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Stalled at the Consulate
A new visa bottleneck tests global mobility — and the U.S.–India talent compact

By Uday Kumar Varma

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Introduction

Across the rich world, immigration pathways are tightening in near synchrony — and India is bearing the brunt. Over the past year, the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia have introduced tougher rules, higher fees, and new constraints on foreign workers and students. At precisely this moment of global contraction, a fresh bottleneck has emerged in India: thousands of approved H-1B visa holders are facing prolonged interview deferrals under newly announced U.S. government requirements for enhanced "online behaviour verification." With Indian professionals accounting for nearly 70% of all H-1B recipients, the disruption has frozen careers, delayed projects, and unsettled employers on both sides of the Atlantic. What appears administrative is fast becoming structural.

The Great Visa Slowdown

The world's most sought-after work visa has become unexpectedly elusive. Across U.S. consulates in India, H-1B interview appointments — the final step for thousands of Indian technology professionals — are being deferred by weeks and months, in some cases without fresh timelines. The uncertainty has stalled careers, postponed relocations, and left families and employers in limbo.

The disruption coincides with a broader hardening of borders in wealthy nations. The United States has sharply increased H-1B-related fees; Britain has reduced post-study work visas from two years to 18 months and proposed a levy on university fees; and Canada has capped foreign student intake. According to the OECD, long-term labour migration to advanced economies fell by nearly 20% in 2024, while student migration declined by 13%.

No country is more exposed to this collective tightening than India. It supplies around 70% of H-1B applicants, 30% of international students in the United States, 25% in Britain, and close to 40% in Canada. In total, an estimated 1.8 million Indians are currently studying abroad. Yet across the "big four" English-speaking destinations — the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Australia — Indian student numbers have dropped by roughly a quarter from last year, following a post-pandemic surge.

Against this backdrop, the current H-1B standstill in India is not an isolated administrative glitch but part of a wider recalibration of global mobility.

The New Bottleneck: Officially Explained, Widely Felt

In late 2025, the U.S. government formally announced additional screening requirements for certain visa categories, including H-1B applicants, citing the need for enhanced review of applicants' "online presence" as part of security vetting. Consular officials in India have since referenced this requirement while deferring visa interviews, describing the checks as necessary but temporary.

The language is restrained; the impact is not.

Immigration law firms estimate that more than 25,000 Indian professionals — largely in technology, engineering, analytics, and health care — are currently affected. Many had resigned from Indian jobs, vacated housing, or committed to U.S. start dates that have now been pushed back repeatedly. Employers report joining dates delayed by months, with projects and teams left understaffed.

According to the National Foundation for American Policy, because India accounts for over 70% of H-1B approvals, any sustained slowdown in Indian consular processing effectively constricts the United States' high-skilled labour pipeline. For U.S. firms, the consequences include delayed product cycles and shortages in critical areas such as artificial intelligence, semiconductor design, and cybersecurity. For applicants — mostly in their late 20s and early 30s — the cost is unemployment, financial strain, and mounting anxiety.

The episode underlines a deeper shift: in today's migration regime, even an approved visa no longer guarantees mobility. Procedural uncertainty itself has become a barrier.

A Changing Global Compact

For decades, the U.S.–India relationship has quietly been underpinned by the movement of skilled professionals. Indian engineers powered Silicon Valley's growth; Indian doctors and nurses reinforced America's health-care system; Indian graduate students sustained U.S. research laboratories. In return, India's middle class accessed opportunity, income, and global integration.

That equilibrium is now under strain. Rising costs, opaque procedures, and prolonged uncertainty risk diverting Indian talent toward countries such as Germany, France, and Japan — nations that are actively liberalising work-migration rules to offset ageing populations. If the United States comes to be seen as unpredictable rather than demanding, the centre of gravity for skilled migration could shift.

For India, the stakes are equally high. High-skilled remittances, knowledge transfer, start-up networks, and collaborative research are all tied to outward mobility. A sustained slowdown — or redirection — could reshape innovation ecosystems at home.

Where Things Stand

Diplomatically, U.S.–India ties remain strong. But talent mobility is their most human and politically sensitive pillar. Indian officials have raised the issue with Washington, while U.S. authorities maintain that the enhanced verification protocols are temporary safeguards.

For now, however, the queues grow longer.

The visa delays of 2025 are more than a consular backlog. They mark a moment of reckoning, as wealthy nations recalibrate their labour needs against political caution. Whether the United States chooses clarity over ambiguity — and reliability over restriction — will shape not only individual careers but the future geography of innovation.

