

A FRAGILE PAUSE

There is yet another positive development in the ongoing volatile situation in West Asia. US President Donald Trump has announced a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, brokered by him. It would be premature to celebrate it as a definite step towards lasting peace in the region, but it does provide a break from ongoing attacks and counter-attacks that are killing innocent people. With over a million displaced in Lebanon, even a temporary halt allows humanitarian relief and creates diplomatic space. It also offers a sigh of relief for displaced Lebanese families, who are returning hesitantly to their homes reduced to rubble by air attacks. It is indeed a window of hope.

Yet, the big question is: will this last? And if it does, what happens after it is over? Will it lead to lasting peace? The key player here is not the US, which has brokered this ceasefire, but Israel, which remains adamant about continuing hostilities.

Since the US and Iran agreed to a month-long ceasefire, Israel opened its Lebanon front to technically avoid violating it, while at the same time provoking Iran into launching a counter-offensive. Within hours of the US-Iran ceasefire, Israel reportedly sabotaged it with a massive 100-missile strike on Lebanon, killing over 250 people. Iran's swift retaliation almost jeopardised the truce.

That said, this 10-day window is significant. It indicates that the conflict has reached a point where active players are exhausted and seeking relief, even if it is momentary. More crucially, Tehran has made de-escalation in Lebanon a precondition for engaging in talks. In that sense, the ceasefire is less a standalone event and more a piece of a larger West Asian puzzle. However, its credibility remains deeply uncertain. Ceasefires in the Israel-Lebanon conflict have historically been fragile. The involvement of Hezbollah further complicates matters, as it is aligned with Iran rather than purely Lebanese state interests.

The key question, therefore, is how credible Trump's assurances are and whether they can be taken at face value. While the US remains Israel's principal ally, Netanyahu has not always complied with Washington. Past instances of Israeli defiance show that US influence, though significant, is not absolute. If Israel perceives its security interests to be at stake, it is unlikely to adhere to a time-bound ceasefire, regardless of who announces it. Analysts have already warned that any breach could derail parallel US-Iran negotiations, which remain tentative. The linkage between Lebanon and broader regional diplomacy means that failure here would have consequences far beyond its borders. The conflict has already triggered economic anxieties, disrupted supply chains, and raised concerns about maritime security.

A sustained ceasefire could stabilise energy markets and reduce the risk of a wider confrontation involving Iran and US forces in the region. Conversely, a collapse would intensify polarisation, draw in more actors, and deepen the instability that has long defined West Asia.

India-Iran: A partnership of strategic necessity

Santhosh Mathew

India and Iran share a relationship that stretches across centuries—two of the world's oldest and most majestic civilisations, bound not merely by trade routes but by cultural memory and strategic necessity. For years, this partnership carried a quiet resilience. It was only after 2019 that visible shifts began to emerge. India recalibrated its global engagements under mounting geopolitical pressures, but it would be naïve to assume that Iran has not forgotten the depth of past cooperation. International relations are not driven by nostalgia; they are governed by national interests, survival instincts, and calculated statecraft.

In today's globalised economy, no country—however resource-rich—can afford isolation. Iran, despite its vast oil reserves, finds itself constrained by sanctions, strategic rivalries, and regional instability. It is within this context that India's importance becomes not just relevant, but indispensable. The Chabahar Port stands as a powerful symbol of this interdependence. Located on Iran's south-eastern coast, it is far more than a commercial hub; it is Iran's economic lifeline. Under heavy sanctions imposed by Western powers, particularly the United States, Iran has struggled to maintain access to global markets. India's investment and operational involvement in Chabahar have provided Tehran with a crucial window to the world. Beyond trade, the port facilitates connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan entirely. This not only secures India's strategic interests but also ensures a steady stream of transit revenue for Iran.

