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India's Efficiency in Evacuation

Why in news?

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Minister of State for External Affairs told the Lok Sabha that around 95,500 Indian nationals have been brought back from countries affected by war, internal strife, natural disasters as also due to economic slowdown in the Gulf region during the last two years.

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How well is India's evacuation capability?

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- On 1986, South Yemen was being engulfed in a civil war that threatened the lives of thousands of foreigners living there.

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- While Britain, France and the Soviet Union coordinated to jointly evacuate their nationals, the 850 Indians in the country were forced to wait for several more days till evacuation was facilitated.

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- On April 2015, Yemen was once again under unrest. This time, however, the Indian government successfully conducted **Operation Raahat** to evacuate almost 5,000 Indians and nearly 1,000 citizens from 41 other countries.

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- Besides Air India aircraft, the Indian Navy deployed vessels, and the Indian Air Force C-17 Globemasters for strategic airlift.

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- Such unprecedented efforts and resources reflect New Delhi's new drive to protect the lives and assets of its citizens abroad in times of crisis.

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- But most of these operations are successful because of heroic efforts by individual officials or quick-fix solutions. There is no proper protocol or policy setup.

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What should be done?

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- The government should document its rich experience in conducting more than 30 evacuations and institutionalise them so that it is passed on to younger generation officials.

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- An **inter-ministerial committee should prepare a manual with guidelines** that establish a clear chain of command and division of competencies, identify regional support bases, assembly points and routes for evacuation and develop country-specific warden systems to communicate with expatriates.

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- India's diplomatic cadre must be given specific training to operate in hostile environments.

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- The government could instruct the police or army **to train Indian Foreign Service probationers to operate in war zones**, conduct frequent evacuation simulations and emergency drills and create rapid reaction teams.

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- India will have to **invest in cooperative frameworks** that facilitate coordination among countries that have large expatriate populations in West Asia, in particular Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

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- The government will have to assign a greater role to its armed forces, in particular by strengthening the Navy and Air Force's capacity to operate in tandem with civilian authorities.

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- It should direct the military to develop a **non-combatant evacuation doctrine**, designate the Integrated Defence Staff as the nodal organisation to improve inter-services and civil-military coordination.

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- To avoid cost inflation and delays, the government must establish a

permanent **civil reserve air fleet that pools aircraft** from all Indian airlines based on pre-established requisition and reimbursement procedures.

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- The government will have to invest in new technologies to better monitor the diaspora's profile and mobility.

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- This can be achieved by encouraging more diplomatic missions to provide **online consular registration forms, developing an online registration system for overseas travellers, utilising social media.**

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- The government must expand efforts to manage public opinion and be able to conduct a **quiet diplomacy** that is crucial to safely extricate Overseas Indians from conflict zones.

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Source: The Hindu

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