

India-Armenia Relations

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Topic- International Relations [GS Paper-2]

Context- Armenia and India have celebrated 30 years of bilateral diplomatic relations in the year 2022.

Key Highlights on India-Armenia Relations

Historical Links:

- The Mamikonians, a revered aristocratic dynasty that controlled vast swathes of Armenia until the 8th century.
- A branch of the family moved between Armenia and India, and the greatest warrior it produced is the fifth-century military commander Vartan Mamikonian bore a Sanskrit name.
- Centuries before Vartan Mamikonian led his forces in defence of Christianity against the Persian army, a pair of Indian princes from Magadha took refuge in Armenia and were even allowed to raise Hindu settlements.
- The warmth and liberality were reciprocated by the Indian rulers as late as the Mughal era.
- In 17th-century India, Armenians were greatly valued for their artisanship, granted trade privileges, and taken on as advisors by royal courts.
- So extensive was the network of Armenians in India that by the 19th century, Kolkata, which was a home among other Armenian-Indians, had gained a reputation as an Armenian city.

India's Contributions for Armenian State:

- India is the land where generations of Armenian diaspora communities have thrived and also gave shape to the dream of reviving the Armenian state.
- It was in Chennai that ideas of resuscitating the Armenian state bloomed for the first time.
- As early as 1773, Shahamir Shahamirian, the great Armenian nationalist based in southern India, published his pamphlet on a future Armenian state and it was a work that has justly come to be regarded as both a roadmap and a draft constitution for a reconstituted Armenia.
- Later, the first Armenian journal, Azdarar, was published from Chennai. Together, These two works of print galvanised Armenian communities around the world and gained a national consciousness.
- The Armenian republic that existed briefly between 1918 and 1920 was the culmination of an aspiration that had acquired wings in India.
- The Armenian republic which was reborn in 1991 was recognised by India a day after the demise of the Soviet Union.

- India chose Yerevan, the Armenian capital, as the site of its first embassy in the Caucasus.

Areas of Cooperation:

- Armenia is the only country in the region with which India has a friendship and cooperation Treaty (signed in 1995 in New Delhi).
- India has received three heads of states from Armenia, but it has none from Azerbaijan or Georgia.
- Also, there are over 30 Agreements/MoUs covering diverse areas of possible cooperation such as trade and commerce, culture, tourism, education, defense, science and technology, information technology, double tax avoidance, academic cooperation between institutes and think tanks, etc.

Trade and Economic Relations:

- The level of bilateral trade and investments remains below potential though some growth has been registered in the recent past.
- Indian exports consist of foodstuffs such as meat, electrical equipment, cut and polished diamonds, optical equipment, plastics, pharmaceuticals and other chemical goods and cars, while Armenia's exports include non-ferrous metals, raw-rubber, books and textiles.

Cultural Cooperation:

- India-Armenia Agreement on Cooperation in Culture, Arts, Education, Tourism, Sports and Mass Media was signed in the year 1995.
- The agreement provides the framework for cultural exchanges.
- Further, a Centre for Hindi Language and Literature was established at Yerevan State Linguistic University "Brusov" (YSLU).
- An abridged version of Ramayana in Armenian language was brought out by the Mission in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture of Armenia.
- Indian films and food are also very popular in Armenia.

Indian Community:

- The partnership between Armenia and India is pushed forward to a great extent by ordinary people from both countries, as it was two thousand years ago.
- The Indian community in Armenia also consists of students pursuing medical education at Yerevan State Medical University.
- The Indian community otherwise is miniscule composed of Indian or PIO professionals working for multinational companies or UN organisations.
- No incident of racial, communal or ethnic violence against the Indian community has ever come to notice.

India's Approach on Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

- India has adjusted its position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as the situation has evolved over certain years.
- In the initial stages of the conflict in 1993, India had endorsed the concept of respect for territorial integrity.
- For quite some time now, India's emphasis has been on a peaceful resolution of the conflict through several diplomatic negotiations.
- India has adopted a balanced and neutral stance and made a politically correct statement in which it has expressed its concern.
- Armenia extends its support to India on the Kashmir issue whereas Azerbaijan not only supports but also promotes Pakistan's narrative on this issue.
- However India has every reason not to support Azerbaijan's territorial integrity as Azerbaijan has shown scant regard for India's territorial integrity violated by Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir.

Way Forward

- It is quite difficult for India to publicly endorse the right of Nagorno-Karabakh for self-determination in view of the possible repercussions it can have for India.
- Adversaries may misuse it not only by making erroneous connections with Kashmir but also re-ignite secessionist movements in several parts of India.
- Also confidence-building measures between Azerbaijan, the Republic of Artsakh and Armenia are needed.

Armenia's Velvet Revolution

- In 2018, tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered in Yerevan in order to demand the expulsion of the then prime minister.
- The revolution was a series of anti-government protests staged by various political and civil groups led by a member of the Armenian parliament, Nikol Pashinyan.
- **Reasons:**
 - Protests and marches took place initially in response to Serzh Sargsyan's third consecutive term as the most powerful figure in the government of Armenia.
 - Later it was against the Republican Party-controlled government in general.

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

- Nagorno-Karabakh is a mountainous and heavily forested region which under international law is recognised as part of Azerbaijan.
- **History:**
 - After Azerbaijan's troops were pushed out of the region following a war in the 1990s, these ethnic Armenians have been in administrative control of Nagorno-Karabakh with needed support from Armenia.
 - In past three decades, ceasefires brokered by Russia and the United States have failed to hold.
 - In 2020, clashes broke out which rapidly escalated to become the deadliest

since the 1990s.

- **Present Status:**

- Armenia has been witnessing growing anti-government protests against possible concessions over the Nagorno-Karabakh territory, disputed with Azerbaijan.
- The ongoing aggression in the Caucasus, including the blockade of the Lachin corridor that has cut-off 1,20,000 Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh from the globe.