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India must lead in securing the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb

On the heels of the Strait of Hormuz crisis comes the new threat – a Strait of Bab el-Mandeb crisis. On July 16, Reuters reported that Iran had instructed the Houthis to close the Strait (which is between Yemen and the Horn of Africa) if the United States attacked Iran's power plants.

Whether the Houthis have the capacity to threaten the Strait or whether this is part of Iran's signalling to the U.S. is secondary. What is important is that this represents a risk to one-third of India's entire trade.

Revisiting 2024

We have been here before. When the Gaza war started in October 2023, the Ansarallah group in Yemen, also known as the Houthis, claimed solidarity with the Palestinians and launched drones and missiles at Israel. From November 2023 to March 2024, the Houthis targeted at least 40 vessels in the Red Sea, claiming that the vessels were linked to or bound for Israel.

In response, the U.S., together with allies including Singapore and Sri Lanka, launched Operation Prosperity Guardian (December 2023) to ensure “freedom of navigation” in the Red Sea. This was followed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2722 (2024), which was adopted in January 2024. Israel also carried out unilateral strikes against the Houthis. The Indian Navy rescued the crew of a British tanker after it was set on fire (January 26-27, 2024). By the time the U.S. declared a ceasefire in May 2025, the Houthis had been weakened, but much of the damage had already been done.

Marine insurance companies tend to be highly risk-averse. With over 90% of the world's shipping insured by just 12 protection and indemnity (P&I) clubs, shipowners have limited room to negotiate. Between November 2023 and March 2024, at least 2,000 ships avoided the Suez Canal and instead sailed around the Cape of Good



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New Delhi's
leadership can
help prevent
another major
shipping crisis
in the Red Sea

Hope. This delayed critical imports to India. Global shipping routes effectively reverted to what was being done 170 years ago. Egypt lost a quarter of the Suez Canal's revenue. By July 2024, Israel's Red Sea port of Eilat had filed for bankruptcy.

This time around, the situation is more unpredictable. With U.S. forces in the region focused on Iran, it is unclear whether they will seek to secure the Red Sea as they did before.

Even in 2024, when India-bound ships were attacked by the Houthis, New Delhi had to lean directly on Tehran to bring the attacks to a halt. But that was a different time for India-Iran ties. Meanwhile, the UN Security Council is more divided today than ever before, and even if it manages to call for “freedom of navigation” in the Red Sea, it is unlikely to pass a resolution approving a force to implement that call. China is also likely to again take a unilateral approach to protecting its shipping in the Red Sea through quid pro quos with the Houthis.

If the Houthis resume attacks on shipping in the Strait, the impact on India's economy – which is already reeling from the Strait of Hormuz crisis – would be dire. While India has now ordered that no Indian mariner be deployed on ships bound to or from the Strait of Hormuz, extending the same restriction to a busy route such as the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb would not be easy and would adversely affect the safety and welfare of thousands of Indian seafarers.

What India should do

In 2024, France stayed out of a U.S.-led operation to guard its role in mediating between Hezbollah and Israel in Lebanon. Those conditions no longer exist. However, France and Japan – two countries that need shipping lanes in the Red Sea for their connectivity with Asia and Europe respectively – maintain bases in Djibouti, perched on the Red Sea. Their navies have also

conducted joint drills with the Indian Navy, which creates an opportunity for India to pre-empt a recurrence of the events of 2024.

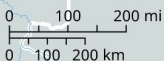
India therefore needs to pro-actively build a naval taskforce in collaboration with France and Japan to deter attacks on shipping in the Bab el-Mandeb.

India would also do well to engage Egypt and Saudi Arabia. They had refused to join the alliance against the Houthis in 2024, given their own stance on Gaza. This time, with their economies at stake, they may not stand by. On July 20, the Houthis announced a “maritime embargo” on Saudi ships, seen as a threat against their transit through the Bab el-Mandeb. India needs to engage with these nations proactively to help secure the Red Sea, from the Suez to Bab el-Mandeb, while keeping its other partners in the region informed.

A rules-based maritime response

It needs to be emphasised that this would be a theatre-specific “Trade Protection Task Force” of navies, rather than a strategic alliance. In addition to ships and personnel, the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region hosted by India could provide the necessary maritime domain awareness, while France and Japan could complement these efforts with on-ground logistical support. The constituent navies could agree on joint rules of engagement in response to any hostile attacks. They could provide security cover or escorts requested by commercial and civilian vessels transiting the Strait, especially those bound for Europe, India, or Japan. The task force would serve as a lasting demonstration of India's resolve to ensure “respect for maritime rules and norms” as part of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).

India has both the responsibility and the capability to prevent the Bab el-Mandeb from becoming a literal “Gate of Tears” this time.





1. Context (GS II – International Relations; GS III – Maritime Security)

Growing security concerns in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait due to Houthi attacks on commercial shipping have highlighted the vulnerability of global maritime trade. The editorial argues that India should play a proactive role in securing this critical sea route through international cooperation.

