

Insight into Indian Medical Students in Ukraine



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Abstract

In 1994, Budapest Memorandum on security assurances signed at the Organization for security & co-operation in Europe(OSCE) conference in Budapest (Hungary) which provided security assurance to Ukraine by Russia and big powers. Despite this agreement and the fact that both Russia and Ukraine are sovereign countries, Russia constantly impedes in the elections of Ukraine. Against these impediments, Ukrainian public organized Orange Revolution (2004-05) & Euromaidan protests in 2013. Afterwards, in 2014, Russia annexed Crimea & eventually, since 24th Feb 2022, both are fighting continuously when Ukraine was invaded by Russia with full force. Since the last 30 years, Ukraine has been a popular destination for Indians to study medicines, dentistry & nursing. Root cause of this tendency is limited seats in Govt. Medical Colleges of India in proportion to willing students and huge charges in private medical Colleges. Aakash experienced the most difficult days of his life over there. Now for him the biggest question is how to complete his studies. Shivani has been in Odessa (Ukraine) since 28 November 2022. She is completing her internship in savage conditions. According to Himanshu, the government did their best, negotiated with all the neighboring counties of Romania, Hungary, Poland, Moldavan, Slovakia and also provided transportation to reach India. He appreciated the efforts of governments in evacuation of students.

He also talked about the mental trauma they faced and still facing regarding their future. Everyone is anticipating but no one knows what will happen. Their whole future is in question.

Keywords: *savage, evacuation, anticipating, accession, plight, panicky, stubbornness, stockpile, magnanimous, exorbit*

Vasudhaiva kutumbakam a Sanskrit phrase, which means “**The world is one family**”. But since 24th February 2022 our two family members are continuously fighting i.e., Russia and Ukraine.

To understand the whole issue, let's go back to 1991 when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) disintegrated and 15 new countries came into existence. Formally, Russia Succeeded the USSR and Ukraine became one of the sovereign countries from the former Soviet Union. This independent status came to Ukraine

after the referendum in which over ninety percent of the people supported it. At that time, Ukraine was the third largest stockpile holder of nuclear weapons in the world. Also, she had the technology to design and produce more nuclear weapons. Later on 5 December 1994, Russia, United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA) and Ukraine signed the **Budapest Memorandum** under which these countries promised Ukraine of security assurances (regarding threatening or using military forces or economic coercion). Only exception to these

security assurances is self-defense or otherwise in accordance with the charter of the United Nations. These assurances were given in return of Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons (commonly known as Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT as a non-nuclear weapons state.

In Spite of both being independent sovereign nations, Russia continuously interfered in the elections of Ukraine and tried to establish their supportive governments. Protests emerged in Ukraine against Russian interference as in the **2004-05 popularly known as "Orange Revolution"**. In this revolution, there was a series of acts of civil disobedience and general strikes against the massive corruption and electoral fraud in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections. Also, **Euromaidan protests in 2013** was a wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine against the Ukrainian government's sudden decision not to sign the European Union-Ukraine Association Agreement, instead choosing closer ties to Russia. Later in February 2014, Russia annexed Crimea (Russian language speaking state) and established a pro-Russian government. Russia, after annexing Crimea, looks forward to annexing Luhansk and Donetsk states where Russian language is being spoken. Ultimately, on 24th February 2022, we all witnessed the beginning of a terrible war which is still continuing on the graves of many dying people. Not only Ukrainians, people of other nations are also facing difficulties. If we talk about India, many students suffered and are still suffering because of this plight.

Among all countries, India sends up to 24% that is the highest number of international students to Ukraine. Since last 30 years, Ukraine has been a popular destination for Indians to study medicines, dentistry & nursing. This is so because of cheap courses, brilliant administration and their world class educational facilities. Also the medical degrees earned in Ukraine are recognized across the world including World Health Organization, European Council & other global bodies. Due to these reasons, Ukraine ranks fourth in Europe for the number of graduate and postgraduate specializations in the field of medicines.

