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GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 1

US begins blockade of Iran's ports, Tehran threatens to hit Gulf; oil again tops \$100

Blockade won't impede transit to or from non-Iran destinations: US

Trevor Hunnicutt & Parisa Hafezi
Washington, Dubai, April 13

THE US military began a blockade of ships leaving Iran's ports on Monday, President Donald Trump said, and Tehran threatened to retaliate against ports of its Gulf neighbours

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Business as Usual

By EP UNNY

Take a short break from strategic silence and play an Asha song that should cut across.



MORE REPORTS, PAGE 21

Iran, India in touch on passage of ships: Envoy

Shubhajit Roy
New Delhi, April 13

INDIA AND Iran are in contact with each other on the passage of Indian ships through the Strait of Hormuz and the Iranian embassy is sending a fresh consignment of about 20,000 kg of medicine from India on Monday night, an Iranian diplomat told *The Indian Express* on Monday.

So far 45,000 kg of medi-



Iran's Ambassador Mohammad Fathali in New Delhi, Monday. ANI

cines have been shipped to Iran in two batches since the war

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Iran, India in touch

broke out. The latest batch will be sent in a Mahaan air flight from Delhi to Mashhad, sources said, for nationwide distribution. These medicines are mainly for Iranians who have been injured in US and Israeli strikes in the war before the two-week ceasefire was declared on April 9.

According to the Iranian embassy here, over 30,000 people have been injured — of whom 4,989 are women, 1,997 are children under the age of 18 years and 70 children are under the age of 2 years.

The medicines have been purchased by the Iranian embassy in Delhi from donations from the people of India, and is valued at about 1 lakh Euros (about Rs 1.09 crore), the Iranian diplomat said.

In his first briefing since the

war broke out February 28, Iranian Ambassador to India Mohammad Fathali said Monday that India and Iran are in touch on the passage of ships through Strait of Hormuz. “We have good contact with Indian government. We want to help the Indian government, and they helped us during these days, and because of our relations,” Fathali said. “We also believe in the freedom of navigation, we are also committed to international law. But the Strait of Hormuz is the territorial water of Iran and Oman.”

When asked if the Indian government has to pay for the passage of the Indian ships to cross the Strait of Hormuz, he said, “You can ask from the Indian government if they paid anything up to now or not.”

“Our high-ranking officials believe that we, as Iran and

India, have a common interest, and God willing, we have a good relation(ship) in the future, and now, in these difficult times, we have a good relationship.”

Recalling that PM Narendra Modi has spoken to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian twice, he said, “Iran and India share a common interest and common fate.” Asked what it will take to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, Ambassador Fathali said that Iran believes in freedom of navigation and is committed to international law.

“I think that it depends on the situation. You know that (US President Donald) Trump announced so many things, particularly last night. Iran believed that and committed to international law and freedom of navigation. What we believe is (on) the Strait of Hormuz...we announced that in the near future we will provide the mechanism and announce it to all the countries.”

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INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 18

what Iran's top delegates have signalled so far

Abhinav Chakraborty
New Delhi, April 13

EVEN AS US President Donald Trump continues to dial up the rhetoric after the marathon US-Iran peace talks in Islamabad on April 11 and 12 failed to reach an agreement, Iran is yet to rule out diplomatic pathways to end the conflict.

US Vice President JD Vance, who led the American delegation, said that Iran's refusal to commit to never seeking a nuclear weapon was a deal-breaker.

On the other hand, Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said that the talks were "full of mistrust and suspicion", pointing to differences both sides had over the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, among other issues.

Although both sides have stated no further negotiations were scheduled, one line by Baghaei stood out: "Diplomacy never ends."

Considering that this was the first time both countries held direct negotiations since 1979, Iran's approach to the Islamabad talks signalled seriousness. Its delegation comprised more than 70 people, and the presence of experienced diplomats, financial and legal experts, and military officials implied a focus on resolving longstanding issues pertaining to economic sanctions and the nuclear option.



