

'Operation Ajay' set to evacuate Indian nationals from Israel

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

India is putting in place a major operation to evacuate its citizens who wish to return from conflict-hit Israel. Announcing the initiative late on Wednesday, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said special chartered flights are being arranged.

This will be the second evacuation this year, after Operation Kaveri that brought back several thousand Indian citizens from conflict-torn Sudan in April-May.

"Launching Operation Ajay to facilitate the return from Israel of our citizens who wish to return. Special charter flights and other arrangements being put in place. Fully committed to the safety and well-being of our nationals abroad," posted Mr. Jaishankar on X, formerly Twitter.

The Indian Embassy in Tel Aviv stated that it has emailed the first lot of registered Indian citizens for

Israel pounds Gaza by air; Hamas fights on

JERUSALEM/GAZA

Israel bombed Gaza overnight ahead of a potential ground assault against Hamas. Israel's death toll reached 1,200 with more than 2,700 wounded, its military said. The group's armed wing, al Qassam Brigades, said it was still fighting inside Israel on Wednesday. » **PAGE 15**

the special flight that is expected to take off for India on Thursday. "Messages to other registered people will follow for subsequent flights," said the embassy in a post on X.

The announcement has come days after Air India suspended its service in the Delhi-Tel Aviv route as Hamas carried out a crippling attack on Israel last Saturday.

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'Operation Ajay' to bring back Indians from Israel

Following that ground, sky and sea attack, Israel has launched a massive military strike against Gaza Strip. The rapid escalation has also drawn the Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, which has lobbed rockets at Israel's northern territory drawing Israeli strikes. The situation has turned the sky above Israel risky prompting cancellation of many international flights.

A source indicated that the scale of Operation Ajay will depend on demand and that the government will augment capacities depending on further need.

Control room set up

India has been preparing for the escalating situation soon after the conflict erupted on Saturday. On Wednesday, the Ministry of External Affairs set up a 24-hour control room, which will operate simultaneously from New Delhi, Tel Aviv and Ramallah in the Palestinian territory.

There are at least 900 Indian students who are enrolled in various Israeli universities and institutions. That apart, a large number of traders, IT professionals and domestic workers and caregivers work in Israel. A significant part of Israeli population consists of Indian-origin Jews who trace their background to Kochi, Kolkata and Mumbai.

After the outbreak of the hostilities, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma had brought to notice that pilgrims were stuck in Bethlehem in Palestinian territories and sought assistance from the External Affairs Minister to evacuate them.

Three-day 'KaniTamil' conference in February

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu government will organise a three-day 'KaniTamil 24' conference here in February 2024 in line with an announcement made in this year's Budget that an international conference on Tamil computing would be

organised, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said on Wednesday.

He said the conference, planned for February 8, 9 and 10, would elaborate on the advancements in computing and exploring the possibilities of using Tamil in natural language processing and artificial intelligence, among others.

Agricultural college to be named after M.S. Swaminathan

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Agricultural College and Research Institute at Eachangkottai in Thanjavur district will be named after renowned agricultural scientist M.S. Swaminathan, who passed away recently, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin announced on Wednesday.

Making a statement in the Assembly, he said the student who ranks first in the college would be given an award named after Swaminathan.

"The evolution of humans from hunter-gatherers to farmers is also a symbol of scientific growth. Dr. M.S. Swaminathan conducted his research in agricultural science in such a manner that it could be implemented successfully in 20th Century India," Mr. Stalin said.

"Dr. M.S. Swaminathan had flagged the issue of global warming in 1969, and he warned in 1989 in Tokyo that the sea level would rise," he recalled.

The Chief Minister said agricultural universities were created and significant research was conducted during the tenure of former Chief Minister M.



M.S. Swaminathan

Karunanidhi. Swaminathan was affectionate towards Karunanidhi, he said, recalling how the agricultural scientist had remembered the former Chief Minister when he passed away.

"M.S. Swaminathan had recalled how *Kalaigarnar* (Karunanidhi) created a biotechnology policy for the State, and said *Kalaigarnar* had always worked for the welfare of farmers," he said.

Panruti MLA T. Velmurugan; CPI(M) MLA V.P. Nagai Mali; Papanasam MLA M.H. Jawahirullah; Congress Legislature Party leader K. Selvaperunthai; PMK MLA G.K. Mani; AIADMK MLA O.S. Manian; and VCK floor leader Sivanthi Selvan welcomed the announcement.