Until then, tens of thousands of qualified Indians wait — between offer letters and appointment portals — as the world's most influential immigration system hesitates. The next chapter of the U.S.–India partnership may be written not in joint statements, but in the quiet rooms where visas are approved, reviewed, or deferred.

India’s Myanmar Policy Needs a Relook

By - Vappala Balachandran

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Myanmar president (General) Min Aung Hlaing visited India for four days from May 30. The former Tatmadaw (Armed Forces) chief, who was nearing retirement age, had seized power in February 2021 after Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy won a landslide election victory in the 8 November 2020 elections.

One reason for Hlaing’s coup was his fear that he might be indicted in international courts for the alleged war crimes during the 2017 Rohingya conflict. In 2018 the United Nations Human Rights Council had said, after perusing report from Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, that the concerned Tatmadaw leaders should be investigated.

Reports at that time had alleged that Tatmadaw had carried out killings and mass rape with "genocidal intent" which saw more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims flee into Bangladesh. However, in February 2021 China and Russia vetoed UN Security Council resolution condemning the Min Aung Hlaing coup.

While Western countries took strong stand against the coup, India, in keeping with its “Look East” and “CMLV states policy tradition” (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam), evolved since the 1990s, expressed "deep concern” but kept the door open for internal dialogue. Also, according to a 16 March 2023 analysis by XCEPT (“Cross- Border Conflict Evidence Policy Trends”), out of nearly 1.3 million internally displaced Myanmar nationals, nearly 50,000 Chins had fled to India (Mizoram) after the coup.

India’s modest policy expectations from Myanmar needs to be compared with the latter’s very close relations with China. India’s objectives are trade, connectivity, defence and security over its 1,643km border. However, China’s objectives are deeper rooted as the Chinese President Xi Jinping’s 2020 visit to Naypyidaw (Myanmar capital) and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s diplomatic tour in April 2026 would indicate.

China expects Myanmar to ensure stability along its border (2129 Kms), protection for infrastructure corridors, access to strategic resources and provide outlet to the Indian Ocean. East Asia Forum says: “Central to this is the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor which links Yunnan to the Bay of Bengal through pipelines, roads, railways and port projects. The Kyaukphyu deep-sea port in Rakhine State, in particular, offers a potential gateway to the Indian Ocean, reducing China’s reliance on the Malacca Strait”. Is this also to rival our “Great Nicobar Project”?

For this China has adopted a pragmatic “Multi-Sector engagement” in areas which are not government controlled. An analysis dated 22 July 2025 by the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) says that opposition groups have effective control over 34 percent of Myanmar’s landmass, including all but one of the border townships: “Townships under opposition control form a crescent that arcs from Rakhine State in the west, through Chin State, Sagaing Region, across Kachin State, and into Shan State in the east”.

The report says that Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and its People’s Defence Forces (PDFs) have reportedly captured more than 300 military installations and 15 towns in Kachin State, Shan State, or Sagaing Region since the 2021 coup. “The KIA and its allies have also taken control of all but one of the border crossings into China. In addition, they control most of Kachin’s valuable mining region, including its rare earth mines”.

East Asia Forum says that Northern Myanmar (Kachin and Shan States) has now become “a critical source of rare earths and tin for China’s industrial, clean energy and defence supply chains”. Chipwi and Pangwa, rare earth mining areas in Kachin, “show how a local war economy intersects with global technology competition. The mines sit in Myanmar but processing, pricing and downstream industrial power remain centred in China. Beijing does not need to control every mine directly so long as it controls the routes, refineries and markets.”

True, a recent BBC Panorama investigation had said that Myanmar rebels are losing ground in some areas. However, to guard its interests, China has ensured strategic parallel engagement with Naypyidaw and the rebels.

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India's Emerging Food-Energy Inflation Challenge: Why FY27 Could Be a Test of Economic Resilience

By - Savio Rodrigues

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India's economic outlook for FY27 is being shaped by two developments that, at first glance, appear unrelated. The first is the growing geopolitical instability in West Asia, particularly the tensions involving the United States and Iran, which have raised concerns about energy security and disruptions to global trade routes. The second is the emergence of El Niño conditions in the Pacific Ocean, which could weaken India's southwest monsoon and place pressure on agricultural production.

Individually, neither of these developments is likely to derail India's economic growth. However, when viewed together, they reveal a more complex challenge. The interaction between higher energy costs and climate-related agricultural stress has the potential to create a cycle of inflationary pressures that policymakers, businesses, and consumers will need to navigate carefully.

India's dependence on imported energy makes developments in West Asia particularly important.

