

Indian diplomacy beats warships in opening Strait of Hormuz amid Iran tensions

The Telegraph online

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar says diplomacy, not warships, may be the most effective way to reopen the Strait of Hormuz after direct talks with Iran allowed two Indian gas tankers to pass safely through the crucial waterway.

"I am at the moment engaged in talking to them and my talking has yielded some results," Jaishankar told the Financial Times in an interview. "This is ongoing. If it is yielding results for me, I would naturally continue to look at it."

His remarks come as tensions rise over the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow channel between Iran and several Gulf countries through which roughly a fifth of the world's oil and gas normally flows. Iran has largely closed the waterway amid the widening Middle East conflict, choking off tanker traffic and sending global energy prices sharply higher.

India's diplomatic approach contrasts with calls by US President Donald Trump for countries including China, France and the UK to send "warships" in a "team effort" to the region to help the United States force open the strait.

Oil prices climbed above \$100 a barrel last week for the first time since 2022, with analysts warning they could hit \$150 or more if shipping remains blocked.

Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghchi said the waterway "is open" but closed to ships be-



External Affairs minister S. Jaishankar

longing to Iran's "enemies", referring specifically to the United States and Israel.

In practice, analysts say this means countries not directly aligned with the US-led military pressure may still be able to send ships through. However, passage will require coordination with Iran's navy, according to Iranian officials.

For India, which imports around 85 per cent of its oil and gas, reopening the strait is critical for the economy.

Jaishankar suggested that quiet diplomacy may be more effective than military pressure.

"Certainly, from India's per-

spective, it is better that we reason and we co-ordinate and we get a solution than we don't," he told the Financial Times. "So if that sort of allows other people to engage, I think the world is better off for it."

The two Indian-flagged gas carriers that transited the strait on Saturday did so after discussions between New Delhi and Tehran, a development that India says shows negotiation can work.

Jaishankar said India has struck no sweeping deal allowing Indian ships free passage.

"There is no blanket arrangement," he said. "Every ship

movement is an individual happening."

Nor, he said, had India offered concessions in exchange.

"It's not an exchange issue," he said. "India and Iran have a relationship. And this is a conflict that we regard as something very unfortunate."

Governments around the world are now weighing their options as the energy shock ripples through global markets. Some are considering joining military operations to reopen the route, while others are exploring diplomatic channels with Tehran.

European countries are among

those testing the negotiation path. France and Italy have begun discussions with Iran about restoring tanker traffic.

Jaishankar was speaking ahead of a meeting of European Union foreign ministers in Brussels on Monday where the Hormuz shutdown is expected to dominate discussions.

Asked whether European countries might replicate India's approach, Jaishankar said relationships with Iran differ from country to country.

"Each relationship frankly, in a way stands on its own merits," he said. "So now it's very hard for me to compare this with some other relationship which may or may not have these."

Still, he said India was open to sharing its experience.

"I'd be happy to share with EU capitals what we are doing. I know many of them have had conversations with Tehran as well."

For now, the safe passage of two ships is only an early sign that diplomacy might ease the crisis.

"These are still early days," Jaishankar said. "We have many more ships there. So while this is a welcome development, there is continuing conversation because there is continued work on that."

An Indian-flagged oil tanker escaped unscathed after a drone attack struck Fujairah port in the United Arab Emirates and has since set sail for India with a cargo of 80,800 tonnes of crude,

the government said on Sunday.

Fujairah sits on the east coast facing the Gulf of Oman, while the other emirates lie on the Persian Gulf. This means oil tankers can load and store crude there without having to pass through the Strait of Hormuz. As a result, Fujairah has grown into an important backup export route for Gulf energy whenever tensions threaten shipping through Hormuz.

The developments came as the war between the United States, Israel and Iran escalated over the weekend with new missile strikes and mounting casualties. Iran launched fresh barrages of missiles at Israel and said it had targeted US bases in Iraq and Kuwait, while Israel said it had struck sites in Iran's central Isfahan province.

Araghchi said Tehran was prepared for a long conflict and denied it had sought a ceasefire with Washington.

US President Donald Trump said Iranian officials had reached out about a possible deal, but that the terms "aren't good enough yet".

