

Standing Committee Report Summary

India's Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy

- The Standing Committee on External Affairs (Chair: Mr. P.P. Chaudhary) submitted its report on 'India's Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: Prospects and Limitations', on December 12, 2022. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) defines soft power as the ability to influence others through appeal and attraction, using non-coercive means. The MEA has noted four limitations that inhibit India's soft power and cultural diplomacy. These are: (i) inadequate financing, (ii) lack of coordination among various institutions, (iii) shortage of skilled manpower, and (iv) lack of clarity on the mandate of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Restructuring ICCR:** ICCR is an autonomous body under the MEA. It has a mandate to engage in policy and programme formulation and implementation pertaining to India's external cultural relations. The MEA stated that the restructuring of the ICCR was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee observed the need for a complete remodelling of the structure, mandate, and functioning of the ICCR to better project Indian culture. The Committee recommended that the MEA finalise the restructuring of the ICCR. It also recommended that a blueprint of the restructuring may be submitted to the Committee within three months.
 - The MEA submitted that the budgetary allocation of the ICCR was inadequate. The Committee observed that the ICCR would require Rs 500 crore to accommodate current demand from embassies and cultural centres. The Committee recommended that the central government should increase ICCR's budgetary allocation by Rs 500 crore so that it can conduct India's soft power and cultural diplomacy in a robust manner.
 - **Coordination committee:** According to the MEA, there is an overlapping mandate between different ministries, which acts as a limiting factor in pursuit of India's soft power and cultural diplomacy. The Committee had earlier recommended the establishment of an institutionalised coordination mechanism between the MEA/ICCR and other line ministries (such as Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education). The Committee noted that there have been no substantive steps taken to establish such a mechanism. The Committee recommended the constitution of a Coordination
- Committee under the monitoring of the MEA to ensure better coordination between ministries/departments responsible for India's soft power and cultural diplomacy.
 - **Working group on cultural diplomacy:** The Committee noted that both the MEA and Ministry of Culture are engaged in the promotion of India's cultural diplomacy. While the Ministry of Culture formulates policy and evolves projects for propagation of culture, ICCR is the executing arm in the external domain responsible for the preservation of cultural heritage within and outside India. The Committee recommended the formation of a working group between the MEA and the Ministry of Culture to coordinate and plan cultural diplomatic activities. Further, the Committee recommended creating a consolidated database of information of cultural resources.
 - **Constituting Yoga Certification Board:** The Committee observed the global popularity of Yoga and recognised its effectiveness as a soft power tool. It recommended collaboration between the Ministry of AYUSH and the MEA to constitute a Yoga Certification Board. The Board would certify Indian yogic practices and therapies.
 - **Mechanism to interact with Indian Diaspora:** India has a large diaspora with more than 31 million people, including over 13 million Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and 18 million People of Indian Origin (PIOs). The Committee observed the role of the Indian diaspora as a soft power tool in building and strengthening relations between their home and host countries. The Committee recommended formulating a mechanism to proactively interact with the Indian diaspora in the Indian Missions/Post abroad. It also recommended holding designated events to solicit their feedback and suggestions for better regular engagement with the host country.
 - **Tourism promotion:** The Committee noted tourism as a key indicator of a country's soft power capital. It observed the need to increase tourism offices abroad and the adoption of a country-specific approach for tourism promotion. The Committee recommended the Government to suggest proposals incorporating feedback from different categories of tourists for a comprehensive country-specific approach.

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