



Parliamentary Forums

RATIONALE OF THE GROUP

M.N. Kaul and S.L. Shakdher have nicely explained the rationale of the Indian Parliamentary Group (IPG) in the following way:

The establishment and development of relations among parliaments constitutes part of the regular activities of national parliaments. Although promotion of inter-parliamentary relations has for many years been a significant part of the work of parliamentarians, recently it has received a new thrust due to the increased inter-dependence of nations in a global environment. It is imperative that parliamentarians will join hands to safeguard democracy and work in synergy to confront the challenges before the world and convert them into opportunities to facilitate peace and prosperity in their countries as well as globally. Parliamentarians from different parts of the world, therefore, have a forum where they can meet to discuss and find out solutions to their common problems. It is here that some sort of cross-fertilisation of ideas can take place not only between the older and the younger parliaments, but also between parliamentarians working under different parliamentary systems. These problems are no doubt discussed in inter-governmental conferences; however, those discussions are not so frank and free as they can be at a conclave of legislators.¹

Inter-parliamentary relations thus assume great importance today when the whole world is beset with many pressing problems. The problems that are

faced by one parliament today may confront another tomorrow. It is, therefore, essential that a link should exist between various parliaments of the world. This link is maintained by India through the exchange of delegations, goodwill missions, correspondence, documents, etc. with foreign parliaments through the machinery of the IPG that acts both as the National Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and also as the India Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).²

COMPOSITION OF THE GROUP

IPG³ is an autonomous body. It was formed in the year 1949 in pursuance of a motion adopted by the Constituent Assembly (Legislative).⁴

The membership of IPG is open to all members of Parliament. The former members of Parliament can also become associate members of the Group.⁵ But, the associate members are entitled to limited rights only. They are not entitled to representation at meetings and conferences of the IPU and the CPA. They are also not entitled to the travel concessions provided to members by certain branches of the CPA.

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha is the *ex officio* president of the Group. The Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha are the *ex officio* vice-presidents of the Group. The Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha acts as the *ex officio* Secretary-General of the Group.

OBJECTIVES OF THE GROUP

The aims and objects of the Group are mentioned below:

1. To promote personal contacts between members of the Parliament of India.
2. To study questions of public importance that are likely to come up before the Parliament; arrange seminars, discussions and orientation courses; and bring out publications for the dissemination of information to the members of the Group.
3. To arrange lectures on political, defence, economic, social and educational problems by the members of the Parliament and distinguished persons.

4. To arrange visits to foreign countries with a view to develop contacts with members of other parliaments.

FUNCTIONS OF THE GROUP

The various functions performed and activities undertaken by the Group are as follows:

1. The Group acts as a link between the Parliament of India and the various parliaments of the world. This link is maintained through exchange of delegations, goodwill missions, correspondence, documents, etc. with foreign parliaments.
2. The Group functions as the (a) National Group of the IPU and (b) main branch of the CPA in India.
3. Addresses to the members of the Parliament by visiting Heads of State and Government of foreign countries and talks by eminent persons are arranged under the auspices of the Group.
4. Seminars and symposia on parliamentary subjects of topical interest are organised periodically at national as well as international level.
5. Members of the Group, when visiting abroad, are given letters of introduction to the Secretaries of the National Groups of the IPU and Secretaries of the CPA branches. The Indian Missions in the countries of visit are also suitably informed so as to enable them to get assistance and usual courtesies.
6. Only those members of the Parliament who are members of the Group of at least six months' standing at the time of the composition of the delegation, may be included in the Indian Parliamentary delegations to foreign countries.
7. An uninterrupted flow of information to members regarding the activities of the Group is maintained through the IPG Newsletter brought out every quarter. It is sent regularly to all members of the Group, including associate members.
8. As per decision of the Group, an award of Outstanding Parliamentarian was instituted in the year 1995 to be given annually. A committee of five persons, constituted by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, invites and finalises the nomination for the award.

