

Clashes at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa - Israel-Palestine Conflict

Why in news?

Israeli police stormed the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in East Jerusalem, leaving a reported 300 people injured, on a day Israel observes as Jerusalem Day.

What are the clashes over?

- The ongoing violence in Jerusalem is a culmination of the tensions building up since the start of Ramzan in mid-April, 2021.
- The unrest is over the eviction of Palestinian residents from two neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem, Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, to make way for Jewish settlers.
- A Jewish settlement agency has issued eviction notices to Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah.
- It claimed that their houses sat on land purchased by Jewish agencies in the late 19th century (when historic Palestine was a part of the Ottoman Empire).
- Arab families have been living in Sheikh Jarrah for generations.
- The Israeli Supreme Court postponed the hearing over the eviction, on the advice of the government.
- Israeli police set up barricades at the Damascus Gate, a main entrance to the occupied Old City of East Jerusalem.
- This move, aimed at preventing Palestinians from gathering there, led to clashes.

What happened?

- On the last Friday of Ramzan, more than 150 people were injured when Israeli forces broke up a massive gathering of Palestinian worshippers.
- They had gathered to pray at the Al-Aqsa mosque, revered as Islam's third holiest site.
 - This happened hours before the annual May 10 Jerusalem Day processions by Jewish groups through the Old City of East Jerusalem.
 - This marks the day the territory was captured by Israeli forces during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

- Israel annexed the territory later and incorporated it into West Jerusalem, captured earlier, in the 1947 war.
- The Palestinians sheltering inside the mosque threw stones and rocks.
- The Israeli Foreign Ministry said the incident was the “direct result of incitement by Palestinian terror groups”.
- The ministry maintains that people inside the compound were planning to attack the May 10 processions of the Jews.

What is the significance of the site?

- The clashes happened at one of the most revered and the most contested sites of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.
- The Al-Aqsa is located on a plaza at Temple Mount, which is known in Islam as Haram-e-Sharif.
- The Mount is also Judaism’s holiest site.
- The most imposing structure on the compound is the Dome of the Rock, with its golden dome.
- The Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall sacred to Jews, is one side of the retaining wall of the Al-Aqsa compound.

What is the contention there?

- Al-Aqsa is central to the rival claims over Jerusalem.
- Both Israel and Palestine have declared Jerusalem their capital.
- For the present, the Palestinian Authority has its headquarters in Ramallah.
- Soon after the 1967 Six-Day War ended, Israel gave back to Jordan the administration and management of the Al-Aqsa compound.
- Non-Muslims have not been allowed to worship at Al-Aqsa.
- But Jewish individuals and groups have made repeated attempts to gain entry to the Mount Temple plaza.
- Since the late 1990s, around the time of the first intifada, such attempts began occurring with a regularity.
 - Intifada refers to the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The first intifada lasted from 1987 to 1993, and the second began in 2000.
- Jewish settlers began claiming the land in East Jerusalem and surrounding areas.
- It has led to repeated clashes and tensions at Al-Aqsa.
- Frequently, the Israeli police have backed such attempts.

What is the long standing conflict?

- Jerusalem has been at the heart of the Israel-Palestine conflict.
- Israel captured the western part of the city in the 1948 first Arab-Israel war and the eastern half in the 1967 Six-Day War.
- It thus claims sovereignty over the whole city.
- On the other hand, the Palestinians say East Jerusalem should be the capital of their future state.
- Most countries have not recognised Israel's claim over the city.
- Most of them are of the view that its status should be resolved as part of a final Israel-Palestine settlement.
- Israel's tactic till now has been to hold on to the status quo through force.
- A peace process is non-existent and the Palestinians are divided and weak.
- Now, the move to evict Palestinians from East Jerusalem is seen as an attempt to forcibly expand Jewish settlements in the Arab neighbourhoods of Jerusalem.

What is the global response?

- The UN Secretary General and US National Security Adviser expressed concern over the clashes.
- UN Secretary General asked Israeli authorities to exercise "maximum restraint" and to uphold and respect the status quo at Al-Aqsa.
- The US wanted Israeli and Palestinian authorities to "act decisively to de-escalate tensions and bring a halt to the violence".
- The UAE has "strongly condemned" the clashes and the planned evictions in Jerusalem.
 - The UAE recently recognised Israel as a state and sealed a historic peace agreement to normalise relations with it.
- The statement issued by its Foreign Minister asked Israel to protect the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa.
- Saudi Arabia said it "rejects Israel's plans and measures to evict dozens of Palestinians from their homes in Jerusalem".
 - Saudi Arabia has notably given its tacit blessings to the "Abraham Accords" by not opposing Israel's recognition by UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan.
- Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan too condemned Israel for "violating all norms of humanity and international law".

What is Israel's response?

- At a special cabinet meeting to commemorate Jerusalem Day, Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel would "not allow any extremist

element to undermine the quiet Jerusalem.”

- He assured to uphold the law and order, to safeguard freedom of worship for all faiths, but said that Israel would not allow violent disturbances.

Source: The Indian Express, The Hindu

