Maritime Chokepoints in the Indian Ocean – Explained

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Maritime Chokepoints Latest News

- Escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia have renewed attention on critical maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, and the Malacca Strait.

Strategic Maritime Chokepoints in the Indian Ocean

- Maritime chokepoints are **narrow sea routes through which a substantial volume of global trade and energy supplies pass**.
- Any disruption in these routes can significantly affect global shipping, oil prices, supply chains, and energy security.
- The Indian Ocean region hosts some of the world's most important chokepoints, particularly for oil and container trade.

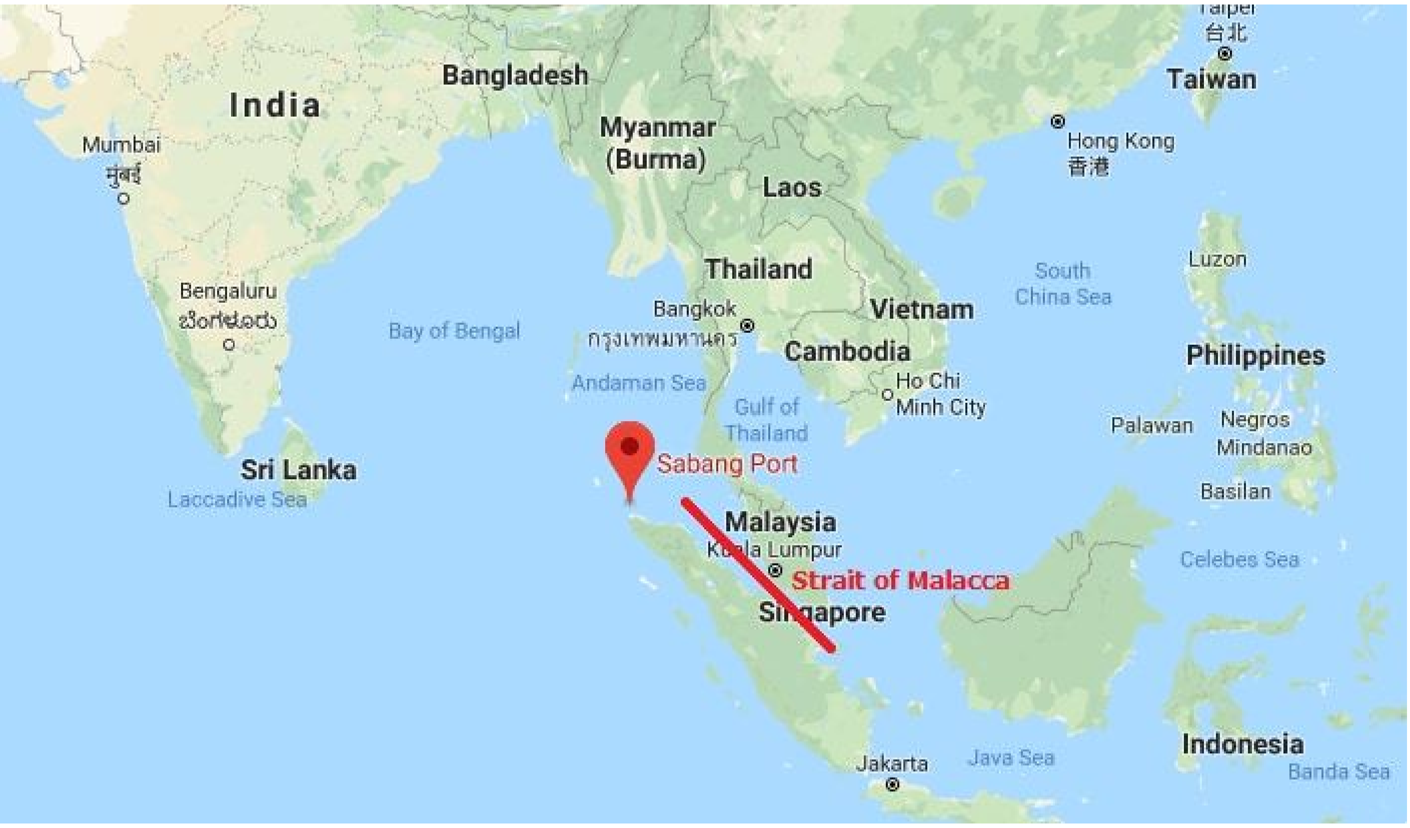
Strait of Hormuz

- The **Strait of Hormuz** lies between **Iran and Oman** and connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- It is one of the most critical energy chokepoints in the world because:
    - Around 20-25% of the global oil trade passes through it.
    - Major Gulf oil exporters such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, UAE, and Qatar depend on this route.
    - India, China, Japan, and European countries rely heavily on oil shipments passing through the strait.
- Any blockade or military disruption in the Strait of Hormuz can trigger sharp increases in global crude oil prices and disrupt international trade.

Bab-el-Mandeb Strait

- The **Bab-el-Mandeb Strait** lies between **Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti/Eritrea in Africa**. It connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, ultimately linking maritime traffic to the Suez Canal.
- Its importance lies in the fact that:
    - It serves as a key route for Europe-Asia trade.
    - Nearly 10% of the global seaborne oil trade passes through this route.
    - It is essential for container shipping between Asia and Europe.
- Recent attacks by **Houthi rebels** in the Red Sea region have increased security concerns and disrupted shipping routes, forcing vessels to take longer alternate routes.

Malacca Strait



- The **Malacca Strait**, located between **Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia**, connects the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean.
- It is one of the busiest shipping routes globally because:
  - Nearly one-fourth of global trade passes through it.
  - Around 80% of China's oil imports transit through this route.
  - It is vital for energy imports of India, China, Japan, and South Korea.
- Due to its strategic significance, the Malacca Strait is often viewed as a potential geopolitical vulnerability, especially in the context of Indo-Pacific competition.

News Summary

- While global attention remains focused on the **Strait of Hormuz**, two additional chokepoints in the Indian Ocean, **Bab-el-Mandeb** and **the Malacca Strait**, are equally critical for global commerce and energy movement.
- **Concerns Over Strait of Hormuz**
  - Amid rising tensions between Iran and Israel/US, concerns have emerged regarding possible disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz.
  - The Strait handles nearly one-fifth of global oil supply, making it indispensable for global energy markets. Even temporary disruptions can raise freight costs, fuel inflation, and affect energy-importing countries like India.

Red Sea Crisis and Bab-el-Mandeb Risks

- Shipping through the **Bab-el-Mandeb Strait** has already faced disruptions due to attacks by **Houthi rebels** in the Red Sea region. As a result:
    - Several shipping companies diverted vessels around the **Cape of Good Hope in South Africa**.
    - Shipping time increased significantly.
    - Freight and insurance costs rose sharply.
- This demonstrates how instability in one chokepoint can disrupt global supply chains.

Limited Alternatives to Chokepoints

- Experts underline that there are **few practical alternatives** to these narrow maritime passages. For example:
    - Ships bypassing Bab-el-Mandeb through the **Cape of Good Hope** face higher transport costs and delays.
    - Alternative pipelines to bypass the Strait of Hormuz have limited capacity.
- Thus, uninterrupted functioning of these chokepoints remains essential for global economic stability.

Source: TH
