

General Studies – 2; Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora

Evacuation Operations of Indian Diaspora

1) Introduction

- More than 11 million Indians now reside abroad and 20 million travel internationally every year.
- The increasing size and complexity of the Diaspora requires the government to expand capacity and improve procedures
- The Diaspora's security has become an Indian national interest
- India needs to develop a coherent and strong Diaspora strategy that includes strategic evacuation operations.
- Whether it is Operation Raahat in Yemen, Operation Safe Homecoming in Libya, Operation Sukoon in Lebanon and Operation Sankat Mochan in South Sudan, evacuation operations have become a recurrent phenomenon in the world today

2) Background

- On January 26, 1986 South Yemen was being engulfed in a civil war that threatened the lives of thousands of foreigners living there.
- 850 Indians in the country were forced to wait for several days until New Delhi finally managed to convince a merchant ship to pick them up.
- Fast forward almost 30 years, to April 2015, when Yemen was on fire once again.
- Indian government successfully conducted Operation Raahat to evacuate almost 5,000 Indians and nearly 1,000 citizens from 41 other countries.
- Such unprecedented efforts and use of resources reflect New Delhi's new drive to protect the lives and assets of its citizens abroad in times of crisis.

3) Rising Challenges in Protecting a Growing Diaspora

- Given the lack of any formal doctrine or emergency plan, the success of India's missions has mostly been due to the individual sacrifices of officials from its diplomatic corps
- The government will no longer be able to rely on heroic, ad hoc efforts and quick-fix solutions.
- Challenges will only intensify as evacuation operations become larger in scope and public scrutiny increases.
- Keeping track of and monitoring this growing mobile population will pose a significant challenge to the Indian government.
- Statistics does not speak very highly about India's preparedness in times of crisis.
- The evacuation of Indians has become challenging due to factors like the host country's politics, geo-political shifts, the Indian Government's stand on various issues etc.

4) Solutions

- The government will need to build on its rich experience in conducting more than 30 evacuation operations since the 1950s.
- Supporting policy-oriented research at universities and think tanks to document the memory of senior officials
- Formulate a blueprint that lists core tasks for all operations.
- An inter-ministerial committee should prepare a manual with guidelines
- India's diplomatic cadre must be given specific training to operate in hostile environments.

- Police or Army can train Indian Foreign Service probationers to operate in war zones; conduct frequent evacuation simulations and emergency drills
- India will have to invest in cooperative frameworks that facilitate coordination among countries that have large expatriate populations
- Adapt military modernisation plans to increase capacity for out-of-area deployment and evacuation.
- The government will have to invest in new technologies to better monitor the Diaspora's profile and mobility.
- Making the Aadhaar card compulsory to facilitate biometric identity verification and reduce identity fraud during evacuation.
- Licensing clause with commercial airlines which mandates that they will make their aircraft and crew available during crises times for evacuation operations anywhere in the world.
- An agreement with international logistics companies and transport operators with insurance liabilities would facilitate immediate movement of the people to the focal point of evacuation.
- Forge agreements with friendly countries for sea and air bases.

5) Conclusion

- As India aspires to become an important global power in the near future it would need the consistent support of the Indian Diaspora.
- The Government should consider these steps and put them urgently in place so that India is able to invest in its capacity to carry out airlifts in the future.

