCC Countries, who are often the most vulnerable category; Ministry has signed separate MOUs/Agreements on domestic workers with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.."

31. The Committee had urged the Ministry to commission a study on harmonization of employee recruitment platforms and working conditions of migrant workers in the

Gulf as well as to ensure better and more transparent working conditions for Indian workers as well as prospective emigrant workers in GCC countries. The Ministry, in its Action Taken Reply, has informed that in accordance with the Labour and Manpower Cooperation/Agreement, Joint Working Group (JWG) meetings are held on regular basis to discuss various labour related issues. The Committee, however, find that the Ministry is silent regarding commissioning a study on harmonization of employee recruitment platforms and working conditions of migrant workers in the Gulf which would be highly beneficial while drafting MoUs/Agreements on labour and manpower related issues and for prospective emigrants. The Committee, hence, reiterate their earlier recommendation and urge the Ministry to commission the said study at the earliest.

TRANSPARENCY IN UTILIZATION OF ICWF

(Recommendation No. 40)

32. The Committee in their Report had observed/recommended as under:

The Committee note that the Indian Community Welfare Fund was set up in Indian Missions in 17 ECR countries & Maldives in the year 2009. Subsequently, the Fund was extended to another 24 Missions in April 2010. In March 2011, it was extended to cover all Missions and Posts abroad. Revised guidelines for utilization of ICWF came into effect from 1st September 2017. Approval for expenditure from ICWF is at the level of HOM /HOP on the recommendation of the ICWF committee of the Mission. The Committee further note that as on 31 March 2023, the corpus of the ICWF is approximately Rs.558 crore or so. An amount of Rs. 565 crore has been utilized from 2014 to 2023 covering 3,33,607 Indians during this period. The Committee

acknowledge the assistance rendered to overseas Indian nationals in times of distress and emergency under the ICWF including air passage offered to stranded Indians during the COVID pandemic. In view of the crucial role played by the ICWF in providing relief to Indian nationals during extreme hardships and emergency conditions, the Committee desire that sanctioning of funds/expenditure should be prompt and decisive. The Ministry should ensure that there is no delay on the part of the ICWF committee to give its recommendations for approval of the expenditure and sanctioning of the same by the Competent Authority so that timely assistance is provided during exigencies. The Committee also urge the Ministry to ensure transparency in the utilization of the Fund for those in need.'

33. The Ministry in its Action Taken Reply have stated as under:

“Recognizing the need for providing timely assistance to distressed Indians, the Ministry has authorized Heads of Missions and Posts to incur expenditure on most of the items of assistance as provided for in the detailed ICWF guidelines. Approval of the Ministry is required only in a few exceptional cases only and proposals for decision on such cases are processed on top priority.”

34. In view of the crucial role played by the ICWF in providing relief to Indian nationals during extreme hardships and emergency conditions, the Committee had desired that sanctioning of funds/expenditure should be prompt and decisive. The Ministry was also urged to ensure transparency in the utilization of the Fund. In its Action Taken Note furnished to the Committee, the Ministry has stated that Heads of Missions and Posts have been authorized to incur expenditure on most of the items of assistance as provided for in the detailed ICWF guidelines. Approval of the Ministry is required only in a few exceptional cases and proposals for decision on such cases are processed on top priority. The Committee hope that the said measures would help the

needy persons to get timely assistance from the ICWF. The Committee also desire that the Ministry should take fresh steps to ensure transparency in the utilization of the ICWF as urged by them and apprise them of the efforts made in this regard.

DATABASE OF PBS AWARDEES

(Recommendation No. 44)

35. The Committee in their 24th Report had observed/recommended as under:

‘The Committee note that Indian Missions are engaging with Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award winners at the local level and the Ministry is also proposing to engage with them in a more structured manner. A diaspora directory based on professions is being prepared. The Ministry is also proposing to organise an interactive session of PBS awardees with all the Ministries . Being aware of the benefits of deeper engagement with PBS Awardees with outstanding accomplishments in areas such as science, business, culture, education and public service and who have significantly contributed to the welfare of the Indian diaspora or to India itself, the Committee urge the Ministry to create an alumni of all the PBS award winners within the shortest time possible specifying their specialization and utilize their expertise in achieving our national priorities.’

36. In their Action Taken Reply, the Ministry of External Affairs submitted as under:

“The Ministry is trying to create a list of all Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awardees with details of their specialization and achievements as part of its efforts to have a comprehensive database of the Awardees for further engagement with them.”

37. The Committee had urged the Ministry to create an alumni of all the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman award winners specifying their specialization and utilize their

expertise in achieving our national priorities. The action taken reply of the Ministry that it is trying to create a list of all Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awardees with details of their specialization and achievements indicate that not much efforts have been made in this direction so far. The Committee are of the view that the PBS awardees would greatly contribute towards achieving our national priorities and since compilation of the list of PBS awardees and their areas of specialization from the official records of the Ministry would not take much time, a database of all the PBS Awardees with details of their specialization and achievements should be created at the earliest. The Committee also desire that based on the specialization and achievements of PBS Awardees, the Ministry should engage them suitably in our national development agenda.

RATIONALIZATION OF FEE STRUCTURE FOR DIASPORA CHILDREN

(Recommendation No. 45)

38. The Committee in their 24th Report had observed/recommended as under:

'The Committee note that under the Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC), 150 scholarships are offered to pursue under-graduate courses in India for specific professional and non-professional courses (except medical and related courses). A total of 131 scholarships were given to children of Indian workers in Gulf countries for the Academic Year 2022-23. The Committee, however, observe that the fees charged to diaspora children for education in India are quite high. The Committee have also been informed that the MEA has always communicated the concerns about high fees to the Ministry of Education. The Committee are of the view that adequate

educational support should be given to diaspora children to pursue their education in India and urge the MEA to make persistent efforts with the Ministry of Education to rationalize the fee structure for such children in Indian educational institutions.’

39. In their Action Taken Reply, the Ministry of External Affairs submitted as under:

“The Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC) scheme is aimed at enabling the Diaspora children to pursue undergraduate courses in Indian Universities/Institutions. The scheme has especially been aligned to cater to the requirement of financial assistance for the children of emigrant Indian workers proceeding for employment in Gulf countries. Out of 150 total scholarships being provided under the Scheme, 50 seats are reserved for children of Indian workers in ECR countries (which includes Gulf countries). Further, out of the aforesaid 50 seats, 1/3rd slots, i.e., 17 seats are reserved for children of Indian workers who had been pursuing studies in India. This demonstrates the Ministry’s efforts to provide financial support for the deserving diaspora children on merit-cum-means basis.

The Government is also facilitating admission of NRI Students in AICTE Approved Institutions by way of creating supernumerary seats through admission to NRI, where in five percent of seats within approved intake shall be allowed for admission under NRI category and also through introduction/continuation of supernumerary Seats for(OCI)/ Children of Indian Workers in Gulf Countries. The Institution shall have nil deficiency based on self-disclosure fifteen percent supernumerary seats over and above the approved intake per course shall be approved for AICTE approved Institutions and University Departments, for admitting students from Foreign Nationals/ Overseas Citizen of India/ Children of Indian Workers in the Gulf Countries. One third of these 15 percent seats shall be reserved for the Children of Indian Workers in the Gulf Countries.”

40. Being of the view that adequate educational support should be given to diaspora children to pursue their education in India, the Committee had urged the Ministry to make persistent efforts with the Ministry of Education to rationalize the fee structure for such children in Indian educational institutions. The Ministry, in its

Action Taken Reply, has highlighted its Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children and facilitating admission of NRI Students in AICTE Approved Institutions, but is silent on the issue of rationalization of fee structure for such children, urged by the Committee. The Committee strongly feel that education for children belonging to emigrant Indian workers in Indian educational institutions should be made affordable and reiterate their earlier recommendation of rationalization of fee structure for such children by pursuing the matter with the Ministry of Education. The Committee also desire that the progress achieved in this regard may be communicated to them.

Chapter-II

OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT

(Recommendation SI No.1)

The Committee note that India has a long standing historic deep-rooted relationship with GCC countries comprising of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain which has consolidated into a very strong relationship in modern times. The GCC countries are home to 8.7 million strong Indian expatriate community and cultural and people-to-people ties between India and Gulf are bedrock of the bilateral relations. The Committee further note that GCC has emerged as a major trade and investment partner for India. The GCC's substantial oil and gas reserves are of vital importance for India's energy security while defence and security cooperation with GCC has also been increasing. There are various institutional mechanism between India and GCC, including political dialogue at the level of Foreign Ministers; MoU on Mechanism for Consultations; India-GCC Senior Officials Meeting at Secretary level and India-GCC Industrial Conference. The Committee understand that India has been maintaining close political and economic ties with all the GCC countries but strategic partnership is mostly with three countries, namely Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman. In view of the GCC as a collective entity having tremendous significance for India, the Committee desire that the Government should consider to elevate India's strategic partnership based on mutual interests and cooperation with the remaining GCC countries viz. Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain to a higher level. The efforts and progress made in this regard may be communicated to the Committee.

Reply of the Government

The Gulf constitutes the "extended" neighborhood of India separated only by the Arabian Sea. India has a long standing historic deep-rooted relationships with GCC countries. The relationship goes back to 3000 BC with India having relationship with Mesopotamian civilization. Our relationship with Gulf countries has consolidated in modern times, in the form of a very strong relationship. The GCC as a collective entity has tremendous significance for India. GCC has emerged as a major trade and investment partner for India. The GCC's substantial oil and gas reserves are of vital importance for India's energy security. Defence and security cooperation with GCC has also strengthened. The GCC countries collectively host 8.7 million strong Indian expatriate community. The cultural and people-to-people ties between India and Gulf are a bedrock of the bilateral relations. India and Oman, recently cemented their long-term partnership through the signing of a Joint vision document titled 'A Partnership for Future' during the State Visit of His majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik to India in December 2023. There has also been high level engagements between other two Strategic partners, UAE and Saudi Arabia. Hon. PM visited UAE in November 2023 to attend

COP28, UAE President was the Guest of Honour at the recently concluded Vibrant Gujarat in January 2024 and Saudi Crown Prince visited India in September 2023 for first meeting of the India - Saudi Strategic Partnership Council.

Even though India has strategic partnership with three Gulf countries, India has maintained a multifaceted relationship with all GCC countries, with cooperation in diverse areas including political, economic, defence, cultural, people to people ties, etc. All efforts are being made to further enhance the bilateral relations with Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. Besides, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman, India's bilateral trade has increased with Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait in recent years. Bilateral trade between India and Qatar was USD 18.77 billion in 2022-23, registering a growth of 24.90% as compared to 2021-22. The bilateral trade between India and Bahrain reached USD 1.97 billion during the fiscal year 2022-23, indicating a substantial growth of 19.75% in comparison to the previous fiscal year, 2021-22. The bilateral trade between India and Kuwait reached USD 13.80 billion in the fiscal year 2022-23, marking a growth of 12.78% in comparison to the fiscal year 2021-22. There are various institutional mechanisms with these countries to deepen our ties based on mutual interests and cooperation.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.2)

The Committee find that there are great opportunities for continuous enhancement in India's relationship with GCC countries in multiple areas of interests and new and emerging fields for cooperation. In Committee's view, India and the GCC countries have significant scope to enhance their cooperation in various multilateral bodies including the UN bodies. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to formulate a fresh strategy encompassing all these aspects and establish a robust Institutional mechanism for strengthening its relationship with GCC countries and expanding it to multilateral bodies. New initiatives may also be taken to deepen the cultural and people-to-people ties between India and GCC countries including the active participation of the 8.7 million strong Indian expatriate community to foster better understanding and cooperation.

Reply of the Government

India has been engaging with all Gulf countries on issues of global interests through various multilateral forums. At the UN and other multilateral fora, wherever appropriate, India has already been having engagements with the GCC countries, mostly bilaterally but also en-block. Recently, GCC was a co-sponsor for India's event "UDHR75 and VDPA30: Implementing the Right to Development for Realizing Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda" held on the sidelines of the 54th session of the Human Rights Council on 21 September 2023. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Oman also attended the G20 Meetings during India's

Presidency last year. However, depending upon the issues and the multilateral bodies, GCC does not always have a coordinated group position nor the views of the individual GCC countries are overlapping with or fully aligned with India's position. Nevertheless, the importance of taking India-GCC engagement (either bilaterally or as a group) in the multilateral fora, as intended by the recommendation of the Committee is well taken and the same has been conveyed to the Indian Missions dealing with UN agencies. Apart from these, the bilateral institutional mechanisms like Joint Commission, Joint Working Groups, Task Force established between India and various Gulf countries also serve as an effective platform for engagement and cooperation.

With regards to the participation of Indian expatriate community, they form a key pillar in fostering our bilateral relations with all Gulf countries with the presence of large expat community of close to 8.7 million. Our Missions in these countries have been making continuous efforts and undertaking various initiatives to strengthen cultural and people-to-people ties. There are various cultural exchanges between India and GCC countries under the Cultural Exchange Programmes. India has Cultural Exchange Programm /Cultural agreements all GCC countries. Our Missions have been showcasing India's rich cultural and heritage diversity in Gulf countries through celebrations of Indian festivals, organizing cultural events, holding of special bilateral cultural events. For example, India participated as the 'Guest of Honour' in prestigious Saudi National Festival of Heritage and Culture – Janadriyah in 2018. The year 2019 was celebrated as India-Qatar Year of Culture in Qatar. Our Embassy in Kuwait organized a Festival of India in 2023. As part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM) celebrations, many events were organised in the Gulf countries. The AKAM events in Gulf countries included Indian dance and music events, illuminations of iconic buildings in tricolour, painting exhibitions, promotion of Indian cuisine etc. Members of Indian community participate in cultural and other activities organized by the Mission from time to time, which also include celebration of important days like International Day of Yoga and Ayurveda Day, Festival of India.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.3)

The Committee note that India, together with UAE is actively engaged in the I2U2 grouping which aims to encourage joint investments in six mutually identified areas such as water, energy, transportation, space, health, and food security. In the first virtual summit of I2U2 leaders on 14 July 2022, two joint projects on Food Corridor and Wind-Solar Hybrid Renewable energy and Battery Storage have been announced to be set up in India. The Committee are pleased at the initiatives taken by the I2U2 as these projects would contribute towards India's energy and food security and urge the Government to ensure its effective implementation. New ideas and innovation in the field of water, space, health, technology, skilled workforces and entrepreneurial

dynamism etc. may be taken forward in the I2U2 so that India is able to fully capitalize on its partnership with UAE and further with other GCC countries.

