India-South Korea Bilateral Partnership

Why in news?

There is much potential for Seoul to become the fourth pillar in New Delhi's Indo-Pacific strategy.

How was the bilateral relation between the two countries in the past?

- During the past five years, India and South Korea have experienced considerable divergence in their respective national objectives.
- **Multilateral initiatives**- There was a clear drift by South Korea away from multilateral security initiatives led by the United States, such as the Quad (the U.S., Australia, India and Japan).
- **Trade**- Trade between the two countries was sluggish and there was no major inflow of South Korean investment into India.
- India and South Korea were also trying to upgrade their Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) agreement, but couldn't.
- **Defence**- In 2020, India and South Korea signed a **Roadmap for Defence Industries Cooperation**.
- However, due to the lack of political and strategic alignment, nothing came of it.
- **Security**- During the Moon Jae-in presidency in Korea, Japan and South Korea were at loggerheads.
- There was little scope for strengthening the trilateral security dialogue in the region between India, South Korea and Japan.

What is the new shift in South Korean policy?

- The newly elected Korean President, Yoon Suk Yeol, has brought about a paradigm shift in South Korean foreign and security policies.
- He has proposed that South Korea should step up to become a "global pivotal state, anchored in liberal values and a rules-based order".
- South Korea's new willingness to become a global pivotal state and play an active role in regional affairs is bound to create multiple opportunities for a multi-dimensional India- Korea partnership.
- **Opportunities ahead**- South Korea's strategic policy shift to correct its heavy tilt towards China is bound to bring new economic opportunities for both countries.
- The emerging strategic alignment is creating a new convergence of capabilities in new areas of economic cooperation such as public health, green growth, digital connectivity, and trade, among others.
- With the strategic shift in South Korea's defence orientation, new doors of cooperation for defence and security have emerged.
- Advanced defence technologies and modern combat systems are the new domains for the next level of defence cooperation between the two countries.

- South Korea's participation in maritime security activities in the Indian Ocean, such as the Malabar and other exercises, will strengthen India's naval footprint in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The shift in South Korean policies will enable a strong India, South Korea and Japan defence policy coordination that could effectively forge new joint regional security policies.
- South Korea could be the fourth pillar in India's Indo-Pacific strategy along with Japan, Australia, and Vietnam.
- With South Korea's emergence as a leader in critical technologies, cybersecurity and cyber-capacity building, outer space and space situational awareness capabilities.
- India can help South Korea withstand Chinese pressure and North Korean threats.

How is South Korea's relationship with other countries?

- **U.S. factor-** In the past, Mr. Trump was unconvinced about the relevance of the U.S.-Korea partnership and had discussed withdrawing U.S. forces from South Korea.
- **North Korea**- South Korea's peace process with North Korea has completely collapsed as North Korea conducts more missile and nuclear tests, leading to regional tension.
- Any breakout of hostilities on the Korean Peninsula can derail South Korea's Indo-Pacific project.
- **China**- During the Moon presidency, South Korea was forced to sign the **three no's agreement** with China. Korea agreed to
    - No additional Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) deployment
    - No participation in the U.S.'s missile defence network
    - No establishment of a trilateral military alliance with the U.S. and Japan

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/scale-up-the-india-south-korea-bilateral-partnership/article6563622ece

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