The country imports the majority of its crude oil requirements and remains exposed to fluctuations in global energy markets. Any escalation of tensions that affects oil production, shipping routes, or maritime insurance costs can quickly translate into higher import bills. Rising oil prices affect much more than fuel costs. Transportation, logistics, manufacturing, and industrial production all become more expensive, creating inflationary pressures across the economy.

The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the world's most strategically important maritime chokepoints. A significant share of global oil and liquefied natural gas exports passes through this narrow waterway. Even the perception of heightened risk in the region can increase freight charges and insurance premiums, adding further costs to global supply chains. For a large importing economy such as India, these developments can place pressure on inflation, the current account balance, and the value of the rupee.

At the same time, India faces a very different challenge from nature. El Niño is a recurring climate phenomenon that alters weather patterns across the globe. Historically, El Niño years have often been associated with weaker monsoons in India. While the relationship is not absolute, meteorologists and policymakers closely monitor El Niño conditions because of their potential impact on rainfall and agriculture. The southwest monsoon is critical to India's economic health.

Nearly 70% of the country's annual rainfall arrives during this period, supporting agriculture, replenishing reservoirs, and sustaining rural livelihoods. Although agriculture's share of GDP has declined over the years, millions of Indians continue to depend on farming and related activities for their income. A weaker monsoon can therefore have consequences that extend well beyond the agricultural sector. Lower crop yields can reduce rural incomes and increase food prices. Since food items constitute a significant component of India's inflation basket, even moderate supply disruptions can contribute to higher headline inflation. Sectors ranging from consumer goods to automobiles often feel the effects of weaker rural demand when agricultural incomes come under pressure.

What makes FY27 different from many previous years is the possibility that these two risks may occur simultaneously. Historically, India has faced energy shocks and weather shocks separately. The current concern is that geopolitical tensions could increase energy and transportation costs at the same time that adverse weather conditions affect agricultural output. This interaction creates what can be described as a food-energy inflation nexus.

The logic is straightforward. Higher oil and LNG prices increase transportation costs and raise the price of key agricultural inputs such as fertilizers. At the same time, a weaker monsoon reduces agricultural output and limits food supply. The result is inflationary pressure from both directions. Production costs rise while supply becomes constrained.

This is important because inflation generated by multiple sources is often more difficult to manage than inflation driven by a single factor. If higher food prices coincide with higher fuel and logistics costs, inflation can become broader and more persistent. Such conditions can influence household spending decisions, business investment plans, and overall economic confidence. For policymakers, this creates a delicate balancing act. Normally, slowing economic growth would encourage monetary authorities to reduce interest rates in order to support investment and consumption. Rising inflation, however, often requires a more cautious approach. When both developments occur simultaneously, policymakers face competing objectives.

Recent policy signals already reflect this challenge. Economic growth expectations have been revised downward while inflation projections have been revised upward, highlighting concerns about external risks and domestic supply-side pressures. Although India's economic fundamentals remain strong, policymakers may find themselves with less room to manoeuvre than in a more stable environment.

Businesses will also experience the impact unevenly. Energy-intensive sectors such as aviation, logistics, chemicals, and petrochemicals are likely to be more exposed to rising fuel and input costs. Consumer-facing industries could face softer demand if inflation reduces household purchasing power. At the same time, some sectors may benefit from the changing environment. Renewable energy, irrigation infrastructure, agricultural technology, and climate adaptation services could see increased investment as governments and businesses seek to improve resilience against future shocks.

Despite these risks, it is important to avoid overly pessimistic conclusions. India today is far better positioned to manage external shocks than it was during previous periods of economic stress. Foreign exchange reserves remain substantial, agricultural buffer stocks are larger, infrastructure has improved, and policymaking institutions have become more responsive. These factors provide important safeguards against both geopolitical and climatic disruptions. The most likely outcome for FY27 is therefore not an economic crisis but a more challenging operating environment. Growth may moderate, inflation may remain somewhat elevated, and policymakers may need to balance multiple competing priorities. However, the country's structural strengths should help limit the severity of these pressures.

The broader lesson is that economic risks are becoming increasingly interconnected. Geopolitical conflicts, energy markets, climate events, and domestic economic conditions can no longer be analysed in isolation. The ability to understand how these forces interact will be essential for governments, businesses, and investors alike. As India moves through FY27, three indicators will deserve particularly close attention: global energy prices, monsoon performance, and food inflation. Together, they will determine whether the country experiences a manageable slowdown or faces a more persistent inflation-growth challenge. The coming year is unlikely to be defined by a single crisis. Instead, it may be remembered as a test of how effectively India manages the convergence of multiple risks in an increasingly uncertain global environment.

