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Israel and Bahrain Diplomatic Ties

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Why in News

Bahrain and Israel are signing a **joint communique** on the establishment of **diplomatic, peaceful and friendly relations**, as well as a number of **memorandums of understanding** in areas of mutual benefit.

Key Points



- Bahrain has a history of open politics and civil society movements, although rights have been curtailed in the past decade.
- The decision to normalise ties comes from the belief in the values of tolerance in a region whose people have suffered from wars and conflicts.

- The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain became only the third and fourth Arab states to agree to normalise ties with Israel, following Israel's **1979** peace deal with Egypt and a **1994** pact with Jordan.
- Under the deal, **Israel would suspend its plans to annex large parts of the occupied West Bank.**
 - The West Bank is **sandwiched between Israel and Jordan**. One of its major cities is **Ramallah**, the **de facto administrative capital of Palestine**.
 - Israel took control of it in the **Six-day Arab-Israeli war, 1967** and has over the years established settlements there.
- **Impact on the USA:**
 - This is the second deal in 2020 after the Israel-UAE Peace Deal brokered by the USA. The recognition **grants a diplomatic win** to the USA President Donald Trump ahead of the Presidential election.
 - The deal buys UAE a lot of **goodwill in the US**, where its image has been tarnished by its involvement in the **Yemen war**.
- **Saudi Arabia** made clear that it will not normalise ties without a resolution to the Palestinian issue despite signs of rapprochement.
- **Concerns:**
 - **For Palestine:**
 - The Palestinians have not embraced the USA's vision. 86% of Palestinians believed the normalization agreements with the UAE and Bahrain served only Israel's interests and not their own.
 - For Palestinians, who long have relied on Arab backing in their struggle for independence, the announcement **marked both a win and setback** for the **Israel-Palestine relations**.

While the deal **halts Israeli annexation plans of the west Bank**, the Palestinians have repeatedly **urged Arab governments not to normalize relations with Israel until a peace agreement** establishing an independent Palestinian state is reached.
 - **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:** A peaceful and prosperous West Asia is necessary for India. Such deals between Arab Countries and Israel are having a positive impact for Indian interests in the region. Also, difficulty in balancing Arab countries and Israel will become easy. Indian interests include:
 - **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.

Way Forward

- A balance between **Shia and Sunni**, between Iran 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.
- 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.

Source: TH