

# 'BRICS chair India to work closely with Russia to address shared challenges'

NEW DELHI, Mar 23 (IANS)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister (EAM) Jaishankar on Monday said that, guided by its humanity first and people-centric approach during its ongoing BRICS chairship, India remains focused on deepening engagement with Russia to collectively address common challenges through a balanced and inclusive framework.

Addressing a conference titled 'India and Russia: Towards a new bilateral agenda' virtually, EAM Jaishankar reaffirmed New Delhi's unwavering commitment to its longstanding partnership with Moscow.

"India, during its BRICS chairmanship with a humanity-first



## EAM talks with Rubio

S JAISHANKAR on Monday said he held a conversation with his US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on the ongoing West Asia conflict with both sides agreeing to stay in close contact amid evolving developments.

and a people-centric approach, looks forward to closely working with Russia to address shared challenges in a balanced and inclusive manner... Let me reiterate our steadfast commitment to strengthening our long-standing partnership and cherished friendship," the EAM said during his address.

"The last visit of President Putin to India in December 2025 broke new ground, covering diverse and novel areas, including mobility of skilled professionals, health and food safety, maritime cooperation, fertilisers, customs and commerce, and academic and media cooperation," EAM Jaishankar said recalling the last visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

# Iran imposes **\$2 million transit fee** on select ships in Strait of Hormuz

TEHRAN, Mar 23 (IANS)

IRAN has begun charging certain vessels a transit fee of \$2 million (approximately Rs 18.8 crore) to pass through the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz, in what officials describe as a new assertion of control amid its ongoing conflict with the United States and Israel.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian stated on X that the strait remains "open to everyone" — except for Iran's adversaries — outlining Tehran's latest stance on access to the crucial maritime route.

The policy has already been implemented, according to Iranian lawmaker Alaeddin Boroujerdi, who spoke to state



broadcaster Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), as cited by Iran International. Boroujerdi said the move represents a shift toward what he called a new "sovereign regime" governing the waterway.

"Collecting \$2 million as tran-

sit fees from some vessels crossing the strait reflects Iran's strength," Boroujerdi said.

"Now, because war has costs, naturally we must do this and take transit fees from ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz," he added, claiming the policy

demonstrates the Islamic Republic's "authority." Earlier, Iran's Foreign Ministry said that the Strait of Hormuz is not blocked and navigation continues in the waterway, with necessary measures being taken due to wartime conditions. In a state-

ment elaborating on Iran's positions amid ongoing US and Israeli attacks, the Ministry said that Iran has always respected the freedom of navigation and maritime security and safety, adding that it has worked to uphold those principles over the years.

## Over 40 oil and gas infra assets damaged in West Asia war: IEA



# 2 Indian LPG tankers carrying day's supply safely transits through Strait of Hormuz

NEW DELHI, Mar 23 (PTI)

**TWO** more Indian-flagged LPG tankers, carrying roughly a day's supply of the country's cooking gas, have safely navigated through the war-hit Strait of Hormuz and are expected to reach Indian shores over the next two days.

LPG tankers Pine Gas and Jag Vasant, sailing close to each other, started from the Persian Gulf on Monday morning before crossing the strait, ship tracking data showed. The two ships are carrying 92,612 tonnes of LPG, said Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways, at a news briefing. "The movement has started."

The tankers are likely to reach



Indian ports between March 26 and March 28. The vessels have 33 and 27 Indian seafarers onboard, according to the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

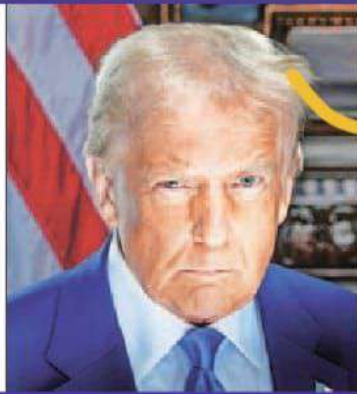
Both the LPG tankers sailed through waters between Iran's Larak and Qeshm islands -- possibly to make their identity clear to Iranian authorities before they

cross the strait, ship tracking data showed.

The two ships were among the 22 Indian flagged vessels that were stranded in the Persian Gulf after the war in West Asia nearly closed the Strait of Hormuz - the narrow waterway between Iran and Oman that connects the oil and gas-producing Gulf countries to the rest of the world.

# Trump halts strikes on Iran power plants for five days

Iran wants 'to make a deal,' US envoys have been holding talks with a 'respected' Iranian leader, claimed President Trump



■ By Jon Gambrell, David Rising and Samy Magdy  
DUBAI, Mar 23 (AP)

**PRESIDENT** Donald Trump extended his deadline for Iran to reopen the crucial Strait of Hormuz to international shipping, saying on Monday that the US would hold off on threatened strikes against Iranian power plants for five days.

In his announcement on Truth Social, Trump also held out the possibility of a resolution to the

war - though Iranian officials denied there were negotiations. Trump's turnaround appeared to offer something of a reprieve after the US and Iran traded threats with potentially catastrophic repercussions for civilians across the region.

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WALKING A  
DANGEROUS PATH  
on page 8

Trump later told reporters that Iran wants "to make a deal," and claimed United States envoys have been holding talks with a "respected" Iranian leader.

He said his Middle East special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, conducted talks on Sunday evening, and that the negotiations would continue.

Trump did not name any official or officials representing Tehran. He said the US has not talked to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei. Trump said if a deal is reached with Iran, the US will move to take Iran's enriched uranium critical to its disputed nuclear programme.

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## Trump backed down after firm warning: Iran

DUBAI, Mar 23 (PTI)

**IRANIAN** state television on Monday offered Tehran's first reaction to US President Donald Trump's decision to extend a deadline for reopening the Strait of Hormuz by five days.

Reacting to Trump's pause decision, Iranian state television said, "US President backs down following Iran's firm warning."

Iran's Parliament Speaker denies there have been any negotiations with the United States. Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf wrote on X that "No negotiations have been held with the US, and fakenews is used to manipulate the financial and oil markets and escape the quagmire in which the US and Israel are trapped."