Separately, Union Minister Piyush Goyal said over the weekend that "on crude oil, on fuel, we are pretty well placed. We have good stocks in hand. There has been absolutely no disturbance of any sort on the crude or the fuel front, petrol, diesel, aviation fuel."

India has resumed buying Russian oil after the US gave the go-ahead, easing pressure on its crude supplies.

Buzz, unease as UK crowds watch US bombers

AFP | Fairford, United Kingdom

Hidden behind a tall hedge-row in the English countryside, Charlie Cumming stood at the fence of an air force base, camera raised towards a US B-1 Lancer bomber parked nearby.

He was one of hundreds of curious onlookers who flocked to the airfield at RAF Fairford in the southwestern county of Gloucestershire since US aircraft began arriving on March 6, days after the start of the US-Israeli war with Iran.

"I've come just for pictures for my Instagram, really," said the 17-year-old. "It's a bit concerning they're here, but I still think they're really cool to see." Beside him stood his friend James Martin, 18, from Oxford, who first got him into plane spotting. Seeing bombers loaded for active combat felt "quite surreal", Martin said.

"Seeing these machines going out to cause destruction and actually being used in a war zone is quite a weird experience... we've always seen planes just doing standard training roles."

On Saturday, cars spilled onto verges and down narrow lanes as visitors converged from across the country.

Along a road offering a panoramic view, veteran enthusiasts, excited locals, dog walkers



Plane spotters stand at a perimeter fence to see and photograph US Air Force (USAF) B-1 Lancer bomber jets taking off at RAF Fairford in south-west England

and father-and-son pairs found their spots in the spring sunshine, armed with telephoto lenses, binoculars, stepladders and air-traffic scanners.

Some settled in with fold-out chairs, sandwiches and flasks of tea.

Dave Savage, a truck driver who had driven three hours from mid-Wales with his son, summed up the "excitement" many felt.

"I just like the power and the size of them," he said. "I get a buzz out of seeing something that big and that impressive."

Adrian, a warehouse worker from Doncaster, arrived in time to see a B-1 take off shortly after dawn.

He has spent 22 years spotting warplanes and said the turnout on Saturday dwarfed anything he had seen at a military airfield on a normal weekend.

"Down the lane there's just as many cars as there would have been on air show days," the 58-year-old said, asking not to give his full name.

He came prepared, arriving with a multi-camera setup and heavy-duty ear defenders round

his neck.

"The B-1 is pretty much the loudest thing on earth. I've never heard anything as loud as that before."

Thrill and dread

Yet the excitement was tempered by an awareness of what these planes were being sent to do -- and Britain's role in their mission.

Fairford, along with Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, is one of two bases Britain finally allowed the United States to use for "defensive" operations

in Iran.

The US Department of Defense did not immediately respond to a request for comment on its use of the base.

But according to estimates from AFP journalists at the site, around six B-52s and 12 B-1s have been using the base, conducting two to three sets of departures and landings per day.

Starmer's refusal to join the US and Israel in bombing Iran from February 28 triggered a public row with US President Donald Trump.

Polls show most Britons oppose the war, with half against US use of RAF bases even when the missions are restricted to bombing Iranian missile sites.

James Martin, who grew up close to RAF Brize Norton some 12 miles (19 kilometres) away, said even those in his local village accustomed to military aircraft overhead were now listening differently.

"Every time the fighter jet comes over, they're very worried about what that could mean," he said. "It's just scary how quickly it's evolving."

Research analyst Christoph Bergs from the London think tank RUSI said Fairford staff were experienced in dealing with large numbers of plane spotters.

"Given the US administra-

tion's public statements on Iran, visible activity at RAF Fairford may have been deemed an acceptable if not a welcomed externality of the current air campaign," he told AFP.

For Adrian, the spectacle was compelling.

"You can't turn your back on it, even though you might not necessarily agree with what they're actually doing," he said.

"We're never going to see this again. It's special in that respect -- but a little bit sad as well."



Fairford is one of two bases, along with the Diego Garcia facility in the Indian Ocean, that the UK has given the US permission to use for "specific defensive operations into Iran" to destroy Iranian missiles at source, the British defence minister said in a statement.