



Bitter Enemies Ethiopia, Eritrea Hold Historic Talks

The leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea announced they would re-open their embassies, hailing a stunningly swift rapprochement between bitter regional enemies.

Background

- The meeting was the first of its kind between leaders of the two Horn of Africa neighbors since their war from 1998-2000 in which around 80,000 people died.
- Eritrea achieved independence from Ethiopia amicably in 1993 but the two countries swiftly became bitter enemies.
- The war began on May 6, 1998, sparked by a battle for control of the border town of Badme. Both Eritrea and Ethiopia wanted it on their side of the border.
- The war ended in June 2000, but it was another six months until a peace agreement was signed, establishing the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission. It was meant to settle the dispute over Badme once and for all.
- But its 'final and binding' ruling 18 months later, awarding Badme to Eritrea, was not accepted by Ethiopia without the preconditions of further negotiations with Eritrea. Eritrea, in turn, refuses to talk to its former ally until the ruling is adhered to.

Horn of Africa: Why India should Care More?

- Africa has been of growing interest to India for political, economic and security reasons, especially the sub-region - the Horn of Africa. The Horn of Africa comprises four countries — Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia.
- The region is strategically important since it is close to the oil-producing region of the Middle East. Approximately 40% of the oil produced in the Middle East crosses through the shipping lanes of Red Sea. Djibouti is the choke point on this shipping route. It is due to this reason that countries like the United States, France, and China have a military base in Djibouti.
- With the new reliance on the sea lines of communication for India's economic growth, Delhi declared that its national interests were no longer limited to the Subcontinent but stretched from the "Aden to Malacca".
- China is raising its strategic profile in the region. Under an accord signed last year, Beijing has secured the rights to a base in Djibouti that can host up to 10,000 soldiers until 2026 and also Beijing's infrastructure development in the region have put the Horn of Africa back in India's focus.

Way Forward

- What happens in the region has a direct bearing on India's security and well-being and hence she should pay more attention to the prevailing conditions and power dynamics in the Horn of Africa.
- India would be well advised to become more active in examining and discussing the complex problem in-depth with the governments in Eastern Africa, the African Union and others concerned so as to be able to make a meaningful contribution to its resolution.

