

3. Pravasi Bharatiya Divas – History

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated once in two years on 9th January. The 18th edition took place in 2025 and the 19th is expected in 2027

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD)– Background and Significance

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is a flagship event of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India. It is celebrated every year on 9 January, commemorating the return of Mahatma Gandhi to India from South Africa in 1915, marking the beginning of his leadership in India's freedom struggle. Gandhi is regarded as the greatest Pravasi, symbolising the transformative role the diaspora can play in national resurgence. The first PBD Convention was held in 2003, institutionalising structured engagement between India and its global diaspora. Since 2015, PBD has been organised as a biennial event, with theme-based conferences conducted in the intervening years to maintain continuity and relevance.

The event serves as

1. A platform for dialogue
2. Recognition of diaspora contributions
3. Policy feedback and partnership building

Indian Diaspora– Definition and Global Presence

The Indian diaspora includes

1. Non-Resident Indians (NRIs)– Indian citizens residing abroad temporarily or permanently
2. Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs)– Foreign citizens with Indian ancestry

As per MEA data (2024)

1. Total diaspora population– ~35.42 million
2. NRIs– 15.85 million
3. PIOs– 19.57 million

Top five host countries

1. United States– 5.4 million
2. United Arab Emirates– 3.6 million
3. Malaysia– 2.9 million
4. Canada– 2.8 million
5. Saudi Arabia– 2.4 million

According to the UN World Migration Report 2024– India is the largest source country of international migrants globally, with nearly 18 million migrants abroad.

Importance of the Indian Diaspora for India

Economic Contributions

Remittances

1. India received USD 129.1 billion in remittances in 2024, the highest ever for any country.
2. India's share of global remittances stood at 14.3% in 2025, the highest for any country since 2000.
3. Remittances
 - a) Strengthen foreign exchange reserves
 - b) Support rural consumption and poverty reduction
 - c) Act as a shock absorber during economic downturns

Investment and Trade Facilitation – NRIs and PIOs contribute through

1. Real estate investments
2. Startup funding and venture capital
3. Infrastructure and manufacturing projects

Diaspora networks facilitate

1. Market access
2. Business partnerships
3. Supply-chain integration

Technology, Knowledge, and Innovation – Indian-origin professionals in

1. Silicon Valley
2. Global academia
3. Multinational corporations act as conduits for
4. Knowledge transfer
5. Research collaboration
6. Mentorship for Indian startups

They strengthen India's participation in the global knowledge economy.

Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy – Diaspora acts as cultural ambassadors, promoting

1. Indian languages
2. Yoga and Ayurveda
3. Cuisine, cinema, and festivals

Their visibility enhances India's

1. Cultural influence
2. Civilisational appeal
3. Global brand image

Policy Advocacy and Citizen Diplomacy – Diaspora communities influence

1. Host-country legislatures
 2. Policy debates
 3. Media narratives
- often in favour of India.

During diplomatic crises or negative narratives, diaspora networks provide–

1. Informal advocacy
2. Image correction
3. Political reassurance

Challenges Faced by the Indian Diaspora

Citizenship and Legal Constraints – India does not allow dual citizenship, limiting

1. Political participation
2. Emotional and institutional attachment

OCI status, while beneficial, does not confer full civic rights.

Racism, Xenophobia, and Safety Issues – Rising racial violence and discrimination reported in

1. USA
2. UK
3. Australia
4. South Africa

Creates insecurity, particularly for students and professionals.

Migration and Employment Vulnerabilities – Restrictive visa regimes, deportations, and uncertainty around

1. Work permits
2. Skilled migration pathways

Low-wage Indian workers in Gulf countries face

1. Exploitative contracts
2. Wage delays
3. Unsafe housing
4. Long working hours

Identity and Cultural Alienation – Second- and third-generation diaspora youth often face

1. Identity crises
2. Cultural disconnect
3. Assimilation pressures

Political and Economic Backlash – Anti-immigrant sentiment rises during

1. Economic slowdowns
2. Political polarisation

Migrants often become targets of populist politics.

Government Initiatives to Engage the Diaspora

Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) Card – Provides

1. Lifelong visa-free entry
2. Parity with NRIs in economic, educational, and financial matters

Restrictions

1. No political rights
2. No agricultural land ownership

Available to eligible PIOs up to the 4th generation (excluding Pakistan/Bangladesh origin).

Know India Programme (KIP) – Short-term orientation programme for diaspora youth (21–35 years).

Aims to

1. Familiarise participants with Indian culture
2. Expose them to governance, development, and institutions
3. Strengthen emotional bonds

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) – Promotes Indian culture abroad through

1. Cultural centres
2. Academic chairs
3. Scholarships
4. Artist and scholar exchanges

e-Migrate System – Digital platform to regulate overseas employment. Ensures

1. Verified recruitment agencies
2. Standardised employment contracts
3. Grievance redressal for migrant workers

Bharatiya Pravasi Samman Award – Highest civilian honour for the diaspora. Recognises

1. Professional excellence
2. Philanthropy
3. Contribution to India's global standing

Madad Portal – Online grievance redressal system by MEA. Provides assistance related to

1. Consular services
2. Passports
3. Legal issues
4. Emergency support

VAJRA Scheme – Invites Indian-origin scientists abroad to collaborate with Indian institutions. Strengthens

1. Advanced research
2. Brain circulation rather than brain drain

Global Pravasi Rishta Portal and App – Digital platform connecting diaspora with

1. Indian missions
2. Government initiatives
3. Outreach and registration services

Conclusion – The Indian diaspora represents a strategic national asset, not merely a population abroad. Through remittances, technology transfer, soft power, and advocacy, it plays a crucial role in India's

1. Economic growth
2. Global influence
3. Diplomatic resilience

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas symbolises India's recognition that nationhood extends beyond geography.

Going forward, India must

1. Enhance migrant protection
2. Deepen diaspora integration into development strategies
3. Balance emotional connect with pragmatic policy engagement

A well-engaged diaspora strengthens India's position as a confident, outward-looking global power.

Source- <https://ddnews.gov.in/en/pravasi-bharatiya-divas-honouring-the-contributions-and-achievements-of-indias-diaspora/>

