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Israel, UAE and Bahrain Abraham Accord

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Why in News

The **Abraham Accord** between **Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain** is mediated by the USA. It is the **first Arab-Israeli peace deal in 26 years**.

Key Points

- **Previous Agreements:** There were the **only two peace deals** between Israel and the Arab States in more than a quarter of a century.
 - Egypt was the first Arab State to sign a peace deal with Israel in 1979.
 - Jordan signed a peace pact in 1994.
- **The Agreement:**
 - As per the agreements, the UAE and Bahrain will establish:
 - Embassies and exchange ambassadors.
 - Working together with Israel across a range of sectors, including tourism, trade, healthcare and security.
 - The Abraham Accords also open the door for Muslims around the world to visit the historic sites in Israel and to peacefully pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the **third holiest site in Islam**.

In the Islamic tradition, **the Kaaba in Mecca** is considered the holiest site, followed by **the Prophet's Mosque** in Medina, and **Al-Aqsa Mosque** in Jerusalem.
- **Reason:** Bringing Israel, the UAE and Bahrain together reflects their shared concern about **Iran's rising influence** in the region and development of ballistic missiles. Iran has been critical of both deals.

Arab-Israel Relation

- Since Israeli independence in 1948, it has fought several wars with Arab neighbouring countries.

- The persecuted Jews saw Israel as their promised home while Arabs saw it as an occupation.
- **Significance of the Accord:**
 - The agreement shows how the Arab countries are gradually **decoupling themselves from the Palestine question.**

Palestine was among former Ottoman territories placed under UK administration by the League of Nations in 1922. All of these territories eventually became fully independent States, except Palestine.
 - **Full diplomatic ties** will be established between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain which will have a positive impact on the entire region.
 - The deal buys UAE a lot of **goodwill in the US**, where its image has been tarnished by its involvement in the **Yemen war.**
 - **In South Asia, it will put Pakistan in a bind**, whether to follow UAE's steps (will be seen as giving up Islamic cause of Palestine) or not to follow the UAE (since it is already in feud with the Saudis over not taking up the Kashmir case, Pakistan cannot afford another hostile Islamic Country).
 - In the upcoming presidential election in the USA, the accord could help shore up support among pro-Israel Christian evangelical voters, an important part of current President's political base.
- **More Deals:**
 - Other gulf states in the region like Oman could follow suit and sign similar agreements with Israel
 - One of the biggest Gulf Arab powers, Saudi Arabia could follow the suit as well.
- **Concern:**
 - The Palestinians have not embraced the USA's vision. 86% of Palestinians believe the normalization agreement with the UAE serves only Israel's interests and not their own.
 - There is a possibility that the Palestine quest is further ignored.
 - Shia-Sunni rifts in the region may get wide and violent.
 - Saudi Arabia (Sunni) and Iran (representing Shia) have a long history of enmity. For decades, one of the main sources of instability in West Asia has been the cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.
 - The Sunni-Shiite schism may also provoke violence between Muslims in such places as Pakistan, Nigeria and Indonesia.



- **Indian Interest in West Asia:**

- **Geopolitical:** West Asia occupies an important position in international relations due to its geographical location and proximity to continents and countries South Asia, China, Central Asia, Europe, and Africa.
- **Energy:** The region is strategically significant due to its enormous energy resources, trade route links to different parts of the world.

It is the world's largest oil-producing region accounting for 34% of world production, 45% of crude oil exports and 48% of oil proven reserves.

- **Diaspora:** Indian expatriates have constituted a substantial share of the regional labour market.

Remittances from the region constitute a major chunk of total remittances to India.

- **Opportunity for India:**

- **Defence and Security:** India should use this unexpected opportunity to give itself a **bigger role** in a region which is its strategic backyard. The first step should be to **ramp up defence and security relations with UAE.**

Israel is already a very close defence partner.

- While some work has already happened, India should **leverage its economy for a bigger opening in this region.** Importantly, India can use its good offices to ensure that any future deal on a regional security framework gives adequate space to Iran, which may be weak but not so weak that it cannot be a hugely disruptive power if it so chooses.

Way Forward

- A balance between Shia and Sunni, between Persian and Arab, is key to any sustainable peace.
- The US may be a pre-eminent power in the Middle East, but Russia has made a space for itself, spending a lot less money. In recent years, China has indicated its willingness to play a larger role in this region, and is close to both UAE and Israel and, increasingly, Saudi Arabia.

India should make its moves before this market and this extended neighbourhood come under the Chinese sphere of influence.

- A deal that could, if played right, open the doors for a changed geopolitical arrangement in the Middle East should have a stronger Indian footprint.

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