

Neighbourhood diplomacy and its West Asia challenge

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

Mains: General Studies - 2
India and its neighborhood- relations.

1. Background

- The **West Asia war began on February 28, 2026**, and escalated after the **U.S. sank the Iranian warship IRIS Dena on March 4**.
- The conflict is disrupting **trade, travel, fuel, food, fertilizers, and citizen safety in South Asia**.
- Around **25 million South Asians live and work in West Asia**, including **10 million Indians**.
- **Indian seafarers form about 15% of global merchant ship crews**, many operating near the **Strait of Hormuz**, increasing risks to them.

2. India's Diplomatic Position and Regional Reactions

- **U.S.-Israel strikes** killed Iran's Supreme Leader **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei**, but **India's response was slower** compared to neighbours.
- **Bangladesh and Pakistan issued condolences quickly**, while Maldives and Sri Lanka also expressed concern.
- **India sent the Foreign Secretary to the Iranian Embassy** after five days and later expressed grief over the killing of over 150 students and teachers in Minab.
- India **criticised Iran's retaliatory strikes** but did not explicitly criticise U.S. or Israeli actions, creating regional unease.
- **India's earlier statement** in the Israeli Knesset **supporting Israel** may have influenced its initial diplomatic posture.

3. Regional and Economic Implications for South Asia

- **Energy disruptions** have emerged, with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives seeking fuel from India, while Nepal and Bhutan may also face shortages.
- Since 2020, **South Asia has faced multiple shocks**, including
 - ➔ **COVID-19 pandemic**, India-China border tensions,
 - ➔ **Russia-Ukraine war**, fluctuating remittances,
 - ➔ **U.S. tariff pressures**, and AI-related job concerns.
- These pressures have contributed to **political instability and youth protests**, including Nepal's March 5 election that brought a **Gen-Z-led government to power**.

4. Strategic and Policy Implications for India

- India must **reassure neighbours** and maintain a **balanced approach** in West Asia.
- The U.S. sinking of IRIS Dena near Sri Lanka challenges India's role as a **net security provider in the Indian Ocean**.
- India should strengthen maritime cooperation through **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**, the **Colombo Security Conclave**, and **Information Fusion Centre -Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)**.
- Forums such as the **Quad Summit** and the **2026 BRICS Summit** will be important for managing regional tensions.
- India should **restore its traditional balanced engagement** with all West Asian powers while protecting its **economic and security interests**.

Belém as a test of a new model of forest finance

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 **climate summit in Belém, Brazil (Nov 2025)** renewed global focus on **tropical forest protection**.
- It highlighted that effective conservation requires shifting power to communities managing forests, not only financial pledges.
- Brazil proposed the **Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF)** as a **new global conservation finance model**.
- However, debates exposed concerns over **participation, equity and accountability**.

2. Key Features of TFFF

- Compensates countries** for **maintaining standing forests**, not only preventing deforestation.
- Secured \$5.5 billion initial commitments**, including \$3 billion from Norway.
- Structured to **generate financial returns** and **incentivise long-term conservation**.
- 20% of performance-based payments** are **reserved for indigenous peoples** and local communities.
- Co-designed** through consultations with **more than 400 community leaders**.

3. Key Concerns

- Indigenous representatives lack voting rights** in the governing body, limiting real decision-making power.
- The **Global Forest Coalition called the fund "colonialistic"**, warning it may **benefit intermediaries** rather than forest communities.
- Market-based funding may **ignore structural drivers of deforestation** such as agribusiness, mining, oil projects and infrastructure expansion.
- Earlier proposed payments** of around \$4 per hectare were seen as **inadequate**.

- Risk that national governments capture funds while **local communities receive little benefit**.

4. Supporting Initiatives and Key Lesson

- Brazil launched a digital platform** to help countries access TFFF.
- It was developed with the **UNDP, Food and Agriculture Organization, World Wide Fund for Nature, and Global Alliance of Territorial Communities**.
- The **Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership** renewed its Forest and Land Tenure Pledge.
- It committed **\$1.8 billion** for the period **2026-2030** to support indigenous and local communities.
- The core issue remains **ensuring secure land rights, accountability, and community control** over conservation finance.