Pakistan's Army chief Asim Munir, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, and Mohd Bagher Ghalibaf, Speaker of Iran's Parliament. X/IRANAM/PAK

Mohammed Bagher Ghalibaf, Speaker of Iran's parliament, led the delegation along with Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. Other prominent individuals in the Iranian camp included Reza Amiri Moghadam, Iran's ambassador to Pakistan, Ali Bagheri Kani, member of Iran's National Security Council; Admiral Ali Akbar Ahmadian, a former top official of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and secretary of the National

Security Council; General Esmail Ahmadi Moghadam, retired military commander and head of Iran's National Defense University; and Abdolnasser Hemati, governor of the Central Bank of Iran.

Mohammed Bagher Ghalibaf

Since the conflict began in February, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf's profile has only risen owing to his public statements and him being perceived as a "pragmatic hardliner" in the Iranian establishment. Few were surprised when he was chosen to lead Iran's delegation.

Following the talks, Ghalibaf posted on X that the Iranian delegation had "raised forward-looking initiatives", but the US ultimately failed to gain its trust during the negotiations. His statement — "we will not for a moment cease our efforts to consolidate the achievements of the forty days of Iran's national defence" — has underlined the high stakes involved.

Abbas Araghchi

Abbas Araghchi was also at the forefront along with Ghalibaf — primarily owing to the central role he played in the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (which Trump scuttled in 2018).

After the talks, Araghchi said on X that Iran had engaged with the US "in good faith to end war" but had encountered "maximalism, shifting goalposts, and blockade" when an "Islamabad MoU" was within reach. "Zero lessons earned. Good will begets good will. Enmity begets enmity," he said, sounding a word of caution.

Reza Amiri Moghadam

As Iran's ambassador to Pakistan, Reza Amiri Moghadam also took part. Of all statements coming from the Iranian side, his echoed a sentiment of optimism.

Calling the Islamabad talks "not an event but a process", he said on X: "The Islamabad Talks laid the foundation for a diplomatic process that, if trust and will are strengthened, can create a sustainable framework for the interests of all parties."

GS 2: INDIAN POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE : 1

SC tells EC that voting is a sentimental right

Poll body departed from promise to leave voters on 2002 rolls untouched during the SIR, says SC

We did not find logical discrepancy cases in Bihar; this is a question of fairness, says Justice Bagchi

Robust appellate process needed for excluded voters as EC purging names was unilateral: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday told the Election Commission of India (EC) that the right to be on the electoral roll and to vote in one's own country is not only constitutional but sentimental.

The top court was referring to lakhs of voters excluded for "logical discrepancies" and lining up for appeal hearings in West Bengal, hardly 10 days ahead of the Assembly election, following an "inquisitorial" special intensive revision (SIR).

The court said 34 lakh appeals by voters purged from the West Bengal electoral roll have already been filed for hearing before 19 appellate tribunals and there were over a lakh appeals pending before each of these tribunals.

The poll body had frozen the electoral roll for the State on April 9, days ahead of the polling on April 23 and 29.

After months of interventions to make the SIR more inclusive, the top court made cutting remarks about the impact of an exercise the poll body said was necessary to "purify the electoral roll".

"The right to remain on the electoral roll, the right to vote in the country you are born in is something which is not only constitutional but sentimental. It is the biggest expression of nationality and patriotism that you are in a participatory process to elect a democratic government," Justice Joymalya Bagchi, part of the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, said while addressing the poll body.

Senior advocate Dama Seshadri Naidu, for the poll body, said "statistics" proved West Bengal did not "stand out" and was "on par" with other States in the number of exclusions.

"We are not bothered about West Bengal 'standing out'. But no other State has a category called 'logical discrepancy'. We have

Ballot proof

While the EC had frozen the West Bengal electoral rolls on April 9, the top court noted that 34 lakh appeals have been filed before 19 tribunals across the State



Ruling awaited: People gather to appeal before a tribunal over issues related to the SIR in Murshidabad, West Bengal, on Monday. PTI

It is the biggest expression of nationality and patriotism that you are in a participatory process to elect a democratic government

JUSTICE JOYMALYA BAGCHI
Supreme Court judge

examined Bihar, we did not find a single person flagged for logical discrepancy... This is not a question of inflating or shrinking the EC, but of fairness," Justice Bagchi said.