Reply of the Government

I2U2 countries (India, Israel, USA and UAE) are united by common desire and commitment to strengthen the economic partnership in trade and investment. There is regular follow up at Sherpas level and Working Group level of the two joint projects on Food Corridor and Wind-Solar Hybrid Renewable energy and Battery Storage announced during the I2U2 leaders' summit. For the Food corridor project, ADQ, a Sovereign Wealth Fund of UAE is in regular contact with Gujarat government and working on its implementation. With respect to Wind-Solar Hybrid Renewable energy and Battery Storage, there is a discussion going on with a few multinational companies for equity investment and collaborating with US and Israel companies for technology. Apart from these projects, I2U2 group is also discussing a few potential projects which includes project on Space Technology, Innovation center and Cold Chain Storage to be considered under I2U2.

Further, with the objective of mobilizing private sector capital and expertise, the first I2U2 Business Forum was held on 22 February 2023 in Abu Dhabi, UAE. It was the first event of this kind to take place since the official launch of the I2U2 Group during the I2U2 Leaders' Summit in July 2022. Companies and private sector representatives exchanged insights and discussed potential partnerships during seven parallel sessions focused on the food security, energy, water, space, transport, health, and technology fields. Further, a webpage of I2U2 was also launched in September 2023, to provide a platform where business communities of four countries can submit their proposal. With these initiatives, government is working to further deepen its partnership across various sectors with I2U2 countries. In addition to the Food Security and Renewable Energy projects, considerable progress has also been made in space co-operation. A joint declaration of intent between the four countries on space cooperation is being discussed. Efforts are also underway to initiate concrete projects/ programs in other areas agreed by the leaders.

Apart from cooperation with UAE under I2U2, we are also engaging with all GCC countries for enhancing cooperation in areas of mutual interests including through bilateral institutional frameworks and mechanisms like Joint Working Groups, Ministerial Committees, etc to deepen our bilateral partnership in various areas of common interests including space, health, technology, skilled workforces, etc.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.4)

The Committee note that the Gulf region is considered as our extended neighbourhood and critical for trade, investment, energy and security of Indians living in the Gulf. The Committee also note that India is having good long standing relations with all the GCC countries. To maintain peace, progress and stability in the region, the Committee desire that the Government should make constant endeavour to strengthen and deepen its political, economic and cultural ties with the GCC countries. India should remain focused on building stronger relationship with Gulf countries through regular exchange visits including high level interactions and working on several areas of mutual benefits and emerging areas of cooperation. At the same time, India should work with GCC countries to create architecture for safety and security of the region and a coordinated response mechanism to deal with threats including piracy in high seas, environmental threats, response during disasters etc.

Reply of the Government:

India has excellent relations with all countries of GCC, straddling almost all domains of cooperation like political, economic, energy, security, culture and people-to-people ties. The strong and stable relations with all GCC countries are ensured through several specific steps. These include inter alia the following:

- i. In the field of political exchanges, regular exchange of high-level visits between India and Gulf countries have taken place. Prime Minister Modi has visited Gulf countries 11 times since May 2014. These include 6 visits to UAE, 2 visits to Saudi Arabia and one each to Oman, Qatar and Bahrain. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain have conferred their highest civilian awards on PM Modi. There has been regular exchange of ministerial visits.
- ii. In trade relations, efforts are being made to improve trade relationship with all GCC countries. The GCC region contributes to about one-sixth of India's total trade. UAE is India's third largest trade partner while Saudi Arabia is at the fourth place. In FY 2022-23, India's trade with GCC countries was approximately USD 184 billion. This was almost a 20% rise from FY 2021-22. To further enhance trade relationship, India signed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with UAE on February 18, 2022. We are also discussing FTA with GCC.
- iii. In the area of Investments, continuous engagements are made for promoting investments from GCC countries into India by engaging sovereign wealth funds in the region as well as private companies. Total FDI from GCC countries into India currently stands at about USD 20 billion.

- iv. In the area of energy partnership, there has been efforts towards expansion of energy cooperation by moving from a buyer-seller relationship to a more comprehensive relationship by encouraging participation in India's strategic petroleum reserves, negotiating long term gas supply arrangements, getting concessions in oilfields and renewable energy cooperation.
- v. In the area of Defence and Security, we have been strengthening defence and security cooperation with GCC countries including through exchange of high-level visits, bilateral exercises, training and participation in exhibitions. Our cooperation has strengthened on counter terrorism, intelligence sharing, cybersecurity, maritime security, prevention of human trafficking and narcotics smuggling. Our strengthened relationship was also evident recently when Saudi Arabia provided excellent cooperation to Indian Air Force and Indian Navy for Operation Kaveri under which we evacuated about 3800 Indian nationals through Jeddah. India become Associate Partner in the multilateral Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) in Bahrain in 2022. India joined as full member of CMF in November 2023. A Joint Military Exercise was held for the first time between India and Saudi Arabia in Rajasthan from 29 January-10 February 2024.
- vi. In the area of community, we have been working with Gulf countries for the welfare of the Indian workforce. The meetings of Joint Working Groups on labour and manpower issues with various Gulf countries are regularly convened to discuss issues related to Indian workers. Government is also working with the GCC countries on issues like skill harmonization and connecting worker recruitment platforms so that Indian workers get better and more transparent working conditions.
- vii. In the area of cultural cooperation, various initiatives are being undertaken for further strengthening cultural cooperation with all GCC countries, which include organising events such as International Day of Yoga, cultural exhibitions, cultural events, etc with involvement of local authorities and community organisations,

India has been working with GCC countries to create architecture for safety and security of the region and a coordinated response mechanism to deal with threats including piracy in high seas, environmental threats, response during disasters etc. A co-ordinated response to deal with threats including piracy already exists in the form of DCoC-JA (Djibouti Code of Conduct- Jeddah Amendment) and CGIMA (Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities) wherein India is an observer but plays an active role. Saudi Arabia plays a very significant role in DCoC-JA. The signatories of DCoC-JA include Saudi Arabia, UAE and Oman.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.6)

The Committee note that out of the six GCC countries, Oman, UAE and Bahrain have conveyed support to India's claim for a permanent seat at a reformed UN Security Council. However, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have not, so far, expressed their support for India's claim publicly. The Committee feel that India should continue its diplomatic efforts to gain support of India's claim for a permanent seat at a reformed UN Security Council.

Reply of the Government:

The recommendation from the committee is noted for giving further impetus to our strong engagement with GCC countries in the UN. It may be noted that on the multilateral front, especially with respect to the United Nations, it is ensured during bilateral visits and Foreign Office Consultations that the UN issues are flagged including greater convergence in various issues ranging from UNSC reforms, political issues, sustainable development agenda etc. In addition, bilaterally, we seek support from GCC countries to support each other's candidatures in various multilateral fora. It is also pertinent to note that in the year 2023, a UN Foreign Office Consultation with Kuwait in Kuwait City was also held at Joint Secretary level. In addition, at New York, constant engagements with our Permanent Representative and other officers are held with their GCC counterparts on a range of matters. Ministry also endeavours to garner maximum written support for India's claim for permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.7)

The Committee note that during India's G20 Presidency, Saudi Arabia as a member of G20 and UAE and Oman as invitee countries have participated in the G20 summit. The Committee further note that these three countries are having strategic partnerships with India. The Committee understand that India is keen to elevate its relationship with Kuwait and have been engaging with Kuwait at other levels. In view of the importance of Kuwait from our manpower perspective, the Committee urge the Government to actively engage with Kuwait including at the highest level for a positive outcome of the engagements.

Reply of the Government

India-Kuwait partnership has been traditionally close and time-tested. Historical contacts and people to people linkages are the foundation of our robust relations. Bilateral relationship has been nourished by sustained cultural and civilizational linkages. India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the State of Kuwait. We celebrated the 60th anniversary of our diplomatic relations in 2021. There has been continuous efforts to increase the frequency of high level engagements including institutional mechanisms to further elevate the bilateral relationship with Kuwait.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.8)

The Committee note that India is also working together with Gulf countries on issue of Climate Change. India and UAE have held regular consultations on climate change issues this year in view of our G-20 presidency and UAE's COP-28 presidency. Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has also established a Joint Working Group with UAE. Under India's Presidency, G20 has accorded high priority to climate change. India has also pioneered several global initiatives contributing to fight against climate change and impact of climate change such as Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), India-UN Development Partnership Fund, International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CRDI), Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS), Leadership Group on Industry Transition (LeadIT) etc. The Committee desire that the Government should impress upon the GCC countries to join and actively participate in the global initiatives pioneered by India for combating climate change and its impact.

Reply of the Government

On the issue of climate change, there are certain areas where there is an alignment of India's interests with those of the Arab Group of which the GCC countries are members. On those matters, India engages with the Arab Group. Saudi Arabia is a member of the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) Group of which India is also a part of. India and UAE also engaged on climate change issues under UAE's COP-28 presidency. The recommendation of the Committee that the Government should impress upon the GCC countries to join and actively participate in the global initiatives pioneered by India for combating climate change and its impact, is well taken. The Government of India is actively encouraging GCC countries to join and engage in the global initiatives pioneered by India for combating climate change and its impact. In this regard, International Solar Alliance (ISA) is India's initiative to provide a collective response to the common obstacles by massive deployment of solar energy in terms of technology, finance and capacity. UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain

are members of the International Solar alliance. Other Gulf countries are also actively engaged to join the ISA. Similarly, CDRI works as an inclusive multi- stakeholder partnership on different aspects of strengthening disaster resilience of infrastructure. In order to strengthen the membership CDRI, CDRI has been changed from membership by invitation only to membership by expression of interest. In this regard, CDRI membership has increased from 31 countries to 37 countries and 7 international organizations. We are actively encouraging GCC countries through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms to join CDRI headquartered in India.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.9)

The Committee note that GCC countries are contributing almost 35% of India's oil imports and 70% of gas imports. India and the GCC countries have a very strong energy partnership and efforts have been made to evolve this partnership into a comprehensive energy partnership rather than mere transactional buyer-seller relationship. UAE was the first country to participate in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) in 2018. An MoU was signed with Saudi Arabian National Oil Company – Saudi Aramco for its participation in India's SPR in 2019. India is now executing Phase-II of the SPR and several countries, including GCC countries, have expressed their interest for participation in the Phase-II of India's SPR. The Committee further note that National Oil Companies of GCC countries are partnering Indian PSUs under the overall value chain of oil & gas sector including E&P assets and technological advancement in clean energy. Indian PSUs have also been awarded stakes in oilfields in UAE & Oman. Long term agreements for supply of LNG was also signed with UAE and Qatar. The Committee are pleased at the progress made towards a comprehensive energy partnership with GCC countries. Keeping in view India's energy security needs, the Committee desire that the Government should keep up the ongoing momentum and make constant efforts to enhance the energy partnership including in the field of renewable energy. The Committee also urge the Government to actively engage with the GCC countries to secure their participation in Phase II of its Strategic Petroleum Reserve for an early implementation.

Reply of the Government

In line with the Cabinet approval on 08.07.2021 for construction of caverns along with SPM's and associated pipelines in Phase II at Chandikhol (4 MMT) and Padur (2.5 MMT) on PPP mode, the ISPRL has been engaging with GCC countries for their participation in phase II. ISPRL had informed Saudi Aramco of Saudi Arabia, ADNOC of UAE regarding opportunity for participation in phase 2 on PPP basis. In this context details were also shared by ISPRL. ISPRL shall inform Saudi Aramco as and when RFP is getting floated. Participation of Kuwait

Petroleum Company in Phase 2 of SPR program of India is one of the new areas of cooperation which is also being explored. KPC had evinced interest to explore the opportunity of storing Kuwait Crude in ISPR phase II. Information regarding Phase 2 strategic reserves was shared with KPC on 10th Nov 2022. To broaden the scope of strategic reserves beyond national borders, ISPR has signed an MoU with Oman Tanking Terminal Company LLC (OTTCO) on June 25th, 2023. This agreement is aimed at conducting feasibility studies for ISPR's potential involvement in Phase 1 of the Ras Markaz project through equity partnership or leasing storage space. This endeavor presents a distinctive opportunity to establish strategic storage beyond India, particularly with an oil-producing nation.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.10)

The Committee further note that India is engaging with the GCC countries on multiple levels to deepen the cooperation in the area of energy through exchanges/dialogues at various levels, Ministerial level meetings, institutional frameworks such as JwGs and Free Trade Agreements. The Committee desire that through these exchanges/dialogues and Agreements, GCC countries may be persuaded to invest in India as well as provide more investment opportunities to Indian PSUs, including in renewable energy sector like solar and green hydrogen, green ammonia sector and hydrocarbon assets. Indian PSUs may also be facilitated and incentivized by the Government for such investments in GCC countries. The Committee also desire that the Government should explore the opportunity of signing more MoUs/Long Term Agreements and collaborations for India's energy security.

