

The Iran-US War: What It Could Cost India



■ Jayanta Roy Chowdhury
What will be the real cost of the Iran-US conflict on the Indian economy?

The war in one of India's key export regions which accounts for a sixth of its exports and about USD 50 billion in remittances has already started creating black holes in Indian balance sheets.

"Gas-burning factories across Gujarat, Maharashtra and several other states have fallen idle. The entire secondary steel sector has been hit," said Pankaj Chadha, chairman of EEPC India. "First, there is not enough gas available to smelt iron into steel. Second, the scrap that we used to import for melting down is no longer arriving. Then the export orders are in jeopardy. Containers are lying empty all over the place." The shipping squeeze, where sending containers through the Straits of Hormuz has become impossible, not to speak of the crude and gas shortage and its inflationary impact is liable to hit the Indian economy for billions of dollars in just the week gone by. "It's all up in the air, we really do not know how much it will cost us, a mere bystander in the war," said Prof Biswajit Dhar, former WTO Chair at the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT).

Industry experts believe the ongoing conflict in the Gulf region could cost India between USD 2-3 billion in electronics exports alone. Up to USD 4 billion in monthly shipments are at risk due to rising freight costs and logistics delays.

"The conflict threatens \$50 billion in remittances, creates potential for skyrocketing oil prices, and disrupts key trade routes, putting Indian electronics, garments, and agricultural exports like rice and tea are at severe risk," said Dhar.

India receives USD138 billion in annual remittances, with roughly 38 per cent (about USD 50 billion) coming from Gulf nations, which is now threatened.

India's basket of crude for the month of March now costs USD 101.25 a barrel. While Brent crude prices have shot up in the spot market to USD 103.86, the month's highest.

"The Strait of Hormuz, the narrow maritime corridor connecting the Gulf to our



energy markets, has today effectively become a geopolitical fault line," said Commodore Ranjit Rai, former Director of Naval Intelligence and a security analyst. Shipping disruptions are adding further

strain. Insurance costs for tankers moving through the Strait of Hormuz have climbed sharply as insurers factor in heightened war risk. At the same time, shipping delays are increasing the cost of

moving goods both into and out of the country.

India's strategic petroleum reserves offer only a modest safety net, covering about 74 days of consumption at current demand levels. However, these reserves serve only as a short-term safeguard rather than a sustainable long-term answer.

The Rupee, which traded for 92.54 on Saturday, has been under constant pressure as foreign investors continued to sell equities in the Indian market on the one hand and as the cost of India's crude imports rose sharply. The Sensex closed on Friday at 74,563 points, down from 83,277 a month ago.

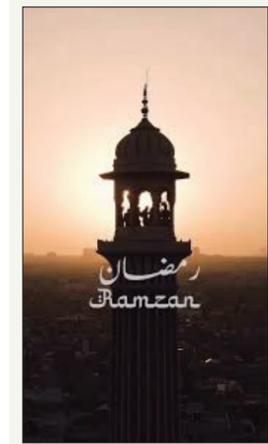
Analysts are now pitching figures for a possible scenario of crude prices going up to USD 150 a barrel if the war stretches with the Straits impassable and much of the oil infrastructure in the Gulf under threat. Dhar points out that a "USD 1 rise in global crude oil prices typically inflates India's annual import expenditure by about USD1.3-1.4 billion."

This escalation tends to widen the current account deficit and intensify downward pressure on the rupee. Already, analysts feel the rupee is headed for Rs 95 to the dollar but could go up to Rs 100 to the dollar in worst-case scenarios.

"The problem for India is that the vulnerability is structural. The country imports the vast majority of its oil, consuming roughly 2.5 to 2.7 million barrels of crude per day from overseas suppliers and increases in prices or constraints on supply tell on the economy," pointed out Dhar.



Ramzan After Sunset: The Magic of Jama Masjid and Mohammad Ali Road



■ Vivek Shukla
In the twilight of Ramzan, two legendary streets, one cradled by Mughal minarets in Old Delhi, the other at Mumbai's Mohammad Ali Road.

More than a thousand kilometres separate the lanes around Jama Masjid from Mohammad Ali Road, yet the air carries an identical promise: the fast will break, hunger will yield to gratitude, and strangers will become kin under strings of fairy lights.

