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Relaxation for Limited Category of OCIs

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Why in News

The Ministry of Home Affairs has relaxed the Visa and travel restrictions for a limited category of stranded Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders to come to the country.

Key Points

- The life-long visa to OCIs was temporarily suspended in March in the wake of **Covid-19** pandemic.
- Several OCIs were feeling discriminated against as it stopped them from flying to India on the special flights being arranged by the government under the **Vande Bharat scheme**.
- The categories allowed by the MHA on include:
 - Minors born to Indian nationals abroad and holding OCI cards,
 - Those who wish to come to India on account of family emergencies.
 - Couples where one spouse is a cardholder and the other is an Indian national and they have a permanent residence in India.
 - University students who are cardholders (not legally minors) but whose parents are Indian citizens living in India.

Overseas Citizenship of India Scheme

- A Committee on the Indian Diaspora under the **Chairmanship of L.M. Singhvi, in 2002** recommended the amendment of the Citizenship Act (1955) to provide for grant of **dual citizenship to the Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs)** belonging to certain specified countries.
- Accordingly, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003, made provision for acquisition of Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) by the PIOs of 16 specified countries other than Pakistan and Bangladesh.

- Later, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2005, expanded the scope of grant of **OCI for PIOs of all countries** except **Pakistan and Bangladesh** as long as their home countries all dual citizenship under their local laws.
- It must be noted here that the **OCI is not actually a dual citizenship** as the Indian Constitution **forbids dual citizenship or dual nationality (Article 9)**.
 - OCI does **not confer political rights**.
 - The registered Overseas Citizens of India shall not be entitled to the rights conferred on a citizen of India under article 16 of the Constitution with regard to equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.
- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2015, replaced the nomenclature of “Overseas Citizen of India” with that of “Overseas Citizen of India Cardholder”.
- The OCI scheme provides facilities like life-long visa, exemption from registration with Foreigners Regional Registration Office and parity with NRIs in economic, financial and educational fields except purchase of agricultural properties, political and public employment rights.

Source:The Hindu