Reply of the Government:

The government has actively been highlighting investment opportunities in India's upstream, midstream, and downstream sectors, as well as renewable energy. This includes fostering collaboration in clean energy technology with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. India is currently in discussions with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia and Kuwait regarding Green Hydrogen initiatives. Additionally, there is ongoing engagement with the UAE on biofuels through participation in the Global Biofuels Alliance. These efforts underscore India's commitment to fostering sustainable and innovative energy solutions through international collaboration. Presently, India has established long-term contracts with key Gulf nations, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain, for the procurement of crude oil, LNG, and LNG resources. Additionally, India is actively exploring the possibility of entering into a term contract with Oman for the sourcing of crude oil. These strategic engagements underscore India's efforts to secure a stable and diversified energy supply and strengthen diplomatic and economic ties with prominent energy-producing

nations in the region. MoU in the field of Energy with Saudi Arabia was signed in September 2023, MoU in the field of Green Hydrogen Developments and Investments was signed with UAE in January 2023 and MoU on Investment cooperation in the field of Renewable Energy Sector was signed with UAE in January 2024. The Ministry continues to explore the opportunity of signing more MoUs/Long Term Agreements and collaborations for India's energy security.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.11)

The Committee note that GCC countries are focusing on India as preferred investment destination under natural gas, green hydrogen and clean energy technologies on broadening our relationship. India and Saudi Arabia have had two rounds of discussions replicating the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana in 2022 and has requested for further sharing of India's experience in designing and implementation of PMUY. The Committee desire that the Government should maximize the focus on India as preferred investment destination by GCC countries and reciprocate through creation of favourable environment and incentives/ concessions for investment, where applicable.

Reply of the Government

The Government has actively fostered engagements with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to attract investments across the entire value chain of the hydrocarbon sector. This includes securing investments in Strategic Petroleum Reserves, enhancing India's natural gas sector, and exploring collaborations. Additionally, efforts are underway to foster cooperation in green hydrogen and other renewable & clean energy technologies, in each other countries, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to bolstering energy infrastructure and sustainability through partnerships for our mutual benefits. India and UAE have signed an MoU for cooperation in the area green hydrogen and related technologies, which provides framework for enhancing UAE investments. An MoU for investments in the field of Renewable Energy was signed during the visit of the President of UAE to India from 09-10 January 2024. The UAE is also in discussion with the Government of Gujarat to set up renewable power capacity of 10 GW. This includes solar and wind projects. An India-Kuwait investment Conference was organized by the Mission in May 2023 with participation of DPIIT, Invest India, CII and NIIF along-with business-houses and investment companies from Kuwait to encourage investments from Kuwait into India in these sectors. India has been growing as an attractive destination for investments from Qatar including in sectors like natural gas and clean energy. In August 2023, it was reported that INQ Holding LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Qatar Investment Authority, acquired 2.7 % stake in the Adani Green Energy for about USD 474 million. India is engaging with the Saudi authorities under

the JWG on Energy that exists within the framework of the Strategic Partnership Council between the two countries. On the sidelines of Crown Prince's visit to India in September 2023, a special Saudi-India Investment Forum was convened which provided an opportunity to highlight the various initiatives and schemes for investment in India. Indian Missions in Gulf countries also organizes regular visits of commercial delegation such as CII, FICCI etc. to showcase opportunities in India. Government continues to highlight the investment potential in these areas through its investment promotion activities.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.12)

The Committee further note that Indian PSUs have invested in green energy/technologies in GCC countries. India has signed MoU with Saudi Arabia, UAE and others. Large number of companies in India are looking at investing in these countries in the green technologies. Saudi Arabia under its Vision 2030 and other countries with similar long-term visions are giving encouragement to increments in the field of renewable energy. The Committee desire that as per India's Long Term Vision for the energy sector to cater to our energy security needs, the Indian PSUs should be encouraged, facilitated and incentivized to invest in green energy/technologies in GCC countries so that they can contribute towards our energy security through importing/buying back of the product.

Reply of the Government:

The Government of India has placed special emphasis on transforming into a preferred investment destination in both the oil and gas sector and renewable energy. This commitment is evident through various measures, including policy reforms, Viability Gap Funding (VGF), budgetary support, strategic partnership showcasing India's investment opportunity, and other initiatives aimed at creating an attractive and conducive environment for investments in these crucial sectors. The Government has actively fostered engagements with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to attract investments across the entire value chain of the hydrocarbon sector. This includes securing investments in Strategic Petroleum Reserves, enhancing India's natural gas sector, and exploring collaborations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE for the establishment of a Greenfield refinery and Petrochemical complex in Maharashtra. Additionally, efforts are underway to foster cooperation in green hydrogen and other renewable & clean energy technologies, in each other countries, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to bolstering energy infrastructure and sustainability through partnerships for our mutual benefit. These concerted efforts reflect the government's dedication to fostering sustainable and inclusive growth in the energy landscape.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.13)

The Committee note that Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman and Bahrain have joined the International Solar Alliance while two GCC countries namely, Kuwait and Qatar are yet to join the ISA. The Committee desire that all the GCC countries should be brought under the ISA as India is already having cooperation with GCC countries in the energy sector. The Committee, therefore, urge the Government to make extra efforts to persuade Kuwait and Qatar to join the Alliance at an early date.

Reply of the Government

The Government of India is actively engaging encouraging GCC countries to become a member of ISA as well as CDRI. 4 out of 6 GCC countries including UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are members of the ISA while Qatar and Kuwait are yet to join the ISA. However, with the concerted efforts of our Missions, both Kuwait and Qatar have expressed their interest and are in further talks to join ISA.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.14)

The Committee note that India and GCC countries are also engaging within the Green Grids Initiative and the One Sun One World One Grid initiative under the aegis of the International Solar Alliance. The GGI-OSOWOG will interconnect generators and demand centres across continents with an international power transportation grid. Cross-border connections would also be combined with community grids, smart vehicle charging and interactive appliances to ensure that grids are green and resilient at all levels. The Committee further note that India is looking forward to explore potential cooperation and has invited GCCIA, UAE and Saudi Arabia to GGI-OSOWOG initiative for setting up interconnected cross border grids. The Committee are of the view that cooperation between India and GCC under the GGI-OSOWOG initiative would greatly enhance its partnership in the renewable/green energy sector and urge the Government to make vigorous efforts for meaningful dialogues so that interconnected cross border grids with GCC countries are set up at the earliest.

Reply of the Government

Ministry continues to make all efforts in enhancing partnership in the renewable/green energy sectors with GCC countries. The MoUs signed in recent years like MoU in the field of Energy

with Saudi Arabia in September 2023, MoU in the field of Green Hydrogen Developments and Investments with UAE in January 2023 and MoU on Investment cooperation in the field of Renewable Energy Sector with UAE in January 2024 are testament to such efforts. Technical teams and working groups are being constituted under the MoUs to pursue the cooperation. With regard to GGI-OSOWOG initiative, Indian side has inter-alia proposed to include Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) as member of the International Ministerial Steering Group. Including GCCIA on the steering committee would help in mutual benefit of sharing experiences, existing infrastructures and technology in grid connectivity. In this regard, Ministry will continue to make vigorous efforts in coordination with line Ministries for meaningful dialogues so that interconnected cross border grids with GCC countries are set up at the earliest.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.15)

The Committee observe that India and the GCC countries cooperated closely during the COVID pandemic. India supplied Hydrochloroquine tablets and Covishield vaccine doses to the Gulf countries. GCC countries helped India with supply of Liquid Medical Oxygen and containers during the Delta wave of COVID in 2021. In the post pandemic period, both countries continue to take forward their healthcare cooperation which includes discussions on promoting medical and wellness tourism to India, collaborations between hospitals and medical institutions, development of reliable supply chains of vaccines and medicines, investments in rapidly growing health infrastructure in India, enhanced access of Indian pharmaceuticals to GCC countries and joint health cooperation in third countries especially in Africa. The Committee feel that mutually beneficial healthcare cooperation between India and GCC countries should continue unabated even in the post COVID world and thus urge the Government to formalize/institutionalize the said objectives in the form of MoUs/Agreements.

Reply of the Government

India has ongoing cooperation in health sector with GCC countries and has also entered into various agreements. With Oman, MoU on Cooperation in Health-care has been signed. Under this MoU, the Joint Working Group (JWG) has been constituted, to discuss various areas of cooperation like pharmaceutical cooperation, exchange of medical professionals, medical value travel etc. India and Saudi Arabia are currently negotiating an MoU on Health. This will further expand the existing cooperation in the health sector including areas such as investments in health care industries, capacity building, exports of medical products, joint ventures, exchange of knowledge and service exports. A draft MoU for Cooperation in the Healthcare and a MoU for cooperation in traditional medicines such as AYUSH, Unani and

Homeopath, etc. are also under discussion with UAE. A MoU on Investment Cooperation in Innovative Healthcare Projects was signed with UAE during the recent visit of UAE President to India in January 2024. There is a MoU for cooperation in the field of traditional medicine and homeopathy under discussion with Qatar. India has signed an MoU on Medical Cooperation with Kuwait, under which Joint Working Group (JWG) on Medical Cooperation has been set up to discuss areas like medical technology, generic drugs, exchange of knowledge etc. India and Bahrain have signed an MOU for cooperation in the field of Healthcare. JWG meeting has been held to discuss cooperation in the field of pandemic management, exchange of medical professionals and ways to enhance trade in pharmaceuticals & medical devices and medical value travel. India has proposed an MoU on Pharmacopoeial Cooperation and an annex titled “Bilateral Cooperation on Pharmaceutical Products” under the existing MoU with Bahrain. Government continues to accord high importance to strengthening health-care cooperation with GCC countries.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.16)

The Committee note that India has entered into various agreements/MoUs in the health sector with Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain while several MoUs are under negotiation with the GCC countries. India and Saudi Arabia are currently negotiating an MoU on Health; a draft MoU for Cooperation in the Healthcare and a MoU for cooperation in traditional medicines such as AYUSH, Unani and Homeopath, etc. are under discussion with UAE and an MoU for cooperation in the field of traditional medicine and homeopathy is under discussion with Qatar. India has also proposed an MoU on Pharmacopoeial Cooperation and an annex titled “Bilateral Cooperation on Pharmaceutical Products” under the existing MoU with Bahrain. The Committee are pleased at the progress made so far and the initiatives and ongoing discussions/negotiations for cooperation in the health sector. They, however, desire that MEA should facilitate appropriately so that the discussions/negotiations are concluded at the earliest and the agreements/MoUs on health cooperation between India and some of the GCC countries are signed and operationalized.

Reply of the Government

India has ongoing cooperation in health sector with GCC countries and has also entered into various agreements. An MoU on Cooperation in Health-care between India and Oman was signed during the visit of Prime Minister of India to Oman in 2018, which forms the basis of cooperation in health-care sector between the two countries. It is important to note that Ayurveda has gained significant popularity in Oman and there are over 35 operational Ayurvedic clinics and a full fledged Ayurvedic hospital in Oman. A MoU on Investment Cooperation in Innovative Healthcare Projects was signed between India and UAE during the

recent visit of UAE President to India in January 2024. India and Kuwait have signed MoU on Medical Cooperation. A MoU on Pharmacopoeial cooperation has been proposed to the Kuwaiti side and the matter is being followed up with the Kuwaiti side for early conclusion of the MoU. India and Qatar, like with other GCC countries, are pursuing enhanced cooperation in health sector. A draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Pharmacopoeial Cooperation between Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission, and its Qatari counterpart has been shared with the Qatari side for its consideration. Discussions have also been held on an MOU for cooperation in the field of traditional medicine and homeopathy between Ministry of AYUSH and Qatari Ministry of Public Health. An MoU in the field of cooperation in health is currently under consideration between India and Saudi Arabia. Ministry is continuously engaging on regular basis with Gulf countries on the early finalization of MoUs under discussion. MEA will continue to facilitate appropriately so that the discussions/negotiations are concluded at the earliest and the agreements/MoUs on health cooperation between India and some of the GCC countries are signed and operationalized as recommended by the Committee.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.17)

The Committee note that Space Agencies of India and GCC countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman are in the process of discussion to explore further collaboration while space agencies of India and Saudi Arabia have been coordinating regarding potential areas of collaboration under the framework of Strategic Partnership Council and also negotiating an MoU on cooperation in space sector. Efforts have been made to further expand the horizon of bilateral cooperation with Qatar in Space sector, especially in Satellites. Moreover, a Collaboration Framework between New Space India Limited (NSIL), India and National Space Agency (NSSA) Bahrain in the areas of capacity building; space technology & applications; Ground Segment support; and Consultancy services is under discussion. In order to enhance and strengthen partnerships in space cooperation and bring about further collaboration in this sector between India and GCC countries, the Committee urge the Government to bring all the ongoing discussion and collaborative efforts to a fruitful conclusion for an early implementation.

Reply of the Government

India has been actively engaging with all the GCC countries to strengthen partnership in Space cooperation. There are ongoing discussions between the Space Agencies of India and the GCC countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman to explore further collaboration. Under the framework of Strategic Partnership Council, space agencies of India and Saudi Arabia

have been coordinating regarding potential areas of collaboration. Both sides are also negotiating a country to country MoU on cooperation in space sector. A MoU on Space cooperation signed with Oman lays the foundation for collaborative efforts in space exploration, satellite technology, academic collaboration and research. There have been efforts to further expand the horizon of bilateral cooperation with Qatar in Space sector, especially in Satellites. India has signed a MoU with Kuwait on Cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes. India and Bahrain have signed a Statement of Intent for cooperation in Space Sector. A Collaboration Framework between NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), India and National Space Agency (NSSA) Bahrain in the areas of capacity building; space technology & applications; Ground Segment support; and Consultancy services is under discussion. Space agencies of India and Saudi Arabia have been coordinating regarding potential areas of collaboration under the framework of Strategic Partnership Council and also negotiating an MoU on cooperation in space sector.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.18)

The Committee note that the education sector has emerged as a strong area of cooperation between India and the GCC countries. As a matter of policy, collaboration between educational institutions in India and countries abroad is encouraged. Indian Missions also facilitate collaborations in education sector. There is an ongoing process of identifying 40 top universities globally in which Indian diaspora are playing a role in the form of faculty members or senior researchers as a part of educational and cultural collaborations with universities across the world . The Committee also note that an MoU was signed in July 2023 to establish an IIT campus in the UAE. The Committee feel that educational collaborations between India and GCC countries should be enhanced and urge the Government to explore more avenues for partnerships in this sector so that more MoUs for facilitating higher and technical education would be signed. Indian Missions abroad may be pursued to play a more proactive role in facilitating educational collaborations between institutions in India and in the GCC countries. The Committee also urge the Ministry to complete the exercise regarding identification of top universities having involvement of diaspora at the earliest for promotion of educational and cultural collaborations.