9. To encourage bilateral relations, the Group constitutes Parliamentary Friendship Groups with other countries in the Parliament.⁶ The aims and objectives of the Friendship Group are to maintain political, social and cultural contacts between the two countries and to assist in exchanges of information and experiences on issues relating to parliamentary activities.

THE GROUP AND IPU⁷

The IPU is an international organisation of the parliaments of sovereign states. At present, the IPU consists of 153 parliaments of sovereign nations. Its aim is to work for peace and cooperation among peoples and for the firm establishment of representative institutions. It fosters contacts, coordination and the exchange of experience among parliaments and parliamentarians of all member countries and contributes to better knowledge of the working of representative institutions. It also expresses its views on all burning questions of international importance for necessary effective implementation of parliamentary actions and suggests avenues for improving the working standard and capacity of international institutions.

The main advantages of membership of the Group, insofar as its functions as the National Group of the IPU are concerned, are as follows:

1. It helps members of Indian Parliamentary delegations to develop contacts with the parliamentarians of the member countries of the IPU.
2. The events provide an opportunity to study and understand contemporary changes/reforms taking place in various countries of the world.
3. It provides facilities to meet parliamentarians in different countries during tours in abroad or in India when visiting Parliamentarians are here.
4. The members of the Group are eligible to visit foreign countries as members of the Indian Parliamentary delegations to Inter-Parliamentary Conferences.

In the recent past, members of the Group have been holding various positions in the IPU bodies, namely, office bearers in different committees of the IPU, Rapporteurs, Chairman of Drafting Committees, etc. and by virtue of the same, the Group has been successful in putting forward effectively the view point of India on various important issues dealt in the IPU meetings.

THE GROUP AND CPA⁸

The CPA is an association of about 17000 Commonwealth Parliamentarians spread over 175 National, State, Provincial and Territorial Parliaments. Its aims are to promote knowledge and understanding of the constitutional, legislative, economic, social and cultural systems within a parliamentary democratic framework with particular reference to the countries of the Commonwealth of Nations and to countries having close historical and parliamentary associations with it. Its mission is to promote the advancement of parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance and by building an informed parliamentary community able to deepen the Commonwealth's democratic commitment and to further co-operation among its parliaments and legislatures.

The main advantages of membership of the Group, insofar as its functions as the main branch of the CPA in India are concerned, are as follows:

1. **Conferences and Seminars:** Membership provides an opportunity for participation in the plenary and regional conferences, seminars, visits and exchanges of delegations.
2. **Publications:** All members of the Group are entitled to receive, free of charge, 'The Parliamentarian' quarterly and the newsletter, 'First Reading', every second month.⁹
3. **Information:** The Parliamentary Information and Reference Centre of the CPA Secretariat provides information to members on parliamentary, constitutional and Commonwealth matters.
4. **Introductions:** The CPA branches readily assist in arranging introductions for members visiting other jurisdictions.
5. **Parliamentary Facilities:** Members visiting other Commonwealth countries are normally accorded parliamentary courtesies, especially access to debates and local members.
6. **Travel Facilities:** Some branches provide for a designated number of their members annually to undertake study tours of Commonwealth and other countries to compare political and procedural developments. Other branches arrange ad hoc visits.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. M.N. Kaul and S.L. Shakdher, *Practice and Procedure of Parliament, Lok Sabha Secretariat*, Sixth Edition, 2009, p. 1160.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Hereafter referred to as ‘the Group’.
4. The concerned motion was adopted on August 16, 1948.
5. A member or ex-member of Parliament can become a life member of the Group on payment of a fixed life subscription.
6. Each Friendship Group consists of 22 sitting members of Parliament (15 from the Lok Sabha and 7 from the Rajya Sabha) in proportion to the strength of parties in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. The Speaker of the Lok Sabha appoints the President and two Vice-Presidents (one from each House) of the Friendship Group.
7. *Hand Book for Members of Lok Sabha*, Fifteenth Edition, 2009, pp. 207–208.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 208–209.
9. These are published by the CPA Secretariat, London.