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India- Egypt Bilateral Ties

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Why in News: After wrapping up his first State visit to the United States, Prime Minister Narendra Modi landed in Egypt to kickstart his two-day visit. Arriving for the first time in Cairo since he assumed the top job, Modi will be the first Indian PM to embark upon an official bilateral visit to the country since 1997.

Historical, Cultural and Diplomatic Exchanges

India and Egypt shared a crucial diplomatic relation since 3rd century BC. During that era, Indian Emperor Ashoka the Great dispatched his envoys to the court of the Egyptian ruler Ptolemy II Philadelphus.

The Egyptian king, in a reciprocal gesture, dispatched his own ambassador named Dionysius to the Mauryan court at Patliputra.

This recorded incident marks the earliest known interaction between the two ancient civilizations, laying the foundation of diplomatic engagement between India and Egypt, and highlighting the far-reaching historical ties that have endured through the ages.

In a notable address, the Indian Ambassador to Egypt, Ajit Gupte, emphasized the enduring nature of the maritime connections between India and Egypt. He highlighted that these connections have transcended time, spanning across centuries and leaving an indelible mark on their shared history.

Evolution of relationship between India and Egypt

Delhi established a bilateral relationship with Cairo just three days after it got Independence on August 15, 1947.

Their partnership, however, began to blossom when India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Egypt's second President Gamal Abdel Nasser became close.

The friendship was first tested during the 1956 Suez Canal crisis when Nasser nationalised the canal leading Israel, and later France and Britain, to attack Egypt.

Nehru lost no time in condemning the aggression against Cairo and took a number of measures to mediate" between the opposing parties, including asking the US to intervene in the matter

India went on to emphasise the urgent need to decolonise Asia and Africa in the United Nations, "contributing substantially to the closing of the crisis

In the following years, the bond between Nehru and Nasser further solidified. The two charismatic leaders, ardent supporters of the liberal and decolonisation movements, played a pivotal role in founding the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** along with Yugoslavia's President Josip **Broz Tito**, Indonesia's President **Sukarno** and Ghana's President **Kwame Nkrumah**.

It was because of this special relationship that India also stood firmly next to Egypt and the Arab world when they came to blows with Israel over Palestine — Delhi didn't establish full diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv until 1992.

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Notably, Delhi and Cairo didn't just focus on political strategies. The two nations seek to strengthen their defence and economic ties too.

For instance, as per the Ministry of External Affairs, "there was close cooperation between the two nations' Air Forces, with efforts at jointly developing a fighter aircraft in the 1960s.

But what once used to be a cornerstone of its foreign policy, India put its partnership with Egypt on the back burner in later years, particularly during the 1970s.

The Indian foreign policy discourse, with its deepening anti-Western rhetoric and empathy for radical Arab States in the 1970s, was not empathetic to the concerns and interests of Egypt as it made brave moves to rethink its regional policies

Those years saw India completely ignoring not just Egypt but also the whole West Asia region.

By the end of the Cold War, the area had completely dropped off Delhi's agenda — India had only maintained relations on "a mercantilist basis" with oil-producing nations and those countries where Indian labourers migrated for work

India and Egypt rekindled their ties

The present government, however, have witnessed a turnaround in the situation. Since 2014, India has sought to engage with West Asian countries

Delhi wants to draw huge amounts of capital from Gulf nations, curtail religious extremism by supporting moderate countries in the region while encouraging social reforms, and participate in the security politics of the area.

And in order to do all this, India has realised that Egypt is a key player.

The country has remained fairly moderate over the years, shares strong ties with the UAE and Saudi Arabia (both nations have made heavy investments in Egypt), and is located at a crucial geo-strategic location — 12 per cent of global trade passes through the Suez Canal. Therefore, the bilateral relations between Delhi and Cairo have once again taken centre stage.

Meanwhile, Cairo wants India's help to tackle its battered economy. The outbreak of the [COVID-19](#) pandemic coupled with the implications of the Russia and [Ukraine](#) war has worsened its financial woes

[Inflation](#) in the country is at a five-year high of over 30 per cent and it has approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the fourth time in six years for a bailout.

Egypt has "sought investments in infrastructure — Metro projects in Cairo and Alexandria, a Suez Canal economic zone, a second channel of the Suez Canal, and a new administrative capital in a Cairo suburb. More than 50 Indian companies have invested more than \$3.15 billion in Egypt" from Delhi.

When el-Sisi arrived in India earlier this year, the two countries announced that they had decided to elevate their bilateral relationship to a "strategic partnership". The strategic partnership is supposed to comprise four key elements, including scientific and academic collaboration; cultural and people-to-people contacts.

Diplomatic exchanges over the past few months, India and Egypt have witnessed a surge in ministerial-level political exchanges. Notably, key ministers from both countries have visited each other, showcasing the intensified focus on strengthening various aspects of the bilateral relationship.

Evolving Defence Cooperation

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The visits of Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in September 2022 and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in October last year have yielded remarkable outcomes in the realm of defence collaboration between India and Egypt.

These visits paved the way for the historic initiation of "Desert Warrior," a joint tactical exercise conducted by the air forces of both nations. Moreover, another bilateral Defence Cooperation was marked by Cyclone 2023, a two-week-long joint exercise conducted by the armies of India and Egypt.

The potential for defence cooperation between Egypt and India has become a prominent focal point of their evolving partnership. Reports have surfaced that India and Egypt are engaged in discussions pertaining to the supply of India's advanced Tejas fighter aircraft to Egypt.

This development signifies a momentous landmark, as it not only strengthens the military ties between the two countries but also lays the groundwork for Cairo to foster the growth of its own indigenous defence industry.

In addition to the remarkable co-production of cutting-edge military equipment, the upcoming discussions will delve into a significant proposition put forth by Egypt--an exclusive slot reserved for India within the prestigious Suez Canal Economic Zone.

This golden opportunity holds immense promise for advancing their economic collaboration and solidifying India's foothold in the region.

In addition to the remarkable co-production of cutting-edge military equipment, the upcoming discussions between our esteemed nations will delve into a significant proposition put forth by Egypt--an exclusive slot reserved for India within the prestigious Suez Canal Economic Zone. This extraordinary prospect holds immense promise for advancing economic collaboration and solidifying India's foothold in the region.

Furthermore, the realms of green hydrogen and tourism stand as fertile ground for fostering substantial growth and mutual prosperity. Indian investments in these areas possess tremendous potential, offering avenues for innovation, sustainability, and economic vitality.

By venturing into the realm of green hydrogen, we can drive the transformation towards a cleaner and more sustainable energy future, while the tourism sector holds immense possibilities for cultural exchange, economic stimulation, and the deepening of people-to-people connections. The convergence of ambitions in these domains holds the power to unlock new horizons of growth, prosperity, and bilateral cooperation.

The Way Ahead

The upcoming meeting between the two leaders holds immense significance as it provides an opportunity to address these concerns bilaterally and within the broader context of the G20, where Egypt has been invited as a guest country under India's G20 presidency. This convergence of interests sets the stage for collaborative efforts aimed at tackling shared problems and fostering mutual growth.