Reply of the Government

As a matter of policy, we encourage collaboration between educational institutions in India and countries abroad. Our Missions also facilitate collaborations in education sector with GCC countries. It is may be noted that important exams such as the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), and other similar exams are

concurrently conducted in Gulf countries alongside India. The collaboration between India and GCC countries in the education sector has a longstanding and robust. Recently, Memorandum of Understanding between the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Dhofar University, for establishing chair in Hindi language was signed in December 2023. Additionally, possibility of signing a Letter of Understanding (LoU) between ICCR and Sultan Qaboos University for the establishment of chair in economics is also being explored. It may be noted that leading Indian Universities like BITS Pilani, AMITY, Manipal etc have also established their campuses in UAE. Our Mission is also facilitating discussions of other universities with the UAE authorities, to set-up their campuses in UAE. Kuwait College of Science and Technology is being run in active collaboration with IIT Delhi. In order to promote collaborations between India and Bahrain in the field of education, Mission has facilitated meetings of Bahrain Institute of Banking & Finance (BIBF) with IIT Mumbai and IIM Ahmadabad to help them start joint courses for mid-level executive training. Discussions in respect of establishment of IIT campus and other private Indian Institutions interested in setting up campus in Bahrain such as Rajagiri Group have been facilitated by the Mission. Our Mission in Qatar continues to engage with the Qatar side for greater educational collaboration between Indian and Qatari institutions as well as provision of higher education courses by Indian universities. Since 2022, Savitribai Phule University has started providing some courses to students in Qatar. Our Mission in Saudi Arabia is actively working with Saudi Ministry of Education to deepen collaboration in the higher education sector. During the recent visit of Crown Prince to India in 2023, it was agreed that direct relations between universities and scientific & educational institutions would be encouraged.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.20)

The Committee note that India's defence and security relationship with the Gulf countries consist of high level defence visits, joint naval and air exercises, NSA and Deputy NSA level dialogues, ship visits, training and participation in exhibitions, cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, cyber security, maritime security, etc. The Committee further note that MoUs on defence cooperation have been signed with UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman in the past few years and two MoUs on defence cooperation with Oman were renewed in May 2021. The Committee acknowledge the growing cooperation between India and GCC countries in defence and security matters but are surprised that MoUs have been signed with only few countries so far. The Committee, are, therefore of the view that India-GCC cooperation on defence and security needs to be scaled up with proper mechanism for intelligence sharing on terrorism, human trafficking, smuggling of narcotics, etc. An institutional framework for cooperation in new and emerging areas such as cyber security, maritime security, use of science and technology and artificial intelligence in the detection and countering of terrorist threats, etc. may be evolved to strengthen our

partnerships in the field of defence and security. The Committee also desire that security dialogues between India and GCC countries may be held regularly at the highest level.

Reply of the Government

We have an abiding interest in the region which we consider as our extended neighbourhood. India's defence and security relationship with the Gulf countries is continuously expanding, with high level visits, bilateral exercises, ship visits, training and participation in exhibitions. There is good cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, cyber security and maritime security. Out of the six GCC countries, India has signed Defence Cooperation MoUs with Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE. India has regular structured meetings with Gulf countries in Joint Defence Cooperation Committee meetings on Security and Defence Cooperation. The MoUs with Kuwait and Bahrain are also under consideration.

Indian Navy has structured exercises with four GCC countries' navies viz Oman (Naseem Al Bahr), Saudi Arabia (Al Mohed Al Hindi), UAE (Zayed Talwar) and Qatar (Za'ir Al Bahr). In addition to these structured exercises, Indian Navy also undertakes regular Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with GCC Navies. There are also Staff level talks between Indian Services and their counterparts in GCC countries. Navy to Navy talks with UAE and Oman are already institutionalized and that with Saudi Arabia is under consideration. Army to Army Staff Talks (AAST) with UAE and Oman also exists. A Joint Military Exercise is being held for the first time between India and Saudi Arabia in Rajasthan from 29 January-10 February 2024. Air Force to Air Force Staff Talks between India and Oman takes place. IAF has been engaging with Gulf countries to develop significant interoperability with GCC countries viz UAE(Ex Desert Flag and Advanced Tactical Leadership course), Oman (Ex Easter Bridge). IAF is planning to initiate exercise with other Gulf countries in the near future.

There have also been NSA/Dy. NSA level dialogues with various GCC countries. NSA visited Saudi Arabia in May 2023 and met his counterparts from Saudi Arabia, US and UAE. He also visited Oman in June 2023. A Dy. NSA level dialogue with Oman was held in January 2023. Similarly, India and GCC countries continue to exchange information and best practices on cybersecurity in various defence and security related dialogues. MOUs on cybersecurity cooperation are also being discussed between India and various Gulf countries. The deepening of our engagement in various means including exchange of visits, institutional mechanisms are fostering our efforts for improved regional security.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.21)

The Committee note that India and GCC countries continue to exchange information and best practices on cyber security in various defence and security related dialogues. MoUs on cyber security cooperation are also being discussed between India and various Gulf countries. The MoUs on Cyber Security cooperation between CERT-In and its equivalent organisation in GCC countries are currently under discussions at various stages. The Committee are of the view that MoUs on cyber security between India and GCC countries are long overdue especially in the backdrop of severe challenge posed by cyber terrorism globally. They, therefore, desire that the Government should make concerted efforts to evolve a mechanism for cooperation with GCC countries through MoUs/Agreements on cyber security expeditiously. The Committee also urge the Ministry to facilitate the ongoing discussion on MoUs regarding cyber security cooperation between CERT-In and its equivalent organisation in GCC countries for its early and successful conclusion.

Reply of the Government

Ministry has been actively taking initiatives in facilitating discussion/negotiation for signing of MoU/MoC on cooperation in the area of Cyber Security between CERT-In and its counterparts in GCC Countries to enhance cyber security for India. MEA has taken initiative in this respect with Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. However, CERT-In has recently informed that they are awaiting for the clarity and clearance on the standard CERT to CERT draft MoU for cooperation in the area of cyber security from NSCS.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation No.22)

The Committee note that high priority has been attached to maritime security in India's cooperation with GCC countries. Given the pivotal role of the Gulf countries in maritime trade, its enormous oil and natural gas resources and India's dependence on these countries for our energy security, the Committee desire that India-GCC cooperation on maritime security should be considerably enhanced including signing of more MoUs/Agreements, if required, so as to ensure maritime safety and unhindered transportation of energy resources in the region. The Committee also urge the Government to extend all support to the GCC countries for protection of its maritime routes to prevent instability which has the potential to impact our economy as well as the global economy.

Reply of the Government

Ministry concurs with the committee's recommendations. Maritime security has been high on the agenda of cooperation between India and GCC countries. This is reflected in high level visits such as that of Chief of Naval Staff to Oman in September 2021, joint naval exercises such as 'Al-Mohed al-Hindi' exercises between India and Saudi Arabia that took place in August 2021 and May 2023, signing of MOU on White Shipping Information with Oman in 2021 and India joining the multilateral Combined Maritime Forces in Bahrain as an Associate Partner in 2022. The Chief of Saudi Naval Forces visited India in January 2024 to strengthen cooperation in maritime defence. Maritime security is discussed in various security and defence meetings between India and GCC. Indian Navy has become full member of Combined Maritime Forces(CMF) from November 2023. Towards cooperation in Information Sharing, one ILO from Indian Navy is being placed at CMF Headquarters in Bahrain. Indian Naval ships have been continuously engaging with Mission deployed at PoG and Op Sankalp towards ensuring protection of International Shipping lanes near the Gulf region and to provide assistance/support to merchant vessels, whenever required.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation No.23)

The Committee note that the contribution of the GCC region to India's total trade is about one-sixth while the total volume of India's trade with GCC countries stood at 184.46 billion USD during the FY 2022-23. Out of the total volume, India's exports stood at 51.27 billion USD and its imports at 133.19 billion USD indicating trade imbalance between the two countries. The Ministry has stated that the trade deficit is owing to heavy energy dependence of India on Gulf nations and high imports of oil and gas. Petroleum and petrochemical products constitute the main items of export for GCC countries to India while the main items of export by India include cereals and food items, jewellerys, synthetic fibres and yarns, textiles, apparels, machinery, iron and steel products and plastic products. The Committee feel that the trade imbalance between India and GCC countries should be addressed through collective efforts of all the Ministries/Departments/Agencies concerned and urge the Ministry to facilitate the process of devising a fresh strategy for enhancing India's exports to GCC countries as well as to increase inward investments to India. Diversification of India's exports basket by including other sectors such as IT, space, automobiles, chemical and pharmaceutical products, etc. should also be taken up for enhancing our exports to GCC countries. The Committee also urge the Ministry to impress upon our Missions in these countries to make vigorous efforts in trade and investment promotion events, facilitation of visits of delegations, addressing non-tariff barriers, and other measures, in association with Industry bodies/associations.

Reply of the Government:

Negative trade balance with the GCC is largely on account of the import of crude oil/natural gas which are raw material imports. Excluding trade in Chapter 27 (oil trade), non-oil trade is relatively more balanced with India's non-oil (exports excluding those in chapter 27) exports to the GCC totalling USD 38(approx) billion in FY 2022-23 and India's non-oil imports from the GCC during the same period stood at USD 42.45 billion. India-GCC trade data for last three years are as under:

India-GCC Non-Oil Trade								
Values in US \$ Billions Source: DGCIS								
2020-21			2021-22			2022-23		
Export	Import	Total Trade	Export	Import	Total Trade	Export	Import	Total Trade
23.86	21.74	45.61	33.82	37.20	71.02	37.97	42.44	80.41

To correct the trade imbalance via enhanced exports with the GCC countries, various steps have been taken. Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry in partnership with the Indian Missions in GCC countries, are making dedicated trade and investment promotion efforts to enhance Indian exports to these countries and also to increase inward investments from GCC countries to India. Moreover, Market Access Initiative (MAI) Scheme also provides financial support to Business Federation, Chambers and Export Promotion Councils (EPCs) for organizing trade exhibitions, trade fairs, and business meets etc. In this regard, ten (10) MAI proposals of Apex Chamber/organization/EPCs have been recommended for the FY-2023-24 in GCC with MAI Assistance of total 462.56(in lakhs). Also, one of the steps being taken includes operationalization of India-UAE CEPA wef 01/05/2022 and also starting negotiations with Oman for a bilateral CEPA. With regard to India-UAE CEPA, in the first year of implementation, total exports from India witnessed a 12.71% growth compared to the previous year. Both the countries have set an ambitious target of taking non-oil bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation No.24)

The Committee observe that trade between India and GCC countries have been dominated by UAE and Saudi Arabia. UAE is India's largest trade partner among the GCC countries with the total volume of trade at Rs. 84.8 billion USD while Saudi Arabia occupies the second position at 52.76 USD during the FY 2022-23. In terms of trade imbalance, India's exports to Saudi Arabia stood at 10.72 and its imports at 42.03 billion USD. The Committee find scope for enhancement in India's trade and investment with the other GCC countries like Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain and desire that the Government should explore the opportunities collectively with all the Ministries/Departments/Agencies concerned. On the issue of the huge trade deficit between India and Saudi Arabia, the Committee urge the Ministry of External Affairs in coordination with all related Ministries, to make all out efforts for improving the trade imbalance in favour of India.

Reply of the Government

Besides, UAE and Saudi Arabia, India's bilateral trade has increased with other GCC countries also. Trade with Qatar has also increased over the year. Bilateral trade between India and Qatar was USD 18.77 billion in 2022-23, registering a growth of 24.90% as compared to 2021-22. Trade with Bahrain has witnessed a year-on-year increase. The bilateral trade between India and Bahrain reached USD 1.97 billion during the fiscal year 2022-23, indicating a substantial growth of 19.75% in comparison to the previous fiscal year, 2021-22. Trade with the UAE has experienced a yearly upswing. The bilateral trade between India and the UAE amounted to USD 84.84 billion in the fiscal year 2022-23, demonstrating a significant expansion of 16.41% in contrast to the preceding fiscal year, 2021-22. Commerce with Kuwait has seen an annual uptick. The bilateral trade between India and Kuwait reached USD 13.80 billion in the fiscal year 2022-23, marking a growth of 12.78% in comparison to the fiscal year 2021-22. Trade with Saudi Arabia has witnessed a yearly upsurge. The bilateral trade between India and Saudi Arabia amounted to USD 52.76 billion in the fiscal year 2022-23, reflecting a substantial growth of 23.11% compared to the fiscal year 2021-22. Commerce with Oman has experienced an annual upswing. The bilateral trade between India and Oman reached USD 12.38 billion in the fiscal year 2022-23, indicating a significant growth of 24.02% compared to the fiscal year 2021-22. Trade with GCC nations excluding UAE and Saudi Arabia has also increased over the year. Bilateral trade between India and Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar was USD 46.95 billion in 2022-23, registering a growth of 20.64% as compared to 2021-22. Significantly, in order to further leverage trade complementarities with Oman, the CEPA negotiations were started in November, 2023.

