

US JOINS ISRAEL IN WAR AGAINST IRAN



- US President announced a major military strike on three Iranian nuclear sites—Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan.
- The strikes, conducted using a full payload of bombs, mark the US's entry into the ongoing Israel-Iran conflict.

• US-Israel Alliance Reaches New Heights

- The US has transitioned from support to direct military involvement in Israel's offensive against Iran.
- Previously offering intelligence and defense assistance, the US now demonstrates "iron-clad" support through direct strikes, reinforcing Israel's claims that Iran poses an existential nuclear threat.

• A Shift from Trump's 'No Endless Wars' Doctrine

- President Trump, who campaigned against US involvement in foreign wars and promised military restraint, has taken a stark turn by ordering strikes on Iran.
- This contradicts his longstanding position, including his pledge to end the Ukraine conflict within 24 hours and avoid entanglement in the Middle East.

• Strategic Victory for Israel

- The US strike on Fordow has handed Israel a critical win, as it lacked the capability to destroy the deeply buried nuclear facility.
- This fulfills Israel's long-standing objective of degrading Iran's nuclear program and marks its strongest position against Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

• A Humiliated and Weakened Iran

- Iran is reeling under the impact of continuous Israeli assaults.
- With over 600 casualties in just over a week and the degradation of Iran-backed groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, the Islamic Republic is facing its weakest strategic moment in over four decades.

IRAN MOVES TO BLOCK STRAIT OF HORMUZ



- The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow waterway that connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, eventually leading to the Arabian Sea.
- It serves as a crucial maritime passage for oil-exporting countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. It handles a significant portion of the world's oil trade.
- Its location in the territorial waters of Iran and Oman adds to its geopolitical sensitivity.
- **Geographic Vulnerability**
 - At its narrowest, the strait is just 33 km wide, with a 3 km wide shipping lane in each direction.

Significance of the Strait of Hormuz

- The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil and LNG transit route.
- In 2024–25, over 25% of global seaborne oil trade and 20% of global oil and petroleum consumption passed through it.
- Additionally, 20% of global LNG trade, mainly from Qatar, also transited the strait.
- **No Sea Route Alternatives**
 - Geographically, there is no direct sea route alternative to bypass the Strait.
 - Any disruption would severely affect global oil and gas flows, causing sharp price hikes and broader inflationary impacts.
- **Limited Overland Alternatives**
 - Saudi Arabia and the UAE have overland pipelines—the 5 million bpd East-West pipeline and the 1.8 million bpd Fujairah pipeline, respectively.
 - However, these are insufficient compared to the 20 million bpd flow through Hormuz.
- **Higher Shipping Costs**
 - Perceived risks in the region increase insurance premiums and security costs, making global shipping more expensive and further impacting global trade.

Impact on India

- India, the third-largest crude oil consumer, relies on imports for over 85% of its oil and about 50% of its natural gas.
- Nearly 47% of India's May crude imports transited through the Strait, making it a lifeline for supplies from West Asian countries like Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and Oman.
- **Price Volatility Is the Main Risk**
 - While India has diversified oil sources—including Russia, the US, Africa, and Latin America—a blockade of Hormuz would disrupt global supply chains.
 - This, in turn, will cause oil and gas prices to spike, even if availability is not immediately compromised.
 - A price surge would impact **trade deficit, forex reserves, rupee value, and inflation**, stressing the overall economy.
- **China's Shift Could Intensify Demand Pressure**
 - If Iran's exports to China are blocked, Beijing may turn to other suppliers, increasing competition and further inflating prices, impacting India's energy costs and broader economic stability.
- **Ripple Effects on Freight and Refining Margins**
 - Disruptions would lead to higher freight rates and tanker insurance premiums, shrinking refinery margins across Asia, according to S&P Global's analysis.

India's Preparedness Amid Strait of Hormuz Tensions

- Due to rising tensions in the Middle East, oil prices could temporarily rise to USD 80 per barrel, according to analysts.
- **India's Key Energy Routes Remain Largely Unaffected**
 - Russian oil reaches India via the Suez Canal, Cape of Good Hope, or Pacific routes, bypassing the Strait of Hormuz.
 - Qatar's LNG supplies to India also do not rely on the Strait.
 - Other LNG sources like Australia, Russia, and the US remain unaffected.

INDIA OPENS DOORS TO FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- India is witnessing a landmark shift in its higher education landscape as several globally renowned foreign universities gear up to establish campuses in the country.
- Facilitated by the UGC (**Setting up and Operation of Campuses of Foreign Higher Educational Institutions in India**) Regulations, 2023, and reinvigorated by the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, this development is set to diversify academic opportunities for Indian students.
- With campuses likely in **GIFT City** (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City) and Navi Mumbai, this move aligns with India's ambition to become a global education hub.

Drivers Behind Foreign University Expansion into India

- **Global Decline in Domestic Enrolments**
 - Post-World War II, countries in the Global North expanded their higher education systems significantly.
 - However, in recent decades, declining birth rates have led to stagnation or a fall in domestic student enrolments. Consequently, many institutions became increasingly dependent on international students to sustain revenues and infrastructure.
- **Recent Policy Constraints in Traditional Host Countries**
 - Host nations like Australia, Canada, and the U.K. have introduced visa restrictions and capped international student admissions.
 - These policies have adversely impacted university revenues, leading to faculty layoffs and resource cuts.
 - In response, foreign universities are now exploring direct in-country presence in emerging markets like India.