Low-Carbon Technology and Energy Transition in BRICS Countries: Why Critical Minerals Security Must Be the Strategic Spine

By – Ashraf Rehman

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Global shift to low-carbon technology is not only an environmental necessity; it has turned into a crucial issue for the BRICS nations-Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and the newly added members such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Iran.

The core issue is not in the decision of how to pursue an energy transition, but in determining how to craft energy transition with strategic policy along with national development goals.

Although, there has been thorough debates by policy makers about renewable energy goals and climate pledges. However, the security of minerals, lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite, rare earth elements, and copper which serves as essential components for low-carbon technologies, such as electric vehicles (EVs), solar photovoltaic systems is often overlooked.

Lacking secure access to these resources, the energy transition risks become technologically reliant, financially exposed, and strategically disjointed. For BRICS nations, essential minerals should thus act as the strategic backbone of low-carbon technology implementation and energy transition strategies.

Does emerging geopolitical landscape can affect "Energy Transition?"

Traditionally, energy security was defined by the availability of oil and gas supplies. However, after the Paris Agreement and the rise of awareness for transition, energy security is more linked to the availability of essential minerals for the development of clean technologies.

International Energy Agency forecasted the significant rise for numerous essential minerals by 2040 under Net-Zero scenarios. This particular shift can lead in global mineral extraction, processing, refining, and technology production, which will have substantial impact on future energy systems.

Although many advanced economies are striving to diversify supply chains, BRICS countries have a distinct advantage: they hold significant reserves, production capabilities, and industrial demand for various minerals.

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China sitting in the control corridor of the worldwide refining and processing capacities for essential minerals and is the forefront of battery production. Russia has sizable reserves of nickel, whereas India is increasing its industrial capabilities for essential minerals. The new BRICS members enhance this resource foundation, via their inputs into energy and industrial supply chains.

From Asset Control to Value-Chain Dominance

BRICS states need to focus on their abundant natural resources, since; numerous developing economies abundant in resources continue to be stuck in low-value extraction jobs, while more valuable processing and manufacturing take place in other locations.

The success of adoption and development of low carbon economic infrastructure requires systematic and strategic diversification of resources within the BRICS. Such as targeted investments throughout the battery supply chain, an economic policy of free trade or more tariff free trade of resources within the BRICS states.

Establishing a BRICS Structure for Minerals Collaboration:

With the growth of the BRICS platform, it offers a chance for a unified system to manage critical minerals and collaborate on the development on low-carbon technologies.

- Initially, if the BRICS create a “Critical Minerals Partnership” which aims at geological surveying, exploration, investment support, and technology exchange.
- Second, channel the financial need via New Development Bank to aid minerals processing plants, battery production and renewable technology initiatives
- Third, establish shared sustainable criteria for mining, processing, and recycling to guarantee environmental and social credibility.

These steps will further enhance research cooperation between BRICS universities, research centres, and technological development in producing cost effective better hydrogen technologies and create a circular economic strategy with a shared goal for energy transition. It should also motivated by encouragement of cross-border industrial and research collaborations.

It is important to understand that the quest for essential minerals should not compromise the social equity. The development approach, if managed by improper mining operations can lead to harm ecology and displacement and erosion of population and resources.

The development approach of BRICS energy transition should be rooted in sustainability and responsible mining practices, community involvement, transparent governance, and strategic recycling system.

Reliability of low-carbon technologies hinges on the sustainability of availability of minerals that supports its development and production. Although, in the policy debates, the vital base of essential minerals, which acts as the spine of the shift of renewable energy are often overlooked.

For BRICS nations, the security of minerals is not just a mere resource concern, but it is the base of industrial development and geopolitical strategy. It connects energy security to economic shift, climate initiatives to technological independence, and national interests to collective collaboration.

Therefore, the future of low-carbon technology in BRICS won’t be defined by the implementations of renewable energy. But it will rather depend on who has authority over the resources, technologies, and value chain that facilities that transition.

From Kolkata to the World: How Yoga Became India's Most Powerful Diplomatic Ambassador

By - Dr. Santhosh Mathew

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On June 21, the City of Joy will become the City of Yoga. Kolkata, a city celebrated for its culture, literature and spirituality, will host India's main celebration of the International Day of Yoga 2026.As thousands gather on the banks of the Hooghly to celebrate this ancient Indian tradition, the event will be much more than a display of physical exercise. It will be a celebration of India's growing influence in the world through ideas rather than weapons, culture rather than coercion, and spirituality rather than superiority. The theme of this year's International Day of Yoga, "Yoga for Healthy Ageing," is especially relevant at a time when the world is facing rising lifestyle diseases, mental stress and an ageing population. Yoga offers a simple answer to many modern problems. It requires no expensive equipment, no costly medicines and no complicated technology. It only requires discipline, patience and a willingness to live in harmony with oneself and with nature.

