India’s stand on Palestine

Why in news?

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Recent visit of Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas to New Delhi – his fifth since being elected as the successor to Yasser Arafat in January 2005, and his first after Modi became Prime Minister.

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How India viewed Palestine conflict?

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- In the early 1920s and amidst the Khilafat struggle, Indian nationalists made common cause with the Arabs of Palestine and **adopted a position that was unsympathetic to the Jewish aspirations** for a national home in Palestine.
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- Adopting an identical position, the Indian National Congress opposed the idea of religion-based partition in India as well as in Palestine.
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- **Mahatma Gandhi’s 1938 statement** said “Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English and France to the French”.
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- Despite India’s opposition to the partition of Palestine and eventual recognition of Israel in September 1950, India did not establish diplomatic relations with the latter.
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- **Prime Minister Narasimha Rao hosted Arafat in 1992** for the first time and signalled India’s intention of abandoning its four decades old policy of non-relations with Israel.
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- Recently **India's ‘unwavering support' for the Palestinian cause** is also witnessed by a subtle but unmistakable shift in its policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
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- India has signalled a new approach towards Palestine as well as the wider

Arab-Israeli conflict.
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What are the changing dynamics in India’s relationship with Palestine?

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- The BRICS summit in Fortaleza, Brazil reaffirmed the member-states’ commitment to a two-State solution with a contiguous and economically viable Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with Israel.
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- **BRICS nation called for a mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders** based on the 4 June 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as Palestine capital.
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- But India signalled its change in stand when it **abstained** in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) vote on alleged ‘war crimes’ being committed by Israel as well as by Hamas during the 2014 war, referred to by Israel as **Operation Protective Edge.**
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- Only a year earlier, India had voted with others in the Council to institute an international inquiry into the Gaza violence and attributed its shift to a reference to Israel being taken to the International Criminal Court.
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- **India once again abstained** in March 2016 when the UNHRC voted on a similar resolution.
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- The present Indian government stands clearly spells out that it is keen to further bilateral relations with Palestine, India is no longer willing to view its Israel policy through the traditional Palestinian prism.
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- In the recent meet Indian PM reiterated India’s support for “a sovereign, independent, united and viable Palestine, co-existing peacefully with Israel.”
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- Indian PM also left out the sentence “East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state”.
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- By not referring to East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian State, India has signalled a major departure from the past.
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- **India is no longer prepared to endorse the exclusive Palestinian claims over the City** but desires a negotiated political settlement based on

mutual respect and accommodation.
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- By departing from the past, much of Indian PM’s focus has been on developmental issues such as ‘capacity-building', ‘information technology, youth and skills development', ‘Techno-park', ‘our cultural exchanges', and ‘Yoga exchanges’ rather than political issues.
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What is the internal division present within Palestine?

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- Palestinians have been living under two political controls.
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- The internationally recognised PNA headed by Abbas whose authority is limited to the West Bank, and an increasingly isolated Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip.
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- Western powers recognised the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the ‘sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people’.
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- But Hamas challenges it and indulges itself in the virulent campaign of suicide attacks and weakening all the Palestinian institutions instituted till now.
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- Thus by calling for a ‘united Palestine’, India is making a great stride in helping Palestine unify itself.
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Source: IDSA

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