On the issue of trade deficit with Saudi Arabia, Mission has been making vigorous efforts by conducting B2B meetings, buyer-seller meets, and frequent visits of Indian business delegations to Saudi Arabia in order to diversify our export basket to the Kingdom. Mission has also been identifying various non-tariff barriers which have been taken up with Saudi side. These issues were also taken up during the recent Ministerial visits including Hon. Commerce and Industry Minister in October 2023. FICCI is also planning to open a regional office in Riyadh for bilateral trade promotion.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.26)

The Committee note that the total FDI of GCC countries to India stood at about 20 billion USD as of December 2022. The Sovereign Wealth Funds of the Gulf countries of UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait have been positive on increasing their investments in India while other public/private companies from the Gulf have also been increasing investments in India. The Committee further note that some UAE companies have also shown interest in investing in the UT of Jammu & Kashmir. India is also currently negotiating Bilateral Investment Treaty with UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The Committee find it encouraging that FDI inflow to India from GCC countries have been increasing over the years but would like to point out that more than 90% of the FDI inflow has been from two countries only i.e UAE and Saudi Arabia. Investments from the other four GCC countries like Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait have been low. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Government should assess the factors for low FDI inflow to India from these countries and work out a strategy for increased investments in India by these countries. The opportunity presented by some UAE companies for investing in the UT of Jammu & Kashmir should also be followed up promptly. The Committee also urge the Ministry to take proactive role in facilitating the ongoing Bilateral Investment Treaty negotiation with UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for its early and fruitful conclusion for an enhanced FDI inflow into India. Indian Embassies/ Missions in GCC countries may also be pursued to organize sustained and vigorous country and sector specific investment promotion campaigns to bring more FDI inflow to India.

Reply of the Government

Pursuant to the Cabinet approval on the Model Indian BIT on 16.12.2015, it has been decided to terminate the existing Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) with countries whose initial duration period is over and re-negotiate on the basis of the revised Model BIT. Accordingly, India is having on-going/active negotiations of Bilateral Investment Treaties with UAE, Saudi

Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman which are part of the GCC. These negotiations are at different stages. Status of these BIT are as follows:

i. India-UAE – India-UAE signed the BIT in December 2013 which got enforced in September 2014. The treaty is valid till September 2024. Meanwhile, both countries started renegotiation on BIT and the 1st round was held from 25th to 27th September 2017. Since then, 18 rounds of negotiations have been held between India and UAE, the last one being held on 8 th -10th January 2024. Substantial progress has been made in the negotiations.

ii. India-Saudi Arabia – India signed a BIPA with Saudi Arabia on 25.01.2006 which was enforced on 20.05.2008 and terminated on 01.08.2019. However, the investments made prior to the date of termination will remain protected under the Agreement for a further period of 20 years from the date of termination of the Agreement. Both sides had exploratory discussions on BIT on 12th September, 2019 through VC and agreed to continue the discussions on the BIT. So far 6 rounds of negotiation have been held, the last one being held on 13.12.2023 wherein discussions were on Most Favoured Nation and Dispute Settlement. A High Level Task Force is also being setup to facilitate and monitor investments from Saudi Arabia.

iii. India-Qatar - BIT signed on 07.04.1999, which was enforced on 15.12.1999 and terminated on 23.03.2017. Nonetheless the Agreement shall continue to be effective for a further period of ten years form the date of its termination in respect of investments made or acquired before the date of termination. BIT negotiations with Qatar have started.

iv. India-Kuwait – BIT signed on 27.11.2001, which was enforced on 28.06.2003 and terminated on 28.06.2018. However, provisions of the Agreement shall continue to remain effective on the investments made prior to the date of notice for termination for a period of 15 years from the date of termination of the Agreement. India sent a Note Verbale to the Kuwaiti side in 2017 to terminate the existing BIT and a request for negotiating a new agreement on the basis of 2015 Model BIT. The 1 st Round of negotiations was held in New Delhi from 12th -14th June and 16th June 2023. The Indian Model BIT Text was taken as base text during negotiation and good progress was recorded. The next round of negotiations is being proposed to be held at the earliest.

v. India-Bahrain –BIT signed on 13.01.2004, which was enforced on 05.12.2007 and terminated on 24.03.2021. Notwithstanding the termination, the Agreement shall continue to be effective for a further period of 15 years from the date of its termination in respect of investments made or acquired before the date of the termination of the Agreement. Bahrain has conveyed that the offer of signing a BIT is currently under consideration.

vi. India-Oman –BIT, signed on 02.04.1997, was enforced on 13.10.2000 and terminated on 23.03.2017. Notwithstanding the termination, the Agreement shall continue to be effective for a further period of 20 years from the date of its termination in respect of investments made or

acquired before the date of termination of the Agreement. The delegations of India and the Sultanate of Oman have met. The discussions are ongoing.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.27)

The Committee note that MoUs were signed between India and UAE on establishment of a framework for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies - the Indian rupee and the Emirati Dirham for cross-border transaction and interlinking payment and messaging system of both countries. With the operationalization of the MoUs, exporters and importers in both the countries can invoice in their local currencies. India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. The proposals related to trade in local currencies and UPI connectivity are being pursued with Kuwait. The Committee understand that bilateral trade settlement in local currencies and interlinking payment and messaging systems of India and GCC countries will greatly enhance the economic engagements between the countries resulting in increased trade and FDI inflow and urge the Ministry to facilitate the signing of such MoUs with all the GCC countries at an early date.

Reply of the Government

India has held discussions related to the UPI platform with various Gulf countries. The Rupay card is already functional in UAE and MOUs for the same have also been signed with Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain. India and UAE are also engaged in discussions on possible integration of the UPI platform with UAE payment platform. Similarly, India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. RBI is open to signing such MoU with GCC countries based on the (i) willingness and cooperation of the Central Banks and authorities in these countries, (ii) their macro-financial and macroeconomic parameters and (iii) geo strategic concerns with the overall concurrence of the Government.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.28)

The Committee note that under Cultural Exchange Programme, regular cultural exchanges have been held between India and GCC countries. Besides, specific events and campaigns were conducted including celebration of Indian festivals, Indian dance and music events, promotion of Indian cuisine, popularization of yoga, etc. The

Committee further note that media cooperation between organizations in India and Gulf countries is also encouraged by both the parties. Indian embassies regularly organize cultural programmes and Indian associations have also been involved in organizing social and cultural programmes. Keeping in view the fact that cultural and people-to-people ties are bedrock to the bilateral relations between India and the Gulf and presence of significant number of Indian diaspora, the Committee desire that the number, frequency, scope of cultural exchanges, events and campaigns and scale of participation should be expanded in a planned manner. More number of cultural exchange programmes/cultural cooperation agreements should also be signed to deepen the cultural ties and people-to-people contacts. The Committee also urge the Ministry to actively facilitate/further escalate media cooperation between organization in India and the GCC countries.

Reply of the Government

Our Missions have been proactive in strengthening cultural cooperation with all GCC countries. Indian contingents, including cultural troops regularly participate in cultural events. Series of events such as roadshows, cultural exhibitions, and festivals that celebrate the rich heritage of India are also being organized regularly. Apart from government agencies, a large number of private organizations and individuals are actively engaged in the fields of entertainment and culture to promote cultural ties in these countries. Our Missions in association with the local communities are supporting such initiatives of private organizations and individuals to promote cultural interactions. In order to closely engage with these countries on the recommendation of the Missions, the ICCR has deployed India-based teachers to teach Yoga in Iraq, Oman and Saudi Arabia during the last two years. An MoU on Yoga Cooperation was also entered into with Saudi Arabia in 2021.

There are various cultural exchanges between India and GCC countries under the Cultural Exchange Programmes. India has Cultural Exchange Programm /Cultural agreements all GCC countries. Our Missions have been showcasing India's rich cultural and heritage diversity in Gulf countries through celebrations of Indian festivals, organizing cultural events, holding of special bilateral cultural events. For example, India participated as the 'Guest of Honour' in prestigious Saudi National Festival of Heritage and Culture – Janadriyah in 2018. The year 2019 was celebrated as India-Qatar Year of Culture in Qatar. Our Embassy in Kuwait organized a Festival of India in 2023. As part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM) celebrations, many events were organised in the Gulf countries. The AKAM events in Gulf countries included Indian dance and music events, illuminations of iconic buildings in tricolour, painting exhibitions, promotion of Indian cuisine etc.

Ministry organizes visits of foreign journalists to India with the objective of familiarizing them with different aspects of the country. The familiarization programme includes engagements with senior Government officials in the Ministry as well as other Ministries/Departments, and

field visits to places of commercial, scientific, educational, and touristic interests. A familiarization programme for journalists of Gulf countries was organized from 14 to 21 January, 2023. 19 media persons from different media organization of Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia and UAE visited India for the familiarization programme. In the current financial year, a similar Familiarization programme for journalists was held, under which Journalists from Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE visited India from 13 to 20 January, 2024. Journalists from Saudi Arabia were part of special familiarization visit to India which was organized for G20 member countries from 12 to 23 August 2023. Asian News International (ANI) has concluded MoUs on cost free content sharing with foreign media organizations including with the following GCC countries to boost cooperation between the countries.

S. No.	Country	Newspaper / Channel
1.	Oman	Muscat Daily The Arabian Stories The Times of Oman Oman News Agency
2.	Kuwait	Kuwait Times Indiansinkuwait.com Aljarida Newspaper
3.	Qatar	Qatar Tribune
4.	United Arab Emirates	Emirates News Agency, WAM Khaleej Times Gulf News

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation No.29)

The Committee note that apart from Government agencies, a large number of private organizations and individuals are actively engaged in the fields of entertainment and culture to promote cultural ties in GCC countries. Indian Missions, in association with the local communities, have also been supporting such initiatives of private organizations and individuals in promoting cultural interactions. The Committee desire that in addition to encouraging and extending support to the private organizations and individuals actively engaged in promoting cultural interactions as well as local communities/diaspora associations in GCC countries, Indian Missions should provide incentives, whether monetary or otherwise to such entities to achieve the goal of deepening cultural ties and people-to-people contacts. The Committee further desire that the Ministry should formulate a strategy to capitalize on India's vast potential in tourism, entertainment and culture to forge strong partnerships with GCC

countries over the next five years for ensuring substantial growth and collaboration in these fields.

Reply of the Government

Government continues to promote India's tourism, entertainment and cultural potential including through enhanced cooperation with GCC countries entities and involvement of Indian community organizations in these countries. This is being done keeping in mind both short and long term perspectives. Our Missions have been proactive in strengthening cultural cooperation with all GCC countries. Indian contingents, including cultural troops regularly participate in cultural events. Series of events such as roadshows, cultural exhibitions, and festivals that celebrate the rich heritage of India are also being organized regularly. Apart from government agencies a large number of private organizations and individuals are actively engaged in the fields of entertainment and culture to promote cultural ties in these countries. Our Missions in association with the local communities are supporting such initiatives of private organizations and individuals to promote cultural interactions. Our Missions have been actively promoting and disseminating information on Indian tourism to various stakeholders in respective GCC countries and has been conducting meetings and workshops with tour operators to increase the inflow of tourists from Gulf countries to India.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.30)

The Committee note that food and food-related products constitute the bulk of Indian exports to GCC countries. Under the Integrated Food Corridors Project under I2U2 Framework, the UAE will invest \$2 billion USD to develop a series of integrated food parks across India while India will provide appropriate land for the project and will facilitate farmers' integration into the food parks. The Committee further note that UAE delegations have already visited India and held meetings with different stakeholders. The Committee understand that integrated food parks across India would greatly contribute towards food security as well as bring benefits to farmers in the country. They, therefore, urge the MEA to facilitate the discussions with all the stakeholders, actively coordinate with the Ministry/Department concerned for allotment of appropriate land and work out the modalities so that integrated food parks are established across the country at an early date. The Committee also urge the Ministry to explore avenues for food security cooperation/ agreements with other GCC countries.

Reply of the Government

Food and food-related products constitute the bulk of Indian exports to GCC countries. Government of India through its Embassy in these countries is encouraging to invest in food and agro industries in India. The Integrated Food Corridors Project under I2U2 Framework was announced during I2U2 Leader's Summit on 14 July 2022. Under this project, Ministry continues to facilitate the discussions with all the stakeholders for the establishment of the integrated food parks at an early date. It may be noted that during the recent visit of UAE President to India in January 2024, a Memorandum of Understanding on Investment Cooperation in Food Park Development was signed between India and UAE. Under the agreement, the parties are committed to developing food park projects and driving other initiatives in the food processing sector that contribute to global food security. There are also continuous efforts on exploring avenues for enhancing food security cooperation and agreements with GCC countries. Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in agriculture and fisheries is under negotiation with Oman and expected to be signed in near future. With Saudi Arabia, a JWG on Agriculture and Food Security exists within the framework of the Strategic Partnership Council between the two countries. During the visit of Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia to India in September 2023, an MoU on saline water conversion was signed between the two countries. A Technical Agreement regarding export of agri-products from India to Saudi Arabia was signed in November 2023. There are also discussions on signing of an MoU on Food Safety with Qatar with a view to promote bilateral cooperation in this important area. Our Missions in GCC countries have conducted several events to spread awareness on millets with respect to the International Year of Millets 2023, an UN-initiative, to promote food security.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.31)

The Committee note that the Indian diaspora in the Gulf region comprising of around 8.7 million are an important source of inward remittances to India. The last figures for remittances from the diaspora has been more than \$120 billion as compared to the previous figures of \$87 billion in 2021 and \$115 billion in 2022. The Committee recognize the potential for further increase in inward remittances and desire that the Ministry should motivate the Indian diaspora to make enhanced remittances through acknowledgment of their role as strong pillars for our economic development. It is also expedient upon the Ministry to bring out a diaspora-centric policy focused to Gulf region keeping the welfare and protection of Indian diaspora at the foremost of our national development agenda.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry, through its Missions and Posts, regularly engages with the Indian emigrant workers in the Gulf through open houses and consular camps. The contribution of workers in national development through inward remittances to their homeland is adequately emphasized in such interactions. Trade promotion events and commercial events organised by Missions and Posts also highlight the high growth rate of Indian economy, indirectly encouraging workers in Gulf region to increase their remittances to India. The Ministry already has a robust policy in place to take care of all aspects of welfare and protection of Indian workers abroad. Our Missions and Posts in Gulf region have dedicated Labour Wings, which remain vigilant and actively monitor any complaints from workers. Grievances can be registered by workers through various channels i.e. emergency telephone number, Walk-ins, E-mails, Social Media, 24x7 Multilingual Helpline, Open Houses, Consular Camps, and portals such as MADAD and e-Migrate. Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendras in Dubai (UAE), Riyadh, Jeddah (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) provide guidance and counseling to Indian workers on all matters. Further, Indian Missions/Posts utilize the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) to provide necessary assistance, whenever needed, on means tested basis to Indian citizens abroad, including workers.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.32)

The Committee note that the Ministry has taken up specific measures like Indian Community Welfare Fund, online MADAD portal, e-migrate portal, Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendras, Kshetriya Pravasi Sahayata Kendras, Open Houses, multilingual 24x7 Helpline, etc. for the welfare of the Indian diaspora and for redressal of their grievances. All the Indian Missions have been sensitized to extend prompt help to any Indian in distress abroad. The Committee further note that Pre- Departure Orientation Training Programme has been started to facilitate safe and legal migration while the Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana covers accidental deaths and injury and also provides legal assistance. Besides, a number of MoUs/Agreements on Labour and Manpower Cooperation have been signed with the GCC countries. India is also working with the GCC countries on issues like skill harmonization and connecting worker recruitment platforms so that Indian workers get better and more transparent working conditions. The Committee appreciate these measures undertaken by the Ministry for the welfare and protection of the Indian diaspora. The Committee, however, desire that the Ministry should also focus on the implementation aspects of such measures and assess the impact of such initiatives and schemes on the migrant workers and domestic sector workers. Since the Ministry is yet to come out with a rehabilitation scheme for migrant workers who lost their means of livelihood due to global pandemics or natural disasters, the Committee also desire that a comprehensive

scheme for such workers may be formulated in consultation with all the Ministries/Departments concerned.