Women's quota — rhetoric and reality

The celebration of the passing of the Women's Reservation Bill by both Houses of Parliament glosses over certain realities about this conditional legislation. The conduct of a census in the country followed by a delimitation of constituencies based on this census are the conditions for this legislation to take effect. Once it is accepted that reservation for women in legislative bodies is a progressive measure, there is no legal or political justification to prolong its implementation.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha, Home Minister Amit Shah justified these conditions saying that there could be legal challenges against the legislation if it is passed without relying on criteria fixed by way of a process of delimitation.

No doubt, a legislation should be based on a solid foundation, and have valid reasons for existence.

In the case of the Women's Reservation Law, the reality is that about half of the population are women and they are under-represented in Parliament and State legislative bodies. Reports show that, of the maximum allowed 550 seats in the Lok Sabha, only 82, i.e., 15% are represented by women, and out of the 250 members in the Rajya Sabha, only 31, i.e., 12% are women. The Global Gender Gap Report places this in a macroscopic context by showing that India ranks 141 out of 185 in its list.

Contentious issue

Article 81 (2) (a) of the Constitution states that the number of seats in the Lok Sabha for a State should have a co-relation with the population of the State and "so far as practicable", the criteria should be the same for all States. Article 170, concerning the legislative Assemblies of States, also takes population as the basis for designing constituencies.

However, delimitation in India is a contentious issue. It acts as an incentive for population



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Parliament has committed an egregious folly in fusing women's reservation with delimitation

expansion with scant regard to development and family planning. This was why a full-fledged delimitation was kept in abeyance in India since 1976. It is now expected to be carried out after the Census which will only be held by 2026 at the earliest.

But, as scholar Nilakantan R.S. predicts, this "demographic detonation" will cause "another big fork in the future allocation of political power and associated resources between the north and south". In his book *South vs North* (2022), Mr. Nilakantan has demonstrated how South India has performed well in sectors such as health, education, economy etc. in comparison to the North.

South Indian States reduced their population by scientific means whereas North Indian States in general and States such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in particular have failed to do so. The South Indian States have raised concerns about this proposed delimitation. This could lead to two outcomes: the delimitation would get prolonged by years which in turn will defer the materialisation of the women's quota law, or it might happen based on population which in turn could translate to undue advantages for certain States in the North.

These are situations that the relevant provisions in the Constitution, namely Articles 81 and 170, failed to foresee. Thus, Parliament has committed an egregious folly in fusing women's reservation with delimitation.

Articles 330 and 332 of the Constitution deal with the reservation of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) in the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assembly of States respectively. Though these Articles mention the relationship between reservation and the population of the SC and ST groups, such a parameter is irrelevant to women's quota. That their share in the total population is almost 50% is undisputed. Further, there cannot be a drastic variation in their population from

one constituency to the other, as it could happen with SC or ST.

Unwarranted conditions

A census to understand the population of women for the purpose of reservation is also unwarranted. The criteria, process and purpose of the Women's Reservation Bill are qualitatively different from those of the delimitation exercise. And, reservation for women in local bodies, which materialised through the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of the Constitution, and came into effect in 1993, was not contingent on any delimitation exercise for that purpose. Parliament, however, has lost sight of these aspects.

How far a constitutional Amendment can be done by way of contingent legislation is an issue too, as certainty is regarded as one of the hallmarks of modern constitutions. In *Hamdard Dawakhana vs Union of India* (1959), the Supreme Court hinted that in conditional legislations, for the statute to take effect, there could be a further dependence on the executive or even on the legislature of the future day, among other things.

Such enactments might be needed on various occasions for multiple reasons. But, by amalgamating the demand for women's reservation with the uncertainty of a future delimitation process, that too in the case of a constitutional amendment, Parliament has made populist rhetoric at best or committed a constitutional blunder at worst. The secrecy maintained on the subject till the commencement of the special session was also thoroughly undemocratic, which in turn, prevented the exposure of the follies of the legislation.

Therefore, with regard to the future of the women's quota in the legislature, one can only have the pessimism of the intelligence and optimism of the will, as Antonio Gramsci famously put it, in a different context.