



Indian Diaspora

Why in News?

- Recently India celebrated its 15th Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas from 21st January to 23rd January.
- India every year celebrates its Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas on 9th January to commemorate return of its most iconic Pravasi M.K. Gandhi from Africa on 9th Jan 1915.
- India would be celebrating Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary in the year 2019.

Indian Diaspora

- The Diaspora encompasses a group of people who can either trace their origins to India or who are Indian citizens living abroad, either temporarily or permanently.
- It includes Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Overseas Citizens of India (OCI).
- PIO and OCI card holders were merged under OCI category in 2015.

Overseas Citizen of India

- A person with OCI status is not an Indian citizen. The person does not have voting rights in India, nor can contest elections or hold any constitutional office.
- An Overseas Citizen of India is however entitled to some benefits such as a multiple-entry, multi-purpose life-long visa to visit India.
- They are exempted from police reporting for any length of stay in the country.
- They are also granted all rights in parity with NRIs except, the right to acquisition of agricultural or plantation properties.

Non-Resident Indian

- An Indian citizen who is ordinarily residing outside India and holds an Indian Passport.
 - A person is considered NRI if She is not in India for 182 days or more during the financial year Or;
 - If he/she is in India for less than 365 days during the 4 years preceding that year and less than 60 days in that year.
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- Indian example of large scale migration began during the British rule as indentured labourers to former colonies like Fiji, Kenya and Malaysia (also known as **Girmitiya people**).
 - Today the Indian diaspora numbers over 20 million, reflecting the full multiplicity, variety of the rich social, ethnic and cultural tapestry of the land of its origin.

Importance of Overseas Indian

- One of the greatest benefits of engaging with the 30-million-strong Indian diaspora has been in terms of remittances.
- Remittances close to 69 billion dollar make an invaluable contribution by aiding in socio-economic development, poverty reduction and changes in consumption behaviour in rural areas.
- NRIs are more prone to donating to domestic charities because of the **strong cultural and emotional feelings** that they nurse.

- Diaspora acts as '**agents of change**' facilitating and enhancing investment, accelerating industrial development, and boosting international trade and tourism.
- Another tangible long-term advantage in nurturing ties with an active Diaspora is an accelerated technological sector.
- A less tangible but important advantage in having a large emigrant group is "**diaspora diplomacy**" and they act as "**bridge-builders**" between their home and adopted countries.
- Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal is a case in point, as ethnic Indians in United States successfully lobbied for clinching of the N-deal.
- The migration of less-skilled labour (especially to West Asia) has also helped in bringing down disguised unemployment in India.
- Migration of skilled labours to foreign countries and their eventual success bolstered the nation's image.
- Diaspora's motives to invest in India are in contrast to non-diaspora FDI. Their investments are long lasting as many of them wish to establish a long-term base in India.

Government Initiative

- Government's initiatives towards the diaspora are two-pronged. Firstly non-residents are provided with consular services, protection and outreach activities.
- At the same time, policies are created to encourage the diaspora to contribute in India's growth through philanthropy, knowledge transfers, and investments in development projects.
- There is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) for implementation of the **Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY)**.

Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana

- The objective of the Scheme is to institutionalize the process of skill development of emigrant Indian workers.
- Provide them basic knowledge about laws, language and culture of the destination countries for the purpose of overseas employment.
- The Scheme also aims at capacity building in the country in the area of development of standards, learning material, assessment standards, testing and certification on par with global standards.
- Indian Government has also launched **Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC)** under which 100 scholarships per annum are granted to Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) and Non Resident Indians (NRI) students for undergraduate courses.
- **Know India Program' (KIP)** is a flagship initiative for Diaspora engagement which familiarizes Indian-origin youth (18-30 years) with their Indian roots and contemporary India.
- Under **Minimum Referral Wages (MRW)**, applicable to **Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries**, India has increased the minimum wages of Indian workers employed as industrial workers, domestic servants, cleaners and labourers.
- **E-migrate system** requires all foreign employers to register in the database. It ensures the welfare and check on exploitation met to emigrants.
- Indian government has also started **Madad Portal** to take timely and speedy action on grievances addressed by people living abroad.
- In words of our prime minister, Indian diaspora are our 'Rashtradoots'. He addressed Indian diaspora in different parts of the world from Madison Square, New York to Kigali, Rwanda.
- The Government of India has given several incentives to NRIs for investing their funds in India. They are exempt from several taxes and other charges. NRI seats are reserved in all the medical, engineering and other professional colleges.
- The Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2017 the provision would help non-resident Indians (NRIs) to participate in the electoral process. It extends the facility of 'proxy voting' to overseas Indians, on the lines of service voters.

Challenges

- **Outside India**

- **Rising incidence of hate speech and crimes** against Indian Diaspora by the locals due to racism, communalism emboldened by coming of nationalist and ultra nationalist governments to power in many countries.
- **Increasing anti globalization:** Fear of losing jobs and educational opportunities to outsiders has resulted in stricter visa rules in many countries including USA, Australia etc.
- Sectarian crisis, increasing terrorist activities and war in the Middle East countries (Yemen, Oman, Libya, Syria etc) leave our diaspora vulnerable to attacks.
- **Adverse local laws** to encourage more employment from locals such as **Nitaqat Law of Saudi Arabia** (mandates one local to be hired in place of 10 migrants) has adversely affected prospects of the Indian working class in Saudi Arabia.
- **In India**
 - Out Migration results in substantial drop in the supply of professionals for running institutions and organisations in India.
 - Remittances are not always used for beneficial purposes. For instance, India faced problems due to foreign funding for extremist movements like the Khalistan movement.
 - The NRIs are not allowed to set up their firms directly in India due to which India is not able to take the advantage of their entrepreneurial skills.
 - **E-Migrate system and the Minimum Referral Wages** policy have been detrimental to India as companies now find it easier to hire labour from countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan.
 - Poor schemes coupled with ineffectual implementation hinder the Diasporas' contribution towards the growth of India.

Way Forward

- India should formalise a rotation program wherein top NRI scientists, engineers, doctors, managers and professionals serve Indian public sector organizations for a brief period, lending their expertise, similar to VAJRA Scheme.
- India should aggressively court NRIs to invest in India — especially for projects which focus on rural development — by offering attractive interest rates on deposits.
- India can open a separate Minister-of-State level department for NRI administration - similar to the Veterans' Administration in the US.
- Social media tools have made it easy and inexpensive for Indian Diaspora to stay in touch with family and friends back home, and their link to India has never been stronger. It is time that the Indian government leveraged this strong bond for the greater good of the nation.

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