



EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

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India-Israel Ties

Syllabus: GS2/ India & Foreign Relations

In Context

- Recently, Hamas, the militant group ruling the Gaza Strip, mounted one of the most audacious attacks on Israel known as “**Operation 'Al-Aqsa Storm**”.
 - In retaliation, Israel has formally declared war on Hamas under “**Operation Iron Sword**”.

Israel Palestine conflict

- It is a decades long dispute between Israel and Palestine that **began in the middle of the twentieth century** when the Jews from various parts of the world were granted **the homeland in present-day Israel by Britain**.
- It is one of the world's longest conflicts where **Israel has occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip** which the Palestine state claims.
- Numerous **attempts have been made to resolve the conflict** as part of the peace process by various groups of countries and the United Nation.
- With time, the countries around have normalised the ties with Israel through the **Abraham Accord, Oslo Accord, etc.** (PLO itself).
- But **the deadlock still persists** and the world community is persistent in its effort to attain the **two-state solution**.

India's position on Israel-Palestine conflict

- **Post Independence:**
 - India's political attitude towards Israel was set quite firmly shortly after independence in 1947, when Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi vowed to support the Palestinian cause as they rejected the idea of two nations on the basis of religion.
 - India's position with regard to Palestine was also guided by the general consensus in the Arab world, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the United Nations.
- **Vote against Israel at UN:**
 - When the partition of Palestine plan was put to vote at the UN, India voted against, along with the Arab countries.
 - When Israel applied for admission to the UN, India again voted against.
- **Recognition for Israel:**
 - New Delhi, however, recognised Israel in 1950.
 - In 1953, Israel was allowed to open a consulate in Mumbai, but no diplomatic presence was granted in New Delhi.

- **Recognition for the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO):**
 - In early 70's the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) emerged as the representative of the people of Palestine
 - India recognised PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and permitted it an independent office at New Delhi.
 - While India was one of the last non-Muslim states to recognise Israel, it became the first non-Arab state to recognise the PLO.
- **Towards the end of the Cold War:**
 - The end of the Cold War weakened the Non-Aligned Movement and reduced the ideological hostility towards Israel.

India-Israel relations

- **Beginning:**
 - **In 1992**, started defence deals, and cooperation in science, technology and agriculture,
 - India was still reticent about its ties with Israel as it balanced this with **its historical support for the Palestinian cause, its dependence on the Arab world for oil, and the pro-Palestinian sentiments of the country's Muslim citizens.**
 - **The first high-level visits:**
 - In 2000, **L K Advani became the first Indian minister to visit Israel.**
 - The two countries set up a **joint anti-terror commission** in 2000.
 - And in 2003, **Ariel Sharon became the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit India.**
- **Economic and Commercial Relations:**
 - The bilateral merchandise trade grew from USD 200 million in 1992 to USD 6.35 billion (excluding defence) during the period 2021-2022, with the balance of trade being in India's favour.
 - **India is Israel's third-largest trade partner in Asia and seventh largest globally.**
 - In recent years, bilateral trade has diversified into several sectors such as **pharmaceuticals, agriculture, IT and telecom, and homeland security.**
 - Israeli companies have been instrumental in transferring technology to India in areas like **renewable energy, telecom, water technologies.**
 - Many of them have also set up R&D centers in India.
 - **The Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** between the two countries is also on cards.
- **Defence Cooperation:**
 - India **imports critical defence technologies** from Israel.
 - There are regular exchanges between the armed forces.
 - There is **cooperation on security issues**, including a **Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.**
 - Indian armed forces use Israeli **Phalcon AWACS (Airborne Warning And Control Systems), Heron drones to Barak anti-missile defence systems.**

- **Cooperation in Agriculture:**
 - **A three-year joint work program** has been signed between the two countries in 2021 for **the development in agriculture cooperation**.
 - It is aimed at establishing **Centers of Excellence**, intensifying **value chains** and encouraging **private investment**.
 - India has benefited from Israeli expertise and technologies in **horticulture mechanization, orchard and canopy management, micro-irrigation** and **post-harvest management**.
 - **Israeli drip irrigation technologies** and products are now widely used in India.
 - Some Israeli companies and experts are providing expertise to manage and improve **dairy farming in India** through their expertise in **high milk yield**.
- **Science & Technology:**
 - The two countries have established a **Joint Committee on S&T**, established under the S&T Cooperation Agreement signed in 1993.
 - **India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F)** has been set up to secure cooperation between the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the Government of India, and the Israel Innovation Authority, Government of Israel to promote, facilitate and support joint industrial R&D projects.
 - It will address the challenges in the agreed **‘Focus Sectors’**.
- **Energy:**
 - **Tamar and Leviathan gas fields** off the coast of Israel were explored recently and India has been one of the first countries to bid for an exploration license in order to extract and import natural gas from the fields.
 - **India's ONGC Videsh, Bharat PetroResources, Indian Oil and Oil India** were awarded an exploration license by the Israeli government, a clear sign of ongoing diversification in ties between the two countries.

Significance of India's role

- **Siding with Israel:**
 - The Indian Prime Minister has connoted it as “terrorist attack” and conveyed “solidarity with Israel”.
- **India's engagement in West Asia:**
 - In the last decade or so, ties have deepened in security, defence, and connectivity with Israel, but also with partners in West Asia — Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar and Iran.
 - The Indian strategic approach to engage with all sides in the complex West Asian region is born out of necessity:
 - The 90 lakh-strong Indian community in the region and connectivity to West Asia and Europe.
 - Crucially, more than 50% of India's energy imports are sourced from West Asia.
- **Challenge for India's exports:**

- The International trade experts said the conflict may reduce the profits of domestic exporters in India but will not impact trade volumes unless war escalates.

Way ahead

- Peace based on a “two-state solution” is much needed with the help of international organisations and can only be achieved from Israel-Palestine talks.
- India has good relations with both Israel and Palestine and is also attached to multilateral principles that can play an “enhanced” role in the search for a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.
- India should enhance political and diplomatic support to talks, as well as development aid and cooperation for institution building in Palestine.
- India should also be proactive in evolving its partnership with West Asia.

Daily Mains Question

[Q] What role can India play in the search for a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict? Examine India’s role shift from “Palestine-leaning” to “a strategic embrace of the Jewish nation”.