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**IMPORTANT**

**EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS**

**DELHI CENTRE:**  
636, Mukherjee Nagar  
New Delhi-110009

**PRAYAGRAJ CENTRE:**  
1/1/8A, Stanley Rd,  
Maharana Pratap Chauraha,  
Civil Lines, Prayagraj, UP - 211002

 **9555-124-124**

 **sanskritiias.com**

## GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## THE HINDU PAGE : 1

# Trump mulls ending war; U.S. eases curbs on Iran oil

U.S. President says securing the Strait of Hormuz is the responsibility of other nations; he adds U.S. is very close to meeting its objectives; however, Tehran claims to have attacked 2 American bases



**Big hit:** Members of a Red Crescent rescue team working at a building that was damaged by a strike in Tehran. REUTERS

## Stanly Johny

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Saturday that he is considering "winding down" the war on Iran, adding that securing the Strait of Hormuz – now under Iran's control – is the responsibility of other nations, even as Washington temporarily eased sanctions on Iranian oil shipments in a bid to alleviate the global supply crisis.

"We are getting very close to meeting our objectives," the U.S. President wrote in a post on a social media platform.

Mr. Trump also said that the U.S. has "degraded" Iran's missile capability, "destroyed" its defence industrial base, and "eliminated" its Navy and Air Force, including anti-aircraft weaponry. The U.S. President vowed to protect

America's allies in the region, "including Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, and others", adding that the U.S. had taken out Iran's nuclear capability, and would never allow Tehran to rebuild it.

The U.S. Treasury Department on Friday said it was temporarily lifting sanctions on Iranian oil already loaded onto vessels, to tackle supply disruptions and rising prices.

Meanwhile, on Saturday evening, Alireza Tangsiri, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Navy said the Guards had attacked two American bases in the Persian Gulf.

"IRGC pounded the facilities of the two Al-Minhad [UAE] and Ali Al-Salem [Kuwait] air bases, the hangars, and the fuel depots of American-Zionist aircraft

with a massive volume of ballistic missiles and suicide drones. These bases were the origin of the aggression against #Iranians-lands," Mr. Tangsiri said in a post on Saturday.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in a statement, "By temporarily unlocking this existing supply for the world, the U.S. will quickly bring approximately 140 million barrels of oil to global markets, expanding the amount of worldwide energy and helping to relieve the temporary pressures on supply caused by Iran." "This temporary, short-term authorisation is strictly limited to oil that is already in transit."

The U.S. and Israel have carried out thousands of air strikes in Iran since they started the war on February 28. At least 1,400 people have been killed,

including Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and its Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani. Mr. Trump has repeatedly claimed that the U.S.-Israeli strikes have destroyed Iran's military capabilities.

Despite such claims, Iran has consistently carried out missile and drone attacks against Israel and America's Persian Gulf Arab allies, besides taking control of the Strait of Hormuz through which one-fifth of the world's traded oil passed before the war. The attacks on oil facilities in the Gulf and the closure of the Strait have driven up oil, gas, and fertilizer prices. Brent crude closed at \$106 a barrel on Friday, up from \$72 on February 28, the first day of the war.

RELATED REPORTS ON  
» PAGES 9 AND 12

## GS 2: INDIAN POLITY

### THE HINDU PAGE: 8

# What did the SC say about paid maternity leave?

Why did the Supreme Court strike down Section 60(4) of the Social Security Code, 2020? What did it say about maternity leave for adoptive mothers? What did the Court recommend that the Union government do regarding paternity leave?

Priscilla Jebaraj

The story so far:

Last week, the Supreme Court ruled that adoptive mothers could avail themselves of 12 weeks of paid maternity leave regardless of the age of their children at the time of adoption. Striking down Section 60(4) of the Social Security Code, 2020 (previously Section 5(4) of the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961), which limited this benefit only to mothers who adopted children under the age of three months, the Court said that an adoptive mother had the same rights and obligations towards the child as a biological mother.

What is the law on maternity leave in India?

Statutory maternity benefits for working women in India began to be granted in colonial times. The Bombay Maternity Benefit Act, 1929, covered women factory workers. It was followed by similar laws in other parts of the country in the run-up to Independence. In 1961, Parliament passed the Maternity Benefit Act to provide paid maternity leave of 12 weeks to working women across the country.

In 2017, the Maternity Benefit (Amendment)

The Court noted that the period of leave plays a key role in fostering emotional bond between the mother and the child

Act not only extended the period of paid maternity leave for biological mothers to 26 weeks, but also inserted a provision extending maternity leave for the first time to adoptive mothers or surrogate mothers. Section 5(4) of the Act stated that surrogate or adoptive mothers legally adopting a child below three months would be entitled to maternity leave for a period of 12 weeks from the date the child is handed over to the mother.

