

US Secretary of State Visit to India

Why in news?

US Secretary of State is going to visit India this week.

What is the current situation?

- For nearly two decades, India and USA had steadily **narrowed their multiple differences** inherited from the Cold War.
- They have **expanded the ambit** of their bilateral and multilateral cooperation.
- However, differences once again dominate the public narrative today which may include,
 1. Trade and market access
 2. Cross border data flows
 3. India's purchases of oil from Iran
 4. Purchase of advanced weapons from Russia.
- Although the divergence between the two nations is disturbing, it is worth remembering four important factors.

What the factors are all about?

- **India is not alone in facing sudden difficulties with USA** - Many of America's leading economic and political partners face similar challenges.
- **This is not the first time that India is facing a crisis-like situation with US** - Over the last quarter of a century, we have had many issues including Kashmir, South Asian security, India's rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Delhi's 1998 nuclear tests etc.
- Political suspicion and bureaucratic resistance in both capitals were relentless.
- Yet many of these difficulties were done away through engagement and sustained negotiations.
- **Opportunity in disguise** - The current dynamic situation between India and US is also an opportunity for taking a fresh look at the relationship that has seen some stagnation in recent years.
- It is also a moment to set some ambitious targets for the future.
- So, the current problems should not be considered as alarming ones.

How were the issues addressed in the past?

- Within a few weeks of India's Nuclear tests and American sanctions in May 1998, both the parties began a series of **conversation on the differences** over nuclear proliferation.
- The dialogue between the two leaders eventually led to the historic **civil nuclear deal** which was signed in 2005.
- This **deal facilitated** the lifting of most technology sanctions against India, the integration of India into the global non-proliferation order and the expansion of bilateral defence and security cooperation.
- Even when struggle arose in India to build a domestic consensus, the then US President was prepared to help move the negotiation forward at all critical junctures.

How different is the situation now?

- This time though, India will have to deal with a **very different US President**.
- He believes that America is being exploited by other countries.
- He insists on **fair trade and reciprocity** in US partnerships.
- But **India too is a very different country** from what it was in 1998.
- It has a **much bigger economy**.
- India is **interconnected** with the rest of the world as never before and has big stakes in consolidating the partnership with the US.
- Unlike the nuclear negotiation, where the real internal stakeholders were few, trade talks involve many government agencies, state governments and the business community.

What should be done?

- The key is to keep the negotiations going and make progress wherever one can.
- It is essential for modernising the partnership with the US so as to secure India's interests.

Source: The Hindu