

A GRAND REVIVAL : ON INDIA-EGYPT TIES

The Hindu

Paper - III (International
Relation)

The decision by India and Egypt to upgrade their ties to a Strategic Partnership during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with Egypt President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi is a significant move for India's ties with the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) region that is long overdue, given their historical ties. The two countries signed a Friendship Treaty in 1955, and India's support to Egypt, including during the Suez Canal crisis in 1956, eventually led to the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, with both as founder members. They were also instrumental in the G-77 grouping and "South-South Cooperation" initiatives. During the Cold War, India and Egypt were united over their desire not to become "camp followers" of either the U.S. or the Soviet Union. More recently, their positions on the Ukraine war have been extremely similar — refusing to criticise Russia's actions but not condoning them either and calling for a diplomatic resolution.



Last year, India's decision to supply wheat to Egypt, one of the world's biggest importers that was hit by the blockade on exports from Russia and Ukraine last year, before the Black Sea Grain Initiative stepped in, won New Delhi much goodwill in Cairo. The two sides are also pursuing closer cooperation in green energy, pharmaceuticals and defence, with MoUs in agriculture, archaeology and antiquities, and competition law. Mr. Modi's visit to the Al-Hakim Mosque and meeting with Egypt's Grand Mufti appeared to be an attempt to dispel misgivings about his government's policies towards the Muslim world.

President El-Sisi who was India's Republic Day chief guest this year, conferred Egypt's highest State Honour, "The Order of The Nile", on Mr. Modi; it is given to world leaders and those "who offer Egypt or humanity invaluable services". The two leaders will meet again as Egypt is a "special invitee" to the G-20 Summit in

Delhi in September. The leaders appear to have spent much time focusing on multilateral issues, India's close ties in Egypt's neighbourhood (especially Israel and Saudi Arabia), food and energy security constraints, and building more cooperation with the Global South including the African Union. In March, Egypt joined the "New Development Bank" set up by BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa), and is keen to join this grouping that will deliberate new memberships at its Summit in Cape Town this August, where Egypt will seek India's support. Bolstered by historical ties, and buffeted by present-day geopolitical turmoil, it is clear that India and Egypt are now essaying a closer relationship, one that looks both at future economies and autonomous foreign policies.

Indian PM's state visit of Egypt

Recently Indian PM Modi completed his first state visit of Egypt. This was the first bilateral visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Egypt in 26 years. On this visit PM Narendra Modi was conferred with the 'Order of the Nile', Egypt's highest honour.

Background of relations 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.

The US-sponsored Uniting for Peace resolution, passed on November 2, 1956, pushed fighting forces behind armistice lines, and opened the way for what came to be known as the Eisenhower-Nehru formula.

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.

After the 1960s, there was a kind of decline in the intense India-Egypt relations. Throughout the 1970s and thereafter, these relations remained only at the business level.

What are the key highlights from the Indian PM's visit to Egypt?

Order of the Nile Award to PM:

Egyptian President has conferred Indian PM with 'Order of the Nile' award, the country's highest state honour. This is the 13th such state honour that several countries have conferred upon PM Modi.

Agreements signed:

An agreement was signed to elevate the bilateral relationship to a "Strategic Partnership" was signed by the two leaders. Three MoUs in the fields of Agriculture, Archaeology & Antiquities and Competition Law were also signed.

Visited Al-Hakim Mosque:

Indian PM visited the historic 11th-century Al-Hakim Mosque in Cairo, Egypt. Al-Hakim Mosque was restored with the help of India's Dawoodi Bohra community. The Dawoodi Bohra Muslims are a sect of followers of Islam who adhere to the Fatimi Ismaili Tayyibi school of thought. They are known to have originated from Egypt and later shifted to Yemen, before establishing a presence in India in the 11th century.

VISIT TO HELIOPOLIS WAR CEMETERY:

The PM visited Heliopolis War Cemetery in Cairo to pay respects to Indian soldiers who laid down their lives during World War I.

Expected Question

Que. With reference to the Al-Hakim Mosque, consider the following statements:

1. It was restored with the help of the Dawoodi Bohra community of India.
2. It is located in Cairo.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: 'The recent visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Egypt is an extension of India's Arab policy.' Do you agree with the statement? Discuss. (250 words).

Answer Format :

- ❖ At the beginning of the answer briefly discuss about the recent visit of Indian Prime Minister to Egypt.
- ❖ In the next part of the answer, discuss India's policy in the context of Arab countries and show it by connecting it with the present journey.
- ❖ Finally give a brief conclusion discussing the future scenario.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.