

Standing Committee Report Summary

Provision of all-weather road connectivity under Border Roads Organisation

- The Standing Committee on Defence (Chairperson: Mr. Kalraj Mishra) submitted its report on ‘Provision of all-weather connectivity under Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and other agencies up to International borders as well as the strategic areas including approach roads- An appraisal’ on February 11, 2019. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee are as follows
- **Underperformance of BRO:** The Committee observed that since 2007-08, the targets set for various construction works by BRO could not be achieved. However, despite the failure to achieve these targets, higher targets were set in subsequent years which led to further underperformance. The failure to achieve targets was attributed to various issues faced by BRO such as difficult terrain, limited working period, and lack of raw material.
- **Indo-China Border Roads (ICBRs):** The Committee noted that the government had identified 73 roads of length 3,812 km, for development along the Indo-China border. Of these, 61 have been entrusted to the BRO. The initial date for completion of these roads was 2012. Out of the 61 roads, 28 roads have been completed and the remaining are in various stages of completion. The completion schedule has been extended to 2022. The Committee recommended that BRO should explore the possibility of completing all roads by 2020, instead of 2022.
- **Delegation of powers:** The Committee noted that BRO was not in a position to perform in the field as there was lesser delegation of power and cases kept coming to the Defence Ministry. Chief Engineers at the field level did not have powers for execution of contracts. However, the delegation of financial and administrative power has increased significantly. The powers of the Chief Engineers at the field level has increased from Rs 10 crore to Rs 50 crore. The Committee recommended that the Defence Ministry should provide the impact of this delegation of powers on the pace of execution of projects.
- **Empowered Committees:** The Committee stated that Empowered Committees (ECs) had been constituted for coordination between BRO and state governments to resolve issues such as land acquisition, and forest clearances. It noted that in states where large number of land acquisition cases were pending, such as Jammu and Kashmir, the ECs have met only once since 2015. The Committee recommended that specific steps should be taken to rejuvenate ECs to play a more active role in issues concerning border roads
- **Delays in projects:** The Committee observed that issues relating to land acquisition resulted in considerable delay in construction of roads, bridges and tunnels. These include delays in joint survey for land acquisition, non-disbursement of land acquisition payment, and demands for additional compensation. The Committee noted that 593 land compensation cases were pending in various courts, and recommended that the Defence Ministry should look for out of court settlements of cases for early resolution.
- Further, the Committee noted that the average time for obtaining wildlife clearances is 3-7 years, despite fast-track processes being put in place. It recommended that the possibility of reducing this time should be explored with the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change. Further, the Committee noted that 29 cases for forest approvals are still pending with various state governments. It recommended that the Empowered Committees should expedite these cases.
- **Lack of equipment:** The Committee observed that the availability of construction equipment with the BRO was less than the authorised numbers in 2016-17. Equipment such as stone crushers and tippers were 40% and 50% less than the authorised numbers, respectively. Further, the Committee noted that BRO was using indigenous equipment as they operate in remote locations where use of sophisticated equipment is not feasible. It recommended that deploying of sophisticated construction equipment may be explored to ensure quicker completion of projects.
- **Shortage of manpower:** The Committee noted that due to issues including inhospitable terrain, and lack of proper facilities for the families of employees, people were opting out of working in BRO. It recommended that an incentive package specific to BRO postings in border areas may be devised to attract talent.

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