

Vande Bharat Mission

September 17, 2020

Vande Bharat mission is the **massive repatriation operation** planned by the Indian government to **bring back stranded Indians** in different parts of the world in the wake of the coronavirus crisis. Citizens in distress will be brought back on **commercial aircraft and naval ships** based on lists prepared by the India's embassies. Over ten lakhs Indians are expected to return home, and more than two lakhs are from the UAE alone.

Features of the Mission

- Over 11.2 lakh Indians have returned from abroad after the government launched the evacuation mission. India has repatriated over 87% of residents who had registered with Indian missions requesting to be evacuated.
- Negotiations on air travel arrangements with 18 more countries-Australia, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Nigeria, Bahrain, Israel, Kenya, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka are ongoing.
- India had **suspended all scheduled international passenger flights on March 23 due to the coronavirus pandemic.**
- **Air India and private Indian carriers** have been operating the unscheduled repatriation flights for Indians stuck abroad.
- The **bilateral air bubbles** arrangements with the US, Canada, UK, France, Germany, UAE, Qatar and Maldives have facilitated the repatriation operation.
- Air bubbles refer to bilateral agreements India has struck or is in the process of finalising with specific countries to **allow their national carriers to ferry passengers back and forth from India.** This is besides the Indian operators.

- Earlier, the only option was to hop on to any of the Vande Bharat Mission flights (or chartered flights) being operated initially by Air India and Air India Express, subsequently followed by IndiGo and SpiceJet.

Conditions of the Mission

- However, **air bubbles don't mean the resumption of commercial international passenger flight operations.** These are still repatriation flights, where countries have agreed to allow each others' carriers to fly in and out of their respective countries but with conditions attached.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs has said that only **persons who are citizens of destination countries; who are green card or OCI card holders; who are holding visa of that country with residual validity of three months, can travel abroad.**
- Indian nationals with a **confirmed offer of employment/ internship/ admission in an educational institution** can be allowed with a visa of that destination country with a minimum residual validity of one month.
- However, this is all still subject to the rules set by the destination country, which could override the concessions made by India.
- Similarly, foreigners wanting to travel to India, have to abide by the rules set by the Indian administration.
- The categories allowed to travel to India include **healthcare, business, manufacturing, engineering/ managerial/ design specialists** and some others, subject to specific conditions being satisfied.