India’s view on Middle East

Why in news?

For India, a US-Saudi Arabia pact and peace between Israel and Iran and Israel and Hamas could mean an opportunity to better harness the region’s potential.

What is the relation between India and Saudi Arabia?

- **Diplomatic relationship -** The two countries established diplomatic relations in 1947 and 2021-22 marked 75 years of establishment of diplomatic relations.
- **Strategic ties-**

Key initiatives	Outcome
Delhi declaration in 2006	It was a watershed moment in India – Saudi Arabia relationship.
Riyadh declaration in 2010	It elevated bilateral ties to a strategic relationship.
Strategic Partnership Council (SPC) Agreement in 2019	It established a *high-level council* to steer the Indo-Saudi relationship.

- **Trade**- India is the *2nd largest trade partner* for Saudi, while Saudi is India’s *4th largest trade partner*.
- **Economic corridor**- India, Saudi Arabia, UAE and USA jointly announced the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

  IMEC is a massive infrastructure project that would connect India to Europe via West Asia, and could rival China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

- **Energy cooperation**- Saudi is India’s *3rd largest crude and petroleum* products sourcing destinations in 2022-23.
- **Defence**- Two editions of the bilateral naval exercise, Al Mohed al Hindi, have been concluded so far.
- **Operation Kaveri**- Saudi Arabia supported in evacuation of Indian nationals stranded in Sudan through Jeddah.
- **Diaspora-** The Indian community is *more than 2.4 million* and is the largest expatriate community in the Kingdom.



What is the relation between India and Israel?

- **Political relations**- India recognised Israel in 1950 and full diplomatic relations were established after the opening of embassies in 1992.
- **Trade ties**- India is Israel's 2nd largest trading partner in Asia, and the *7th largest globally* with a robust growth that has been experienced over the past 5 years.
- **Multilateral cooperation**- '***I2U2' group***, which has been called the *"West Asian Quad"*, comprises of India, Israel, the U.S., and the UAE.
- **Operation Ajay**- It was launched by the Indian government to repatriate *Indians from Israel and Palestine* through special chartered flights.
- **Support for Kargil war**- Israel supported India with arms during the Kargil conflict in 1999.
- **Israel Hamas conflict**- India believes in its long-standing support for the establishment of a "sovereign, independent and viable" state of Palestine. India has expressed its support for Israel condemning the terrorist attack by Hamas.



- **Defence-**Israel has been a major supplier of defence equipment, as well as of high-tech communications systems that have helped meet some of India's security tech challenges.
- **Innovation partnership**- Israel is an important partner to India in the innovation ecosystem — smart irrigation systems being an example of cooperation in this field.

What are the potential for India in Middle East?

- **Strategic partnerships**- India has strengthened bilateral ties with countries in the region, including Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Turkey. Long-standing connections to Iran further enhance India's position.
- **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor**- The ambitious project aims to foster connectivity and economic integration between Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Europe.
- **Look West policy-** India intensified its existing "Look West" policy focusing on the Arab Gulf countries, Israel and Iran, the goal was to strengthen economic ties, enhance strategic partnerships and foster regional stability.
- **Regional stability-** The US-Saudi mega deal would normalize relations between Saudi and Israel which could lead to a more stable Middle East, beneficial for India's regional interests and its diaspora in the Gulf countries.

US-Saudi mega deal involves US, Saudi Arabia and Israel to support Israel against Hamas and Iran, which could lead to significant shift in Middle East relations.

What are the challenges faced by India in Middle East?

- **Stalled project**- The ongoing Israel Hams war has caused a stall in the plans for this ambitious connectivity project, which aims to link India with Europe via the Gulf.
- **Balancing relations-**India strives to maintain a delicate balance between supporting Israel and fostering strong ties with Arab nations but this has become more complex with the intensification of conflicts in the region.
- **Israel Hamas conflict**- The recent terrorist attacks by Hamas and the retaliatory

military response from Israel have posed difficult challenges for India's diplomatic strategy, especially considering India's significant diaspora and trade relations in the region.

- **Lack of security presence**- India's lack of security presence in Middle East has led to costly evacuations of its diaspora during crises, such as the evacuation from Kuwait during the Gulf War.
- **Geopolitics of corridor**- IMEC involves US allies like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which are economic powerhouses, whereas *International North-South Transport Corridor* (INSTC) involves Iran and Russia, which have been at odds with the US.

INSTC is an initiative taken by India, Russia, and Iran, aiming to enhance trade and transport connectivity among countries along its route

What lies ahead?

- India's strategic choices must navigate geopolitical complexities and safeguard investments
- India will welcome a durable peace in the Middle East, with a stronger American presence in the region it considers its extended neighbourhood.
- The US-Saudi mega deal will provide India with an opportunity to better harness the region's potential and foster a conducive environment for its strategic and economic goals.

References

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