Aakash (21) one of the students who returned from Ukraine after his struggle of tough five days. He was 2019 Higher Secondary(12th) pass out and gave NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) exam 3 times (in 2019, 2020 and 2021) but everytime qualified for BDS (Bachelor of Dental Surgery) only. According to the data in 2022, 18,72,343 students registered for NEET but only 83,125 got a chance to pursue their dream to be an MBBS doctor. Almost 18 times more students sit in the exam than seats available for MBBS in India. Don't you think our government should seriously work on this and 542 public medical colleges are not enough. Obviously building Mandir, Masjid and other religious institutions are more important than medical colleges. Don't want to hurt anyone's religious sentiments but think rationally. Considering private medical colleges in India, education is too costly for a student to study. Students are left with no option but to study abroad. Don't you think our medical education is becoming a luxury which is available and possible for elite sections only. Forget it, this is another issue. Coming back to Aakash, he went to the nearest border from his place, the Shehyni-Medyka border (close to Poland). It was 90 kms. from his place. Aakash along with his group, with the Indian flag, traveled 60 kms. by bus. They booked the bus for Rs.5,000/- per student, almost 50 students and they covered this distance in almost 12 hours. This charge was exhibit due to war and chaos. Another 30 kms were to be covered by feet. He experienced the most difficult days of his life over there. He had left with nothing to eat or drink. The temperature was almost -8 degrees Celsius around him. In Ukraine sunset happens as early as 4:00 pm in winters and as late as 10:00 pm in summers. Poor visibility was enormous due to the absence of street lights. One can't see even 10 meters radius. That place was overcrowded, congested and had no space for movement. Aakash's phone was dead for 3 days, he had no connection with his parents. He requested Ukrainian soldiers to charge their phones for just 5 minutes. But soldiers refused and also scolded them. After many requests, he got someone's phone which enabled him to contact home. He even lost the hope to see his parents again. The misery of the situation can be

realized when, they burnt their books, clothes and bags for warmth in that chilled winter. There was commotion, everytime when the border gate opened for entry into Poland. He got separated from his group but after sometime he met a Pakistani student. Both were in the same anxiety and fearfulness. So they decided to stay together and give emotional support to each other. Subsequently, he got out of this situation and entered Poland. He spent 2 days in Poland in government camps, got food, water and everything from domestic chores. Ultimately, after 7 days of struggle, he finally reached India under "Operation Ganga". According to him, those days were a nightmare for him and his family.

Now for him the biggest question is how to complete his studies. Before the war, he was enrolled in December 2021 in Ukraine for a 6(5+1) years medical education program. After the war broke out, nearby countries gave the option of transferring courses to their country for these medical students but that offer is not valid for first year students. Since Akash is in first year only, now he has left with only 3 options. First is to take online medical classes which no one knows will be valid or not because no government clarifies their stand on online classes in medical education. Second, take academic leave and resume from the beginning when war ends. Third is to forget his dream of becoming an MBBS doctor and also forget his family's finances invested in the course. He chose the second option of taking academic leave and is still hoping that war will stop very soon and he will be able to fulfill his dreams.

Next is **Shiwani (25)**, a final year MBBS student who is still in Ukraine. She also had a dream of becoming a doctor. For this, she did her best for 5 years when the war broke out. Now she has left with only three options. First, transfer her MBBS course to another neighboring country and give 2 more years (approx) for her degree and also invest more finances. Second, take online classes with no clarity about their recognition. Third, go back to Ukraine and complete her degree in this situation when there is no guarantee of her security because war is still going on. Against all odds, she made up her mind, consoled her parents and decided to choose the third option. Yes! She

has been in Odessa (Ukraine) since 28 November 2022. She has invested so much in her dream not merely financially but also emotionally that she is not ready to compromise with this.

She talked about inflation and terror in the Ukraine. The packet of milk they used to get at Rs. 20 earlier is now at Rs. 50. Sometimes, they get disturbed by news of bomb blasting in other cities of Ukraine like Kyiv, Kharkiv. Also their parents are always worried about them. She too requested both governments to end this war through social media because war can never benefit the last person.

When I asked her about coming back to India in February 2022 when war had just started, she appreciated the Indian government's efforts. Shivani and her local guardians can be called somewhat lucky because she didn't face the challenges as Aakash did in returning home that time. Government did an excellent job under "Operation Ganga" in providing transport assistance and other facilities for students to reach India.

Shivani faced difficulties when she decided to go back to Ukraine again with her batchmates. Firstly, they have to board flights for some neighboring country to reach Ukraine because all the airports of Ukraine are destroyed by the Russian army. On 10th October 2022, they had to cancel the tickets on the spot because of National Medical Commission's (NMC) unclear directions regarding resuming classes. They were also facing pressure from their universities in Ukraine to clear their future plans for classes in either online or offline mode. They bear extra financial losses because of confusions which were made by policy makers. Finally, she flew from Delhi to Poland, then to Moldova and then to Odessa (Ukraine). Now she is completing her internship and hoping to get her degree in mid-2023 if everything will be fine. These words "if everything will be fine" have the future of many students of different nationalities studying over there.

