PM’s Visit to Israel

Why in news?

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Narendra Modi will be the first Indian PM to travel to Israel 25 years after the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1992.

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What are the things that define our relationship?

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- **Defence:** India is Israel’s top destination for arms exports, buying 41% of Israel’s arms export between 2012 and 2016.
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- India and Israel also closely **cooperate on counter-terrorism** issues through a joint working group on counter-terrorism.
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- **Diplomacy:** Since 1992, India has developed significant defense and trade relations with Israel while also **maintaining a strong commitment to the creation of a Palestinian state.**
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- The Key takeaway from this visit would be whether our PM will mention Palestine at all during his visit, barring the usual remarks about support for a two-state formula.
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- **Agriculture:** An **Indo-Israel agriculture action plan** for 2015-18 is operational, and 15 of the proposed 26 centers of excellence in agriculture are being developed in India with Israel’s help.
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- India has benefited from Israeli technologies in **horticulture mechanisation,** protected cultivation, orchard and canopy management, nursery management, micro-irrigation and post-harvest management.
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- **Water Management:** Recently, the union cabinet approved a MoU with Israel on the **National Campaign for Water Conservation** in India.
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- Being located in a semi-arid region with limited sources of fresh drinking

water, Israel has developed water-management technologies which will be useful in India.
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- **Trade:** Israel was India's **38th largest trading partner**. The trade balance stood in India's favour at $1.10 billion in 2016-17.
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- Mineral fuels and oils are India's leading export to Israel. India's major imports from Israel included natural or cultured pearls and precious stones.
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- **Diaspora:** An estimated 85,000 Jews of Indian-origin live in Israel, the majority being from Maharashtra (Bene Israelis), with some from Kerala (Cochini Jews) and Kolkata (Baghdadi Jews).
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Can we expect any substantial shift in relations?

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- The current transactional partnership which has emerged over the last decade holds at least three advantages.
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- First, it benefits both India and Israel in the defense sector. Israel has become one of India's most important weapons suppliers, after Russia and the US.
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- Second, trade and defence ties have developed in isolation from the fluctuation of political events, whether these were regional crises (in Gaza) or domestic political transitions (across the Congress and BJP).
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- Finally, the current nature of the partnership means that **state governments can directly seek collaborations** and investments in agricultural and water technologies from Israel.
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- Despite all this, the structural differences between Indian and Israeli national security situations, worldviews (Ex: on Iran), and the absence of explicitly shared enemies limit any stronger strategic rapprochement.
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- It seems that both regional pressures and opportunities have compelled Modi to recalibrate back to a more neutral approach.
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- Given the unique nature of this bilateral relationship and of the imminent visit, **a paradigmatic shift remains a possibility.**
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Source: The Hindu & The Indian Express

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