

Operation Sankat Mochan 2016, Background, India South Sudan Relations

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Operation Sankat Mochan was an evacuation mission carried out by the Indian Air Force in South Sudan capital Juba in July 2016. The operation was aimed at rescuing the Indians in South Sudan who were in danger due to hostilities breaking out between two warring factions. The Minister of State for External Affairs (Retd) General VK Singh headed the operation and brought back with him 150+ stranded Indians and 2 Nepali citizens from South Sudan.

Operation Sankat Mochan Background

Operation Sankat Mochan was put into action once the civil clashes broke out in Juba. As per official records there were 550+ Indians in Juba itself and approximately 150 in other areas around oil wells.

- Major challenge: Despite the direct appeal by the External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, a lot of these people refused to return citing business concerns as an excuse.
- Out of total 156 evacuees, 2 were Nepali Citizens, 9 Women and 3 Children.

- Indian Air Force flight C- 17 was flown via Uganda for Operation Sankat Mochan. Minister of State for External Affairs, Retd Gen V.K Singh who was onboard, met Ugandan Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda who assured India of all possible help
- The Minister was also accompanied by the Economic Relations Secretary, Joint Secretary and Director from the Ministry of External Affairs.
- The flight was brought to Delhi after a brief halt at Thiruvananthapuram where certain evacuees deboarded and were received by state Power Minister and District Collector of Thiruvananthapuram.

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India South Sudan Relations

Until 2011, South Sudan was an autonomous region within Sudan.

- July 2011- India became one of the first countries to recognise its independence from Sudan.
- December 2013- Civil war erupted in South Sudan
- February 2019- 3 years after Operation Sankat Mochan, India and South Sudan signed an MoU called Foreign Office Consultation(FOC) mandating annual consultations alternatively in Juba and New Delhi at Director General or equivalent level

Economic Relations

There is considerable amount of trade between the 2 countries with India importing oil and timber and exporting household items to South Sudan

- Along with presence of few companies across various sectors, ONGC Videsh also has made considerable investments in South Sudan
- Various capacity building measures like specialised courses for South Sudan police and foreign officers are regularly undertaken by India.
- There is huge inflow of Medical Tourists from South Sudan to India
- An MoU is signed between Tilonia's Barefoot college and Evangelical Presbyterian church (On behalf of government) to train older women in solar electrification in villages.
- India also offers various scholarships to South Sudanese students via Indian Council for Cultural Relations and Ministry of External Affairs.

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Operation Sankat Mochan Contemporary Relevance

Operation Sankat Mochan holds significant contemporary relevance for India

- It demonstrated India's commitment to protecting its citizens abroad.
- Internationally also India earned a good reputation by rescuing 2 Nepali nationals under Operation Sankat Mochan. It showcased India's ability to collaborate with other countries and international organizations to ensure safe evacuation.

- It highlighted India's military preparedness and flexibility when we deployed C-17 transport aircraft for humanitarian missions.
- It underscored the importance of effective leadership and coordination when Retd. Gen. V.K. Singh led the operation from the forefront.

Evacuation under Operation Sankat Mochan was meticulously planned in coordination with local authorities as well as support of Indian Peacekeeping contingent in UNMISS. The whole operation was conducted under the direct supervision of EAM Sushma Swaraj and led by MoS for External Affairs Retd. Gen. V.K. Singh. This operation once again emphasized the Government's proactive approach towards helping distressed Indians in all corners of the world.

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