

Nadir Shah's Invasion of India (1738–1739) – UPSC Notes

1. Background: Weakening of the Mughal Empire

Decline of the North-West Frontier Defence

- Under **Aurangzeb**, the **north-west frontier** (Kabul–Ghazni region) was well defended.
- Tribal chiefs were paid **regular subsidies**.
- Strong intelligence and communication existed between **Kabul and Delhi**.

Post-1707 Deterioration

- After **Prince Muazzam left Kabul (1707)**:
 - Administration became **corrupt and careless**
 - Soldiers' salaries remained **unpaid for years**
 - Tribal subsidies were **withheld**
- Frontier provinces were neglected due to:
 - Favouritism in appointments
 - Jobbery and corruption
 - Indifference of the Mughal court

2. Nadir Shah: Rise to Power

Early Life

- Born in **1688** in **Khorasan** (Turkoman Afshar tribe)
- Originally known as **Nadir Quli**
- Rose from poverty through **military skill**

Role in Persia

- Persia was under **Afghan domination** after:
 - Capture of Isfahan (1722)
- Nadir expelled Afghans and restored Persian power
- Became **Commander-in-Chief** under the Safavid ruler **Shah Tahmasp**

Becoming Shah of Persia

- In **1736**, Nadir overthrew the Safavids
- Assumed title **Nadir Shah**
- Founded the **Afsharid Dynasty**

3. Afsharid Dynasty

- Established: **1736**
- Founder: **Nadir Shah**
- Capital region: **Khorasan**
- The Empire at its peak extended over:
 - Iran, Afghanistan, parts of India (west of the Indus), the Caucasus
- Declined after **Nadir Shah's assassination (1747)**

4. Causes of Nadir Shah's Invasion of India

Immediate Causes

1. Afghan fugitives sheltered in **Kabul & Ghazni**
2. Mughal failure to honour promises
3. The attack and killing of **Nadir's envoy at Jalalabad**
4. Discontinuation of Mughal–Persian diplomatic exchange

Fundamental Causes

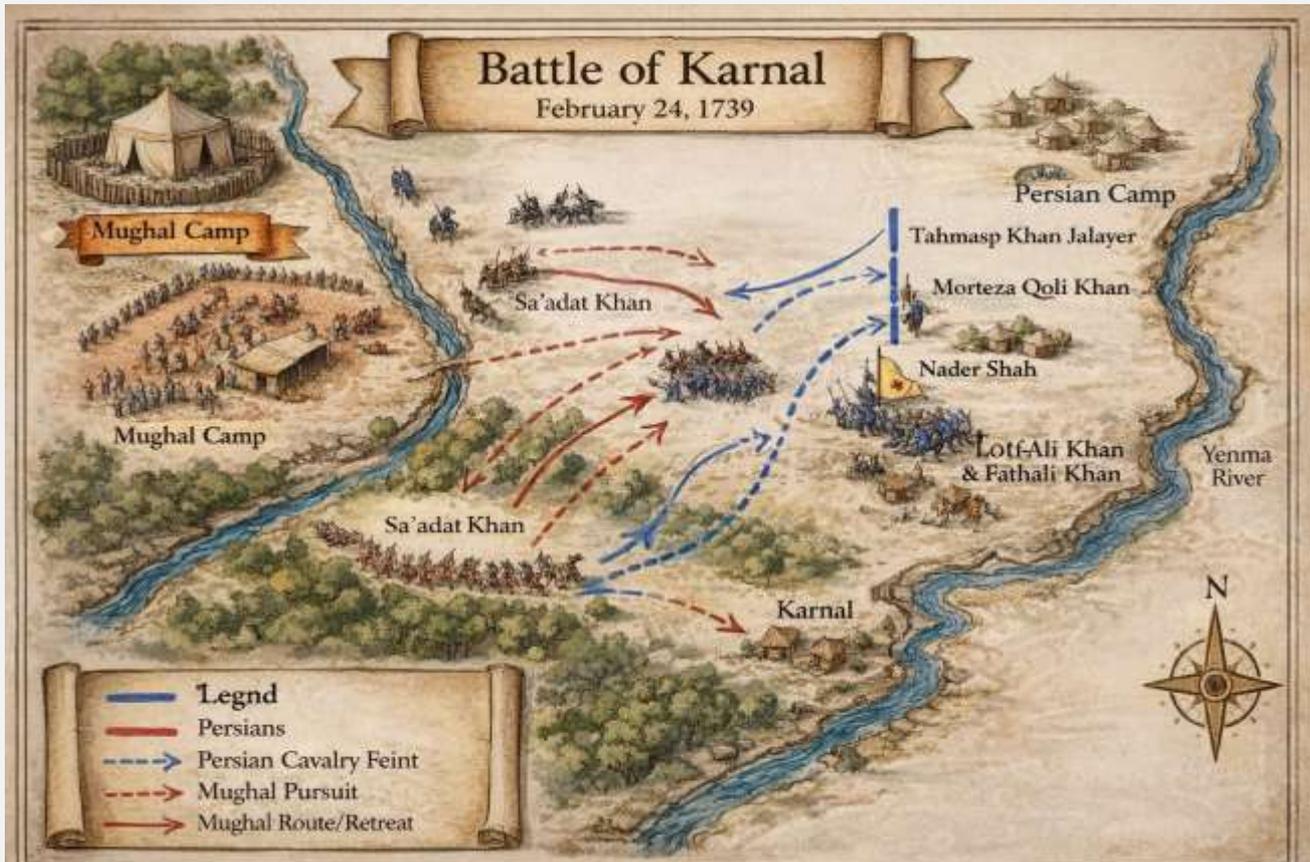
- **Ambition and the military expansionism** of Nadir Shah
- **Extreme weakness of the Mughal Empire**
- Knowledge of India's **immense wealth**
- Invitations and goodwill letters from **discontented Mughal nobles**
- Internal factionalism at the Delhi court

