

RESEARCH SUPPORT TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Dr. RUP NARAYAN DAS
Joint Director
Research & Information Division
Lok Sabha Secretariat
Parliament of India

IMPERATIVE FOR RESEARCH SUPPORT TO MEMBERS

A member of Parliament performs a multi-functional role. He is a member of a political party, unless elected as an independent candidate, which is very rare; he is a representative of his constituency espousing the cause of the people who have voted him; and he is also a member of a State Assembly or National Legislature or Parliament as the case may be. As a member of the Legislature, he articulates the grievances, concerns, hopes and aspirations of his constituency through various procedural means available to him. He is also a legislator which entrusts on him the mandate to critically examine a bill which is before the Legislature and suggest amendments if it so warrants and finally votes for it. If he is a Minister then there is an additional responsibility bestowed on him. A member is also often a member of Parliamentary Committees and a host of other civil society associations at different levels. All these multi-functional roles demand his attention and time. He has to navigate a fine balancing act which is very challenging.

A member of Parliament is thus hard pressed for time. It is here that the support services of the Legislature Secretariat like the library and research & reference services come to his rescue and help him to discharge his various responsibilities effectively and meaningfully. Although a member may have his own support system in the form of his own office or secretariat, the Legislature Secretariat should always be in a position to extend its services to the member. It is the responsibility of the library, and research & reference services to provide him with inputs in the form of research notes, backgrounders, select articles and books and other information so as to enable the member to take part in the deliberations of Parliament and its committees.

It is all the more beneficial, if there are specialized units or braches/wings in the Legislature Secretariat specialising on certain areas and issues such as education, scientific, social, health, rural and urban development, energy and international issues. Keeping in mind the need for such specialization and in order to develop expertise and intellectual capital, different wings have been set up in the Library and Research, Reference, Documentation and Information Service (LARRDIS) of Indian Parliament which is the Service responsible to provide intellectual input to the members of Parliament. The units of LARRDIS make earnest efforts to attain a high level of perfection.

PRECISION

While rendering assistance, we have to bear in mind that the inputs that we provide to the members have to be first of all precise and crisp, devoid of verbosity. Besides the demands on his precious time, the issues before the members and the world at large at times are complex and sometimes even technical or scientific. Every care therefore should be taken to explain issues in a very simple and lucid language and in a self-explanatory manner. A Parliamentary researcher, mandated to serve the members, is often flooded with a wide array of information and literature in what is called "information explosion". It is the responsibility of the Parliamentary researcher to remove the chaff from the grain and provide relevant information in a cogent manner.

A member of Parliament knows that knowledge is power, particularly at a time when the world is emerging as a knowledge society where the boundary of knowledge is breaking and we have a seamless knowledge paradigm. This is indeed a very challenging task on the part on the service provider. He needs to be well informed and well read, and a very well aware person. One has to develop regular reading habits, which will be of great use.

IMPORTANCE OF TIMELY INFORMATION

The second important point is that research input has to be made available in time. The whole purpose of providing the research note/or background forfeits its usefulness if it is not

made available to him/her well in time to enable him to take part in debate/discussion. So speed has to be ensured.

AUTHENTICITY

The third most important factor to be borne in mind is that the information/material provided to the member should be authentic and reliable. The information contained in the research note should be based on authentic sources such as government reports and reports of U.N. Agencies. There is no harm if they are based on news paper reports or articles published in newspapers and magazines, but its authenticity should be ensured.

OBJECTIVITY

Finally, efforts are made to make sure that such research notes/background notes are objective, unbiased and factual. A parliamentary researcher has to be non-political, non-partisan and objective. While a member has every reason to speak from his point of view of his party's point of view, the job of Parliamentary researcher is to provide unbiased information.

ANTICIPATION

Anticipatory research is an integral aspect of Parliamentary research. An ideal researcher does not wait for the member to make a demand for information on a particular issue. A well informed parliamentary researcher anticipates what a member can ask and accordingly prepares notes for the information and use of the members. Over the years, LARRDIS has been bringing out anticipatory research notes for information and use of members on a variety of subjects and issues which have been found immensely useful.

PROVIDING INTELLECTUAL SUPPORT TO PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Besides assisting members of Parliament in discharging their Parliamentary responsibilities, LARRDIS also extends intellectual support to Hon'ble Speaker Lok Sabha and members of Parliament when they participate in important conferences and seminars, both within and outside the country such as the ones organized under the aegis of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the CPA. On such occasions, LARRDIS prepares comprehensive briefs on various topics which

are scheduled. Some of the important subjects on which briefs and background notes have been prepared include:

- (1) Are the Millennium Development Goals Achievable?
- (2) Combating Terrorism: The Role of Parliament;
- (3) Digital Divide and the Threat of Cyber Terrorism: Challenges and Solutions;
- (4) Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-making Process at all Levels, with particular emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership;
- (5) Fighting Corruption – What can Parliamentarians Do?
- (6) How can the Doha Round contribute to increasing Trade and Investment opportunities for Developing Countries?
- (7) How Parliament can and must promote effective ways of combating violence against Women in all fields;
- (8) How to maintain cordial relations amongst Legislature, Executive and Judiciary for the smooth functioning of Democracy?
- (9) Into the New Millennium: the Role of Governments and Parliaments;
- (10) Natural Disasters – Effective Early Warning, Relief and Reconstruction;
- (11) Need for constitution of Ethics Committees in Legislatures;
- (12) Parliament and the Civil-society working together for Poverty Reduction;
- (13) Parliament and the Media;
- (14) Parliament and the Right to Know;
- (15) Responsibilities and Rights of the People and Parliaments in a Global Community;
- (16) Role of Democracy in Promoting Regional and Global Security;
- (17) Role of Parliamentarians in Combating HIV/AIDS Pandemic;
- (18) Role of Parliament in promoting Regional and International Cooperation;
- (19) Role of Women Parliamentarians in Conflict Resolution;
- (20) Trend towards Supra-National Parliaments – Should every Region have one?

Members who participate in Parliamentary Conferences find such briefs useful in enabling them to take part effectively and meaningfully in such Conferences.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, there is no doubt that in a Legislature set-up, the library and research services are like two sides of the same coin supplementing, complementing and reinforcing each other. At a time where there is unprecedented developments in the domain of knowledge the world over, what empowers a member is knowledge. It is all the more appropriate to quote here what the revered Philip Laundry, an institution in himself and a very highly respected former Director of Research Branch of the Canadian Parliament Library, wrote years ago:

“The developments which have since (the second world war) taken in some jurisdiction have been impressive and parliamentary librarianship has come into its own in a way that has deep significance for all who practise librarianship. Parliamentary librarians have a specialized function, but the phenomenon of their transformation from what they once were into what some of them are now gives an exciting new insight into what a library can become and what a librarian can become. The good parliamentary library has become an instrument for reinforcing Parliament. The Parliamentary library is no longer a ‘bookmans’ library of conventional mould but a many faceted complex of information processing operations offering everything from current awareness service to in-depth research” (*Parliamentary Librarianship in the English Speaking World*, 1980 p.p. 3 and 4).

What Laundry wrote is almost three decades back is even more relevant today than ever before.