

Tensions in West Asia, closure of the Strait of Hormuz and importance of PM Modi's New Zealand visit

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In a statement, CENTCOM said: "Iran was provided yet another opportunity to demonstrate adherence to the Memorandum of Understanding after being held accountable for earlier attacks on commercial vessels but has again failed,"

US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth said that Iran had made a "poor choice" and now it would "pay".

On July 10, US President Donald Trump had said that while the ceasefire between Iran and US had ended talks between both sides would continue.

In response to the US strikes, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said that they had hit a US base in Jordan.

On the evening of July 12, the US launched a second round of strikes on Iran. The CENTCOM said it “..began launching more strikes against Iran to continue degrading their ability to attack civilian mariners and commercial ships freely transiting the Strait of Hormuz,”

Tehran's response: Attacks on Gulf countries and closure of the Strait of Hormuz

Tehran retaliated to US strikes by launching attacks on Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Qatar and Oman and closing the Strait of Hormuz.

On July 12, the IRGC said that it had closed the Strait of Hormuz till “further notice” and said that it would remain so until US interference in the region continued.

On July 11 Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi in Muscat to discuss mechanisms for safe passage via the Strait.

After the recent rise in US-Iran tensions, oil prices rose by 4% with Brent crude prices rising over \$79 per barrel.

PM Modi's New Zealand visit

The New Zealand visit (July 10-11) was the last leg of PM Modi's three-nation visit (which also included Indonesia and Australia). The focus was on the India-New Zealand trade deal.

PM Christopher Luxon on the eve of PM Modi's visit said that New Zealand businesses will “boom” via the trade deal with India. He also said:

“57% of everything we export to India will be tariff free from day one”.

After the meeting both Modi and Luxon reiterated their commitment to strengthening trade ties and doubling it to \$4 billion by 2030. PM Modi also welcomed New Zealand's commitment of \$20 billion.

India and New Zealand upgraded their relationship to a strategic partnership. Important agreements were signed in the maritime sector. This includes; greater maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, a mutual logistics support arrangement for warships to access support at each other's bases and the establishment of an annual Maritime dialogue to strengthen cooperation between both countries. New Zealand and India reiterated their commitment to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

Apart from the economic and strategic sphere, both Modi and Luxon during their meeting sought to give a push to educational linkages between both countries. A joint statement issued by the MEA stated:

“The Prime Ministers recognised education as a central pillar of the relationship, underpinning people-to-people links, skills development, research collaboration and long-term economic partnership. They welcomed the growing connections between education institutions in both countries and agreed to strengthen cooperation in ways that support student mobility, institutional partnerships, innovation and mutual understanding”.

MOU's were signed between education institutions of both sides. PM Modi highlighted the fact that New Zealand had been an 'important destination' for Indian students. He also invited New Zealand Universities to set up campuses in India.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the situation in West Asia seems to have gone back to square one after the developments of recent days. Continuing tensions and closure of the Strait of Hormuz could again impact the global energy market.

PM Modi's New Zealand visit is important not just from a bilateral context. In a changing economic and strategic environment, there is immense potential for both countries to work together. The agreements pertaining to greater maritime cooperation are especially important in this context. There is also immense scope for greater people to people linkages and tourism linkages. Apart from this, one area where there is more scope for cooperation is higher education. At a time when Indian students are looking at alternatives to the traditionally preferred choices for higher education – US, UK, Canada and Australia – New Zealand could emerge as a possible alternative. Apart from this, if universities from New Zealand set up campuses in India -- as universities from UK and Australia are – Indian students will have more choices.

(Disclaimer: The views expressed above are the author's own and do not reflect those of DNA)

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