5. Course of the Invasion

Entry into India

- Ghazni captured: **11 June 1738**
- Kabul captured: **29 June 1738**
- Mughal governors surrendered **without resistance**
- Crossed the Indus at **Attock**
- Lahore subdued easily

6. Battle of Karnal (24 February 1739)



Mughal Side

- Emperor: **Muhammad Shah**
- Army: ~80,000 soldiers
- Leaders: Nizam-ul-Mulk, Saadat Khan, Khan-i-Dauran
- Poor coordination and rivalry

Persian Side

- Highly disciplined and experienced army
- Clear leadership under Nadir Shah

Outcome

- The battle lasted **only 3 hours**
- Khan-i-Dauran killed
- Saadat Khan captured
- Crushing Mughal defeat

7. March to Delhi & Sack of the City

- Nadir entered Delhi on **20 March 1739**

- **Khutba read, and coins struck** in Nadir's name
- Rumour of Nadir's death led to an uprising
- Nadir ordered a **general massacre**
 - ~30,000 people killed
- Stopped only after Muhammad Shah's request

8. Loot and Return

Enormous Booty

- ~30 crores rupees in cash
- Gold, silver, jewels
- **Peacock Throne**
- Animals and skilled artisans were taken to Persia

Territorial Losses

- Mughal territories **west of the Indus** surrendered:
 - Kabul
 - Kashmir
 - Sindh
- Annual tribute from Punjab

Political Arrangement

- Muhammad Shah was restored as the Mughal emperor
- Mughal sovereignty became **symbolic**

9. Peacock Throne

- Built by **Shah Jahan**
- Located in **Diwan-i-Khas, Red Fort**
- Adorned with emeralds, rubies, and diamonds
- Taken to Persia by Nadir Shah
- Destroyed after his death (1747)

10. Impact of Nadir Shah's Invasion

On the Mughal Empire

- Complete **loss of prestige**
- Severe financial ruin
- Breakdown of north-west defence
- Increased exploitation of peasants
- Intensified noble factionalism

Long-Term Consequences

- Exposed India to **repeated Afghan invasions**
- Encouraged **Ahmad Shah Abdali** (1748–1767)



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- Strengthened:
 - Marathas
 - European trading companies

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