India-Israel: The Maturing of a Steady Relationship

Why in news?

Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett will visit India to mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

What is the history of India-Israel relation?

- India recognised Israel in 1950 but normalisation took another four decades.
- The full diplomatic relations were established after the opening of embassies in 1992.
- In the wake of the first Gulf War, Arab support for the Palestinian cause began to weaken due to Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) backing for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.
- From 1992, there were defence deals, and co-operation in science, technology and agriculture.
- But India was reserved about its ties with Israel because of its historical support for the Palestinian cause, dependence on the Arab world for oil, and the pro-Palestinian sentiments.
- The first high-level visits took place only after the NDA-1 under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took office where L K Advani became the first Indian minister to visit Israel.
- In 2000, the two countries set up a joint anti-terror commission.
- In 2003, Ariel Sharon became the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit India.

To know more about the India-Israel Relationship, click here

How is the relationship evolving currently?

- Prime Minister Modi undertook the first ever visit by an Indian PM to Israel in 2017.
- Prime Minister Bennett last year addressed all the people of India on 30 years of a wonderful partnership, deep cultural connection and economic and military co-operation.
- He described that the opportunities for collaboration between the two countries is endless.
- Prime Minister Modi had spoken about setting new goals to take the relationship forward, and referred to Jewish communities in India who had lived here without discrimination.
- With the 2020 Abrahamic Accords that saw the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco normalising relations with Israel, New Delhi is now more confident about its relationships in West.

> *The Abraham Accords was signed by the UAE, Bahrain and Israel, under U.S. President Donald Trump's mediation in 2020 to normalise ties with Israel.*

What is India's earlier stance in the Palestinian cause?

- India continues to walk a tightrope between its historical ties with Palestine and its more recent affection for Israel.

- Earlier, India backed the Palestinian right to self-determination and rallied behind the PLO and its leader Yasser Arafat as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.
- In 1975, India invited PLO to open an office in Delhi, giving it diplomatic status five years later.
- In 1988, when the PLO declared an independent state of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem, India granted recognition immediately.
- India voted for Palestine to become a full member of UNESCO in 2011, and also co-sponsored the UNGA resolution that enabled Palestine to become a "non-member" observer state at the UN without voting rights.
- India also supported the installation of the Palestinian flag on the UN premises in 2015.
- The UN Security Council virtually held Israel responsible for the violence, and expressed India's strong support to the Palestinian cause and unwavering support for the two-state solution.

How the policy shift happened?

- The first big shift in India's policy came during the visit of Mahmoud Abbas in 2017 when India in a statement dropped the line in support of East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.
- But the balancing act continued as Modi made a separate visit to Ramallah in 2018, and called for an independent Palestinian state.
- Even as it abstained at UNESCO in 2017, India voted in favour of a resolution in the General Assembly opposing the Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital.
- At the UNHRC's 46th session in Geneva in 2021, India voted against Israel in three resolutions –
    - on the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people
    - on Israeli settlement policy
    - on the human rights situation in the Golan Heights
- It abstained on a fourth, which asked for an UNHRC report on the human rights situation in Palestine, including East Jerusalem.
- In 2021, the International Criminal Court claimed jurisdiction to investigate human rights abuses in Palestinian territory but India did not take a stand against it.

What does the current visit signify?

- The visit will reaffirm the important connection between the countries and the leaders and will mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of relations between Israel and India.
- The purpose of the visit is to advance and strengthen the strategic alliance between the countries, and to expand bilateral ties.
- The visit also aims to expand the cooperation between the two countries in the areas of innovation and technology, security and cyber, and agriculture and climate change.

References

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