Reply of the Government:

Assessment of the implementation aspects of welfare measures for migrant workers is a dynamic and regular process and Missions and Posts remain in constant contact with the migrant workers through various communication channels to assess the effectiveness of such measures. Grievances and suggestions in this regard brought to the notice of the Missions are addressed promptly through necessary corrective measures.

During the pandemic, it was the Government's priority to ensure that its impact on Indian workers in terms of loss of employment was mitigated. To that end, the Ministry and all our Missions especially in the Gulf region were continuously engaged with respective local Governments to maintain the workers, ensure their welfare and facilitate financial payments due to them. Government to Government interactions, including at the level of the Prime Minister, helped the Government of India to mitigate devastating impact of the pandemic on Indian migrant workers.

As soon as pandemic started to recede, Government's focus was shifted on pressing for return of workers and families on an expeditious basis. These issues have been taken up by the Government with its Gulf counterparts at the highest levels and various diplomatic endeavours led by the EAM and MoS(VM) to the GCC countries. Government of India worked with Governments of identified countries, including the GCC countries, to establish air bubbles and ease visa and travel restrictions. As a result, there has been a steady flow of returnees back especially to the Gulf region.

The Ministry collaborated with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship(MSDE) to undertake following initiatives at Union and State levels for rehabilitation of returnee migrant workers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the govt. launched the 'SWADES (Skilled Worker Arrival Database for Employment Support) initiative under the Vande Bharat Mission with an aim to empower the returning citizens with relevant employment opportunities by creating a database of qualified citizens based on their skill sets and experience to tap into and fulfill demand of Indian and foreign companies. The returning citizens are required to fill up an online SWADES Skills Card. The database has been integrated with Skill India's ASEEM portal which provides employee connect for the employers, agencies and job aggregators looking for skilled workforce in specific sectors. Further, concerted efforts are being taken to make skill ecosystem more vibrant and competitive in accordance global market standards. The thrust of the government is on the co-ordination of all skill development efforts across the country, removal of disconnect between demand and supply of skilled manpower, building of new skills, skill upgradation, and encouraging entrepreneurship and livelihood generation.

Training programmes for both short term and long term skilling have been implemented by the government. The govt. has been implementing Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) Scheme and National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) for providing short term Skill Development training and Craftsman Training Scheme (CTS) through Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) for long term training, to the youths to acquire skill development training of their choice and be employable. Also, in order to help Job seekers to transition to being Job creators, MSDE through its different initiatives and dedicated institutions such as Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship is encouraging entrepreneurship.

Due to Ministry's consistent efforts and strict implementation of various measures taken for the welfare and protection of the Indian migrant workers abroad, the number of Indians proceedings for overseas employment, in the post COVID-19 era, through e-Migrate portal, has significantly increased and is continuously on upward trajectory. It is evident from the number of Emigration Clearances (ECs) issued to Emigration Check Required (ECR) category workers during the last few years which is tabulated below :

Year	No. of EC issued through e-Migrate
2020	93,223
2021	1,32,673
2022	3,73,434
2023 (till November)	3,68,570

Further, with an aim to expand network of registered Recruitment Agents (RAs) across the country, the Ministry has introduced Credit Insurance Scheme in addition to the existing Bank Guarantee (BG) mechanism. This flexibility in financial security to be furnished by RAs will promote emigration of workers through 'safe and legal' mechanism.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.33)

The Committee observe that Labour and Manpower Cooperation MoUs/Agreements provide institutional mechanism to discuss and resolve all prevailing Indian labour and manpower-related issues through regular meetings of Joint Working Groups. Such MoUs/Agreements are in place with GCC countries and Jordan, while specific agreements on labour cooperation for the domestic sector have been signed with Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait. The Committee desire that the Ministry should further identify the gaps in this regard and work out country-specific MoUs/Agreements to secure the rights of Indian workers in the GCC countries. The Committee also urge the Ministry to strengthen the Joint Working Groups to serve as effective mechanism for redressing the grievances of migrant workers and domestic sector workers in the Gulf region.

Reply of the Government

The Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) signed by the Government of India with all GCC member countries are country specific. The broad principles covered in these MoUs include:

- (i) Declaration of mutual intent to enhance employment opportunities and for bilateral cooperation for protection and welfare of Indian workers;
- (ii) The host countries to take measures for protection and welfare of the Indian workers working in their organized sector;
- (iii) Statement of the broad procedures that the Foreign Employers shall follow to recruit Indian workers;
- (iv) The recruitment and terms of employment are in conformity with the laws of both the countries;

Constitution of Joint Working Groups, which is part of these MOUs is aimed at finding solutions to bilateral labour issues arising from time to time. Agenda for the meetings of the Joint Working Groups is decided on the basis of issues faced by the Indian workers as reported by affected workers from time to time to the Missions and the Ministry. Composition of the Group from different Ministries and Departments of both countries is also decided on the basis of agenda to be discussed in a particular meeting of the Joint Working Group to ensure that concerns of Indian workers are addressed directly by the officials directly related to these issues.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.34)

The Committee note that Indian workers in the Gulf countries are facing many challenges on various issues such as legal cases, imprisonments on false allegations, employment related issues, harassment by the employer, cheating by recruiting agents, non- payment of wages, death compensation, exploitation of domestic workers, difficulty in equalisation of degrees, emergency medical problems, lack of financial resources for returning to India, etc. The Committee desire that the Ministry and Indian Missions should extend all assistance to the migrant workers for quick redressal of their grievances and ensure that the mechanisms to resolve their grievances such as ICWF, MADAD portal, PBSK/SPSK, PBBY, dedicated community welfare/labour wings in Missions and Posts are functioning effectively. The Committee also desire that fake or unregistered recruitment agencies involved in cheating and luring people to bypass the immigration system, should be rooted out completely through vigorous checking, identification and prosecution.

Reply of the Government

Government has robust mechanism to monitor working conditions and grievance redressal of Indian workers abroad and all these are functioning effectively. The workers have been given various channels to register and monitor their complaints such as i.e. emergency telephone number, walk-ins, e-Mails, social media, 24x7 multilingual helpline, open houses, MADAD and e-Migrate portals, Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendras (PBSK). In addition, there are dedicated Labour Wings in all the Indian Missions in Gulf Countries.

On receipt of complaint from or on behalf of the emigrant, the same is taken up pro-actively with the concerned Foreign Employer (FE) and the work place of the aggrieved worker is visited, if required. The complaints pertaining to employment issues are also taken up with the local Labour Department and other relevant authority of the host country for prompt redressal.

The Missions/Posts utilize the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) from time to time to provide financial and legal assistance to Indian national in distress abroad on a 'means tested basis'. Under ICWF, the major assistance includes Boarding and Lodging, Air Passage to India, Legal Assistance, Emergency Medical Care, Transportation of Mortal Remains to India, and Payment of Small Fines and Penalties. Since the launch of ICWF, total 3,42,543 Indian nationals have been assisted by Indian Missions/Posts with a total outlay of Rs.626 Crore (Rupees Six Hundred Twenty Six Crore only) till September, 2023. The Indian emigrant workers are provided with the low cost insurance scheme, Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojna (PBBY) which offers wide range of insurance coverage at a low cost. The insurance scheme

is being extended by around ten Indian insurance companies and is operating satisfactorily. The PBBY insurance scheme is mandatory for emigrant workers in ECR countries. Grievances received from the insurer/family of the insurer are taken up with respective insurance companies for redressal.

Ministry comes to know about fraudulent activities of illegal recruitment agents in the country based on the complaints filed by aggrieved emigrants who have been cheated by their employers. As and when complaints of illegal migration/human trafficking are received, such matters are referred to the State police for investigation and prosecution. Details of complaints received and forwarded to state police for action and investigation, requests received from state governments for issue of prosecution sanction and the prosecution sanctions issued during the last three years are as under:

Year	No. of complaints	Cases referred to state governments for action	Prosecution sanctions sought	Prosecution sanctions issued
2020	166	166	7	7
2021	139	139	7	7
2022	297	297	11	11
2023 (till November)	80	77	15	15

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.35)

The Committee note that recruitment of Indian female Domestic Sector Workers is regulated through the provisions of the Emigration Act, 1983. To safeguard the interests of female DSWs, the process of their recruitment for employment abroad has been restricted only through 10 State run Recruiting Agencies. The Committee understand that regulating the recruitment for female DSWs is necessary for their safety, security and well being but at the same time, care should be taken to ensure that restricting the recruitment process through only ten State run RAs do not deprive them of the opportunity to find means of livelihood abroad. The Committee urge the Ministry to maintain a fine balance between strict regulation and employment opportunities abroad and make all efforts to facilitate the migration of such workers through authorized RAs.

Reply of the Government

The Government accords highest priority to the safety, security and well-being of Indian nationals abroad, particularly Indian female Domestic Sector Workers (DSWs). To protect DSWs from exploitation/harassment in the destination country, the Ministry has made process of issue of EC for female workers going for employment in 18 ECR countries mandatory only through state-run recruiting agencies. Recently, with addition of a new state-run recruitment agency in Bihar; the number of state-run recruitment agencies has become 11.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.36)

The Committee note that a new draft Emigration Bill seeking to replace the Emigration Act of 1983 is under preparation since long. The proposed Bill envisages comprehensive emigration management by instituting regulatory mechanisms and developing a regime for safe and orderly migration governing overseas employment of Indian nationals for their protection and welfare. The Committee understand that the proposed Bill would facilitate and promote overseas employment to a large number of Indian nationals and urge the Ministry to commence and conclude the deliberations and consultations with other Ministries/ Departments and stakeholders while keeping the migrant worker at the very core of its formulation, and bring the Bill to Parliament within the shortest possible time.

Reply of the Government

The Bill is currently undergoing Inter-Ministerial Consultations with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Ministry of Finance (MoF), Department of Commerce (DoC), Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and Ministry of Law and Justice (MoLJ). On completion of Inter-Ministerial Consultations, the public consultations and consultations with the State Governments will be held before obtaining External Affairs Minister's approval to the Cabinet Note. After approval of the Cabinet note, the same will be processed for introduction in both the Houses of Parliament after completing procedural requirements.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.37)

The Committee note that while the National Skill Development Corporation focus on providing skills as per global standards, the focus of the MEA is to provide facilities for skill mobility and providing a pre-departure orientation training programme. However, MEA, Indian Missions and Consulates work very closely with NSDC. The Committee feel that there is an urgent need for a coordinated approach amongst MEA, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and NSDC and hence, desire that a defined mechanism may be worked out for the purpose and the Committee may be apprised of accordingly.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry has been working in close coordination with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and Missions abroad to provide facility for skill mobility and providing pre-departure orientation training programme. To this end, the Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT) was initiated by the Ministry in January 2018. At present 13 PDOT Centres run by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) under Pravsai Kaushal Vikas Yojna(PKVY), a joint collaboration under an MoU between Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) for MEA has extended a Grant of Rs. 10 crore to MSDE. In addition, there are 17 PDO training centres which are run by the various State Government agencies, funded by the Ministry. Alongwith in-person training, the PDOT training programme is now imparted through online mode also for a greater outreach to workers in remote areas, looking for overseas employment.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.38)

The Committee note that MEA is conducting labour market studies across the entire GCC and these studies are in the last phase of completion. The Committee are of the view that the findings of the labour market studies would be invaluable for the aspiring emigrant workers in terms of its prospects for the coming years. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to complete the studies at the earliest so that the information could be disseminated to all the recruiting agents and prospective emigrants.