2. Bab el-Mandeb Strait – Basics

- I. Means “Gate of Tears” in Arabic.
- II. Located between Yemen and Djibouti–Eritrea.
- III. Connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.
- IV. Forms the southern gateway to the Suez Canal.

3. Why is it Strategically Important?

- I. One of the world’s most important maritime chokepoints.
- II. Vital trade and energy corridor linking Europe, Asia and Africa.
- III. Any disruption forces ships to sail via the Cape of Good Hope, increasing time, freight costs and insurance premiums.

4. Why is it Important for India?

- I. A significant share of India’s trade with Europe passes through this route.
- II. Critical for India’s energy security and export supply chains.
- III. Protects Indian merchant ships and seafarers operating in the region.
- IV. Advances India’s MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) vision and strengthens its role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region.

Buried questions

The costs of projects in environmentally fragile zones are many

India is grappling with another Himalayan tragedy. Workers in an under-construction tunnel at the Teesta Stage-VI hydroelectric project of NHPC Limited (formerly National Hydroelectric Power Corporation Private Ltd.), in Sikkim's Namchi district, struck a pocket of suspected trapped methane. The resulting burst partially damaged the tunnel, killing at least 15 of an estimated 25 workers, with rescue operations still under way. The NHPC has announced a detailed investigation. Methane is a well-recognised hazard in underground excavation, and the geology of the Teesta basin makes it a likely one. The basin sits in a seismically active zone, with young and heavily fractured rock, and where compressed pockets of gas laid down long ago can lie hidden until an excavation breaks into them. The presence of the gas, in that sense, is not in itself surprising. What remains unclear is far more consequential: the precise circumstances in which the pocket was breached, whether its risk was assessed and modelled during project planning, and whether the gas-detection and ventilation safeguards that such conditions demand were in place and functioning.

Underground work in India's difficult terrain has always been perilous. In February this year, an explosion at an illegal coal mine in Meghalaya killed about 30 workers, and in 2023, a stretch of a road tunnel under construction in Uttarakhand collapsed, trapping 41 workers for 17 days before they were pulled out. The circumstances vary, but together they underscore how lethal underground and tunnelling work remains across the country. A series of hydropower projects along the 400-kilometre stretch of the Teesta that links Sikkim, West Bengal, and Bangladesh have varied histories with environmental clearances but share a common feature – their location in the fragile Himalayan belt. That vulnerability was demonstrated tragically in October 2023, when a glacial lake outburst flood from the South Lhonak lake destroyed the Teesta-III dam and killed more than a 100 people downstream. Teesta-VI was absorbed by the public-sector NHPC Limited after its private developers, unable to afford escalating costs, went into insolvency. Relief and rescue must remain the immediate priority, and every effort to reach those still trapped is warranted. But once the emergency has passed, the government cannot treat the disaster as an isolated misfortune. It must order a thorough, independent review of whether the conditions attached to the project's environmental clearance were, in practice, strictly met.



1. Context (GS III – Environment, Disaster Management)

The recent Teesta Stage-VI hydropower tunnel accident in Sikkim has highlighted the need for scientific planning, geological risk assessment and strict environmental safeguards while undertaking infrastructure projects in the fragile Himalayan region.

2. Teesta Stage-VI Tunnel Accident

- I. Workers excavating the tunnel struck a trapped methane gas pocket, triggering an explosion.**
- II. The blast partially damaged the tunnel, causing multiple fatalities and trapping workers.**
- III. The incident has prompted an investigation into whether geological risks were properly assessed and whether mandatory safety measures were in place.**

3. Issues Highlighted by the Editorial

- I. Fragile Himalayan geology (young rocks, seismic activity and hidden gas pockets) increases risks for tunnelling and hydropower projects.**
- II. Inadequate geological investigations and hazard mapping before project execution.**
- III. Poor implementation of environmental clearance and worker safety conditions, including gas detection and ventilation systems.**
- IV. Recurring disasters indicate the need to balance infrastructure development with ecological sustainability rather than treating each accident as an isolated event.**
- V. Calls for an independent review of environmental compliance and safety standards for projects in environmentally sensitive regions.**

Are pellet guns being used at protests?

Pellet guns are used by police and military worldwide as a non-lethal crowd-control measure. They were last known to have been used during the 2024 farmers' protest along the Punjab-Haryana border. Though police denied their use, farmer leaders had alleged that several people were injured.

EXPLAINER

Vijai Singh

The story so far:

At least one of the 80 protesters injured in police action during the march to Parliament on Monday (July 20), called by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) sustained pellet gun injuries. The victim identified as Shaikh Irshad Mansoori (25), a resident of Gurugram, underwent surgery at a government hospital to remove the pellets lodged near his eye. Most pellets were lodged in the upper part of his body.

