Modi’s Houston Address - Significance of Indian Diaspora

What is the issue?

- Indian Prime Minster and U.S. President Trump are to address the Indian American community in Houston, U.S.
- Here is a look at what it means to India’s diaspora diplomacy.

How did the Indian diaspora evolve?

- There was significant Indian migration (both labour and capital) during the 19th century.
- With this, the diaspora became an important part of the emergence of India as a nation in the first half of the 20th century.
- But, there was fear in many newly independent nations that the Indians might become a potential fifth column (a group within a country at war who are sympathetic to or working for its enemies).
- There was also widespread resentment in some parts of Afro-Asia against the privileged economic positions that Indians held in the colonial era.

How significant has it become?

- The Indian diaspora (including non-resident Indians and persons of Indian origin) is estimated to be more than 30 million and is growing.
- Its substantive concentration is in the Anglo-American world, the Gulf and the former colonies of the British empire.
- Increasingly, its presence is growing beyond these traditional areas.
- The political and economic influence of the diaspora is also increasing in the host nations.
- **U.S.** - Nowhere is the presence of the Indian diaspora more expansive than in the US.
- As a rich and accomplished minority, the Indian-American community has become influential in all walks of life in the US.
- Within the US, Texas, California, New York and Illinois are among the states that host large Indian-American communities.
- Houston is among the top 10 American cities hosting the Indian-American community.

How has Delhi’s approach to diaspora evolved?

- Delhi consciously distanced itself from the diasporic communities in the 1950s and 1960s due to nationalist backlash against the Indian communities in Africa and Asia.
- As India turned inwards, it did not pay attention to the "brain drain" happening; many well-trained Indians began to look for opportunities elsewhere.
- It was only in the late 1980s that Delhi began to rethink its approach to the diaspora.
- PM Rajiv Gandhi was the first to appreciate the potential role diaspora could play in advancing national development and improving India's ties with the US.
- As he launched the reform era, P V Narasimha Rao sought investments from the diaspora.
- Further, Atal Bihari Vajpayee formalised India's engagement with the diaspora by institutionalising the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas.

How significant is the Houston gathering?

- The political role of the diaspora has been valuable for Delhi in the US.
- E.g. in the last decade, the diaspora has generated the much needed political support in the US Congress for changing the American non-proliferation laws and facilitating civil nuclear cooperation with India
- For Modi, the Houston engagement is a continuation of his political investment in engaging the Indian diaspora.
- It is based on the recognition that a large and successful diaspora has widened India's footprint and can contribute to domestic and international goals.
- Modi went beyond demanding that the diaspora do more for India. He promised that India would do more for them as well.
- India's diaspora engagement in America could also help elevate the strategic partnership with the US to a higher level.

Source: Indian Express

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