Few could have imagined that an ancient Indian practice, developed thousands of years ago by sages and saints, would one day become one of India's strongest diplomatic tools. That transformation began in September 2014 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the United Nations General Assembly and proposed that June 21 should be observed as the International Day of Yoga. His proposal received the support of 177 countries, one of the highest levels of support ever received for a UN resolution. Since then, yoga has travelled from the ashrams of India to parks, schools, universities and public squares across the globe. Today, millions perform yoga every June 21 in cities ranging from New York to Nairobi, London to Tokyo and Sydney to São Paulo. Even New York's famous Times Square, once known only for giant advertisements and commercial activity, now welcomes thousands of yoga enthusiasts every year. It is a remarkable example of how Indian civilisation has quietly entered global public life.

This is where the idea of soft power becomes important. The late American political scientist Joseph S. Nye, who introduced the concept of "soft power," argued that the most successful countries are not always those with the biggest armies or the strongest economies. Real influence comes from the ability to attract rather than force others. As Nye famously said, "It is not just whose army wins, but whose story wins. "India's story today is increasingly told through yoga, Ayurveda, classical music, spirituality, cuisine, democracy and its global diaspora. Yoga has become one of the brightest symbols of that story. Every person who learns yoga anywhere in the world unknowingly becomes connected to India's civilisational heritage.

Prime Minister Modi understood this potential early. His vision of India as a Vishwaguru is not based on military dominance or economic pressure. It is rooted in the belief that India can guide the world by sharing its timeless wisdom. Yoga has become the most visible expression of that vision. Unlike many forms of diplomacy that remain confined to conference halls and government meetings, yoga reaches ordinary people. It enters homes, schools, workplaces and communities. It creates goodwill that cannot be purchased with money. This may well become one of the defining diplomatic achievements of the Modi era. Governments often spend billions on public relations campaigns to improve their national image. India has achieved something unique by promoting a cultural tradition that people willingly embrace because it improves their health and quality of life.

Yoga is also closely linked with what may be called Modi's Dharma Diplomacy. This is not about promoting one religion over another. It is about presenting India's ancient spiritual traditions as universal values that belong to all humanity. Yoga is practised today by people belonging to every religion and every nationality. It has crossed political boundaries because its message is universal. It speaks of harmony between body and mind, between humanity and nature, and between individual well-being and collective welfare. India's spiritual teachers have always viewed yoga in this universal spirit. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa taught that all religions ultimately lead to the same truth. Swami Vivekananda introduced yoga to the modern world as a scientific method of self-development rather than a religious ritual. Sri Aurobindo expanded it into Integral Yoga, combining spiritual growth with social transformation. Their ideas continue to shape India's cultural image abroad.

Another remarkable example of India's soft power under Prime Minister Modi is Mann Ki Baat. Since its launch in 2014, the monthly radio programme has become one of the world's most successful experiments in public communication. Instead of political speeches or election campaigns, the programme highlights ordinary citizens, innovators, teachers, farmers, students, environmental activists and social workers. Their stories inspire millions and create a sense of national participation. Like yoga, Mann Ki Baat works through persuasion rather than pressure. It reminds people that communication is not merely about delivering messages but about building trust. In many ways, it has become another instrument of India's soft power by projecting a positive image of the country and celebrating grassroots achievements. Together, Yoga and Mann Ki Baat demonstrate how communication and culture can become powerful diplomatic assets.

Yoga itself has a rich philosophical foundation. The Sanskrit word "Yoga" comes from the root "Yuj," meaning "to unite." It seeks harmony between body, mind, intellect and soul. Maharshi Patanjali, whose Yoga Sutras remain the foundational text of yoga philosophy, defined yoga as the control of the restless movements of the mind. His teachings remain relevant in today's fast-moving world where anxiety, loneliness and depression have become global concerns. Modern science increasingly supports what ancient Indian sages understood centuries ago. Regular yoga practice improves flexibility, strengthens the heart, reduces stress, enhances concentration, boosts immunity and contributes to healthy ageing. It helps children perform better in studies, professionals manage workplace pressure and senior citizens remain active and independent. The World Health Organization's concept of holistic health closely reflects these principles. India's success in promoting yoga also carries an important lesson for international relations. Influence in the twenty-first century will not be measured only by missiles, military alliances or economic sanctions. It will also depend on culture, education, innovation, ideas and values. Nations that inspire admiration often enjoy greater global acceptance than nations that merely inspire fear.

