

15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention

January 31, 2019

Manifest Pedagogy

Diaspora as an issue has become relevant due to the activism of present Government towards the particular group ranging from converting the Ministry for Overseas Indians to a department under Ministry of External Affairs to the present 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention. Questions may be related to provisions for the diaspora by the Government or may be specific to a particular country and the importance of Indian diaspora in that country. Importance should be given to those diaspora groups which have been making news in the past year.

In news

The 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention was held at Varanasi

Placing it the syllabus

Role of diaspora in Indian Foreign Policy (not explicitly mentioned)

Static dimensions

1. Ways of Migration and Indian Diaspora
2. Diaspora diplomacy of India under various Governments
3. Pravasi Bharatiya Divas
4. Various provisions for Diaspora

Current dimensions

1. Key initiatives for Indian diaspora under the present Government
2. 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention

Content

Where was it held and its theme

The 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention was **held at Varanasi**, Uttar Pradesh.

The **theme** of 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) 2019 was **“Role of Indian Diaspora in building a New India.”**

In reverence to the sentiments of the larger diaspora to participate in Kumbh Mela and Republic Day celebrations, the 15th PBD Convention is being organized from 21 to 23 January 2019 instead of 9th January. After the Convention, participants will visit Prayagraj for Kumbh Mela on 24th January.

What is PBD, History and its objectives

- The decision to celebrate PBD was taken by the former Indian Prime Minister, **late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee**. PBD is celebrated on **9th January** every year to mark the contribution of the Overseas Indian community in the development of India.
- January 9 was chosen as the day to celebrate this occasion since it was **on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi, returned to India from South Africa**, led India's freedom struggle and changed the lives of Indians forever.
- 14th PBD held during 7–9 January 2017 at Bengaluru, Karnataka was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The theme for the 14th PBD was “Redefining engagement with the Indian diaspora”.

Objectives

- PBD is celebrated to strengthen the engagement of the overseas Indian community with the Government of India and reconnect them with their roots.
- During the Convention, selected overseas Indians are also honored with the prestigious **Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award** to recognize their contributions to various fields both in India and abroad.

What is the importance of Diaspora in India

A recent UN report says that **India now has the largest 'diaspora' in the world**, with more than 16 million persons of Indian origin living abroad. This Non-Resident Indian (NRI) pool represents a little over 1 per cent of India's population but is a crucial cog in the wheel of India's development.

How does the Indian diaspora benefit India?

The biggest way is through regular **remittances**. According to a World Bank report 2016-17, India was the largest remittance-receiving country in the world, with an estimated \$69 billion in 2015.

This amounts to a whopping 3.4 percent of India's GDP, an amazing multiplier because just 1 percent of the citizenry, which does not even live in the country, **contributes more than three times its fair share to the nation's wealth.**

Stimulating the economy

- There are **other advantages** which diaspora populations bring that are harder to measure. When they visit India, they tend to spend more lavishly than the locals, thereby **helping economic activity.**
- NRIs are more prone to **donating to domestic charities** because of the strong cultural and emotional feelings that they nurse.

- **They bring technical and domain expertise to domestic startups and often act as angel investors.**
- Indian faculty abroad volunteer time and resources to help faculty in Indian campuses **improve the quality of education** – as in the case of member institutions of the Indo Universal Collaboration of Engineering Education.
- With a little commitment and some creative thinking, the government could double or even treble the already substantial economic value of diaspora contributions by carefully designing a set of policies to exploit the talent, industriousness and patriotism of those living abroad.
- Diasporas have emerged as one of the agents of development in today's world. India's experience with the IT industry can be cited as one of the best instances of Diaspora-induced development.
- The Indian Diaspora has shared a symbiotic relationship with the Indian **IT industry**, where both have reinforced each other's quantitative and qualitative growth over the decades. On the one hand, the Indian Diaspora brought a multi-layered gain to the IT industry in terms of enhanced skills; capital formation (human, social and financial); inward remittances; foreign direct investment flows; creation of networks/markets and a boost for India's image.
- On the other hand, the Indian IT industry created a strong incentive for the mobility of highly skilled professionals and provided the Diaspora with the much needed opportunity to engage with their motherland.

Diaspora diplomacy by various PMs and various initiatives taken by the government for them

- It was **Atal Bihari Vajpayee** who shaped India's policy on the diaspora, During his visit to New York for the annual United Nations General Assembly, he was honored by community reception organised by the Indian diaspora

there. As always, he welcomed the diaspora audience effusively.

- Vajpayee may have been instrumental in taking the millions of Indians abroad and working to turn them into force multipliers for India's diplomacy.
- While there had been episodic efforts in the past to engage with this demographic, Vajpayee institutionalized the outreach. He appointed Baton Rouge, Louisiana-based lawyer Bhishma Agnihotri, as the nation's ambassador-at-large for overseas Indians. **His government also established the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas.**
- In a sense, that may well have been a repayment of debt: After Western nations imposed sanctions up on India following the 1998 Pokhran-II nuclear tests, New Delhi turned to this bloc for a bailout, with the **Resurgent India Bonds, issued by the Reserve Bank of India.** That was followed by the India Millennium issue two years later, which was also oversubscribed.
- More importantly, his tenure saw the community abroad being mobilized to promote India's interests in their adopted lands. Subsequent governments built on that foundation.
- The first UPA **Government of Manmohan Singh** established the **Ministry of Non-Resident Indians' Affairs, which became the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs.** Though it no longer exists as a separate ministry, even a cursory scan of Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj's Twitter feed is evidence of how the government remains receptive to the diaspora.
- After then Prime Minister Singh signed a path-breaking civil nuclear deal with the American President of that time, George W Bush, it was the Indian-American community that lobbied members of Congress in the years that followed to facilitate its passage.
- Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** has taken it to another level. Interestingly, his first community event outside India after assuming the post was at Madison Square

Garden, which was originally to be the venue of the 2003 Vajpayee event, except that the New York landmark was unavailable for that particular day.

- The 31-million strong NRI and PIO populations abroad have become a brain trust and bridge-builders between the mother country and their adopted homelands. With their potential role in the unfolding of a national renaissance, diaspora outreach has become the signature diplomatic style of PM Modi and the Indian government's unstinting commitment to their welfare.
- **To facilitate engagement with the diaspora, and to assist business, educational and tourist travelers, the Government has taken a slew of initiatives** to simplify and improve passport, visa, and consular services. The passport services became the embodiment of service excellence, having achieved the unique distinction of becoming the only Mission Mode Project to receive three ISO certifications (9001:2008, 20000: 2011, 27001: 2013) together.
- Following are the key initiatives of the government for diaspora;

1. National pension scheme for NRIs
2. Online services for voters
3. Overseas citizenship of India scheme
4. Know India programme
5. Scholarship programme for Diaspora children
6. Indian community welfare fund
7. Pravasi Bharatiya kendra
8. Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards (PBSA)
9. Regional Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (RPBD)
10. Study India Programme (SIP)
11. Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) Card Scheme