

The Iran war, India's strategic autonomy challenges

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. Impact of the Iran War on India

- The **Israel-U.S. attack on Iran** has created a major geopolitical crisis for India.
- India depends on **Iran** for:
 - ➔ **Energy security**
 - ➔ **Geopolitical balance**
 - ➔ **Strategic autonomy**
- The conflict is described as a **"generational challenge"** for Indian foreign policy, bigger than the challenges posed by the **Ukraine war**.
- Recent economic and defence deals with **France** and the **European Union (EU)** were seen as strengthening India's global position.
 - ➔ However, the new **West Asian conflict** shows that these agreements may not significantly improve India's strategic advantage.

2. Challenges to India's Strategic Autonomy

- India traditionally balanced relations with countries like the **U.S., Russia, China, Iran, Israel, and Europe** without fully siding with any bloc.
- Under **Donald Trump**, the U.S. is increasingly linking:
 - ➔ **Economic policies**
 - ➔ **Trade**
 - ➔ **Strategic alignment**
- The U.S. pressured India to:
 - ➔ Stop buying **Russian oil**

- ➔ Reduce ties with **Iran**
- ➔ Avoid **de-dollarisation** efforts in **BRICS**

- This weakens India's ability to maintain an **independent foreign policy**.
- The sinking of the Iranian naval ship **IRIS Dena** by a U.S. submarine after participating in India's naval exercise hurt India's image as a **regional naval power**.

3. India's Deals with France and the EU

- India signed:
 - ➔ A major **Rafale fighter jet deal** with France
 - ➔ A long-pending **India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**
- These **agreements were seen as attempts to**:
 - ➔ Diversify partnerships
 - ➔ Reduce dependence on the U.S.
 - ➔ Protect **strategic autonomy**
- However, concerns remain:
 - ➔ Limited **technology transfer**
 - ➔ France retaining control over **source codes and algorithms**
 - ➔ Possible weakening of India's **Make in India** goals
- The **EU FTA** may also create domestic opposition from:
 - ➔ **Farmers**
 - ➔ **Industrial workers**
- Europe may use trade agreements to gain **economic leverage** over India.

4. America's Dominance and Europe's Position

- The **U.S. still dominates the global order**, despite talk of **multipolarity**.
- Most European countries eventually align with the **U.S.** during crises.

- A speech by U.S. Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** highlighted:
 - ➔ The idea of a united **Western bloc**
 - ➔ A **“western supply chain”**
 - ➔ Exclusion of the **Global South** from decision-making
- In today’s divided world, **Europe and India may not remain close partners during major crises.**
- Despite some reservations over the Iran war, **European countries are likely to support American and Israeli interests**, making it difficult for India to rely on Europe to protect its strategic autonomy.

Building a preventive health culture in India

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

Mains: General Studies - 2
Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

1. Context

- India has made **significant progress in healthcare** over four decades, building strong institutions and expanding advanced treatment access.
- However, the system remains **curative-focused rather than preventive**, prioritising treatment over health preservation.
- There is a **conceptual gap** where treatment of illness is mistaken for the pursuit of health.
- This calls for a **shift towards proactive and preventive healthcare.**

2. Nature and Scale of the Challenge

- **Non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** like heart disease, cancer, and diabetes are now the **leading cause of death**, overtaking infectious diseases.
- Around **270 million Indians live with chronic diseases**, many **unaware of their condition.**
- This reflects **poor early detection and awareness**, not lack of treatment capacity.
- Preventable illness leads to **loss of productivity and economic strain** on the nation.

3. Critical Window for Intervention

- The **30-40 age group** is a **key turning point** for onset of metabolic and cardiovascular risks.
- Many individuals **ignore preventive care** due to work and family pressures.
- By 40, a **large share is no longer disease-free**, often without awareness.
- **Early detection and lifestyle changes** can prevent or reverse many conditions, but the **window is limited.**

4. Way Forward

- India must promote **self-stewardship of health**, making prevention a daily practice.
- Focus should be on **routine check-ups, early action, and healthy habits.**
- Health must be seen as **active well-being**, not just absence of disease.
- Real change depends on **behavioural and cultural transformation**, beginning at the household level.