The judge noted that the court had permitted the poll body to embark on an inquisitorial exercise

mindful of the latter's concern about the electoral rolls. "The original SIR notification said voters in the 2002 electoral roll would not be touched. The 2002 roll would be the benchmark. But when you introduced 'logical discrepancy', you infringed that rule," Justice Bagchi told

the poll body. Mr. Naidu said voters who could prove their credentials were retained. Those with disparity in their names or other background details were asked to provide details, which were verified. "A voter in the 2002 roll was not required to give anything.. When the Bihar SIR was argued, and the Bihar SIR was a facsimile of the SIR we are dealing with today, the EC was unequivocal when it submitted that a person in the 2002 voter list does not have to prove anything. No uploading of documents was required... And then you deviated from your original arguments," Justice Bagchi said.

Uncertain atmosphere

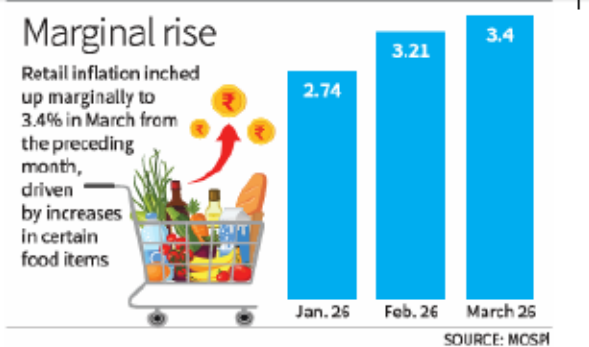
So far, the Supreme Court had avoided any direct criticism of the SIR. Justice Bagchi referred to how the exclusion of voters in the name of logical discrepancy came "so close" to the date of election in West Bengal that the top court had to step in and deploy judicial officers to hear out the objections. This was all the more reason why the appeal process must not be hurried, the judge said. The Supreme Court judge said the top court wanted a robust appellate process in place for the excluded voters as the purging of names from the list by the EC was a "suo motu" and unilateral process. This was followed by a "verification" of identity documents during the objections phase of the SIR, and not exactly a hearing. "The appellate process must be robust... somewhere we are getting blinded by the dust and fury of an impending election... We need to protect the due process rights of the voters," Justice Bagchi said.

Justice Bagchi referred to how the exclusion of voters

So far, the Supreme Court had avoided any direct criticism of the SIR. Justice Bagchi referred to how the exclusion of voters

GS 3: INDIAN ECONOMY

THE HINDU PAGE : 1



Food prices push retail inflation up to 3.4% in March

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Retail inflation inched up to 3.4% in March from 3.21% in February, mainly due to an uptick in prices of certain food items, show data released on Monday. The food inflation, based on the consumer price index (CPI), was estimated at 3.87% as against 3.47% in February. This remains below the Reserve Bank of India's median target of 4%.

The data released by the National Statistics Office is based on a new series with a base year 2024.

High inflation was noticed during March in gold and silver jewellery, coconut (copra), tomato, and cauliflower. On the other hand, inflation was in negative in onion, potato, garlic, arhar dal, and chickpeas, according to the NSO data.

The CPI was at 1.65% in 'electricity, gas and other fuels' segment during March as against 1.52% in the preceding month. Inflation rates for rural and urban segments are 3.63% and 3.11%, respectively. Housing inflation rate for March 2026 was 2.11%.

Highest inflation was in Telangana at 5.83% and the lowest in Mizoram at 0.66%.

Food inflation, based on the consumer price index, was estimated at 3.87% as against 3.47% in Feb.

Commenting on CPI data, ASSOCHAM President Nirmal K. Minda said the government's approach to manage prices by keeping petrol and diesel rates unchanged, despite a sharp rise in international crude oil prices, is highly commendable.

The RBI has also supported economic activity by maintaining a stable repo rate, he added.

ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said the CPI inflation rose slightly to 3.4% in March over February, indicating a mild initial impact of the West Asian crisis on the headline number. "The sequential uptick in year-on-year inflation was driven by food and electricity, gas and other fuels groups, with the latter reflecting the impact of the West Asia crisis across LPG and alternate fuels," she said.

NSO collects real-time price data from selected 1,407 urban markets (including online markets) and 1,465 villages covering all States/UTs.