Joseph Nye believed South Asia should become a laboratory for soft power instead of hard power. His advice remains highly relevant. India possesses extraordinary cultural assets—yoga, Ayurveda, Buddhism, democracy, Bollywood and one of the world's largest diasporas. These are resources that can build friendships across continents without firing a single bullet. As the sun rises over Kolkata on June 21, thousands will sit quietly on yoga mats. It may appear to be a simple exercise session. In reality, it represents something much larger. It is the celebration of a civilisation that has discovered one of the most effective ways to influence the world—not through conquest, but through compassion; not through fear, but through friendship; not through force, but through values.

Perhaps that is the true meaning of India's emergence as a Vishwaguru. In an age of conflict and uncertainty, the country is reminding the world that lasting leadership comes not from the strength of the sword but from the strength of ideas. Yoga has become India's silent ambassador, carrying a message of peace, health and harmony across continents. That is India's soft power at its finest, and Kolkata, the City of Joy, now has the privilege of sharing that message with the world.

Is a Blockade Possible – A Study of the Legalities

By Uma K.

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Introduction:

The contemporary geopolitical environment in West Asia – particularly tensions involving Iran, Isarael and the presence of extra-regional powers like United States of America (USA or US) have put to question not only the success of maritime strategy and security but also the law enforcement. The Strait of Hormuz, strategically located between Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, is an important Choke Point/ Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC). As of 2025, this strategically located SLOC witnessed the transit of oil flow of around 20 million barrels per day (b/d), or the equivalent of about 20% of global petroleum liquids consumption (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2025). Rightly termed as "world's most important oil transit chokepoint", the 'closure of the Strait of Hormuz' serves a trump card for Iran during its confrontation with major powers in the particularly narrow and congested waterway (Bao, 2026).

With the geopolitical escalation happening in West Asia, slight impact on the trade transit in this international strait displayed its vulnerability and raised doubts on sustenance and stability. For India, who heavily relies on the Gulf region for its oil and energy imports, the impact is profound. This paper aims to find answers to the question: can a state effectively blockade a critical maritime chokepoint such as the Strait of Hormuz, and with what consequences? The study will assess the strategic and legal dimensions of the feasibility of imposing a blockade under international law.

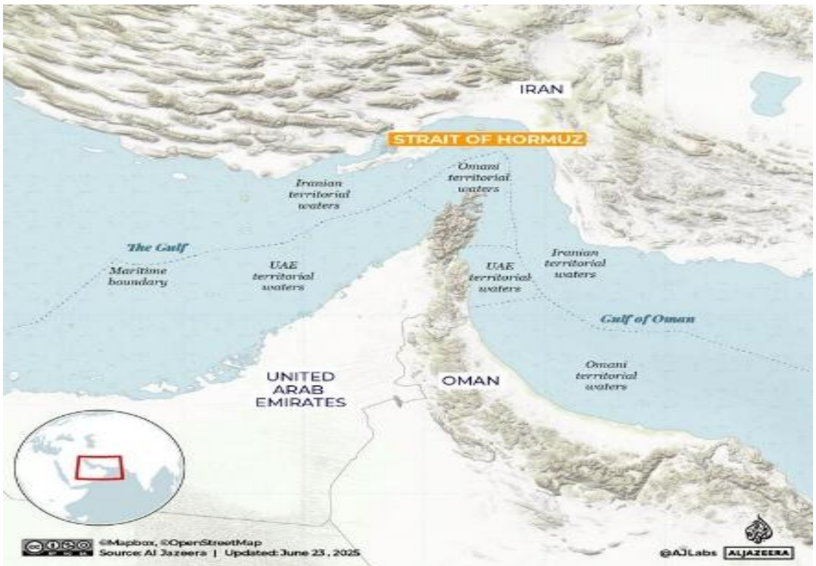

Figure 1: Strait of Hormuz

What is a Strait? The Legal Character of an International Strait:

Strait refers to narrow waterway of limited width which is bordered by land and used by both commercial and military vessels and aircraft for international navigation between the open seas and regions of the world (Devika Radha, 2022). However not all straits are legally justified as international straits. According to 'The Commander's Handbook on the Law of Naval Operation' and 'United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Part III', an international strait is a neutral waterway that links one country's High Seas or Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to another countries High Seas or EEZ (Alexander, 1991), (United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea, 1982)

Exemplifying all the conditions all laid down under Part III of UNCLOS, the location specificity of the Strait of Hormuz has rendered it as a legal corridor of global commerce. This signifies its indispensability – indicating unavailability of any other accessible route for navigation.