Why India must electrify its kitchens

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

Mains: General Studies - 3
Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

1. Context

- India imports about 60% of LPG and 50% of natural gas**, making cooking fuel highly vulnerable to global price fluctuations.
- The **combined LPG and natural gas import bill reached about \$26.4 billion** in FY 2024-25
- Supplies depend on routes like the Strait of Hormuz**, making prices vulnerable to West Asian tensions
- Even with LPG connections, **many households still use firewood and dung** because unsubsidised LPG is expensive.

2. Can Electricity Beat Gas for Cooking?

- Electric cooking is **cheaper than unsubsidised LPG and piped natural gas** for many households.
- Induction cooktops (~85%) transfer much more energy to the vessel** than LPG burners (~40%).
- Indian cooking **often needs multiple pots at the same time**, so better multi-pot induction designs are needed.

- Experts suggest **starting electric cooking in cities, saving LPG for rural areas** with limited electricity.

3. What is 'Peak' Electricity Demand?

- Peak demand is the **time when electricity use is highest during the day, usually in the evening** when many appliances are used together.
- **India's peak demand increased from 148 GW in 2014 to 242.5 GW** in 2025.
- A 1°C rise in temperature can increase peak electricity demand by over 7 GW.
- If supply is still inadequate, load shedding (planned power cuts) may be imposed.

4. Can Smart Technology Flatten Peak Demand?

- OpenADR(Open Automated Demand Response) is a **technology that allows smart devices** like EV chargers, thermostats, and cooktops **to automatically adjust electricity use** during peak demand.
- It **enables two-way communication between the power grid and appliances**, helping manage electricity demand automatically.
- **Tata Power Delhi Distribution tested OpenADR** and reduced peak demand by about 14%.
- **Studies suggest nationwide deployment could cut peak demand** by around 7% in buildings.

5. Rooftop Solar and Neighbourhood Energy Trading

- A **Rooftop solar panel with a battery can turn households into "prosumers"** (both producers and consumers of electricity).
- Stored solar power can **reduce evening peak demand and grid costs**.
- **Peer-to-peer (P2P) energy trading allows households to sell excess solar power** directly to neighbours.
- **India tested blockchain-based P2P solar trading in Lucknow**, helping lower electricity purchase costs and reduce grid pressure.

6. What Needs to Happen Next?

- Expand programmes like **Go Electric and the National Efficient Cooking Programme (NECP)** to increase induction stove adoption.

- **Introduce time-of-use electricity tariffs** and ensure OpenADR-compatible smart meters and appliances.
- **Support R&D for multi-pot induction stoves suited for Indian cooking** and expand rooftop solar through PM-Surya Ghar Yojana.
- Encourage all-electric residential buildings in major cities to reduce LPG imports and strengthen energy security.

KEYWORDS

Anusandhan National Research Foundation

- The Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) was established under the **Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act, 2023** and functions under **the Department of Science and Technology (DST)**.
- It **subsumed the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB)** to streamline research funding in India.
- ANRF **aims to promote research and innovation across universities, colleges, and R&D institutions**.
- It acts as an apex body guiding India's research ecosystem, aligned with the National Education Policy 2020.
- The foundation **targets ₹50,000 crore funding for 2023-2028**, with about 70% expected from the private sector.

National Efficient Cooking Programme (NECP)

- The National Efficient Cooking Programme (NECP) is **implemented by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL)** to promote **energy-efficient cooking in India**.
- It **aims to transform cooking practices** by introducing induction-based cookstoves.
- The **programme targets the deployment of 20 lakh induction cookstoves** across the country.
- NECP is implemented in partnership with Modern Energy Cooking Services (MECS) for large-scale adoption of induction cooktops.

- It supports India's Go Electric campaign, offering 25-30% cost savings and contributing to carbon emission reduction.

Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership (FCLP)

- FCLP is a **voluntary international partnership** of countries and the European Union.
- It aims to **halt and reverse forest loss** and land degradation by **2030**.
- It supports implementation of the **Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use**.
- It brings together leaders from the **Global North and South** to **align policies and mobilise finance**.
- It promotes **forest-positive economic growth** and **sustainable development**.
- It emphasises the role of **Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs)** in conservation.
- **Membership is voluntary** and **does not require any fee**, but members are expected to contribute to action areas.
- **India is not a member** of the FCLP.