



## CHABAHAR - GATEWAY TO CENTRAL ASIA - GS II MAINS

Q. Chabahar Port holds immense strategic importance for both Iran and India. Discuss how chabahar port acts as a gateway to Central Asia for India. (15 marks, 250 words)

**News:** *Chabahar | India's gateway to Central Asia*

### What's in the news?

- The project, which was launched in early 2000s and saw sporadic progress over the years, mainly due to geopolitical reasons, got a booster last week as India and Iran signed a long-term agreement to further develop and operate the port.

### Backdrop of Chabahar Port:

Chabahar Port holds immense strategic importance for both Iran and India.

#### 1. Location:

- Chabahar Port is strategically positioned at the mouth of the Gulf of Oman in Iran.

#### 2. Deepwater Port:

- It stands as Iran's first deepwater port, holding a pivotal position on global oceanic trade routes.

#### 3. Geographic Positioning:

- Situated west of Iran's border with Pakistan, it competes with China's Gwadar Port, located to the east.

#### 4. Mitigating Western Sanctions:

- It allows Iran to mitigate the impact of Western sanctions.

#### 5. Alternative Trade Route:

- For India, it offers an alternative trade route, bypassing Pakistan's restrictions on land access for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

### Strategic Significance of Chabahar Port:

#### 1. Viable Gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia:

- The Chabahar port provides an alternative route for India to reach Afghanistan and Central Asia. India's land access to Afghanistan has been blocked by a hostile Pakistan.

#### 2. Enhancing India's Connectivity with Russia and Eurasia:

- The Chabahar port complements INSTC for optimising Indian connectivity with Russia and Eurasia.

#### 3. Diversification of India's Import Routes:



- The Chabahar Port provides strategic advantages to the Indian oil and gas sector through diversification of import routes

#### 4. Facilitate Supply of Humanitarian Assistance:

- The Chabahar port has facilitated the supply of humanitarian assistance, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### 5. Bolstering Bilateral Relations:

- The Chabahar port has given a boost to deepening of bilateral relations between India and West Asian neighbours.
- For example - India supplied 40,000 litres of the environment friendly pesticide (malathion) through the port to Iran to fight locust attacks in 2021.

#### 6. Countering Chinese Aggressive Infrastructure Push:

- The Chabahar project helps in countering the aggressive Chinese push in the Central and West Asian region due to projects such as BRI.
- For example - Counters the Gwadar Port being Developed by China in Pakistan.

#### 7. Anchor for Indian Trade in the West Asian Region:

- Chabahar port serves as an anchor for Indian trade in the West Asian region.
- It also enhances India's role in the Global Supply Chain.

#### 8. Enhanced Access to New Markets:

- The Chabahar port provides India the opportunity to access new markets in Central Asia, and for infrastructure development opportunities.
- The development of Chabahar Port will increase trade between India and Central Asia, with a potential bilateral trade value surpassing US\$ 200 billion.

### Challenges Ahead:

#### 1. Geopolitical Hurdles:

- Geopolitical complexities, particularly Iran's relationship with the US, have contributed to project delays.

#### 2. US-Iran Relations:

- The fluctuating US-Iran relationship has posed challenges, especially after the US withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018.

#### 3. Sanctions Impact:

- India faced challenges in finding international suppliers under sanctions.

#### 4. Afghanistan Dynamics:

- The situation in Afghanistan also affected India's relations with Kabul but gradually improved.



## 5. Geopolitical Uncertainty over the INSTC Project:

- The war in Ukraine and the destruction of Europe's relationship with Russia has complicated the integration of Chabahar port with INSTC.

## 6. Rising Regional Tensions in West Asia:

- Rising regional tensions between Iran and Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iran is also a major geopolitical challenge for smooth operation of the Chabahar project.

## 7. Declining India-Iran Trade:

- The stringent western sanctions on Iran has led to a significant drop in India's energy imports from Iran.
- These sanctions can impact the volume of trade through the Chabahar port.

## Way Forward:

### 1. Focus on Connectivity:

- Cooperation regarding the integration of the Chabahar port and the International North-South Transport Corridor should be undertaken.

### 2. Securing Waivers from US Sanctions:

- India must strive to obtain waivers from US sanctions on Iran, for smooth port operations.

### 3. Enhancement of Bilateral Trade:

- The bilateral trade between India and Iran must be increased to reap the full benefits of the Chabahar port.

### 4. Strategic Diplomacy:

- Active diplomacy, efficient implementation, and operations are vital for overcoming these challenges and maintaining Chabahar's status as a viable transit hub and a crucial link between Iran and India.

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