Capital flight and pressure on the rupee

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

Mains: General Studies - 3
Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

1. India’s External Economic Problems

- The **rupee has depreciated sharply** against major currencies.
- **Rising LPG and fuel prices have increased hardships** for common people.
- **Reverse migration of workers** to villages has been observed.
- India’s **current account deficit is widening** due to expensive oil imports.
- PM Narendra Modi urged people to reduce gold and petrol consumption.

- **Depreciation refers to the fall in the value of a country's currency compared to foreign currencies** in the foreign exchange market. Example: If more rupees are needed to buy one U.S. dollar, the rupee is said to have depreciated.
- **Current Account Deficit occurs when a country's total imports of goods, services, and transfers exceed its total exports**, leading to higher outflow of foreign exchange than inflow.

2. Capital Flight and Global Uncertainty

- **Conflict in the Persian Gulf triggered capital outflows** from India.
- **Closure of the Strait of Hormuz increased fears** in global markets.
- **Foreign investors shifted money** away from emerging economies.
- The **rupee weakened further because of higher demand for dollars**.
- Capital outflows happened despite no rise in U.S. or U.K. interest rates.

Capital flight refers to the large-scale movement of money or investments out of a country due to economic instability, fear of currency depreciation, or expectations of better returns elsewhere.

3. Interest Rates and Foreign Investment

- **Foreign investors compare Indian and foreign interest rates** before investing.
- Inflation and rupee depreciation **reduce returns on Indian assets**.
- **Higher foreign interest rates can attract capital** away from India.
- **India may need to raise domestic interest rates** to protect the rupee.
- **Higher domestic interest rates can reduce investment** and economic growth.

4. The 'Taper Tantrum' Comparison

- **In 2013, expectations of higher U.S. interest rates** caused capital outflows.

- The **U.S. Federal Reserve hinted at ending quantitative easing**.
- Emerging economies like India faced financial pressure.
- Current capital flight is similar to the 2013 taper tantrum.
- Investor expectations alone can affect currency and capital flows.

Taper tantrum refers to the 2013 financial market reaction when investors withdrew capital from emerging economies after the U.S. Federal Reserve signaled a reduction in quantitative easing (reducing its bond purchases).

5. India's Policy Response and Risks Ahead

- The **RBI imposed restrictions on some forex derivative contracts**.
- The **government increased import duties on gold**.
- These **measures have not solved deeper economic vulnerabilities**.
- Prolonged war **may increase global inflation and oil prices further**.
- Future interest rate hikes abroad could worsen pressure on India's economy.

India's labour market shows gains, but challenges persist

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Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

1. Context

- **7–10 million youth enter the labour market annually**, with **average schooling at 10 years**.
- Raises concerns about **job absorption, especially for youth and women**, and utilisation of India's **demographic dividend**.
- **PLFS(Periodic Labour Force Survey) 2025** shows **progress along with structural challenges**.

2. Positive Employment Trends

- Strong indicators: **LFPR(Labour Force Participation Rate) 59%, WPR(Workforce Participation Rate) 57%, unemployment 3%.**
- **Youth unemployment declining** since 2024; **female participation rising**, especially in rural areas.
- **Regular salaried jobs increased (22% → 24%),** while self-employment declined (58% → 56%).
- **Wages increased, especially for women:**
 - ➡ Regular work: **+7% (women) vs 6% (men)**
 - ➡ Self-employment: **+9% vs 8%**
 - ➡ Casual labour: **+5% for women, stagnant for men**
- **Structural shift:** Agriculture **43%**, manufacturing and services around **12%** and **13%**.
- **Reduced caste and gender segregation** among younger workers.

