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Vande Bharat Mission: One of Top Civilian Evacuations

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Why in News

The **Vande Bharat Mission (VBM)**, which started repatriating Indians stranded abroad due to Covid-19 and the resultant lockdowns since May 2020, has become **one of the largest evacuations of civilians by a country.**

Key Points

- **Vande Bharat Mission (VBM):**

- It is the **biggest civilian evacuation exercise to bring back Indian citizens stranded abroad amidst the coronavirus-induced travel restrictions.**
- It has **surpassed the large-scale airlift of 1,77,000 people in 1990 at the onset of the Gulf War.**
- The mission is **undergoing its 10th phase** and has **carried 32 lakh passengers approximately both inbound and outbound.**
- **National carrier Air India**, alongwith its **budget carrier Air India Express (AIE)** carried out the bulk of air transfers under the mission.
 - **AIE** used its fleet to **lift agricultural products**, mainly fruits and vegetables (the most sought-after items among the NRI Indians), **to West Asian countries**, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.
- Besides, helping distressed rural farmers and the NRIs, the aim of the mission is to **keep the supply chain intact.**
- While overseas Indians from as many as 93 countries have availed repatriation through the VBM, the government has entered into special travel arrangements called '**air travel bubbles**' with 18 different countries so far.
 - **Transport bubbles** or **air travel arrangements** are temporary arrangements between two countries aimed at restarting commercial passenger services when regular international flights are suspended as a result of the pandemic.
 - **It allows carriers of both the countries to fly passengers either way** without any restrictions.
 - Reciprocal in nature, the bilateral pact aims to benefit airlines from both countries with faster repatriations.
- Due to **a recent spurt in Covid-19 cases** in the country and many countries of late, **patronage has come down in the VBM flights.**

- **Other Civilian Rescue Missions:**

- **Evacuation from the Gulf (1990-91):**

- Until VBM, **India's evacuation of civilians from Kuwait during the 1990-91 Gulf war** had been the world's largest evacuation exercise of civilians by air.
- Around 1,77,000 Indians were caught in the war which left millions homeless and many dead. Air India, at that time, operated around 500 flights over two months.

- **Operation Raahat:**

- It was **launched by the Indian Armed Forces**, to evacuate 4,640 Indian citizens and 960 foreign nationals of 41 countries from Yemen **during the 2015 Yemen Crisis**.
- The evacuation took place **both by sea and the air**.

- **Operation Maitri:**

- The rescue and relief operation was carried out by the government of India and Indian armed forces in the **aftermath of the April 2015 Nepal earthquake**.
- The Indian Armed Forces evacuated around 5,188 persons, while nearly 785 foreign tourists were provided transit visas.

- **Operation Safe Homecoming:**

- It was **launched by the Indian government on 26th February, 2011** to evacuate its citizens, fleeing from the **Libyan Civil War**.
- The air-sea operation was conducted by the Indian Navy and Air India. Around 15,000 civilians were rescued in the operation.

- **Operation Sukoon:**

- It was an operation **carried out by the Indian Navy** to evacuate Indian, Sri Lankan and Nepalese nationals, from the conflict zone during the **2006 Lebanon War**.
- It was one of the largest evacuations conducted by the Indian Navy in which a total of 2,280 people were evacuated.

Source: TH