

Israel and Iran

- The 1979 revolution that brought down the Shah's monarchy and turned the country into a theocratic republic radically altered not just Iran but the whole region as well.
- West Asia would never be the same again.
- The revolution moved Iran, one of the natural powers in the region in terms of resources, geography and population, from an American ally to its top enemy.
- For the Sunni Gulf monarchies, a Shia theocratic republic across the Gulf waters not only posed geopolitical challenges but also existential and ideological threats.
- For Israel, the region's only nuclear power, its most prominent rival was just born.
- But despite their shared concerns, these three pillars could not come together immediately as there were pre-existing contradictions between Israel and the Arab world despite American sanctions, Israel and the Arab world, under the aegis of the United States, are coming together to counter their common foe.
- If Israel was ready to supply nuclear missiles to Tehran in the 1970s, its primary foreign policy objective today is to stop Iran from getting nuclear capability.
- Israel has carried out covert operations inside Iran targeting its nuclear and missile programmes, in what former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett called the "Octopus doctrine" hit the octopus at its head, not just at its tentacles.
- Iran has responded with drone attacks, targeting what it claimed was a compound used by Israeli operatives in northern Iraq.
- Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes inside Syria in recent years, targeting Iranian supplies and proxies, while a naval conflict between the countries, where ships linked to them have come under attacks in the Gulf, Arabian and the Mediterranean waters, is escalating.
- There is a consensus among West Asia's anti-Iran axis (the U.S., Israel and the Gulf kingdoms) that Iran's nuclear programme should be scuttled.
- If Iran achieves nuclear capabilities (even if it does not make a bomb), it could alter the regional balance of power, which is now in favour of Israel. But there is no consensus on how to address this challenge.
- The Obama administration signed the 2015 nuclear agreement with

Iran, which practically cut off its path towards nuclear capability.

- But Israel and the Gulf kingdoms were not happy with the JCPOA (or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as the deal is known) because in return for limiting Iran's nuclear programme, the agreement promised economic rewards to the Islamic Republic, which could transform Iran into a non-nuclear conventional, mainstream power in West Asia.
- Israel wants not just Iran's nuclear programme to be scuttled but also its rise to be contained.
- Israel saw its concerns being heard in Washington when the Trump administration decided to unilaterally pull the U.S. out of the nuclear deal and reimpose sanctions on Iran in 2018.
- U.S. President Donald Trump thought the administration's 'maximum pressure' approach would force Iran to flinch and return to the table to renegotiate the deal.
- Mr. Trump wanted programs from Iran on its weapons programmes and regional activism (support for non-state actors).
- But Iran took a 'maximum resistance' policy to Mr. Trump's maximum pressure it carried out attacks in Saudi Arabia and in the

Gulf waters, stepped up support for its proxies, especially the Houthis in Yemen who now pose a direct security challenge to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and started enriching large amounts of uranium to a higher purity and developing advanced centrifuges.

- The U.S. wants to address the nuclear programme but it wants to do so through talks as it does not want to get stuck in another conflict in West Asia certainly not now when its priorities are in Europe and Indo-Pacific.

Multi-directional strategy

- Iran wants the sanctions to be lifted in return for going back to its 2015 commitments.
- But it also wants to emerge from the crisis economically stronger.
- The U.S. wants to scuttle Iran's nuclear programme through talks, but it wants a "stronger and longer" deal that would address not just Iran's nuclear programme but also its "destabilising" activities in the region. In today's world, forests need to be celebrated more than ever before. Simultaneously, more forests need to be created and restored
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deforestation and forest degradation contribute around 12% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

- The total area occupied by primary forests in India has decreased by 3.6%.
- One of the reasons for the collapse of the Vienna talks was the Biden administration's refusal to undo the Trump decision of designating the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist group.
- Israel's goals (and that of its Gulf partners) are way more ambitious; it wants to scuttle Iran's nuclear programme, debilitate its military programme, build stronger region-wide defences against its proxies, and contain its rise.
- Israel has come up with a multi-directional approach is driven by a common goal to escalate the shadow war with Iran and forge a stronger security partnership with the Gulf kingdoms which could prepare them both for any full-scale war in the future, while the U.S. and Europe continue to hold talks with Iran.
- This strategy elevates Israel's role as a new security provider in the Gulf at a time when the U.S. is preoccupied with its priorities elsewhere.

