Israel’s Expanding Settlement

Why in news?

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Israel passed a legislation that would legalise nearly 4,000 Jewish settler homes on private Palestinian lands in the West Bank.

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What are settlements?

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- Settlements are communities established by Israel on land occupied in the 1967 Middle East war.
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- This includes the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.
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- Prior to that no Israeli citizens had lived in the territory.
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- In 1968 Israeli government reluctantly allowed Jews to stay "temporarily."
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- Since then hundreds of thousands of Israeli Jews now reside in the West Bank, citing religion, history and Israel's security among their reasons for being there.
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- There are 131 settlements in the West Bank, housing about 385,000 Israeli Jewish settlers, and 97 outposts - settlements built without official authorisation.
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- Palestinians, along with the rest of the world, see their presence as one of the key obstacles to a peace agreement and the creation of a Palestinian state.
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- Palestinians say the presence of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem - land they seek for a future state - make such a state with contiguous territory impossible.
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- They have demanded Israel freeze all settlement activity as a precondition for resuming peace talks.
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What is the legislation about?

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- Despite international criticism, successive governments have supported the settlements.
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- The legislation allows the Israeli government to confiscate private Palestinian land if the land-owners are unknown.
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- If known, they will be compensated in cash or kind.
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What will be the impact?

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- The legislation seeks to extend Israeli law to the West Bank.
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- It can be overturned by the judiciary.
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- Israel’s Attorney-General has said he wouldn’t defend the bill in the high court as it is unconstitutional and violates international law.
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- But this is unlikely to stop the current government from taking more Palestinian land.
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- Earlier UN Security Council demanded that Israel stop all settlement activity in the Occupied Territories.
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- An international conference attended by more than 70 countries urged both sides in the conflict to resume talks
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- In this scenario, Israel’s legislation shows its disregard for international

opinion and institutions.
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What is the Israel’s stand?

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- Israel still says it is committed to the **two-state solution**.
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- But the two-state solution will not be relevant if it continues to grab Palestinian land.
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- The current government has shown no interest in resuming negotiations.
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- This is compounded by the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President, who also does not believe in two state solution.
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Source: The Hindu

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