Reply of the Government

The study on the 6 GCC countries has been completed. The study analyses the labour market of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region with an aim to understand the dynamics of international migration for foreign workers in the region and project future trends. It provides a broad overview of each of the six countries, their economic profiles, demographic characteristics, and policy changes, and identifies sectors with ongoing or anticipated labour shortages. The study has been published on the Indian Council of World Affairs' (ICWA) website and is easily accessible to all stakeholders. Link: <https://www.icwa.in/pdfs/GulfStudy.pdf>

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.40)

The Committee note that the Indian Community Welfare Fund was set up in Indian Missions in 17 ECR countries & Maldives in the year 2009. Subsequently, the Fund was extended to another 24 Missions in April 2010. In March 2011, it was extended to cover all Missions and Posts abroad. Revised guidelines for utilization of ICWF came into effect from 1st September 2017. Approval for expenditure from ICWF is at the level of HOM /HOP on the recommendation of the ICWF committee of the Mission. The Committee further note that as on 31 March 2023, the corpus of the ICWF is approximately Rs.558 crore or so. An amount of Rs. 565 crore has been utilized from 2014 to 2023 covering 3,33,607 Indians during this period. The Committee acknowledge the assistance rendered to overseas Indian nationals in times of distress and emergency under the ICWF including air passage offered to stranded Indians during the COVID pandemic. In view of the crucial role played by the ICWF in providing relief to Indian nationals during extreme hardships and emergency conditions, the Committee desire that sanctioning of funds/expenditure should be prompt and decisive. The Ministry should ensure that there is no delay on the part of the ICWF committee to give its recommendations for approval of the expenditure and sanctioning of the same by the Competent Authority so that timely assistance is provided during exigencies. The Committee also urge the Ministry to ensure transparency in the utilization of the Fund for those in need.

Reply of the Government

Recognizing the need for providing timely assistance to distressed Indians, the Ministry has authorized Heads of Missions and Posts to incur expenditure on most of the items of assistance as provided for in the detailed ICWF guidelines. Approval of the Ministry is

required only in a few exceptional cases only and proposals for decision on such cases are processed on top priority.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.41)

The Committee note that legal assistance to Indian nationals imprisoned or arrested in GCC countries is provided through panel of lawyers appointed by the Mission/Post and expenditure on lawyers' fee is paid from Indian Community Welfare Fund. ICWF can also be used by Missions for payment of small fines & penalties for minor offences/crimes, for illegal stay in the host country where prima facie the worker is not at fault and to enable release of Indian nationals from jail/detention center and their repatriation. The Committee are aware that there may be some section of the diaspora like labourers and domestic workers who could not afford the fees for lawyers and actually needed assistance while other sections could well afford legal fees for their court cases. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Ministry should differentiate between those who could afford fees for lawyers and those who could not, and ensure that priority is given to those who actually needed legal assistance under the ICWF.

Reply of the Government

Eligibility of the Indian national seeking assistance from ICWF is determined by the Mission / Post after taking into account financial condition of the applicant. Immediate assistance for lawyers fee, air passage for return to India, emergency medical care, boarding & lodging etc., as the case may be, is provided to those who are not in a position to incur the requisite expenditure on their own resources.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.42)

The Committee note that as per the law in Gulf countries, charges for the transportation of mortal remains is the responsibility of the employer/company and the sponsor. In cases where the employer could not be traced, the entire expenditure is borne by the ICWF. The Committee further note that there has been undue delay in dispatch of mortal remains back to India generally due to cumbersome procedures for completion of formalities in most of the Gulf countries. Transportation of mortal remains being a sensitive and humanitarian issue, the Committee urge the Ministry to take it up at the Highest level with the Gulf countries for easing of the cumbersome

procedures. Indian Missions may also play a more proactive role in coordinating with the local authorities for early completion of all the required formalities and timely dispatch of the mortal remains to India.

Reply of the Government

The transportation of mortal remains of Indian workers involves family of the deceased, sponsor/employer and local authorities. Initially, concerned India Mission grants a No Objection Certificate (NOC) expeditiously upon receipt of all essential death-related documents submitted by the sponsor/Attorney. Necessary clearances from the local authorities are also required before completion of the cargo formalities. Any delay, which might occur in securing clearances from local authorities and completion of procedures by the sponsors is mitigated by proactive efforts by the Missions to get all necessary formalities completed in the shortest time in coordination with the family of the deceased, sponsors/ employers and the local authorities to ensure timely transportation of the mortal remains to India.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.43)

The Committee note that the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas celebrations and Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards are special elements undertaken by the Ministry in its engagement with the diaspora in the Gulf countries. The Ministry has also made efforts to have a regional PBD element taking a theme related to the Gulf countries. The Committee desire that the focus of the PBD celebrations should be to ensure maximum participation of migrant workers in these celebrations and events, consider/discuss their issues and prepare the policies for improving the working and living conditions of such workers. The Committee further desire that PBD and regional PBD elements should serve as platforms for engagement of these workers with the policy makers in India.

Regarding the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards given by the Government to recognize and honour exceptional achievements and contributions made by overseas Indians in various fields, the Committee urge the Government to ensure that at least one awardee is selected from each region and from each country.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry takes note of the recommendation regarding Pravasi Bharatiya Divas and regional PBD elements serving as platforms for engagement of workers from Gulf countries with policy makers in India. The 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention held in Indore, Madhya Pradesh in January 2023 had enthusiastic participation from the Indian

diaspora in Gulf, including a large number of blue-collar workers from the region. The focus of the PBD on workers in Gulf region was also reflected in a dedicated plenary session on the welfare of Indian emigrant workers in Gulf countries, and release of a commemorative postal stamp emphasizing the importance of safe, legal, orderly and skilled migration.

The selection process of Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards has already mechanisms in place to ensure that adequate nominations are received from all geographic regions, including Gulf countries. The 17th PBSA ensured that at least one Awardee was selected from each region.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation No.44)

The Committee note that Indian Missions are engaging with Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award winners at the local level and the Ministry is also proposing to engage with them in a more structured manner. A diaspora directory based on professions is being prepared. The Ministry is also proposing to organise an interactive session of PBS awardees with all the Ministries. Being aware of the benefits of deeper engagement with PBS Awardees with outstanding accomplishments in areas such as science, business, culture, education and public service and who have significantly contributed to the welfare of the Indian diaspora or to India itself, the Committee urge the Ministry to create an alumni of all the PBS award winners within the shortest time possible specifying their specialization and utilize their expertise in achieving our national priorities.

Reply of the Government:

The Ministry is trying to create a list of all Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awardees with details of their specialization and achievements as part of its efforts to have a comprehensive database of the Awardees for further engagement with them.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.46)

The Committee observe that Indian diaspora are investing their money in Gulf countries including Dubai and Saudi Arabia. The Committee have been informed that there have been demolitions in old Jeddah area and other places. As conveyed by the Saudi authorities, some of the structures have become structurally weak and hence, demolition had to take place. The Committee further note that the Indian Embassy has taken up the cases where compensation to any Indian diaspora is to be made. To

ensure that the Indian diaspora who have invested their hard money do not suffer major losses, the Committee urge the Ministry and the Indian Embassy to identify the individuals entitled for compensation and pursue the competent authority in Saudi Arabia for payment of the said compensation at the earliest.

Reply of the Government

There has been demolitions in old Jeddah area and other places. Saudi authorities have conveyed that some of the structures demolished had become structurally weak, therefore demolition had to take place. The Indian Mission/ Post in Saudi Arabia has not received any formal request so far from Indian investors where compensation is to be claimed from Saudi authorities on account of demolition of their properties in Jeddah. Mission/Post will take up compensation issue promptly with Saudi authorities whenever received from Indian investors.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.47)

The Committee note that the MEA has always been flagging the issue of high price of flight tickets to the Gulf with the Ministry of Civil Aviation. Indian Embassies have also been talking to two airlines. The Committee are aware that India has Bilateral Air Services Agreements with many countries and desire that such agreements should be reviewed frequently for assessing the capacities of air services at the ground level. Consistent efforts may be made to bring down the cost of air flights in coordination with the Ministry of Civil Aviation. The Committee also desire that the Indian Embassies/Missions should hold regular discussion with airlines operating in the Gulf region to resolve the issue of high air fares.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry takes note of the recommendation of the Committee. Flight tickets are market-driven and are neither established nor regulated by the Government, but Ministry has always communicated the concerns of Indians living in Gulf about high ticket prices to Ministry of Civil Aviation. Ministry of Civil Aviation has also conveyed that the airlines have been sensitised regarding instances of aberration in air fares charges by airlines and have been urged to build some level of sensitivity in their reservation booking designator and to take corrective action to deploy additional capacity, etc. India and various Gulf countries have also held discussions on civil aviation issues including Air Services Agreement from time to time. Efforts are being made for the introduction of more number of flights and destinations between the two countries that will result in the reduction of cost of ticket for journeys.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.48)

The Committee note that based on a review conducted by the Ministry, there are about 12 Passport Offices out of 36 where the appointment cycle for passports is quite high. In Punjab sometimes the appointment cycle goes up to 60 days and beyond. It is informed that TCS has already started an exercise to shift several PSKs in Punjab to buildings with better infrastructure to accommodate more appointment slots. The Committee further note that migration from PSP version 1 to 2 would also enable the system to be in a better position to cope up with enhanced demands for passports. The Committee are of the view that the issue of long appointment cycle for issuance of passports should be addressed urgently to facilitate aspiring migrants for getting employment abroad. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry to complete the exercise of shifting the identified PSKs to the new locations and migration from PSP version 1 to 2 without further delay.

Reply of the Government

For the past several months, Ministry has been working hard to bring down the appointment cycle at PSKs/POPSKs with high appointment cycle. One of the measures has been release of appointments during the Saturday Special Drive at such PSKs/POPSKs. This drive is being conducted since May 2023 on Saturdays. This has resulted in bringing down the appointment cycle from an average of 55 working days to an average of 26 working days. As regards shifting of PSKs, there are 5 PSKs in the State of Punjab, out of which, Ministry in collaboration with the service provider, is in the process of shifting 3 PSKs, namely, Ludhiana, Amritsar and Jalandhar-2 and the migration from PSP V1.0 to PSP V2.0, and the project is expected to go-live by the end of March 2024.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.49)

The Committee note that in pursuance of a ban imposed by the Government on travel to Yemen, 422 passports of Indian truck drivers who have travelled to Yemen after the notification was issued and came back to India, have been seized. The Committee further note that passports of those people who found jobs elsewhere, have been released. So far, about 169 passports have been released based on the appeals made on a case-by-case basis. The Committee view the causes of those people whose passports are still lying with the passport offices, sympathetically and desire that the Ministry/Passport Offices should take a lenient view of their cases and release their passports if their appeals have merit.

Reply of the Government

In view of the fragile political and security situation in Yemen, Government of India promulgated a travel ban to Yemen through Gazette Notification S.O. 3223(E) dated 26 September 2017. The Notification continues to remain in force. Under the provisions of this Notification, there have been instances where passports of individuals have been seized by Indian authorities due to their travel to Yemen despite the travel ban. Out of 463 passports seized, a total of 204 passports have been released based on merit of each case. Humane and sympathetic considerations guide the Government in examining all such cases of seized passports and wherever the facts and circumstances of the case merit release of the passport, recommendation to that effect is made to the Passport Issuing Authority.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

CHAPTER-III

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

-NIL-

CHAPTER- IV

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

(Recommendation SI No.39)

The Committee note that the Government is working with the GCC countries to harmonise employee recruitment platforms so that Indian workers are provided with better and more transparent working conditions. However, the extent to which the Ministry and the Government have been successful in achieving these objectives is not known. The Ministry has also not mentioned whether any specific MoU or Agreement have been signed with the GCC countries in this regard. Keeping in view the security and well being of the migrant workers at the forefront, the Committee urge the Ministry to commission a study on harmonization of employee recruitment platforms and working conditions of migrant workers in the Gulf. The Committee also urge the Ministry to ensure better and more transparent working conditions for Indian workers as well as prospective emigrant workers in GCC countries.

Reply of the Government

Labour and Manpower Cooperation MoUs/Agreements are in place with the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates) and Jordan that provide the overarching framework for cooperation on labour and manpower related issues. In accordance with the Labour and Manpower Cooperation/Agreement, Joint Working Group (JWG) meetings are held on regular basis to discuss various labour related issues so that to ensure that India migrant workers in these countries have better and transparent working conditions. Further, to safeguard the specific interest of domestic workers in GCC Countries, who are often the most vulnerable category; Ministry has signed separate MOUs/Agreements on domestic workers with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.45)

The Committee note that under the Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC), 150 scholarships are offered to pursue under-graduate courses in India for specific professional and non-professional courses (except medical and related courses). A total of 131 scholarships were given to children of Indian workers in Gulf countries for the Academic Year 2022-23. The Committee, however, observe that the fees charged to diaspora children for education in India are quite high. The Committee have also been informed that the MEA has always communicated the concerns about high fees to the Ministry of Education. The Committee are of the view that adequate educational support should be given to diaspora children to pursue their education in India and urge the MEA to make persistent efforts with the Ministry of Education to rationalize the fee structure for such children in Indian educational institutions.

Reply of the Government

The Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC) scheme is aimed at enabling the Diaspora children to pursue undergraduate courses in Indian Universities/Institutions. The scheme has especially been aligned to cater to the requirement of financial assistance for the children of emigrant Indian workers proceeding for employment in Gulf countries. Out of 150 total scholarships being provided under the Scheme, 50 seats are reserved for children of Indian workers in ECR countries (which includes Gulf countries). Further, out of the aforesaid 50 seats, 1/3rd slots, i.e., 17 seats are reserved for children of Indian workers who had been pursuing studies in India. This demonstrates the Ministry's efforts to provide financial support for the deserving diaspora children on merit-cum-means basis.