Why was this law considered inadequate?

This provision was challenged in 2021 by Hamsaanandini Nanduri, a lawyer who adopted siblings in 2017. Ms. Nanduri told *The Hindu* that her Bengaluru-based law firm gave her only six weeks of paid maternity leave. "I could not leave my young children at home to turn up in office after just six weeks, so I took some additional months of unpaid leave. But it made me angry that there was no policy about it," she said.

Terminating the 12 weeks of maternity leave granted in 2017 to adoptive or surrogate mothers as "mere lip service", the petitioner contended that when compared to the 26 weeks of maternity leave granted to biological mothers, the provision violated the fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution.

The three-month limit was unjust to both children and parents, depriving older adoptees from receiving the maternal care they need for their development and integration into their adoptive families, her lawyer argued.

The petitioner also pointed out in Court that adoption procedures take much longer than three months in India.

Also, as Ms. Nanduri told *The Hindu*: "I found on filing an RTI (Right to Information) application with CARA (Central Adoption Resource Authority) that less than 5% of children adopted at that time were under the age of three months."

What did the Court say about motherhood?

The Court made it clear that motherhood cannot be seen through the "narrow lens of biology" alone. It referred to adoption as part of the "right to reproductive autonomy". It noted that "the period of leave plays a crucial role in fostering [an] emotional bond between the mother and the child". The Court added that

stress hormone levels in children raised in orphanages are often higher than those in children brought up in a familial environment, which pointed to a greater need for paid maternal leave for older adoptees.

How will the judgment help adoptees and their parents?

Madhumitha Venkataraman started interviewing for jobs as a senior IIR executive while waiting for an adoption referral, stipulating in every interview that she would need paid time off to support her child. Several multinational organisations balked at the idea of granting leave for more than a few weeks. But Ms. Venkataraman was finally recruited by a global media company that promised her one year of paid maternity leave. "My son came home at the age of three and a half months in 2023, so I was not eligible for maternity leave under the old law. But because this company was so accommodating, I did not have to choose between my career and my parenting," she said. "There are emotional needs, and not just for the child. The time at home with my son gave me space to grow into motherhood," she said. It is this time and space that other adoptive mothers say they will be entitled to as well, from now.

Noopur Goyal's daughter was 15 months old when she came home in 2021. "I worked as a paediatric cardiologist at a top hospital in Delhi. I knew there was no provision for maternity leave, so I had to give up my job," said Dr. Goyal, a single parent who works as a freelance consultant in Noida. "I had brought her into a new world, so I had to be present for her. An adopted child has been uprooted twice. I needed the time at home with her to build attachment and give her a sense of security." Dr. Goyal said she was financially stable to be able to do this, but she is "glad now that there is a law mandating 12 weeks of paid maternity leave for all adoptive mothers."

What did the Court say about paternity leave?

The Court also called on the Union government to examine the need for a formal law recognising paternity leave for all fathers, adoptive or biological. Noting that India's legal framework does not adequately account for the role of fathers in childcare, it underlined the importance of shared parenting. As of now, only male government servants are entitled to 15 days' paternity leave for the birth of a child or adoption. Leaves in the private sector are generally determined by company policies.



Mother and child. GETTY IMAGES

## GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## THE INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 1

STRIKES TO CONTINUE UNTIL THREATS REMOVED: ISRAEL DEFENCE MINISTER

# Iran fires two long-range missiles at Diego Garcia, says its Natanz n-site hit

Winding down ops, let countries that use Strait of Hormuz police it, says Trump

Jana Choukeir, Idrees Ali & Phil Stewart

Dubai, Washington, March 21

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump said the US was considering "winding down" its military operation against Iran, as Iran and Israel traded attacks Saturday and Iranian media said the nuclear enrichment facility in Natanz had been attacked.

Iran fired two ballistic missiles towards the US-British military airport on the island of Diego Garcia, 3,800 km away in the Indian Ocean but did not hit the base, the Wall Street Journal reported.

A source at Britain's defence ministry said the attack had occurred before the government gave specific authorisation Friday for the US to use British military bases to carry out strikes on Iranian missile sites.

In a social media post,  
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



During Eid al-Fitr at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Grand Mosque. AP

## First op use of IRBMs by Tehran, way beyond West Asia theatre of war

Abhishek Chakraborty  
New Delhi, March 21

IRAN'S BID to target Diego Garcia, a joint US-UK military base in the Indian Ocean, with ballistic missiles has made the world sit up. Because Diego Garcia is around 4,000 km away from the Iranian mainland.

