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Title: The Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs laid a statement regarding status of implementation of recommendations contained in 11th Report of Standing Committee on External Affairs on Demands for Grants (2006-07)

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI ANAND SHARMA): Sir, with your permission, I beg to lay a statement regarding the status of implementation of the recommendations contained in the 11th Report of the Standing Committee on External Affairs on Demands for Grants (2006-07).

I am making this statement on the status of implementation of the recommendations contained in the Eleventh Report of the Standing Committee on External Affairs in pursuance of the Direction 73A of the Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha.

2. The Standing Committee on External Affairs examined the Demands for Grants of the MEA for the year 2006-2007 and laid its Eleventh Report in Lok Sabha on 18th May, 2006. The Report included 36 recommendations on which Action Taken Report was submitted to the Committee in August, 2006. Now, I am laying on the Table of the House the progress made on the recommendations of the Committee, as required under Hon'ble Speaker's above direction.

3. We are grateful to the Committee in recommending the need for additional funds for the Ministry to carry out more effectively the enhanced activities of the Ministry in pursuance of our dynamic foreign policy. To take care of the current requirements, Ministry has submitted Revised Estimates of Rs. 4567.00 crores representing an increase of 872 crores as compared to BE of 2006-2007. We are also grateful to the Committee in acknowledging evenly paced utilization of budgetary allocations.

4. On the filling up of posts, Ministry is happy to report that the Staff Selection Commission has selected 8 candidates against backlogged reserved vacancies and

* Laid on the Table and also placed in Library. See No. LT 5628/2006

requisite approval for creation of posts for the newly opened Missions at Kinshasa and Melbourne has been obtained. Ministry recognizes the need to curtail expenditure on rental liability and action is under way to acquire built-up properties and construct buildings in high rental stations. The Ministry also would *like* to inform the Committee that it has reached a final settlement with the NOMC for clearance of all dues relating to Akbar Bhavan.

5. On the External Publicity front, a review of publicity budget was carried out and Missions were asked to redouble their efforts to fully utilize the publicity budget and accomplish the objective of projecting and promoting India globally in an effective manner. Fifteen key Missions were selected to improve perceptions about India through strengthened media interventions in the countries of their accreditation. On the Public Diplomacy front, the outreach has been extended to the strategic community, number of international think tanks, research institutions, leading institutes, media and many universities in India. PD Division is laying special emphasis on how Ministry can contribute to and sustain the national objectives of achieving 8-10% economic growth and re-connecting with neighbours.

6. In keeping with the Committee's recommendations, an increased allocation of RS.147.98 crores has been provided at the RE stage to open new passport offices at Dehradun, Raipur and Shimla by March, 2007 and at Amritsar in the near future. Passport issuance guidelines have been simplified including the police verification system and measures put in place to reduce the pendency in passport offices.

7. To cater to the increasing activities of ICeR, Ministry has provided an enhanced allocation of Rs, 68,50 crares in the RE of 2006-2007. The Council's advisory body in different regional centres has been constituted. Meetings of regional offices at Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata are scheduled to be held in January, February and March, 2007 respectively.

8. I am happy to report that the Working Committee of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) has been constituted under the Chairmanship of Hon'ble Vice-President of India with 15 members. ICWA is in the process of drawing up detailed rules and regulations for its smooth functioning.

9. On assistance to Nepal, a generous package was announced during the visit of H.E. Prime Minister Koirala, amounting to nearly Rs. 900 crores. Bhutan is also receiving generous assistance from the GOI for implementation of various projects in that country.

10. Some of the multilateral projects undertaken by India are operationalisation of the SAARC Disaster Management Centre in New Delhi in October this year and the second BIMSTEC Summit proposed to be held in India in February, 2007.

11. The progress made in the implementation of the recommendations is detailed in the Annexure which is laid on the Table of the House. I would not like to take the valuable time of the House to read out all the contents but would request that this may be considered as read.
