Resolving Bilateral Irritants with Iran

Why in news?

\n\n

Recently, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei equated the on-going Kashmir conflict with that of Yemen conflict and said that the Muslim world must express their disdain against 'oppressors'.

\n\n

Why Iran issued a statement like this?

\n\n

\n
- The statement just **reflects his country's concerns** about getting regionally isolated at a time following the Donald Trump administration's hard line against them.
\n
- The hardline seemed to have emboldened Saudi Arabia and its allies to **squeeze Iran out of the regional matrix.**
\n
- Ex. Saudi Arabia has recently warned Qatar that more punitive measures would follow if Qatar embraces Iran any further.
\n
- Thus, the statement might be a signal to India that its growing closeness to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, is being watched closely in Tehran.
\n
- It's a reminder to India that Iran too has a role in the Islamic world which can't be ignored.
\n

\n\n

What does the statement signify?

\n\n

\n
- There is **nothing new** in his recent statement since Ayatollah has been talking of Kashmir since 2010.
\n

- Iranian criticism of India’s position on Kashmir has repeatedly sparked protests within the Indian government.
  \n
- Still, New Delhi has done well not to give it too much weight.
  \n
- But eventhough Iran has earlier voted against India on the issue of Kashmir in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), this is the first time the **issue has been given a religious colour** by Iran.
  \n

\n\n

What should be the major concern?

\n\n

\n

- The **recent decline in economic ties** should be of greater concern to the two countries.
  \n
- Iran seems to be in no hurry to decide on awarding the contract for gas exploration in its **Farzad B offshore field** to ONGC Videsh.
  \n
- Pending a decision on the contract, India has decided to decrease the volume of Iranian crude oil it will be buying this year.
  \n
- Further, the **slow pace of the Chabahar port project** has vexed the Iranians.
  \n
- They have even indicated that despite India developing the project, it won’t be exclusive to the country.
  \n
- For India, this **undercuts the very strategic utility of the port** — viewed as India’s answer to the Gwadar port (developed by China) that will allow it to circumvent Pakistan and open up a route to landlocked Afghanistan.
  \n
- Thus, India needs to work with the reformist regime of Hassan Rouhani (President of Iran) to ensure that the bilateral irritants in fostering economic ties are resolved soon.
  \n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu & The Indian Express

\n

