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Resolving Bilateral Irritants with Iran

Why in news?

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Recently, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei equated the on-going Kashmir conflict with that of Yemen conflict and said that the Muslim world must express their disdain against 'oppressors'.

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Why Iran issued a statement like this?

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- The statement just **reflects his country's concerns** about getting regionally isolated at a time following the Donald Trump administration's hard line against them.
- The hardline seemed to have emboldened Saudi Arabia and its allies to **squeeze Iran out of the regional matrix.**
- Ex. Saudi Arabia has recently warned Qatar that more punitive measures would follow if Qatar embraces Iran any further.
- Thus, the statement might be a signal to India that its growing closeness to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, is being watched closely in Tehran.
- It's a reminder to India that Iran too has a role in the Islamic world which can't be ignored.

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What does the statement signify?

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- There is **nothing new** in his recent statement since Ayatollah has been talking of Kashmir since 2010.

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- Iranian criticism of India's position on Kashmir has repeatedly sparked protests within the Indian government.

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- Still, New Delhi has done well not to give it too much weight.

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- But eventhough Iran has earlier voted against India on the issue of Kashmir in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), this is the first time the **issue has been given a religious colour** by Iran.

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What should be the major concern?

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- The **recent decline in economic ties** should be of greater concern to the two countries.

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- Iran seems to be in no hurry to decide on awarding the contract for gas exploration in its **Farzad B offshore field** to ONGC Videsh.

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- Pending a decision on the contract, India has decided to decrease the volume of Iranian crude oil it will be buying this year.

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- Further, the **slow pace of the Chabahar port project** has vexed the Iranians.

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- They have even indicated that despite India developing the project, it won't be exclusive to the country.

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- For India, this **undercuts the very strategic utility of the port** — viewed as India's answer to the Gwadar port (developed by China) that will allow it to circumvent Pakistan and open up a route to landlocked Afghanistan.

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- Thus, India needs to work with the reformist regime of Hassan Rouhani (President of Iran) to ensure that the bilateral irritants in fostering economic ties are resolved soon.

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Source: The Hindu & The Indian Express

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