3. Key Challenges

- **Education-job mismatch:** roughly 5 million graduates yearly, only **about 2.8 million employed.**
- Only **4% have formal skill training,** though participation is higher among trained (83% men, 51% women).
- **Women constrained by unpaid work,** working **17.5 hrs (self-employed) and 7.9 hrs (salaried) less than men weekly.**
- **Gender wage gap persists:**
 - ➡ Women earn **76% of male wages in salaried work**
 - ➡ 69% in casual labour
 - ➡ Only **36% in self-employment**
- **NEET(Not in Employment, Education, or Training) issue:** Around **25% of youth (15-29)** are not in employment, education, or training, and are **excluded from unemployment data,** risking long-term disengagement.

4. Way Forward

- Expand **skill training and apprenticeships.**
- Enable **women's participation** via childcare and support systems.

- Promote **formal jobs with social protection.**
- Focus on **green and emerging sectors** for sustainable employment growth.

KEYWORDS

Vande Mataram

- Bankim Chandra Chatterjee **composed “Vande Mataram,”** which was first published in the journal **Bangadarshan** in **1875** and later included in his novel **Anandamath (1882).**
- The song **was set to music by Rabindranath Tagore** and became a major symbol of India's freedom movement.
- The **first two stanzas of Vande Mataram were adopted as the National Song by the Congress Working Committee** in 1937.
- On **January 24, 1950,** the **Constituent Assembly of India** adopted the **first two stanzas of Vande Mataram** as the **National Song.**
- On **7 November 2025,** the **Prime Minister inaugurated year-long celebrations commemorating the 150th anniversary of “Vande Mataram,”** India's national song.

Lightning

- **Lightning** is a sudden **electrical discharge** that can occur between **clouds,** between a **cloud and the ground,** or within the atmosphere itself.
- Normally, the **atmosphere/air acts as an insulator** between positively and negatively charged regions.
- When the **amount of charge becomes too great,** the **insulating capacity of the air breaks down,** causing a rapid discharge of electricity called **lightning.**
- The bright flash we see is known as the **return stroke,** which is one of the final stages of a lightning strike.
 - ➡ It can reach temperatures of around **30,000°C.**
- This **intense heat rapidly expands the surrounding air,** creating a **shock wave** that produces **thunder.**

Places In News

Temple of Heaven



- The **Temple of Heaven**, located near the **Zhengyang Gate** in Beijing, China, was used by the **Ming and Qing emperors** to worship heaven and pray for **good harvests**.
- Its design reflects the ancient Chinese belief that **"Heaven is round and Earth is square"** the northern part is **semicircular** and the southern part is **square**.
- Spread across **273 hectares** and surrounded by a **double wall**, the complex is divided into the **Inner Temple** and **Outer Temple**, with the main buildings located in the Inner Temple.
- The Temple of Heaven is considered a **masterpiece of Ming and Qing architecture** and is the **world's largest complex for offering sacrifices to heaven**.
- Its layout symbolizes the connection between **heaven and earth** and highlights the **special role of the emperor** in Chinese beliefs.

Raniganj Coal Belt

- It holds the **historical distinction of being the birthplace of the Indian coal mining industry**, with the first commercial extraction initiated by the **East India Company in 1774**.
- Located primarily in the **Paschim Bardhaman district of West Bengal**, extending into **Jharkhand**, the belt lies in the **Damodar River valley**, which **facilitated early industrialisation in eastern India**.

- Geologically, it belongs to the **Gondwana rock system** and produces **high-quality, high-volatile non-coking bituminous coal**, widely used for **thermal power generation and industrial heating**.
- In addition to traditional mining (including some of **India's deepest underground mines**), the basin is important for **Coalbed Methane (CBM) exploration and production**.
- The region faces **severe socio-environmental challenges** due to long-term extraction, including **land subsidence, underground mine fires, illegal mining, and air and groundwater pollution**.