Under UNCLOS, articles 34 – 45 define the various provisions under "Straits used for International Navigation" (United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea, 1982). An important charter of an international strait is the legal regime of 'Transit Passage'. The Section 2 of the Part III clearly defines that Transit Passage allows a) Continuous and Expeditious navigation b) Freedom of overflight c) Non-suspendable passage for all ships/ aircraft. This indicates that the navigational freedom in an artery of global trade (here the Strait of Hormuz) therefore cannot be compromised in any case of rifts regionally as well as globally. With freedom comes responsibility and this has been explicitly mentioned in article 39 which lists the 'Duties of Ships and Aircraft during Transit Passage' (United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea, 1982). It imposes duties on ships and aircraft to proceed without any delay and refrain from threatening or use of force.

Apart from Part III that specifically deals with international straits, Article 311 (2) of UNCLOS reiterates the fact that the passage regime in the international straits cannot be impeded even during armed conflicts. To validate this point the "San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea" (San Remo Manual) expresses similar thought through the usage of the term "openness of straits during armed conflicts".

In the present case of the Strait of Hormuz, the waterway is so narrow that at its narrowest point, the Strait is only 29 nautical miles wide (54 km) and it consists of 2-mile-wide navigable channels (3.7 km) for inbound and outbound shipping as well as a 2-mile-wide buffer zone (IEA, 2026). This underscores the fact that large ships have to pass through the border states' territorial waters (Oman) thereby making Traffic Separation Schemes a necessity.

International Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) under UNCLOS

The concept of the TSS pertaining to international straits has been codified and elaborated under Article 41 of UNCLOS. It is a navigational safety mechanism to prevent collisions and ensure safe transit in densely navigated waterways. UNCLOS has designated International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to be the competent authority to administer the TSS. The history of the successful enforcement of the TSS in the Strait of Hormuz can be traced back to 1973 when it was adopted thereby marking the as the oldest TSS internationally (Lott, 2026).

The TSS regime under article 41 states the following (United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea, 1982):

a) Article 41 (1): states bordering the straits may designate sea lanes and prescribe TSS for navigation to promote the safe passage of ships.

b) Article 41 (3): TSS can conform to generally accepted international regulations.

c) Article 41 (4): Refer proposals to the competent international organisation with a view to their adoption.

d) Article 41 (7): Ships in transit passage shall respect applicable sea lanes and TSS in accordance with this article.

The above clauses from UNCLOS there indicate that the TSS is not a sovereignty tool and is internationally supervised. Designated to prevent mishaps at sea by organising mercantile traffic, the usage of TSS cannot be restricted. It can therefore be concluded that TSS even though very technical – reinforces the principle that international commerce cannot be destabilised and navigation through the Strait of Hormuz must remain orderly yet uninterrupted. For a very narrow waterway like the Strait of Hormuz, the usage of the TSS is binding on all mercantile marine and cannot be used to deny passage.

As per the 1969 Vienna Convention article 18, it is binding on Iran to "refrain from acts which would defeat the object and purpose" of the UNCLOS (Bao, 2026). Moreover, since the Strait of Hormuz is overlapped by the Territorial Seas (TS) of two coastal states namely Iran and Oman, Iran, without the consent of Oman does not hold the right to unilaterally declare the closure of the Strait (Bao, 2026).

Iran and legal status of the Strait of Hormuz:

Iran is a party to UNCLOS since 1982 but has never ratified it on grounds of non-acceptance of terms mentioned in "transit passage". Consequently, interpreting the UNCLOS to suit their needs, the Iranian Government through its own domestic law of 1993 has stated Iran claims authority to regulate both foreign naval as well as commercial vessels transiting the strait (Kudrin, 2026). On the night of 28 February 2026, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), announced that "no ships would be allowed to pass the Strait of Hormuz" (Bao, 2026). Ebrahim Jabari, senior advisor to IRGC'S Commander-in-Chief, on 02 March 2026 declared that a closure has been declared on this (Strait of Hormuz) highly strategic maritime corridor vital to global energy supply and threatened to destroy (set fire) any ships that attempt to pass though this crucial passageway (TOI Business Desk, 2026). The remark by the senior Irani military officials was assumed as a de facto blockade (Lott, 2026). However, the principle that no coastal state can impede the transit passage even during heightened tensions lies at the heart of the legal debate over a blockade.

What is a blockade?

