FINDER
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The Iran war intensifies India's strategic challenge

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. Nature and Objective of the Iran War

- The war is **not primarily about eliminating an immediate military threat**, stopping **Iran's nuclear programme**, or destroying **ballistic missiles**.
- The central objective of the **U.S. and Israel** is to **eliminate the ideological foundations of the Iranian regime**.
- This ideology promotes **support for proxy groups** and attempts to reshape regional politics.
- Therefore, **regime change in Iran** is viewed by the U.S. and Israel as the **key pathway** to remove this ideological influence.

2. Iran's Proxy Network and Regional Impact

- Iran has long supported **non-state actors** to project influence and challenge Israel.
- Key examples include:
  - **Hezbollah in Lebanon**, which holds significant political and military power.
  - **Houthis in Yemen**, controlling large territory and targeting regional infrastructure.
  - **Shia militias in Iraq**, supported by Iran.
  - **Hamas in Gaza**, whose **October 7, 2023 attack** triggered major Israeli retaliation.
- Iran's strategy of **proxy warfare and ideological expansion** has alarmed **Gulf monarchies**, pushing them closer to Israel through agreements such as the **Abraham Accords**.

3. Limits of Military Strategy and U.S. Policy Dilemmas

- **Airstrikes alone rarely achieve regime change**, especially without **ground troops**.
- Iran has prepared for such threats by **decentralising authority across government institutions**.
- The conflict has expanded beyond Iran to **regional targets and maritime routes**, especially near the **Strait of Hormuz**, threatening **global energy security**.
- The **U.S. faces a strategic dilemma**:
  - End the war quickly and **declare victory**, or
  - Continue the conflict at the risk of **economic disruption, regional instability, and domestic political opposition**.
- Prolonged engagement in West Asia could **benefit rivals such as China and Russia**, as it distracts the U.S. from other global theatres.

4. Implications for India and the Regional Order

- The war is part of a broader **U.S. attempt to reorder West Asia's strategic architecture**.
- Despite strong **bilateral relations with Israel, Gulf states, and Iran**, India needs a **balanced regional strategy**, not just separate bilateral ties.
- Rising tensions threaten **India's energy security, diaspora interests, and regional investments**.
- The weakening of Iran could increase the influence of **Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan**, altering the regional balance.
- The world may soon see **changes in U.S.–China relations** when **Donald Trump meets Xi Jinping**.
- Countries like **Japan, South Korea, India, and Taiwan** are watching closely to see whether the meeting will strengthen **America or China**.

The lesson is national security cannot be outsourced

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1. Iran's Strategy and Escalation of the War

- The war began on **February 28** with **U.S.-Israel strikes on Iran**, citing **"existential" and "imminent" threats**.
- Contrary to expectations, **Iran retaliated strongly**, targeting **U.S. military bases and assets** across the **Gulf region**.
- Countries affected include **Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Oman**.
- Iran also struck **critical energy infrastructure** and threatened the **Strait of Hormuz**, causing **regional panic and global energy concerns**.

2. Collapse of the U.S.-Led Gulf Security System

- Gulf states had relied on **U.S. security guarantees** since the **1979 Iranian Revolution**.
- After the **1979 Iranian Revolution**, Gulf monarchies felt threatened.
- In **1980**, U.S. President **Jimmy Carter** declared that any attempt to control the **Persian Gulf** would be treated as a threat to **U.S. vital interests** and could be met with **military force**.
- Later initiatives included proposals such as **'Arab NATO' / Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA)**.
- Despite these assurances, the ongoing war has exposed the **weakness and unreliability of U.S. protection**, with Gulf countries struggling to defend themselves.

3. Lessons for India: Importance of Defence Self-Reliance

- India historically depended heavily on **arms imports**, which created vulnerabilities during the **1999 Kargil War**.
- The **Kargil Review Committee** recommended achieving **self-reliance in defence production**.
- Since **2014**, the push for **"Atmanirbhar Bharat" in defence** has accelerated domestic manufacturing.
- India now produces and exports major systems such as **BrahMos missiles, Tejas fighter aircraft, artillery guns, and ammunition**.
- **Defence exports reached ₹23,622 crore in FY 2024-25**, while **import dependence has fallen to about 25–30%**.

4. Future of Gulf Security and Global Implications

- Gulf countries like **Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar** are reconsidering their **security dependence on the United States**.
- Some are even exploring the possibility of **removing U.S. military bases** from their territory.
- Such moves could **transform the Gulf's security architecture**, which has existed for nearly **five decades**.
- The central lesson from the war is clear: **national security cannot be outsourced or bought through external guarantees**.

Bengal SIR test: reading the SC's order

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Indian Polity and Governance - Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues

Mains: General Studies - 2
Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

1. Background

- On **February 20, 2026**, the Supreme Court invoked **Article 142** to deploy judicial officers in **West Bengal** to examine cases related to the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls.

> **Article 142 of the Indian constitution** empowers the Supreme Court to pass any order necessary to ensure **"complete justice."**

- The decision came when the **second phase of SIR** was nearing completion and **nearly 60 lakh cases required adjudication.**

2. Reason for Supreme Court Intervention

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** stated that the **State failed to provide Group 'A' officers** of SDO/ SDM rank.
- Such officers are required to perform the **quasi-judicial functions of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs).**
- Instead, **Group B and C staff and clerical personnel were deployed**, which the ECI considered **unsuitable** for adjudicating electoral roll cases.
- To ensure completion of the process, the Court allowed **deployment of judicial officers from West Bengal and neighbouring States** such as **Odisha and Jharkhand**.