Energy remains the lifeblood of the global economy, and Iran's oil needs reliable buyers. India has long been one of the most trusted customers of Iranian crude. Even amid international pressure, India explored mechanisms to sustain this trade. The rupee-rial arrangement, for instance, allowed transactions to continue without



reliance on the US dollar, offering Iran a critical cushion against foreign exchange constraints. Such financial ingenuity reflects not sentimentality but pragmatic diplomacy.

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) further deepens this partnership. By linking India with Russia and Europe through Iran, the corridor transforms Iran into a pivotal transit hub. In times of economic uncertainty and shifting alliances, this strategic geography becomes a source of leverage and survival for Tehran.

Equally significant is India's role in sustaining Iran's domestic economy during difficult times. Essential commodities such as basmati rice, tea, and sugar from India help stabilise Iranian markets. When Western pharmaceutical supplies become inaccessible, India—the "pharmacy of the world"—steps in with affordable, life-saving medicines. This humanitarian-economic dimension adds another layer to the bilateral relationship.

India's diplomatic maturity in handling such complexities deserves attention. Under the stewardship of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, India has demonstrated a rare ability to maintain balanced ties with adversarial blocs. It engages Iran

while strengthening relations with Israel and the United States. This doctrine of strategic autonomy allows India to act not as a subordinate ally, but as an independent pole in global politics. Even critics like Shashi Tharoor have acknowledged the professionalism underpinning this approach.

Security concerns in the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea further reinforce the need for Indo-Iranian cooperation. Maritime attacks and regional conflicts disrupt trade routes that are vital to both nations. Ensuring the safety of shipping lanes, particularly through critical chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz, requires coordination and dialogue. In such turbulent conditions, Iran increasingly recognises India as a stable and reliable partner—one that does not abandon its friends in times of crisis.

Speculation often fills the gaps left by secrecy in international affairs. There are whispers of discreet assistance—technical, logistical, even humanitarian—extended by India to Iran, including support for infrastructure such as water purification systems or port development. While such claims remain unverified, they reflect a broader perception: that India's engagement with Iran is deeper than what meets

the eye.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's credibility deficit is well known, particularly in Tehran. In contrast, India's consistent and measured approach has earned it a degree of trust that few others enjoy. There are even suggestions that, in the context of escalating tensions between Iran and the United States, Tehran sees New Delhi as a potential mediator—capable of playing a constructive role in de-escalation.

At the same time, global conflicts carry economic consequences back home. A prolonged Iran-US confrontation could significantly impact Indian corporate giants like Reliance Industries. Its Jamnagar refinery, the largest in the world, accounts for a substantial share of India's petroleum exports. Disruptions in global supply chains, currency fluctuations, and policy interventions—such as restrictions on exports to prioritise domestic supply—could result in massive financial losses. This underscores the delicate balance India must maintain between strategic diplomacy and economic stability.

Ultimately, India-Iran relations are not a tale of emotional solidarity but of mutual necessity. Iran needs India for economic access, trade, and diplomatic balance. India, in turn, engages Iran as part of a broader geopolitical calculus—securing energy routes, countering regional adversaries, and expanding its strategic footprint.

Dharma diplomacy, as it is often described, is not about moral grandstanding. It is about calibrated restraint, principled engagement, and the ability to act with both wisdom and realism. In a world increasingly defined by conflict and fragmentation, India's approach offers a model of balance—one that even a nation like Iran, under immense pressure, appears to be seeking.

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) further strengthens this partnership. By connecting India to Russia and Europe through Iran via a network of ships, railways, and roads, it turns Iran into a key transit hub for global trade.

