

U-TURN WITH UK

The Ant Has a Story to Tell



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Imagine returning to Bahrain after a holiday in Australia or Argentina. Somewhere inside your luggage or hidden within your clothes, a tiny ant unknowingly makes the journey with you. To most people, that may sound harmless. But to an environmental scientist, it could trigger immediate alarm bells.

Because some invasions do not arrive with noise, armies or warning signs. Sometimes, they arrive silently... one tiny insect at a time.

Have you heard the story of the infamous yellow crazy ants and their vast supercolonies? It sounds almost like science fiction. Yet, it is frighteningly real.

Unlike ordinary ant colonies that compete and fight among themselves, yellow crazy ants developed a completely different survival strategy: cooperation. Separate colonies merge into gigantic interconnected networks, allowing them to spread rapidly and endlessly. Over time, these supercolonies grew into billions of ants operating almost like a highly organised civilisation.

As the ants expanded, forests began to change slowly. Animals disappeared silently. Ecologists even began referring to some affected regions as "silent forests".

The scale of the crisis became evident on Christmas Island, a remote Australian territory in the Indian Ocean renowned for its unique rainforest ecosystem and the spectacular migration of millions of giant red crabs.

Yellow crazy ants spread aggressively across the island, forming massive colonies that consumed vast stretches of rainforest.

The island's ecological balance depended heavily on its red crabs. These crabs played a critical role in maintaining forest health by clearing leaf litter, recycling nutrients, controlling weeds and preserving the natural structure of the rainforest floor.

But these invasive ants launched a devastating assault. They sprayed formic acid into the crabs' eyes and joints, blinding and dehydrating them before eventually killing them. Nearly 20 million crabs were wiped out.

The consequences were catastrophic. Without crabs maintaining the forest floor, weeds spread uncontrollably, snail populations increased, tree health declined, and several native species began to disappear. The ants also cultivated scale insects that produced sugary honeydew — a food source that strengthened the ant colonies while simultaneously damaging the trees.

Australia responded with one of the world's most aggressive environmental control operations. Helicopters conducted aerial baiting campaigns over dense rainforests. Scientists surveyed more than 1,000 ecological sites, tracked ant movement and monitored declining crab populations. Environmental strike teams were deployed across the island.

The battle on Christmas Island eventually taught scientists a frightening lesson: yellow crazy ants were not the only species capable of building such organised invasions. Across the world, researchers soon discovered another tiny empire quietly expanding beyond borders — one that many experts believe is even more sophisticated in its strategy for survival and domination.

The Argentine ant soon emerged as another global ecological threat. These tiny Argentine ants behave like a highly organised army, spreading across cities, farms and forests without internal conflict. It is almost like a 24-hour task force that neither sleeps nor recognises borders.

Originally native to South America, they may appear harmless at first glance. However, scientists now consider them among the most invasive species on Earth.

They spread rapidly through shipping routes, cargo containers, plants and human travel. Over time, they established enormous supercolonies that stretched for thousands of kilometres along the Mediterranean coast of Europe and parts of California. Researchers discovered something extraordinary — ants from distant colonies did not attack one another. Instead, they cooperated as though operating under a single global command system.

The success of their invasion rested on one simple principle: cooperation.

Slowly, these ants also began reshaping ecosystems. Native ant species disappeared. Birds, reptiles and insects that depended on the original ecological balance were affected. Billions of dollars have been spent on surveillance, treatment and ecological recovery, yet countries around the world continue to battle invasive ant species today.

This story carries a far bigger lesson than simply the danger posed by insects.

It reminds us that something incredibly small can destabilise ecosystems, damage economies, overpower native species and trigger long-term environmental destruction. More importantly, it demonstrates how neglecting even a minor breach in protection can eventually demand enormous financial, scientific and national resources to control.

The greatest threats do not always arrive loudly. Sometimes, they crawl in unnoticed.

(P. Unnikrishnan is the Chairperson and Managing Director of The Daily Tribune)

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Pentagon says it has reduced brigades in Europe from four to three

AFP | Washington, United States

The Pentagon said on Tuesday it was cutting the number of US Brigade Combat Teams stationed in Europe from four to three, returning troop levels to those seen in 2021 as Washington presses European allies to assume greater responsibility for regional defence. The move will temporarily delay the deployment of additional US forces to Poland.

