

Event Report: Report Launch by Carnegie, India and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), 5th January, 2017

In the run-up to the 14th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) held in Bangalore from the 7th until the 9th of January 2017, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), in partnership with Carnegie India, launched the report 'Bringing the Diaspora Home: India's Expatriate Evacuation Operations' by Dr. Constantino Xavier.

The event was chaired by **Dr. A. Didar Singh, Secretary General, FICCI**, who outlined the economic importance of this subject. He was of the view that successful evacuation operations lend credibility to the government which in turn benefits the economy by way of remittances (USD 68.9 Billion in 2015-16), transfer of knowledge and skills by the Indian Diaspora. Dr Singh also remarked on the relevance of the report to bring awareness on India's accomplishments in its successful evacuation operations.

In the discussion on this important subject, the following could be considered major takeaways:

1. **Evolution of a Diaspora Engagement Strategy:** While some discussants were of the view that the Government of India's engagement with the Diaspora has been progressive, bolstered by social media outreach and regional pressures, others were more critical. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), some felt, has not geared up for the exponential growth of the Diaspora the world over.
2. **Infrastructure and strategic preparedness:**
 - a. **Infrastructure:** Need for more stand-by aircrafts and ships; need for forward military presence in the form of navy patrolling.
 - a. **Strategic:** Panelists asserted that the role of maritime diplomacy and the role of international relations and cooperation cannot be underestimated. In addition to this, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) must be developed. This may be differentiated from a uniform operational doctrine which is not just unnecessary but also undesirable. Discussants were of the view that the cooperation from the country of destination

(especially if it is in a state of turmoil, civil war, controlled by rebels etc.) is more important than the political ideology (such as non-alignment) followed by the country of origin. Participants were of the view that the MEA must lead efforts in evacuation operations but there is a greater need for policy coherence in order to overcome the *silo* mentality of different ministries. There is also a need for dedicated Taskforces, necessary involvement of the Ministry of Home Affairs and state governments. The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) should also be considered an important part of these evacuation operations as this a part of their core competence/mandate.

3. **‘Optimizing the existing wheel’ as opposed to reinventing the wheel:**

b. Institutionalizing use of existing expertise: Lessons from the Indian experience need to be institutionalized, collective memory from successful operations as well as anecdotal experience is of great value for building capacities.

c. Learning from others: While some stressed on the need to learn from the experiences of successful operations of other countries in evacuation operations, other panelists asserted that the shortcoming of physical capacity and the lack of access due to international standing are among the impediments that evacuation operations face.

4. **Post-evacuation phase (reintegration and return):** Panelists were of the view that responsibility must go beyond bringing Indian citizens home. A coherent approach towards integration is required including the need for state governments to be involved so that education, health and other facilities are provided.

About the report:

More than 11 million Indian citizens now reside worldwide, more than 20 million travel internationally every year, and around ten million Indian passports are issued every year. Given their rising role in India's economic development, with their remittances accounting for more than 3 per cent of its GDP, Overseas Indians have now become a priority for New Delhi's foreign and security policies. The Indian government has therefore committed unprecedented attention to the safety of the diaspora, especially during recent crises in the Gulf region. However, given the lack of any formal doctrine or emergency plan, the paper shows that the relative success of India's evacuation operations has mostly been due to the individual sacrifices of its officials and that the government must go beyond punctual efforts and quick-fix solutions.

Based on new data and interviews with officials, **Dr. Xavier's** paper assesses India's experience in conducting these missions and forwards policy recommendations on how these can be improved. Such measures should include institutionalizing best practices as standard operating procedures and emergency plans; improving operational coordination between various ministries and agencies; training its diplomatic cadre to operate in hostile environments; increasing operational coordination and cooperation with foreign governments; and attributing a greater role to the armed forces, strengthening its capacity to plan and deploy in tandem with civilian authorities.

The paper can be downloaded at <http://ceip.org/2hO7Dqb>
