Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the issue; about India-Iran relations

News: India summoned Iranian ambassador to the foreign office to protest remarks made by Iran’s foreign minister on the recent riots in the national capital.

Background

- In a rare rebuke to India, Iran’s foreign minister slammed the government for the riots in the national capital, which have claimed over 40 lives.

- India has drawn criticism for the violent clashes in the national capital but Iran’s comments were unexpected given that Tehran generally avoids public criticism of matters seen as internal to India.

- Following the revocation of Article 370, which had granted special status to Kashmir, Tehran had limited its reaction to expressing concerns over the “condition of people” in the Valley and urging New Delhi to adopt “a fair policy” towards the people of the region.

- Tehran has also avoided taking Islamabad’s side whenever tension between India and Pakistan have escalated in recent years.

India-Iran ties

- India and Iran established diplomatic links on March 15, 1950. In addition to the Embassy in Tehran, India has two Consulates in Iran, one in Bandar Abbas and other in Zahedan.

- The ties between India and Iran have been on an upswing over the last few years notwithstanding US sanctions against the Shia majority country.
India has been maintaining cordial ties with Tehran and has been actively involved in the development of the strategically located Chabahar port in the Gulf nation.

- Since the 1990s, India and Iran have cultivated fairly close ties. It was then Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani’s visit to India in 1994 that ended India’s isolation in the Islamic world over the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992.

- In 1994, Iran had helped kill an anti-India human rights resolution on Kashmir that was brought in by Pakistan at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

- Some years later, India and Iran joined hands with Russia to back Afghanistan’s anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, which was headed by Tajik leader Ahmad Shah Masood till his assassination in September 2001.

- In 2003, India and Iran agreed to develop the Chabahar port but the project is yet to be completed as a result of India pursuing a civil nuclear deal with the US and also because of delays associated with India’s own decision making processes, according to analysts.

- In recent years, India has had to reduce its oil imports from the Shia majority country despite the fact that New Delhi acknowledges that Iran is an energy source that is situated geographically close to India. One reason that is given for New Delhi stopping oil imports from Tehran is the re-imposition of sanctions on Iran by the US after it pulled out of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

- The Indian community in Iran comprises of around 4000 Indian nationals. (This includes 80-100 families in Tehran and 13-15 families in Zahedan. There are approx. 2800 Indian nationals in Qom, Esfahan and Mashhad consisting of Indian students undergoing theological studies and their family members. There are also around 200 Indian nationals working in private companies in Iran). There is an Indian school in Tehran run by the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) under the aegis of Embassy of India.