Wander into the narrow gullies near Jama Masjid as the call to Maghrib prayer fades, and the scene feels timeless. The grand red sandstone mosque looms above, its domes and minarets bathed in soft floodlight, holding centuries of whispered suppli-

cations. Families claim patches on the wide steps, spreading cotton sheets and unpacking modest iftar treasures: plump dates, chilled rose sherbet in plastic bottles, golden pakoras still sizzling from the fryer, and bowls of vibrant fruit chaat dusted with chaat masala. Vendors thread through the crowds like gentle currents, balancing trays of sliced watermelon, boiled chana laced with onions and lemon, and crisp samosas whose steam curls into the evening.

A few steps away, the real feast ignites. Seekh kebabs hiss over live charcoal, fat dripping and sparking; shami kebabs fry to a perfect crust; enormous deghs bubble with nihari, its marrow-rich broth perfuming the air. Nearby stalls ladle out steaming biryani layered with saffron-kissed rice and tender mutton, while tandors roar as rotis puff and char. The aromas, smoky meat, frying ghee, roasted spices, blend with drifting notes of ittar and incense, wrapping the chaos in something almost holy.

Avid traveller Tshetan Wangmo Norbhu, who visited with friends one Ramzan evening, still recalls the quiet magic before the azan ended. "As twilight deepens, the illuminated mosque looks majestic," she says. "Its towering minarets and vast courtyard seem to hold centuries of prayers within their walls." In that sus-



ended moment, the steps fill with people of every background, locals in kurtas, tourists clutching cameras, families from distant states, united by the shared wait for the first bite.

Across the country, Mohammad Ali Road erupts into a dazzling carnival at the same hour. Neon signs flare to life, fairy lights zigzag overhead, turning the narrow stretch into a glittering tunnel. The crowd here is louder, more polyphonic: Marathi banter mixes with

Gujarati exclamations, Konkani phrases weave through Hindustani calls, creating a lively chorus absent in the more uniformly Urdu-inflected lanes of Old Delhi. Women move freely through the throng, their presence adding a visible layer of openness that makes Mumbai distinct.

Near Minara Masjid, daily iftar gatherings draw hundreds. Across the road, young restaurateur Abdul Rahman—once a chartered accountant, oversees

Mashaallah Cuisines amid a constant rush. "Mohammad Ali Road is not just about non-vegetarian delicacies," he insists between greeting customers. "You can find some of the best mithai here too. People travel from across India just for the atmosphere and the food."

His words prove true with every step. Stalls brim with syrup-drenched malpuas, creamy rabdi, phirni scented with cardamom and served in

earthen kulhads, and towering stacks of golden fried chicken. Kebab skewers turn slowly over coals, sparks dancing upward; massive cauldrons of haleem release a slow, seductive aroma of lentils, meat, and spice. The street feels intimate—people perch on stools at shared tables or stand elbow-to-elbow at counters, trading recommendations and stories between bites.

Mohammad Wajihuddin, author and senior Mumbai

based journalist, has been visiting Mohammad Ali Road for the last several years. "Bollywood actors, college students, families, food lovers—they all come," he observes. "Many wait all year for this Ramzan month. Beyond food, people shop for Eid clothes, turning the nights into a full celebration."

Yet beneath the sensory overload lies the same quiet warmth that defines Jama Masjid evenings. Strangers pass plates, stall owners call regulars by name, and laughter rises over the clatter of spoons. Mumbai's relentless energy softens here, revealing its generous soul.

Delhi and Mumbai may differ in cadence, Old Delhi's Mughal serenity versus Mumbai's exuberant intimacy—but Ramzan binds them. At Jama Masjid, faith unfolds beneath soaring architecture; on Mohammad Ali Road, the community celebrates through shared abundance. Both places remind us that sunset during the holy month is more than an end to hunger. It is the moment gratitude arrives, plates are passed, and entire neighbourhoods fold into one extended family.

As Mumbai-based social worker M. Zaid Khan puts it, "For a few luminous hours each night, these streets stop being just streets. They become home."

(Author is a senior journalist. Views are personal)