Structural and Market-Level Challenges

- **Affordability Concerns**
 - Although India has a large student population, affordability remains a critical issue.
 - The cost of foreign university education, even if offered within India, may still exceed what an average Indian household can bear.
 - Ensuring cost-effective fee structures and scholarships will be essential for the success of these ventures.
- **Precedents of Mixed Success**
 - Experiences of foreign branch campuses in regions such as China, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia have been mixed.
 - While some ventures succeeded, others faced regulatory, financial, or student enrolment challenges and exited. India presents its own complex regulatory, cultural, and economic dynamics.
- **Limited Initial Impact**
 - In the near to medium term, the actual number of branch campuses and their total enrolment figures are expected to remain modest.
 - The initial response from Indian students will play a crucial role in determining long-term viability and scaling of such campuses.

Future Outlook

- If implemented successfully, foreign university campuses in India could:
 - Enhance student choices and academic quality.
 - Encourage Indian institutions to raise standards through competitive pressure.
 - Attract students from neighbouring South Asian and African nations.
- However, long-term success will depend on a supportive policy environment, pricing strategies, student perception, and the ability to adapt to Indian realities without compromising academic standards.

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STEERING THE INDIAN ECONOMY AMIDST GLOBAL TROUBLES

The Current Global Trade Climate: Risks and Challenges

- **Rising Trade Protectionism and Tariff Uncertainty**
 - At the forefront of this shift is the **United States**, which, **under successive administrations**, has **adopted a more protectionist approach** to trade.
 - The **review of existing trade agreements**, imposition of reciprocal tariffs, and pursuit of bilateral rather than multilateral deals have **introduced significant uncertainty for trading partners**.
 - For India, **this is particularly concerning as the U.S. remains its largest merchandise export destination**, accounting for nearly one-fifth of total exports.
- **Legal and Diplomatic Ambiguity**
 - Further complicating the scenario is the **unpredictability in U.S. trade policy itself**.
 - Though tariffs have been threatened, their **imposition is mired in ongoing bilateral negotiations and court decisions**.
 - A **notable example is the U.S. Court of International Trade's recent intervention**, which casts doubt over the legality of certain tariff measures.
 - As a result, **Indian policymakers and exporters find themselves navigating a constantly shifting terrain** with little clarity on long-term scenarios.
- **Intensifying Global Competition and Dumping Risks**
 - While India grapples with external uncertainty, it also faces **increased competition from other exporting nations**.
 - Countries such as **China, Bangladesh, and Vietnam**, traditional rivals in textile, electronics, and manufacturing sectors, may benefit from more **favourable trade terms with the U.S. or the European Union**, leaving Indian exports relatively disadvantaged.

Strategic Opportunities for India

- **Proactive Trade Engagements**
 - India's early initiation of **Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA)** negotiations with the U.S. signals a **proactive approach**.
 - Concluding such agreements swiftly can provide India a **first-mover advantage**.
 - The **BTA must be designed to secure zero-tariff** access in key export sectors while cautiously liberalising sensitive domestic industries.
 - It is also **vital to protect India's robust services exports** and address non-tariff barriers (NTBs) through mutual recognition agreements.
- **Diversifying Trade Partnerships**
 - The **successful finalisation of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** with the **United Kingdom** is a promising development.
 - India **must now pursue other strategic FTAs**, especially with the European Union and Australia, through Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements.
 - These **partnerships will broaden market access and reduce overdependence** on any single export destination.

Conclusion

- **India is navigating a turbulent phase in global trade**, characterised by volatility and unpredictability.
- However, **this disruption also offers a rare opportunity** for strategic repositioning.
- **By proactively negotiating trade agreements, diversifying markets, etc, India can not only mitigate current risks but also emerge as a pivotal player** in the global supply chain ecosystem.
- With a calibrated approach and visionary policy execution, **India stands poised to convert global headwinds into a catalyst for long-term economic ascendance**.

PALM TREE



The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has sought a response from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and others in a matter related to the large-scale felling of palm trees in Bihar which is reportedly causing an increase in lightning-related deaths.

- Palm is a member of the **Arecaceae, or Palmae**, a single family of **monocotyledonous** flowering plants of the order Arecales.
- It is an evergreen plant which can grow in the form of **shrubs, trees, or long**, woody vines called lianas.

Distribution: It is distributed in **America and in Asia**, from India to Japan and south to Australia and the islands of the **Pacific and Indian oceans**, with Africa and Madagascar as a third but much less important palm region.

Characteristics of Palm tree

- They are characterized by a **tall, unbranched stem** or, rarely, by a dichotomous branching stem (Hyphaene), and of the same diameter all along from base to top;
- Palmate leaves, like hands, grow in a bunch at the end of a stem. Pinnate leaves are like feathers, growing all along either side of a stem.
- Though many species of palms are sturdy and plentiful, as many as 100 species are endangered due to deforestation and unsustainable cultivation practices.
- The palms with the greatest importance in world commerce are the coconut and the African oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*); both are prime sources of **vegetable oil and fat**.

SARISKA TIGER RESERVE



- **Location:** It is located in the **state of Rajasthan**.
- It is spread over the world's oldest mountain range- the
- It was once a hunting ground of the Maharaja of Alwar before being proclaimed a natural reserve in 1955 and a national park in 1979.
- It is also famous for old temples, palaces, and lakes such as **Pandu Pol, Bhangarh Fort, Ajabgarh, Pratapgarh, Siliserh Lake**, and Jai Samand Lake.

Topography: It possesses a rocky landscape, **scrub thorn arid forests**, grasses, hilly cliffs, and semi deciduous wood.

Vegetation: The vegetation of Sariska corresponds to Northern Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests and Northern Tropical Thorn Forest.

Flora: The area of this reserve is covered with dhok trees.

Other species found include salar, kadaya, gol, ber, Banyan, gugal, bamboo, kair, adusta, etc.

Fauna: A variety of other wild animals, like the leopard, sambhar, chital, nilgai, four-horned antelope, wild boar etc are found in the reserve apart from the tiger.