Blockade can simply be termed as successful enforcement of sea denial to vessels and aircraft of States from using the sea by blocking access to designated areas such as ports, coastlines, SLOC etc. According to the San Remo Manual, Blockade can be defined as: (San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea, 1994)

1. A blockade shall be declared and notified to all belligerents and neutral States.
2. The declaration shall specify the commencement, duration, location, and extent of the blockade and the period within which vessels of neutral States may leave the blockaded coastline.
3. A blockade must be effective. The question whether a blockade is effective is a question of fact.
4. The force maintaining the blockade may be stationed at a distance determined by military requirements.
5. A blockade may be enforced and maintained by a combination of legitimate methods and means of warfare provided this combination does not result in acts inconsistent with the rules set out in this document
6. Merchant vessels believed on reasonable grounds to be breaching a blockade may be captured. Merchant vessels which, after prior warning, clearly resist capture may be attacked
7. A blockade must not bar access to the ports and coasts of neutral States.
8. A blockade must be applied impartially to the vessels of all States

From the above-mentioned definition, we can infer that, a blockade is an effective method of naval warfare targeting the armed forces (surface, sub-surface, space and cyber) of the other enemy nation. An effective invocation of a blockade is possible when a war.

Though it appears that Iran has achieved most of the conditions of that a blockade has to achieve, Iran's claim of "closure" of the Strait of Hormuz cannot be regarded as a blockade. Closure can therefore be viewed as under the "grey zone" – consequence of partial non-applicability of UNCLOS to the regulation of navigation in a strait (Lott, 2026). Iran as a way out can designation to Maritime Exclusion Zone (MEZ)

What is a Maritime Exclusion Zone (MEZ)?

The concept of MEZ is not mentioned in the UNCLOS but is derived from customary international law and reflected in the San Remo manual on naval warfare. MEZ is a unilateral declaration by a belligerent nation during armed conflict wherein a specific sea area is declared. Under the MEZ: a) entry can be restricted b) Adversary or masquerading neutral vessels capable of aiding the enemy may be capable of interception, search, diversion or attack c) Navigation may be restricted for military purposes.

MEZ is a tool short of full blockade often used to signal escalation without invoking stricter legal thresholds. Importantly, an MEZ does not override transit passage rights in international straits, especially in peacetime or absent a declared armed conflict recognized under international law. The effectivity of the MEZ can be legally justified only when there are clear public declaration and notification, non-discrimination and respect for neutral shipping rights.

Conclusion:

All in all, a thorough consideration of the relevant provisions under UNCLOS, laws governing naval warfare, it can be concluded that Iran formally lacks the unilateral right to close the Strait of Hormuz.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.

India is Proud of:

Padma Shri Bhiklya Ladakya Dhinda

"TARPA" Tribal Wind Musical Instrument Player

Tribal wind instrument player, Bhiklya Ladakya Dhinda, when named as a recipient of the Padma Shri award in the 'unsung heroes' category, hailed the recognition as blessings of God, whom he worshipped through music since he was a ten-year-old child.

He hails from Walvanda village in Maharashtra's Jawhar Taluka that falls in the Palghar District. His family has a tradition of playing Tarpa for around 150 years. He is the third generation of Tarpa player in his family. His grandfather Navsu Dhaklya Dhinda and father Ladkya Dhaklya Dhinda were also Tarpa players. Bhiklya learnt the art from his father and grandfather.

This honour is a tribute not just to one man, but to an entire tribal cultural legacy.

For 92-year-old Dhinda, regarded as one of the finest exponents of the tarpa, the award is the result of a lifetime spent serving tradition.

Dhinda, regarded as one of the finest exponents of Tarpa- a musical instrument made of bottle gourd and bamboo-says "this honour is a blessing earned through devotion to tradition."

"I have preserved my culture and worshipped God through my music. I have been playing the tarpa since the age of 10. This is a 400-year-old family tradition. That is why God has blessed me with this award," Dhinda told the curious media reporters.

Belonging to a lineage that has nurtured Tarpa music for centuries, Dhinda has dedicated his entire life to both making and playing the instrument.

The Tarpa, which can stretch up to ten feet in length, holds a central place in tribal rituals and celebrations.

Dhinda's performances have enthralled audiences across several parts of Maharashtra, earning him recognition as a custodian of tribal art.

"We are poor, but our culture is our real wealth. There are 22 members in my family. I have no other profession. A little farming and making tarpa instruments is how we survive," he said, adding that an earlier award from the Maharashtra government helped him construct a small hut for his family.

Dhinda has also been mentoring young artistes, imparting lessons in Tarpa playing to ensure the art form survives future generations.

Following the announcement and ceremony in the Rashtrapati Bhawan where he was conferred Padma Shri just few days back, tributes and congratulatory messages have poured in from far and flung places. Local populace of Palghar District has described the Padma Award as a proud moment not just for Dhinda, but for the entire tribal community.

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