WHEN STRESS IS NOT JUST A PASSING PHASE

Asha Iyer Kumar

I remember the initial days of recognising 'something abnormal' in the way I was living my life. My first instinct was to dismiss it as my imagination, and then, when the condition persisted, I chalked it up to the S-word that is casually woven into our lives—stress. "Who is not stressed these days?" is the modern-day maxim, making the word reductive and the condition itself more dangerous than it seems. What in the beginning looked like a commonplace response to everyday pressures slowly settled in, taking residence in my nervous system and body, and before I knew it, the condition had crossed the line. From mere stress, it had leapt into a territory that became a long drawn-out health crisis. Prolonged stress, I realised, was not a state that moves on with time. It persists, finds places in our system to lodge, and slowly becomes a health challenge of unthinkable proportions. Stress by itself may not be dangerous if it rises and recedes with work and life situations, but when it becomes a habit to be constantly on edge, it turns into an anxiety disorder, putting us in a spiral of



psychosomatic illnesses. The difficulty, however, is not in understanding this intellectually. It lies in recognising the moment of shift and taking action to prevent further deterioration. Because the line does not announce itself. It slips in quietly. One day, you are dealing with pressure; another day, you are unable to return to yourself even after the pressure has passed. What was once a reaction becomes a state of being. And that is perhaps the first sign that something has altered beneath the surface.

It is not always the large breakdowns that warn us. It is often the smaller, more persistent disturbances—sleep that refuses to come easily; a mind that will not switch off; a body that feels perpetually tense, as though bracing for something unnamed; irritability that has no clear cause; a heaviness that lingers through the day; the loss of interest in things that once offered ease; and a quiet dependence on distractions, stimulants, or substances to feel momentarily better. None of these seem alarming in isolation. Together, they form a pattern we are too quick to overlook.

We tell ourselves it is a phase, that it will pass. We tell ourselves this is simply what modern living looks like. In doing so, we normalise what is, in truth, a slow erosion of well-being. From being a hindrance, it

becomes a series of ailments that can leave one indisposed both mentally and physically. Pre-emptive care, in this context, is not a grand corrective step taken after collapse. It is a series of small acknowledgements made before we get there. It begins with taking our own signals seriously, instead of dismissing them as weakness or exaggeration. It requires us to step back from the pace we have unquestioningly accepted and ask whether it is sustainable for the mind and body that must carry it.

It may mean allowing ourselves pauses without guilt, setting boundaries, and speaking openly instead of remaining silent. Most importantly, it means seeking help early and restoring basic rhythms—rest, movement, and quiet—without the pressure to be constantly productive.

Mental health is often addressed only in crisis, but its preservation lies in early attention. Not everything overwhelming is a disorder, yet not everything persistent is merely stress. Recognising this difference is crucial. When stress becomes a way of living rather than a response, it turns into an early warning. How we respond to it can shape our long-term well-being.

Super El Niño: A brewing climate shock

BK SINGH

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) on April 9, has predicted that there is 61% chance that El Niño will be formed in late summer and fall towards the end of this year and there is 33% chance that it would be a strong one, typically known as "Super El Niño". There have been only 5 such El Niño have been registered since 1950 and the last one was formed in 2015-16. The Copernicus Climate Change Service has also confirmed that 2026 March has registered second highest Sea Surface temperature, which points towards the possibility of El Niño conditions forming later in summer this year.

April 9, advisory of NOAA has confirmed that an eventful La Niña winter, when powerful storms have disrupted the lives of the people on American and European continents, is concluded and Pacific Ocean has shifted into a neutral pattern such that Sea surface temperature in central and east-central tropical Pacific has become average.

La Niña, neutral and El Niño are three phases of El Niño southern oscillation (ENSO) cycle formed on ac-

count of natural changes in Pacific Ocean temperature and atmospheric circulation. El Niño typically means less activity in Atlantic basin and more activity in central and eastern equatorial Pacific. During El Niño cycle more tropical cyclones is experienced in Pacific and lower than the average in Atlantic. A super El Niño acts as a shield bringing higher pressure and vertical wind shear that suppresses hurricane formation in Atlantic. The weather pattern in this cycle in the equatorial Pacific region experiences droughts, floods, extreme heat, hurricanes and declining Sea ice. The sea surface temperature rises by more than 2 degrees Celsius, resulting in hotter than average summer in Western United States, parts of Africa, Europe and India. Further, the tropical countries like Caribbean islands and Indonesia may experience severe drought and extreme heat.