The Government is also facilitating admission of NRI Students in AICTE Approved Institutions by way of creating supernumerary seats through admission to NRI, where in five percent of seats within approved intake shall be allowed for admission under NRI category and also through introduction/continuation of supernumerary Seats for(OCI)/ Children of Indian Workers in Gulf Countries. The Institution shall have nil deficiency based on self-disclosure fifteen percent supernumerary seats over and above the approved intake per course shall be approved for AICTE approved Institutions and University Departments, for admitting students from Foreign Nationals/ Overseas Citizen of India/ Children of Indian Workers in the Gulf Countries. One third of these 15 percent seats shall be reserved for the Children of Indian Workers in the Gulf Countries.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

CHAPTER-V

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

(Recommendation SI No.5)

The Committee note that political dialogues between India and GCC have been held over the years. A Memorandum of Understanding on Mechanism of Consultations to institutionalize the political dialogue between India and GCC was signed in September 2022. This MoU also instituted a dialogue at the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) level. The Committee further note that during the first India-GCC Senior Officials Meeting held in March 2023, it was proposed to form five Joint Working Groups in the fields of political and security issues; economic cooperation and trade; cultural, education, youth and sports; health and pharmaceuticals; maritime security and counter terrorism. The Committee welcome the proposal for formation of five mutually beneficial JWG's and urge the Government to make all out efforts for the finalization of all the groups and start working at an early date.

Reply of the Government

The recommendation from the committee is noted and the Ministry is actively following up with the GCC authorities for the finalization of all working groups and for their work to begin at an early date.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.19)

On the adoption of India's Digital Public Infrastructure by GCC countries, the Committee note that the Rupay card is already functional in UAE while MoUs for the same have also been signed with Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain. India and UAE are also engaged in discussions on possible integration of the UPI platform with UAE payment platform. India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. Moreover, proposals related to trade in local currencies and UPI connectivity are being pursued with Kuwait. The Committee understand that besides promoting digital transactions, integration of the UPI platform with the payment platforms of GCC countries would go a long way in fostering closer economic cooperation through enhanced bilateral trade as well as tourism and at the same time, reduce the cost of cross border payments. The Committee, therefore, urge the Government to pursue the GCC countries and enter into constructive talks with UAE, Kuwait and others for an early finalization of India's UPI connectivity and its integration with the payment Platforms of the GCC countries. Efforts made and success achieved in this regard may be communicated to the Committee.

Reply of the Government

UPI is not merely a Real Time Payment system providing Person to Person Payment system but it is a comprehensive payment scheme where the online transaction processing, Interbank settlements and Customer dispute life cycle management are encompassed holistically. At present, Indians who visit different countries have to pay for any expenses via international cards. With the introduction of UPI, Indians will now be able to use multiple bank accounts to make payments via a single mobile application. UAE has accepted India's UPI interface. While talks are ongoing with the Central Bank of Oman for technical integration of UPI. The implementation of UPI in overseas markets is a significant step towards promoting digital transactions and fostering closer economic cooperation between India and foreign countries. With UPI's user-friendly and secure interface, Indian tourists will be able to make payments seamlessly, eliminating the need for currency exchange. This will enhance our bilateral trade as well as tourism. Internationalization of UPI will also help in reducing the cost of cross border payments. NPCI (I) is the nodal agency under the Ministry of Finance. MEA works as an interface to promote Unified Payment Interface in other countries. In this regard, we have been facilitating NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL controlled by RBI which

is under Department of Financial Services, MoF) interactions with Banks of respective countries through our Missions. The details country wise are as follows:

- i. United Arab Emirates (UAE)- Al Etihad Payments (AEP), an indirect subsidiary of Central Bank of UAE (CBUAE) and NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL) signed a strategic framework agreement on for Domestic Card Scheme (DCS) implementation based on NPCI's RuPay stack. Also, Mercury is Middle East's first domestic payment scheme, headquartered in the United Arab Emirates, which enable member institutions to issue cards under the Mercury brand that function securely at large number of ATMs and merchant outlets across the UAE. Mercury connects consumers, banks, the government entities and businesses to facilitate payments in the region. NIPL has signed definitive agreement with Mercury for seamless integration to ensure acceptance of RuPay cards in UAE. Rupay cards have been accepted in the UAE since 2021. Today Rupay Cards have 98% Point of Sale acceptance coverage in the UAE. Similarly, UPI has also been active in UAE since 2022. Recently, Phonepe [a UPI App] went live in the UAE. Indians visiting the UAE can now do UPI transactions though UAE NeoPay. In addition to the above, an MoU was signed on July 15, 2023 for interlinking UPI and UAE's instant payment platform. Discussions are underway to complete this integration soon.
- ii. Saudi Arabia- NPCI and Saudi Arabia Monetary Authority (SAMA) have already signed an NDA. RBI has proposed a MOU/TOR to SAMA and their response is awaited on the same.
- iii. Oman- NDA and MOU were signed between Central Bank of Oman and NPCI international Payments Limited on 4th October 2022 for enabling acceptance of UPI QR and RuPay cards. Also, NDA and MoU signed between NIPL and Bank Muscat for enabling Real-time crossborder remittance between Oman and India using UPI rails. Discussion on technical integration and definitive agreement are still in progress between teams of NIPL and Bank Muscat.
- iv. Kuwait- Knet is a Kuwaiti national company providing electronic banking services to all the banks in Kuwait. NIPL and Knet signed an Memorandum of Agreement. Discussion on technical Specifications and integration are still in the pipeline. Mission is following up the matter of trade in local currencies as well as UPI connectivity with the Kuwaiti authorities. Central Bank of Kuwait and K-Net are already in touch with NPCI on UPI connectivity.
- v. Bahrain and Qatar- Discussions are on-going with Bahrain and Qatar side on Technical integration and definitive agreements are still in progress.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.21)

The Committee note that India and GCC countries continue to exchange information and best practices on cyber security in various defence and security related dialogues. MoUs on cyber security cooperation are also being discussed between India and various Gulf countries. The MoUs on Cyber Security cooperation between CERT-In and its equivalent organisation in GCC countries are currently under discussions at various stages. The Committee are of the view that MoUs on cyber security between India and GCC countries are long overdue especially in the backdrop of severe challenge posed by cyber terrorism globally. They, therefore, desire that the Government should make concerted efforts to evolve a mechanism for cooperation with GCC countries through MoUs/Agreements on cyber security expeditiously. The Committee also urge the Ministry to facilitate the ongoing discussion on MoUs regarding cyber security cooperation between CERT-In and its equivalent organisation in GCC countries for its early and successful conclusion.

Reply of the Government

Ministry has been actively taking initiatives in facilitating discussion/negotiation for signing of MoU/MoC on cooperation in the area of Cyber Security between CERT-In and its counterparts in GCC Countries to enhance cyber security for India. MEA has taken initiative in this respect with Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. However, CERT-In has recently informed that they are awaiting for the clarity and clearance on the standard CERT to CERT draft MoU for cooperation in the area of cyber security from NSCS.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.25)

The Committee note that commencement of negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement between India and GCC was approved in 2005 and two rounds of negotiations were subsequently held in 2006 and 2008. However, in 2011, GCC announced deferral of FTA negotiations with all countries and economic groups. GCC Secretariat again welcomed the resumption of FTA negotiations in November 2019 and followed it up in 2021. After the constitution of Joint Working Group and preliminary virtual meeting of the Joint Working Group held in February 2022, the intent to pursue negotiations on

the India-GCC FTA was announced in November 2022. As of now, the technical teams have been constituted and the modalities and terms of reference are being worked upon. The Ministry has also stated that the recent delay was due to the non-appointment of Chief Negotiator from the GCC side. GCC Secretariat has now informed that a new Chief Negotiator from the GCC is in place. The Committee feel that the process of negotiation and finalization of the FTA between India and GCC has been delayed for long and in view of the prospects of substantial increase in trade between India and GCC countries as well as India's integration into the global value chain through the signing of the FTA, urge the Government to maintain close coordination with the GCC Secretariat so that formal negotiations on the India-GCC FTA commence soon for its early conclusion.

Reply of the Government

Upon appointment of Chief Negotiator from the GCC side, a meeting at that level took place in August 2023 to take forward the discussions and Terms of References were exchanged. While the GCC is keen on including investment protection as a chapter, Indian side has suggested to follow the India-UAE CEPA text and instead include a chapter of investment promotion. GCC side has sought time to respond to the suggestions made by Indian side upon consultation with its member countries.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation SI No.27)

The Committee note that MoUs were signed between India and UAE on establishment of a framework for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies - the Indian rupee and the Emirati Dirham for cross-border transaction and interlinking payment and messaging system of both countries. With the operationalization of the MoUs, exporters and importers in both the countries can invoice in their local currencies. India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. The proposals related to trade in local currencies and UPI connectivity are being pursued with Kuwait. The

Committee understand that bilateral trade settlement in local currencies and interlinking payment and messaging systems of India and GCC countries will greatly enhance the economic engagements between the countries resulting in increased trade and FDI inflow and urge the Ministry to facilitate the signing of such MoUs with all the GCC countries at an early date.

Reply of the Government

India has held discussions related to the UPI platform with various Gulf countries. The Rupay card is already functional in UAE and MOUs for the same have also been signed with Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain. India and UAE are also engaged in discussions on possible integration of the UPI platform with UAE payment platform. Similarly, India is also engaged in discussions with various Gulf countries on establishing mechanisms for bilateral trade settlement in local currencies. RBI is open to signing such MoU with GCC countries based on the (i) willingness and cooperation of the Central Banks and authorities in these countries, (ii) their macro-financial and macroeconomic parameters and (iii) geo strategic concerns with the overall concurrence of the Government.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

(Recommendation No.44)

The Committee note that Indian Missions are engaging with Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award winners at the local level and the Ministry is also proposing to engage with them in a more structured manner. A diaspora directory based on professions is being prepared. The Ministry is also proposing to organise an interactive session of PBS awardees with all the Ministries . Being aware of the benefits of deeper engagement with PBS Awardees with outstanding accomplishments in areas such as science, business, culture, education and public service and who have significantly contributed to the welfare of the Indian diaspora or to India itself, the Committee urge the Ministry to create an alumni of all the PBS award winners within the shortest time possible specifying their specialization and utilize their expertise in achieving our national priorities.

Reply of the Government

The Ministry is trying to create a list of all Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awardees with details of their specialization and achievements as part of its efforts to have a comprehensive database of the Awardees for further engagement with them.

[File No. AA/Parl/125/102/2023 dated 14/10/2024]

NEW DELHI
25 November, 2024

04 Agrahayana, 1946 (Saka)

Dr. Shashi Tharoor,
Chairperson,
Committee on External Affairs

MINUTES OF THE SECOND SITTING OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

(2024-25) HELD ON 25 OCTOBER, 2024

The Committee sat on Friday, 25 October, 2024 from 1430 hrs. to 1640 hrs. in Committee Room No. 2, Extension Building, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

Present

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Chairperson

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Mitesh Patel Bakabhai
3. Shri Arun Govil
4. Shri Sanatan Pandey
5. Smt. Aparajita Sarangi
6. Shri Arvind Ganpat Sawant
7. Ms. Praniti Sushilkumar Shinde
8. Ms. Bansuri Swaraj

Rajya Sabha

9. Dr. John Brittas
10. Smt. Kiran Choudhry
11. Smt. Sagarika Ghose
12. Dr. K. Laxman
13. Shri A. D. Singh
14. Kunwar Ratanjeet Pratap Narayan Singh
15. Dr. Sudhanshu Trivedi

Secretariat

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. | Shri Anjani Kumar | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. | Smt. Reena Gopalakrishnan | - | Director |
| 3. | Ms. K. Muanniang Tunlut | - | Deputy Secretary |
| 4. | Ms. Maya Menon | - | Under Secretary |

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

1.	Shri Vikram Misri	:	Foreign Secretary
2.	Shri Randhir Kumar Jasiwal	:	JS(XP)
3.	Shri Nagaraj Naidu Kakanur	:	JS(AMS)
4.	Ms. Pratibha Parkar	:	JS (Parl & Coord.)
5.	Dr. Suresh Kumar	:	JS (WANA)
6.	Ms. Priyanka Sohoni	:	DS (FSO)
7.	Shri Abhishek Upadhyay	:	DS (FSO)

2. At the outset, Chairperson welcomed the Members to the Sitting of the Committee and apprised them of the agenda for the day.

3. The Committee took up for consideration the Draft Report on the Action Taken by the Government on the observations/recommendations contained in the Twenty Sixth Report of the Committee on External Affairs (17th Lok Sabha) on the subject 'India and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)- Contours of Cooperation'. After Chairperson invited the Members to offer their suggestions, if any, for incorporation in the draft Report and deliberations on the subject, the Committee adopted the Draft Report with minor modifications suggested by the Members.

4. xxx xxx xxx

5. xxx xxx xxx

6. The Committee authorized the Chairperson to finalize the Action Taken Reports incorporating the suggestions made by the Members and present the same to Parliament.

7. xxx xxx xxx

8. xxx xxx xxx

9. xxx xxx xxx

10. xxx xxx xxx

The Committee then adjourned

(The witnesses then withdrew)

A verbatim proceedings of the Sitting has been kept on record.

(Vide Para 4 of Introduction of Report)

ANALYSIS OF ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT ON THE OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THE TWENTY SIXTH REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (17TH LOK SABHA)

- | | | |
|-------|--|----------------------------|
| (i) | Total Number of Recommendations | 49 |
| (ii) | Observations/Recommendations which have been accepted by the Government. | |
| | Recommendation Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4 , 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48 and 49 | |
| | | Total-41 |
| | | Percentage: 83.673% |
| (iii) | Observations/Recommendations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the Government's replies. | |
| | NIL | |
| | | Total-Nil |
| | | Percentage: 00 % |
| (iv) | Observations/Recommendations in respect of which replies of the Government have not been accepted by the Committee and require reiteration. | |
| | Recommendation Nos. 39 and 45 | |
| | | Total- 2 |
| | | Percentage: 4.082 % |
| (v) | Observations/Recommendations in respect of which final replies of the Government are still awaited. | |
| | Recommendation Nos. 5, 19, 21, 25, 27and 44 | |
| | | Total- 6 |
| | | Percentage: 12.25% |