The India-Israel Relationship

Why in news?

On January 30, India and Israel marked 30 years of full diplomatic relations.

How has the India-Israel Relationship evolved over the years?

- **Political Relations-** India recognised Israel in 1950 and full diplomatic relations were established after the opening of embassies in 1992.
- Prime Minister Modi undertook an historic first ever visit by an Indian PM to Israel in 2017, during which the relationship was upgraded to a strategic level and seven Agreements/MoUs were signed
- **Trade-** The bilateral merchandise trade stood at 5.65 billion dollars (excluding defence) in 2018-19, with the balance of trade being in India's favour.
- Trade in diamonds constitutes close to 40% of bilateral trade.
- Potash is a major item of Israel's exports to India.
- Indian software companies are beginning to expand their presence in the Israeli market and the first meeting of the newly established India-Israel CEOs Forum took place in 2017.
- **Agriculture**- India has benefited from Israeli expertise and technologies in horticulture mechanization, protected cultivation, orchard and canopy management, nursery management, micro- irrigation and post-harvest management.
- Israeli drip irrigation technologies and products are now widely used in India.
- A comprehensive Work Plan for cooperation in agriculture was signed in 2006.
- Agricultural cooperation between the two sides formalized through 3-year Work plans wherein 3-year Action plans are developed.
- Centres of Excellence have been constituted in Indian states.
- **Defence & Security-** India imports critical defence technologies from Israel.
- There is cooperation on security issues, including a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.
- Since 2015, IPS officer trainees have been visiting the Israel National Police Academy every year for 1-week long foreign exposure training.
- **Cooperation in S&T and Space**- India-Israel cooperation in S&T is overseen by the Joint Committe on S&T, established under the S&T Cooperation Agreement signed in 1993.
- In 2017, an MoU for establishing India-Israel Industrial R&D and Innovation Fund (I4F) was signed.
- In 2017, space agencies-ISRO & Israel Space Agency- signed three agreements on space cooperation.
- **Culture and Education**- India is known in Israel as an ancient nation with strong cultural traditions, and India is an attractive, alternative tourist destination.
- Several courses related to India are taught at Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University and Haifa University.
- In 2013, India and Israel launched a new funding programme of joint academic research with the University Grants Commission and the Israel Science Foundation as nodal organizations.

- **Indian Community**- There are approximately 85,000 Jews of Indian-origin in Israel (with at least one Indian parent), who are all Israeli passport holders.
- In 2013, the Indian Embassy in Tel Aviv facilitated the first-ever National Convention of Indian Jews in Israel that was held in Ramla.
- The Know India Programme has been effective in binding the Indian origin youth to India.

What issues are hampering the bilateral relations?

- **Palestinian issue**- India does continue to walk a tightrope, between its historical ties with Palestine and its newfound love for Israel.
- In 1988, when the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) declared an independent state of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem, India granted recognition immediately.
- India voted for Palestine to become a full member of UNESCO in 2011, and a year later, co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution that enabled Palestine to become a "non-member" observer state at the UN without voting rights.
- India also supported the installation of the Palestinian flag on the UN premises in September 2015.
- India supported the just Palestinian cause and the two-state solution in the UN Security Council on the Israel-Palestine violence in 2021.
- The first big shift in India's policy came in 2017 when India in a statement dropped the customary line in support of East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state.
- Even as it abstained at UNESCO in December 2017, India voted in favour of a resolution in the General Assembly opposing the Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital.
- At the UNHRC's 46th session in Geneva earlier in 2021, India voted against Israel in three resolutions and abstained on a fourth, which asked for an UNHRC report on the human rights situation in Palestine, including East Jerusalem.
- **Pegasus issue- Pegasus** is a spyware developed by NSO Group, an Israeli surveillance firm, that helps spies hack into phones.
- It was said that the Indian government used it to hack more than 1000 phone numbers.
- A case was filed in the Supreme Court accusing the government for indiscriminate spying.
- The company has said it sells the licence for use only to governments, and only after approval from the Israeli government's Defense Export Control Agency.
- New York Times reported that India bought Israeli Pegasus spyware as part of weapons deal in 2017.

References

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