Forest restoration

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- Typically, governments have relied on afforestation and reforestation as a means of establishing trees on non-treed land. These strategies have now evolved.
- The focus is now on forest landscape restoration the process of regaining ecological functionality and improving human welfare across deforested or degraded forest landscapes.
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deforested or degraded forest landscapes.

- Forest landscape restoration seeks to involve communities in the process of designing and executing mutually advantageous interventions for the upgradation of landscapes.
- Nearly two billion hectares of degraded land in the world (and 140 million hectares in India) have scope for potential restoration as forest land.
- A crucial aspect of this process is to ensure the diversity of the species while planting trees.
- Natural forests with diverse native tree species are more efficient in sequestering carbon than monoculture tree plantations.
- Forests are integral in regulating ecosystems, influencing the carbon cycle and mitigating the effects of climate change.
- Annually, forests absorb roughly 2.6 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide.
- This absorption includes nearly 33% of the carbon dioxide released from burning fossil fuels.
- Forests are a boon for local communities and their livelihoods by functioning as a resource base for goods and services. India is an agrarian economy.
- According to academics from the World Resources Institute, forest ecosystems enrich soil fertility and water availability, enhancing agricultural productivity, and in turn the rural economy.
- Tree planting prevents erosion and stems flooding. Sustainable forest crops reduce food insecurity and empower women, allowing them to gain access to more nutritional diets and new income streams.
- Agroforestry lessens rural-to-urban migration and contributes to an increase in resources and household income.
- Planting trees is deeply linked to the 'wholistic' well-being of all individuals, the community, and the planet.

India and programmes

- The span 2021-2030 is the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, emphasizing efforts to restore degraded terrestrial ecosystems including forests.
- In 2011, the Bonn Challenge was launched with a global goal to restore 150 million hectares of degraded and deforested landscapes by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030.
- India joined the Bonn Challenge in 2015, pledging to restore 26 million

hectares of degraded and deforested land by 2030.

- An additional carbon sink of 2.5 billion-3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent through forest and tree cover is to be created by 2030.
- There are a myriad government programmes such as Compensatory Afforestation, the National Afforestation Programme, the National Mission for a Green India (Green India Mission), the Nagar Van scheme and the Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme to name a few.
- Forest restoration in India faces hurdles in terms of the identification of areas for restoration, a lack of importance accorded to research and scientific strategies in tree planting, stakeholders' conflicts of interest, and financing.
- An analysis of public weather data over the last half a century by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), suggests that the all-India average temperature during the monsoon months (June-September) is higher than the summer months (March-May).
- Monsoon temperatures are 0.3°C higher than average summer temperatures when compared from 1951-80. In 2012-2021, this anomaly rose to 0.4°C.
- The India Meteorological Department has said that India's average temperature has risen 0.62°C from 1901-2020 but the CSE analysis says supporting similar studies on these lines that this has not meant a uniform rise in temperatures across seasons.
- It is the winter (January and February) and post monsoon (October-December) average all-India temperatures that have risen faster than even the monsoon and summer temperatures.

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Temperature anomaly

- India too has been registering instances of anomalous weather with alarming frequency with an erratic monsoon and coastal erosion.
- However, some recent changes are seemingly paradoxical.
- Average daily maximum temperature for north-western States in March was 30.7°C, whereas the all-India average was 33.1°C or 2.4°C hotter.
- The average daily minimum temperature showed an even larger (4.9°C) difference.

- Central India's normal maximum was 2°-7°C higher, while south peninsular India's normal minimum was 4°-10°C higher than temperatures in northwest India.
- From 2015-2020, 2,137 people had reportedly died due to heat stroke in northwest India but southern India had reported 2,444 deaths due to excess environmental heat, with Andhra Pradesh accounting for over half the reported casualties.
- The urban heat island effect whereby cities because of concrete surfaces and dense populations tend to on average be hotter than rural habitations also contributed to heat stress.
- Indian authorities are cognisant of these trends with some States, led by Gujarat, having Heat Action Plans (HAP).
- The National Disaster Management Authority is working with 23 out of 28 heat-prone States to develop HAPs that stress changes in the built environment: using material that keeps the indoors cooler, having an early warning system about heatwaves and improving health infrastructure to treat heat stroke patients.
- However, much remains in terms of reaching out to rural India as well as governments taking steps to plan

infrastructure and housing in ways that recognise the dangers from a warming environment.

- It is time that India includes financial incentives, preferably via Budget outlays, for effective cooling plans.

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