The atmosphere is likely to trap more greenhouse gases and increase the concentration of carbon dioxide and 2027 is set to register record rise in average global temperature. So far 2024 has been the warmest, and now 2027 is likely to breach this. The experts have also forecasted that the su-

per El Niño of 2026-27 is likely to disperse more heat than what three earlier super El Niño events in 1982-83, 1997-98 and 2015-16 have dispersed. The unusual heat and humidity may intensify the flow of atmospheric moisture. As the warmer atmosphere has huge amount of moisture carrying capacity, it will bring excessive rains and flash floods in the region. Also the heat released in super El Niño event remains trapped in the atmosphere due to increasing concentration of greenhouse gases, and thus every cycle of El Niño stair-steps the global rise in temperature.

The above average summer temperature and humidity may bring downpours in hills and a thunderstorm season in the plains of Western United States. Along with Central Africa, Australia, Indonesia, Philippines, central America, Brazil and south Pacific islands, the central and northern part of India is likely to have monsoon suppressed causing a severe impact on agriculture production.

Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has also issued advisory confirming the prediction of NOAA and the strong link between Pacific Ocean condition and India's June to Septem-

ber rainfall. It has suggested the weakening of monsoon this year, as 7 out of 10 El Niño years have registered poor monsoon. Besides the human health in the region will be impacted, the El Niño cycle has potential to disrupt the lives and livelihood of the people in the region. Unpredictable disruptions are also expected in global travel.

Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) may turn favorable in August, which may counter the impact of El Niño in second half of monsoon season. However, IOD is generally unpredictable, but the loss of snow covers in 2026 (January to March) in northern hemisphere may brighten the chances of southwest monsoon.

Historically El Niño brings lower GDP growth due to a contraction in agricultural output, affecting overall economy. The 2023-24 El Niño, which was not a super El Niño, had caused a drop of 6.1% in agriculture production of the country. Promoting drought resistant crops and sustainable farming practices as well as soil and water conservation measures are the basic mitigation measures suggested for farming communities. IMD must continue to predict rainfall trends as well as issue of early warn-

ing. Keeping a check on the water levels of the reservoirs and managing it for urban water supply, irrigation and power projects will have to be monitored by central and state governments till Pacific attains a neutral condition and El Niño conditions vanish in later part of 2027. Some urban and rural areas may encounter drinking water problem, which has to be managed by agencies judiciously. A cap on the rent of the water tankers may be imposed to ensure that water-tanker mafias are not allowed to take advantage of the situation and the population is not put further into the hardships.

The rising temperature of the planet can lead to devastating wildfire in different regions. While the burning of forests of California, Boreal and Amazon forests can damage the global lung spaces by reducing the capacity of Carbon dioxide sequestration, the continued fire can disrupt the lives and livelihood of the communities' dependent on forest resources.

Strait of Hormuz is already a choke point, where 20% of oil and gas from GCC countries flows to the world market. A sizable proportion of fertilizer

and helium also flow through this point. Many economies have taken a hit owing to the trade disruption at the strait. El Niño is predicted to create another choke point at Panama Canal.

El Niño events are associated with rainfall deficit in Central America, which may directly impact water levels in Gatun lake - a fresh water reservoir that powers the lock system of Panama Canal. During El Niño driven drought experienced in 2023-24, the transit of ships through it was slashed down to 24 vessels per day. It also faced a shipping draft restriction of 44 feet, permitting vessels navigating shallower ports. These vessels transported reduced cargo due to fallen water level in Gatun Lake. The prolonged disruption had ripple effect in global supply chains, driving congestion, higher transit cost and several re-routing of the cargo vessels. However, a shift to La Niña and a sustained rainfall restored water level in Gatun reservoir and the Canal could transport nearly 36 vessels with full 50 feet draft. NOAA has forecasted that 2026-27 El Niño could again reduce water level in Gatun reservoir and bring down the daily transit slots as well as the cargo loads.