Another student is **Himanshu (23)**, he started his journey on 24th February 2022 itself. He was only able to pack his important documents As he never imagined for such situations. Everything was sudden and tough for each and every person present over there. All were terror stricken and

scared. There were sleepless nights for everybody, infect parents of those students were also afraid, nervous and worried for their children. They are having conversations with their child from time to time, giving motivation to be strong and avoid thinking pessimistically. Everything will be alright.

On 26th February 2022, Himanshu and his group reached Romania's border. It was chaos on its own, there were students who had been waiting for more than 30 hours to cross the border. There were 400-500 students at one place. Border authorities were hard on students because students were reacting panicky and they were helpless. A beam of hope was coming from the locals of Ukraine who lived near the border. They were generous, sympathetic and helpful in nature. They provided food, shelter and blankets for them. On 28th February 2022, they crossed the border. According to Himanshu, the government did their best, negotiated with all the neighboring counties of Romania, Hungary, Poland, Moldava, Slovakia and also provided transportation to reach India.

Now, Himanshu is pursuing online classes and planning to go back to Ukraine in March 2023. He wants to request the government authorities that when their degree gets completed, then there should not be any problem regarding the online education they got during this period of time and reduce the time of internship if possible.

One of the Indian medical students Naveen Shekharappa Gyanagoudar (21, Karnataka) died in war torn Ukraine. A 21 year old boy standing in the queue for food when the area was blown up. He had taken shelter in bunkers for safety but even that didn't prevent the misfortune. The food accommodated in the bunker got empty and he had no option but to come out for food. He was standing in a chain of people to get food when a missile from Russia attacked the innocent public including him.

It is said that **"The first casualty of war is INNOCENCE"**.

Well true! Nearly 20,000 Indian students return to India, everyone has their stories and hard times they experienced physically, economically and psychologically too. Not only Indians, people of all nationalities. The United Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified a total of 6,884

civilian deaths during Russia's invasion of Ukraine as of December 26, 2022. Of them, 428 were children.

This also impacted students psychologically. They missed their usual college lives like other children have. It's not easy for them to deal with that mental trauma about their future. Their whole future is in question. No one has any idea about when this war will finish and a ceasefire will be announced. Infact we don't even know this day will come or not. We can just hope for peace as soon as possible.

Both countries, Russia and Ukraine, lost their soldiers, assets, citizens and peace. No one benefits from this situation. Some of the citizens of Ukraine migrated from other neighboring countries leaving everything behind, in the hope that they will be back to their homeland one day. Some participated in the war and sacrificed their lives. Even still sacrificing. A spectacular, progressive country like Ukraine changed into a battlefield and graveyard because of their government's stubbornness.

On 28th February 2022, after being invaded by Russia, Ukraine applied for membership of the European Union (EU). The European Commission president supports Ukrainian accession but the process would take time. On this Russian president said, "We have nothing against it. It's their sovereign decision to join the Economic Union or not.....It's their business, the business of the Ukrainian people". The Russian president, in the past, expressed fierce opposition to Ukraine joining NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) because it has been deemed a "security threat" to Russia. But the EU is not a military alliance. So they are ok with it.

On the other side Russia itself lost many soldiers in this conflict. Some of their citizens and media are criticizing the Russian government for their actions against Ukraine. But the Russian president acted despotically, suppressed their own citizens and attacked the sovereignty of Ukraine. In response, Russia is facing sanctions from many countries like the USA, Canada, and the EU. Belarus too is sanctioned for its cooperation and assistance to Russia.

One of the sayings of **Martin Luther King JR.** **"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his**

individualistic concerns to the border concerns of All Humanity ". Is war above humans? Is this a fight or clash between Humanism and National Interests or Nationalism for one's country? Or this is a kind of Facism in which leaders sacrifice their people, their country and everything for the sake of their ego. Is this war even necessary or relevant? Can leaders avoid this war and save humanity? Decide yourself!!

In this article, we come across two kind of humans, one who have the power and wealth still they are causing so much harm, suffering, pain, distress, trauma to humanity and on the other side there are people of Ukraine, Russia and other neighboring countries who were helping people despite of their losses in this war. Until these positive, generous and magnanimous hearted persons exist, we should have faith in humanity.

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