While neither of the two ballistic missiles reached the is-

land — one was said to have failed mid-flight and the second was targeted by an SM-3 interceptor launched from a US Navy warship — this was the first time that Iran had disclosed and deployed intermediate-range ballistic missiles.

The IRBMs, with a range of 3,000-5,500 km, bridge the gap between medium-range

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

PM speaks with Iran President, flags attacks on energy infra, shipping lanes

'Cessation of aggression by US, Israel,' must to end war: Iran

Shubhajit Roy  
New Delhi, March 21

AS THE war in West Asia entered its fourth week with no signs of a let-up, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Saturday, flagging growing concerns over attacks on "critical infrastructure" and the importance of "safeguarding freedom of navigation."

Tehran, for its part, made it clear that an "immediate cessation of aggressions" by US and Israel was a "pre-requisite for ending the war."

In the call, Modi's second  
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## THE INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 2

## Iran fires missiles at Diego Garcia

Trump said the US was close to meeting its goals but insisted that other countries should take the lead in policing the vital shipping lane of the Strait of Hormuz, whose near-closure threatens a global energy shock.

Trump and his administration have sent mixed messages about US goals throughout the war, now entering its fourth week, leaving traditional US allies struggling to respond.

Trump has suggested the war could wind down as the Iranian threat was being eliminated, while at the same time US Marines and heavy landing craft head to the region.

"We are getting very close to meeting our objectives as we consider winding down our great Military efforts in the Middle East with respect to the Terrorist Regime of Iran," Trump said on Truth Social.

"The Hormuz Strait will have to be guarded and policed, as necessary, by other Nations who use it — The United States does not" he added. "If asked, we will help these countries in their Hormuz efforts, but it shouldn't be necessary once Iran's threat is eradicated."

As the fighting continued, Iranian media said US-Israeli forces had attacked the Shahid Ahmadi-Roshan Natanz enrichment

The War  
DAY 22

● Iraq said Saturday Iranian gas supplies have resumed at 5 million cubic metres per day. It was halted after an attack on South Pars.

● The US has announced

temporary lifting of sanctions on sale of Iranian oil stranded at sea in a bid to cool down crude prices. It will make available 140 million barrels of Iranian oil. **REPORTS, P 12**

ment complex Saturday morning.

Technical experts found that no radioactive leaks had occurred and nearby residents were not at risk. Israel said it was unaware of such a strike while the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said it was investigating.

Russia called it "a blatant violation of international law".

Iranian media later reported strikes on a passenger terminal in the southern port of Bushehr and an empty passenger ship at nearby Kharg Island. The island, where Iran loads nearly all its oil exports, is seen as a potential target if Washington decides to hit Iranian energy or to use ground troops to seize it.

Iran said it fired drones at US bases in the UAE and Kuwait used to stage attacks on Iranian

islands in the Gulf.

Israel also attacked Beirut, saying it was targeting the Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah militia, in the deadliest spillover from the war on Iran since Hezbollah fired on Israel in support of Tehran on March 2.

Defence Minister Israel Katz said Israel was "determined to continue leading the attack against the Iranian terrorist regime, to behead its commanders and to thwart its strategic capabilities until any security threats to Israel and US interests in the region are removed".

Israel also said it had attacked Tehran, Karaj, west of the capital, and the central city of Isfahan. Three members of a family were killed in a strike on a residential building in the city of Ramsar, Iranian media reported.

Air raid sirens in Israel warned of incoming missiles from early morning, sending millions to shelters as the blasts of interceptions rang out from above. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Natural gas prices in Europe surged as much as 35% this week as Iran and Israel hit some of the region's most important gas infrastructure.

The European Union urged members to lower gas-storage targets and start refilling reserves gradually to curb demand, the Financial Times reported Saturday. The Strait of Hormuz, conduit for around a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies, has been effectively closed to most shipping.

Leading allies of the US from Europe as well as Japan and Canada have pledged to join "appropriate efforts" to ensure safe passage through the strait, but Germany and France have spelled out that fighting must stop first.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told Kyodo news agency that Iran was ready to let Japan-related vessels pass through the strait, which carries around 90% of Japan's oil imports.

—REUTERS

## THE INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 2

## First op use of IRBMs by Tehran

ballistic missiles (MRBMs with a range of 1,000-3,000 km) and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs with a range exceeding 5,500 km).