3. Institutional and Legal Issues

- The State also challenged the ECI's deployment of **Micro-Observers** and objected to notices issued under **"logical discrepancies"** categories.
- Nearly **60 lakh cases remain pending,** unlike Tamil Nadu and Kerala, where the SIR exercise was completed within the timeline.
- The episode highlights a **structural issue:** the ECI lacks a **permanent administrative machinery** and **relies on officials from Central and State governments** under **Article 324**.

4. Debate on Permanent Electoral Machinery

- In the Constituent Assembly, **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar opposed a permanent staff** for the ECI, citing **duplication and costs**.
- **R.K. Sidhwa** argued that reliance on State officials may **compromise independence** because they remain accountable to the executive.
- The West Bengal episode revives the debate on whether the ECI should have **permanent staff** for **preparing and updating electoral rolls.**

5. Current Status and Implications

- The **final electoral roll** published on **February 28, 2026** contains **7.04 crore electors**, but the number may increase after adjudication and supplementary lists.
- The Supreme Court's intervention seeks to ensure **timely completion of the SIR** while maintaining **electoral integrity.**
- The episode underscores the need to **strengthen institutional capacity** for credible and accurate electoral rolls.

What is the Musi riverfront development project?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
General issues on Environmental ecology, Biodiversity and Climate Change

Mains: General Studies - 3
Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

1. Background

- The **Musi River** flows for about **260 km**, including **55 km through Hyderabad,** but currently functions largely as an **open sewage channel** except during monsoon.
- It originates from the confluence of **Musa and Esi rivulets in the Ananthagiri hills** of **Vikarabad district, Telangana**.
- After the **1908 floods,** the **Asaf Jahi ruler Mir Osman Ali Khan** built **Osman Sagar** and **Himayat Sagar reservoirs** to control flooding.
- Several governments -**in 1997–98, 2017, and the current administration**, have attempted to develop the **Musi River as an urban waterfront.**

2. Project Features

- The project aims to develop **both banks of the 55-km stretch** of the Musi River in Hyderabad with **leisure spaces, commercial zones and heritage areas**.
- The government plans to ensure **year-round river flow** by diverting **2.5 tmcft water from the Godavari** through **Mallanna Sagar Reservoir** located 72 km away.
- **39 new sewage treatment plants (STPs)** are proposed in addition to 31 existing STPs to treat wastewater entering the river.

3. Implementation and Current Developments

- In **October 2024**, the State formed a consortium of five companies to prepare the **Detailed Project Report (DPR)**, which is **yet to be approved.**
- **Evictions of slum residents** along the riverbed triggered **protests, l**eading the government to initially focus development on **21 km along the Musa and Esi rivers**.
- The project proposes a **cultural precinct** called **'Gandhi Sarovar'** with the **world's tallest Gandhi statue** at the confluence of the rivers.
- The first phase has received **in-principle funding approval** from the **Asian Development Bank (ADB).**

4. Concerns and Opposition

- **Residents, civil society groups** and activists formed **'Musi Jan Andolan'** to oppose **forced evictions and lack of consultation.**
- Critics argue that the **DPR has not been publicly released** and residents are treated as **obstacles rather than stakeholders.**
- Fresh controversy emerged after **three land acquisition notifications**, including for a **gated community** near the proposed Gandhi Sarovar site.

KEYWORDS

The Capability Approach

- The Capability Approach is a framework for **evaluating human well-being and development.**
- It was mainly developed by **Amartya Sen** and later expanded by **Martha Nussbaum.**
- It emerged in the **1980s** as an **alternative to traditional measures of development** based only on **income or economic growth.**
- The approach emphasizes **human freedom and opportunities available to individuals**.
- It focuses on the ability of people to achieve valuable **"beings and doings"**, such as being **healthy, educated, and socially integrated.**
- It distinguishes between **capabilities** (opportunities or freedoms available) and **functionings** (actual achievements or outcomes).
- According to this approach, **poverty is seen as deprivation of capabilities,** not merely lack of income.
- **Development** is understood as **expansion of human capabilities and freedoms**..

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

- The **ISAF** was a **United Nations mandated mission** in Afghanistan aimed at helping the **Afghan government provide security** and build **Afghan security forces.**
- **NATO took command of ISAF on 11 August 2003**.
- **ISAF was first deployed in 2001** after a **request from the Afghan government** and a **United Nations Security Council mandate** to help **maintain security in Kabul and nearby areas**.
- Initially deployed to provide security in and around **Kabul**, the mission was gradually **expanded across Afghanistan by 2006**.
- From **2011**, security responsibilities were **gradually transferred to Afghan forces**, which took the lead in **nationwide security operations by summer 2013**.
- The transition was **completed in 2014**, when **Afghan forces assumed full responsibility** and the **ISAF mission ended**.
- At its peak, **ISAF had more than 130,000 troops from 51 NATO and partner countries**, making it **one of the largest coalitions in history** and **NATO's most challenging mission**.