The Pentagon "has reduced the total number of Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) assigned to Europe from four to three", it said in a statement. A BCT comprises 4,000-4,700 personnel, according to a Congressional report.

The statement said that the reduction was resulting in a "temporary delay" of the deployment of US forces to Poland.

That announcement was preceded earlier Tuesday by US Vice President JD Vance saying that a planned deployment of 4,000 troops to Poland had been delayed rather than canceled. "The Department will determine the final disposition of these and other US forces in Europe based on further analysis of US strategic and operational requirements, as well as our allies' own ability to contribute forces toward Europe's defence," the Pentagon said.

OpenAI to file IPO paperwork in coming days: WSJ

AFP | New York, United States

ChatGPT maker OpenAI is preparing to file for a stock market listing in the coming days, possibly as early as Friday, the Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday, citing people familiar with the matter.

Valued at \$852 billion in a recent funding round, OpenAI is working with bankers at Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley on a draft prospectus it plans to file confidentially with regulators, with the aim of going public as early as September, according to the report.

The filing would come as Elon Musk's SpaceX is expected to unveil IPO paperwork this week ahead of a potential June offering, making 2026 a blockbuster year for IPOs, with AI giant Anthropic also expected to go public.

Radio station sorry after mistakenly announcing death of King Charles

AFP | London, United Kingdom

A former British pirate radio station yesterday apologised "for any distress caused" after accidentally announcing the death of King Charles III.

The erroneous announcement was made on Tuesday afternoon due to a computer error at its main studio in Maldon in eastern Essex, Radio Caroline said in a post on social media.

The error had triggered the so-called death of a monarch procedure "which all UK stations hold in readiness while hoping not to require", wrote station manager Peter Moore.

"Radio Caroline then fell silent as would be required, which alerted us to restore programming and issue an on-air apology," he said on Facebook post.

"Caroline has been pleased to broadcast Her Majesty the Queen's and now the King's,



Britain's King Charles III and Britain's Queen Camilla hold shovels as they plant a Malus Royalty tree during a Garden Party at Hillsborough Castle, in Hillsborough, Northern Ireland

Christmas message and we hope

to do so for many years to come," he said, referring to the monarch's traditional Christmas Day message to the nation.

"We apologise to HM (his majesty) the king and to our listeners for any distress caused," Moore added.

The mishap on Tuesday came as Charles and Queen Camilla were in Northern Ireland, where they joined a performance with an Irish folk group.

The post did not say how long it was before the mistake was discovered, but the domestic Press Association news agency reported that on Wednesday afternoon, playback for Tuesday's broadcast between 1:58 pm and 5:00 pm was unavailable on the station's website.

Established in 1964 to challenge the BBC's broadcasting monopoly, Radio Caroline previously operated from ships off the English coast.

Deal or strike

Trump warns Tehran of fresh military action if talks fail

Tehran, Iran

President Donald Trump warned Iran that the United States was prepared to launch fresh military strikes if Tehran failed to agree to a peace deal, as tensions remained high despite an April 8 ceasefire that ended the US-Israeli conflict with Iran.

Trump said Washington continued to hold the upper hand in negotiations and insisted Iran was under pressure to return to the negotiating table.

"You know how it is to negotiate with a country where you're beating them badly. They come to the table, they're begging to make a deal," Trump said on Tuesday.

"I hope we don't

have to do the war, but we may have to give them another big hit. I'm not sure yet."

Iran reacted sharply to the remarks, with parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf accusing the United States of seeking to reignite conflict in the Middle East. He warned Tehran would respond forcefully to any renewed attack.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards also cautioned that any new conflict would spread beyond the region.

Despite the heated rhetoric, diplomatic contacts between Washington and Tehran have continued, with Pakistan mediating talks aimed at securing a formal end to the conflict.

US Vice President JD Vance said progress was being made in negotiations but stressed the US military remained "locked and loaded" if diplomacy failed.



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Lebanese civil defence workers search through the rubble in the southern Lebanese village of Deir Qanun al-Nahr