That Tehran, which has been launching MRBMs from its arsenal to reach targets in Israel, chose to strike Diego Garcia, home to US strategic bombers, demonstrated its ability to strike beyond West Asia and hurt US interests. Until now, it had limited its ballistic missile range to 2,000 km to reach its adversaries in the region. But the attempt to hit Diego Garcia confirmed suspicions of IRBMs in its arsenal. Western analysts have long pointed to Iran's space programme, and warned it could develop and deploy IRBMs, even ICBMs.

Diego Garcia is the largest island in the Chagos Archipelago and one of only two critical US bomber bases in the Indo-Pacific

region, the other being Andersen Air Force Base in Guam. The base hosts bombers, nuclear submarines, and guided-missile destroyers.

It sits approximately 3,000 km from both the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait at the mouth of the Red Sea and the Malacca Strait near the South China Sea. This strategic location allows long-range bombers to reach the two critical maritime chokepoints. The base is also critical to US Space Force tracking infrastructure. Numerous air operations were launched from Diego Garcia during the Persian Gulf War in 1990-91, US-led strikes on Afghanistan in 2001, and the initial phase of the Iraq War in 2003.

After the Iranian Revolution in 1979 dramatically destabilised West Asia, Diego Garcia underwent the biggest expansion of any US military site since Viet-

### The 4,000-km target



nam. The harbour was deepened to accommodate aircraft carriers; a 12,000-foot runway was built for B-1, B-2, and B-52

bombers; and massive pre-positioned ships, each roughly 1000 m, were loaded with enough weapons and supplies for an entire Marine brigade. Other advanced weaponry is also housed on the island. The UK leased the island to the US for 50 years in 1966, and extended it in 2016 for another 20 years. This extension meant the lease would expire in 2036. But then a 2025 sovereignty agreement with Mauritius was finalised.

In 2019, the International Court of Justice ruled that the UK's original separation of the Chagos Archipelago - Diego Garcia is its largest island - from Mauritius had been illegal and recommended that the islands be returned.

A resolution of sorts came in May 2025 when UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer signed a formal agreement transferring sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, with Diego Garcia immediately leased back to the UK for the next 99 years for 101 million pounds a year.

## GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 12

## Iran's IRGC overhauls Hezbollah command to ready group for war

Reuters

Beirut, March 21

IRAN'S REVOLUTIONARY Guards (IRGC) rebuilt Hezbollah's military command after it was mauled by Israel in 2024, plugging gaps with Iranian officers before restructuring the Lebanese group and laying plans for war it is waging in support of Tehran, two people familiar with IRGC activities said.

The overhaul was the first of its kind for Hezbollah, a Shi'ite Muslim group founded by the IRGC in 1982, pointing to a hands-on approach after the blows of the 2024 war, including the killing of its leader Hassan Nasrallah and other top commanders. Iran's investment paid off, getting Hezbollah back on its feet in time to enter the war in the Middle East on Tehran's side after it was attacked by the United States and Israel.

Reuters reported earlier in March that Hezbollah had seen another war as inevitable and spent months readying itself. This article sheds light on the IRGC's role in these preparations, based on accounts from six sources who spoke on condition of anonymity as well as an expert on Hezbollah.

The IRGC, deeply involved in Hezbollah since it was established, sent officers to retrain its fighters and oversee rearmament, the two sources familiar with IRGC activities said.

They said IRGC officers also reshaped Hezbollah command structures that had been



Israeli soldiers patrol the Israeli side of the border with Lebanon, in northern Israel on Saturday. AP

### • From Rigid Command to Decentralised Force

- Iran's Revolutionary Guards rebuilt Hezbollah after heavy losses in the 2024 war.
- About 100 IRGC officers were sent to retrain fighters and supervise rearmament.
- The Guards replaced Hezbollah's rigid hierarchy with small, decentralized units.
- Units were structured to know little about each other, boosting operational secrecy.
- IRGC helped reorganize Hezbollah's command and military planning after the ceasefire.
- Coordinated missile attack plans from Iran and Lebanon were drawn up and used March 11.
- Hezbollah fighters are now more resilient, able to continue fighting after major losses.
- Analysts say the group now mirrors Iran's "mosaic defence" model for flexible warfighting.

breached by Israeli intelligence - a factor that had helped Israel kill many Hezbollah leaders.

An Israeli military spokesperson said on March 12 that Hezbollah remains a relevant and dangerous force despite the damage Israel has inflicted on it over the last three years. Hezbollah has fired hundreds of missiles at Is-

E.

rael since it entered the regional war on March 2, prompting an Israeli offensive that has killed more than 1,000 people in Lebanon. Hezbollah fighters are battling Israeli soldiers who have seized ground in the south. It has yet to be seen how Hezbollah would fare in the event of a full-scale Israeli invasion.