GS 2 : INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE HINDU PAGE : 15

Iran and Strait of Hormuz: a lone struggle for control of the world's vital artery

NEWS ANALYSIS

M. Kalyanaraman

In the negotiations that began on Saturday in Pakistan, a key U.S. demand from Iran will be free passage – both unrestricted and cost-free – for merchant ships through the Strait of Hormuz. Although Iran has often threatened to control the strait and use it as leverage, including during the Iran-Iraq war, this is the first time the issue has been formally raised at the international negotiating table.

Iran has floated the idea of levying tolls to fund post-war reconstruction. However, tolls are typically charged only in artificial waterways such as the Suez Canal and Panama

Canal – not in natural maritime chokepoints. Naturally occurring straits such as Malacca, Bosphorus and Dardanelles, Bab-el-Mandab, the Baltic Strait, and Gibraltar have traditionally allowed free passage.

The distinction lies in sovereignty and construction. The Suez and Panama canals are man-made channels within national territories, and tolls are effectively rents for their use. Additional fees apply for services such as pilotage, escorting, and mooring. Both Egypt and Panama earn billions of dollars annually from these canals.

The Panama Canal, in particular, remains a striking engineering achievement, lifting ships across elevations like an escalator between the Atlantic and Pacific. Historically, inter-

national straits have been flashpoints between littoral states and external powers, often serving as bargaining tools during conflicts. In the early stages of the current crisis, Iranian officials suggested the Strait of Hormuz would remain open to merchant shipping. That position quickly shifted, with warnings issued against transit. Even the perception of instability drove insurance premiums to unsustainable levels, sharply reducing shipping traffic.

Historical parallel

Iran has since permitted limited transits, mainly for its own vessels and those of friendly nations. India remains among the more favoured countries, despite having reduced its engagement with Iran over the



Iran initially suggested that the Strait of Hormuz would remain open to merchant shipping, but that position quickly shifted. REUTERS

past decade – cutting oil imports, scaling back involvement in Chabahar port, and dissolving the Iran O Hind shipping joint venture.

For India, some degree of Iranian control may not be entirely negative, aside from increased costs. However, other Persian Gulf states strongly oppose such a shift. Some point to Turkey's control over the Bosphorus and Darda-

nelles as a precedent.

There is indeed a historical parallel. The current Iran conflict has been driven in part by U.S. President Donald Trump's assertive posture. In 1915, Winston Churchill, as the head of the British Navy who saw himself as an assertive leader defending British imperial power, led the Gallipoli campaign in an attempt to seize control of the Turkish straits. Al-

lied forces suffered heavy losses and withdrew in defeat. While Churchill's campaign failed, the Ottoman Empire – long the gatekeeper of the straits – was also weakened and eventually collapsed.

The aftermath reshaped the region. Mustafa Kemal Pasha emerged to lead a secular Turkish state that sought formal sovereignty over the straits. Various treaties attempted to regulate access, but the issue was ultimately settled by the Montreux Convention of 1936.

Under this framework, Turkey retained control while guaranteeing free passage for merchant vessels, subject to safety regulations. Warships faced restrictions, and no tolls could be charged for passage, though fees for ser-

vices were allowed. The rules tightened in wartime: Turkey could block warships of belligerent states and restrict merchant vessels if national security was at risk. This framework remains relevant. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Turkey invoked the convention to block Russian warships. It also restricted certain merchant shipping, citing safety concerns after sanctions caused ships carrying Russian oil to lose insurance.

Since then, maritime law has evolved significantly. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) treats oceans as global commons and enshrines freedom of navigation, including for warships under innocent passage. These provisions currently govern the Strait

of Hormuz.

The Montreux precedent shows that altering such frameworks requires complex, prolonged negotiations involving multiple stakeholders and competing interests. Any move away from the principle of free navigation would face significant resistance.

UNCLOS cannot easily be modified to accommodate an exception for Iran. Turkey's success in securing control over its straits was shaped by great-power rivalries – particularly between Western powers and Russia, later the Soviet Union. Iran lacks comparable backing.

With multiple stakeholders opposed, Iran may find itself once again negotiating largely on its own, with even its allies reluctant to intervene directly.