India-Egypt Relations

Why in news?

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has been invited as the chief guest for the Republic Day celebrations this year.

What is the significance of a Republic Day invite?

- **Choosing the Chief Guest** - The choice of chief guest is dictated by a number of reasons — strategic and diplomatic, business interests, and international geo-politics.
- Another factor in the choice of the Chief Guest is the association with the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** which began in the late 1950s, early 1960s.
- The first Chief Guest of the parade in 1950 was President Sukarno of Indonesia, one of the five founding members of the NAM.
- **Significance** - Being invited as the chief guest at Republic Day celebrations is the highest honour a country accords in terms of protocol.
- It is the ultimate sign of friendship between India and the country of the invitee.
- This is the first time that an Egyptian President has been invited as chief guest for the event.
- El-Sisi's arrival in India as the Chief Guest invokes the history of NAM and the close relationship they have shared for 75 years.

What is the history of India-Egypt relations?

- **Historical** - The history of contacts between India and Egypt, two of the world's oldest civilisations, can be traced back to at least the time of Emperor Asoka.
- In modern times, Mahatma Gandhi and the Egyptian revolutionary Saad Zaghloul shared common goals on independence from British colonial rule.
- **Geostrategic** - Egypt, the most populous country in West Asia, occupies a crucial geo-strategic location — **12%** of global trade passes through the **Suez Canal**.
- It is a major market for India and can act as a gateway to both Europe and Africa.
- It also has bilateral trade pacts with important West Asian and African nations.
- **Political** - The joint announcement of the establishment of diplomatic relations at the Ambassadorial level was made in 1947.
- India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser signed the **friendship treaty in 1955** and they were key to form the **NAM in 1961**.
- High-level exchanges with Egypt continued after the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.
- New Delhi views Egypt as a moderate Islamic voice, which has made an attempt to play a positive role in the 57-member **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).**
- **Economic** - The India-Egypt bilateral trade agreement has been in operation since 1978 and is based on the **most-favoured nation** clause.

- The bilateral trade has increased more than five times in the past 10 years.
- Agriculture will be a key area of cooperation as Egypt is facing a shortage of food grains due to Ukraine Russia war.
- **Other sectors** – Egypt is keen to push for more tourism from India so that there is more forex inflow into their tourism-dependent economy.
- A proposal for establishing an IIT in Egypt is in the works.
- Egypt is interested in procuring defence equipment from India, which includes LCA Tejas, missiles like Akash, DRDO's Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon, and radars.
- Egypt has also been invited to participate in the **Aero-India 2023** at Yelahanka Air Force Station, Bengaluru, next month.
- Recently, India-Egypt bilateral relationship was elevated to a **"Strategic Partnership"** which will have broadly 4 elements.
    - Political, defence, and security
    - Economic engagement
    - Scientific and academic collaboration
    - Cultural and people-to-people contacts

What geo-strategic concerns lie ahead?

- However, **China's bilateral trade** with Egypt is double that of India's in 2021-22.
- India should use this opportunity to forge a new path ahead, not just for their strategic and economic interests, but as the voice of the Global South.

Quick facts

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

- The OIC is formerly the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.
- It is the **world's second largest inter-governmental organisation** after the UN, with a membership of **57 states**.
- Its stated objective is "to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world".
- OIC has reserved membership for Muslim-majority countries.
- Russia, Thailand, and a couple of other small countries have Observer status.
- India is home to the **world's third largest Muslim population**, next only to Indonesia and Pakistan.
- Yet, **India is not a member** of the OIC.

References

1. The Indian Express | Sisi's visit as Republic Day chief guest
2. The Indian Express | India's ties with Egypt



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