

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO OVERSEAS CITIZENSHIP : POLITY

NEWS: 35 million diaspora are India's pride, says PM Modi in Trinidad and Tobago

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

India has extended the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card to sixth-generation Indian-origin citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, marking a significant diaspora outreach as the Caribbean nation celebrates the 180th anniversary of Girmitya migration. This reflects India's growing focus on cultural, digital, and diplomatic engagement with its global diaspora.

Context and Announcement

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced in Trinidad and Tobago that sixth-generation Indian-origin citizens of the Caribbean nation will soon be eligible to receive the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card.
- This comes as Trinidad and Tobago prepares to commemorate the 180th anniversary of the arrival of the Girmityas in 2025.

About the Girmitya Community

- Girmityas were indentured Indian labourers who migrated under a contractual system ("Girmit" being a colloquial form of "Agreement") during the 19th and early 20th centuries.
- They were sent to work in British colonies such as Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, and others.
- A large number of them came from regions in Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh, preserving their Bhojpuri linguistic and cultural heritage.

Significance of Trinidad and Tobago

- The nation has a significant Indian-origin population that forms a vital part of its demographic and cultural fabric.
- Trinidad and Tobago became the first Caribbean country to adopt India's UPI (Unified Payments Interface) system, marking a major step in digital and financial cooperation.

Indian Diaspora: Overview

- The Indian diaspora includes both Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), currently totalling over 35.42 million globally.
- Top host countries include the USA (5.4 million), UAE (3.6 million), Malaysia (2.9 million), Canada (2.8 million), and Saudi Arabia (2.4 million).
- According to the UN World Migration Report 2024, India has the highest number of international migrants (around 18 million).

Importance of the Indian Diaspora

- **Remittances:** In 2024, India received a record \$129.1 billion in remittances, accounting for 14.3% of the global total.
- **Investments & Trade:** Diaspora investments boost real estate, startups, and bilateral trade between India and host countries.
- **Technology & Innovation:** Indian-origin professionals contribute to global innovation ecosystems and promote technology transfer.
- **Cultural Ambassadorship:** The diaspora has played a crucial role in promoting Indian festivals, yoga, languages, and films worldwide.
- **Policy Influence & Citizen Diplomacy:** Diaspora lobbying often helps advance Indian interests in foreign policy and image-building abroad.

Challenges Faced by the Diaspora

- **No Dual Citizenship:** Limits political rights and emotional engagement.
- **Racial and Religious Discrimination:** Incidents of xenophobia and intolerance in the West and Gulf regions.
- **Legal & Economic Exploitation:** Labour rights violations, especially among blue-collar workers in the Gulf.
- **Cultural Alienation:** Second and third-generation diaspora often struggle with identity and integration.
- **Rise of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment:** Far-right populism in Western democracies poses challenges to immigrant communities.

Government Initiatives to Engage the Diaspora

- **Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (9 January):** Celebrates diaspora contributions and commemorates Gandhi's return from South Africa.
- **Overseas Citizen of India (OCI):** Offers lifelong visa-free entry, economic rights, and cultural privileges to eligible PIOs (up to 4th generation).
- **Know India Programme (KIP):** Aims to re-connect diaspora youth (aged 21-35) with Indian heritage and governance.
- **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR):** Drives cultural diplomacy through academic exchanges, language promotion, and cultural shows.
- **e-Migrate System:** Streamlines overseas employment and ensures worker protections through formal channels.
- **Bharatiya Pravasi Samman Award:** Government's highest award for outstanding diaspora contributions to their communities or India.
- **Madad Portal:** Online grievance mechanism to aid Indians abroad facing consular or legal challenges.

- **VAJRA Scheme:** Encourages Indian-origin scientists to engage in collaborative research in Indian institutions.
- **Global Pravasi Rishta Portal & App:** Enhances digital outreach and communication between Indian missions and diaspora individuals.

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