Clashes at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa

(Mains GS 2 : Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.)

Context:

- On Monday, Israeli police stormed the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in East Jerusalem, leaving a reported 300 people injured.
- It came on a day Israel observes as Jerusalem Day, and marked the fourth day of clashes at one of the most revered and the most contested sites of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Prevailed tension:

- On the last Friday of Ramzan last week, more than 150 people were injured when Israeli forces broke up a massive gathering of Palestinian worshippers who had gathered to pray at the mosque, revered as Islam's third holiest site.
- The stand-off came at the end of a week of tensions over the eviction of Palestinian residents from East Jerusalem to make way for Jewish settlers.
- On Monday, the tensions came to a head again, hours before the annual May 10 Jerusalem Day processions by Jewish groups through the Old City of East Jerusalem to mark 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 mosque & the Mount

- 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.

The rival claims over Jerusalem.

- Both Israel and Palestine have declared Jerusalem as their capital.
- In July 1980, the Israeli Parliament passed the Jerusalem Law declaring it the country's capital.
- Palestinians declared Jerusalem the capital of the putative state of Palestine by a law passed by the Palestinian Authority in 2000.
- The 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence also declared Jerusalem as the capital. For the present, the Palestinian Authority has its headquarters in Ramallah.

Al-Aqsa mosque and the issue:

- After the 1967 Six-Day War ended, Israel gave back to Jordan the administration and management of the Al-Aqsa compound.
- While non-Muslims have not been allowed to worship at Al-Aqsa, 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 as Jewish settlers began claiming land in East Jerusalem and surrounding areas.
- It has led to repeated clashes and tensions at Al-Aqsa.

World concerns:

- US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan called his Israeli counterpart to express "serious concern".
- The Security Council held a meeting on the situation in Jerusalem, but did not make any statement immediately.
- UN Secretary General António Guterres expressed "deep concern" over the violence and the possible eviction of Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem.
- He asked Israeli authorities to exercise "maximum restraint". A spokesperson for Guterres said the status quo at Al-Aqsa should be "upheld and respected".
- A White House spokesman said the US wanted Israeli and Palestinian authorities to "act decisively to de-escalate tensions and bring a halt to the violence".
- The UAE, which recently recognised Israel as a state and sealed a historic peace agreement to normalise relations with it, has "strongly condemned" the clashes and the planned evictions in Jerusalem over the past week.

- The statement, issued by Foreign Minister Khalifa al-Marar, asked Israel to protect the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa.
- Saudi Arabia, which has given its tacit blessings to the "Abraham Accords" by not opposing Israel's recognition by UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, said it "rejects Israel's plans and measures to evict dozens of Palestinians from their homes in Jerusalem".