Another video of a woman being stunned by a "shock baton," also emerged on Tuesday (July 21). The use of pellet guns and shock batons against civilian protesters, appears to be the first in Delhi.

What are pellet guns?

Pellet guns, whose technical name is 'pump action guns', are a form of non-lethal crowd-control method used by police and military worldwide. The other common measures are tear gas, water cannon, pepper spray and taser guns among others.

Pellet guns are also popular in hunting and pest control. Intended to immobilise an individual, they are effective over short ranges of up to 500 yards but when fired from close quarters can be lethal, particularly when sensitive parts like the eyes are hit. The pellets can penetrate soft tissues.

What happened during the July 20 protest in Delhi?

There are standing instructions to open minimal fire at protesters and if necessary "below their waist." A cartridge of a pellet gun contains a few hundred pellets made of lead, which disperses a few hundred metres when fired. Pellets can be of various shapes either like ball bearings or irregular. They are manufactured at the Ordnance Factory, Ishapore.



While Delhi Police has denied its use against protesters, pellet guns are part of the RAF's gear. ANI

While the Delhi Police have denied its use against protesters, pellets guns and shock batons are part of the gear of the Rapid Action Force (RAF) – the anti-riot unit under the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) – which was deployed alongside police personnel on July 20 and continues to be deployed near the Jantar Mantar protest site.

On Monday, the victim Shaikh Irshad Mansoori was hit near Palika Bazaar by a RAF official. His friend said that there are around 30-40 injuries on his face and across his body. Four of them, including one in the neck, had penetrated deeply, which is why he underwent surgery.

Originally from Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Mansoori works at a private company in Gurugram and was attending the protests in solidarity. He also had some visa-related work in New Delhi, which he was supposed to finish after the protest.

What is the first known usage of pellet guns?

Pellet guns were first deployed in Jammu

and Kashmir after Kashmir Valley's summer unrest of 2010 that claimed the lives of 112 protesters in police firing. The then Congress-led government at the Centre deployed pellet guns as a "non-lethal" measure to avoid civilian fatalities.

After violent protests broke out in the Kashmir Valley post July 8, 2016 – when the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) commander Burhan Wani was killed in an encounter with security forces – several people were blinded due to injuries inflicted by pellet guns, used by the CRPF as a crowd control measure.

Why were its specifications changed?

In 2016, the BJP-PDP government faced severe criticism for using pellet guns, with several political parties asking for its complete withdrawal. Due to the use of pellet guns, 13 people were killed in 2016 and more than 250 were injured, while some lost their vision.

In 2017, a year later, the first batch of less lethal "plastic bullets" were dispatched to the Kashmir Valley. The

plastic bullets were tested at the Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory (TBRL) in Chandigarh and could be fired from the weapons that the security forces already possessed. Instead of metal, this round of ammunition had a plastic head.

In 2016, 1,022 CRPF personnel were also injured in stone-pelting by protesters. Of these, 956 were injured in the Valley between July 8 and 16 during the unrest.

What is the last definitively known use of pellet guns in the country?

They were last known to have been used during the 2024 farmers protest at Khanauri and Shambhu barriers along the Punjab-Haryana border. Though the police denied using pellet guns, farmer leaders had alleged that several persons were injured.

In 2023, they were used against protesters in the ethnic-strife torn Manipur, leading to a massive public outrage.

What about shock batons?

Shock batons are also a part of the RAF personnel gear.

In 2021, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), through the Border Security Force (BSF), prescribed Qualitative Requirements (QRs) for handheld 'Shock Batons' intended for self-defence and operational use by security personnel. It said that the equipment should be light weight, with a maximum weight of 1 kg and a length of 450 mm to 700 mm, ensuring ease of carriage and handling. It must be constructed from high-impact resistant material, capable of functioning reliably in temperatures ranging from -20°C to +50°C and offering a minimum level of water resistance.

The shock baton should have a service life of at least five years and be powered by a rechargeable battery. Additional requirements include the capability to deliver at least 1,000 quarter-second shock bursts on full charge, thereby ensuring sustained operational effectiveness in field conditions.

THE GIST

▼ At least one of the 80 protesters injured in police action during the march to Parliament on Monday, called by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) sustained pellet gun injuries.

▼ Pellet guns were first deployed in Jammu and Kashmir after Kashmir Valley's summer unrest of 2010 that claimed the lives of 112 protesters in police firing.

1. Context (GS II – Governance; GS III – Internal Security)

The issue gained attention after allegations that pellet guns were used during the July 2026 protest march to Parliament in Delhi, resulting in injuries to protesters. The incident has revived the debate on the use of non-lethal weapons for crowd control.

2. What are Pellet Guns?

- I. A non-lethal crowd-control weapon used by police and security forces.**
- II. They fire multiple small metal pellets in one shot, dispersing over a short distance.**
- III. Intended to disperse crowds, but can cause serious injuries, especially to the eyes and upper body.**
- IV. They are also used for hunting and pest control in some countries.**

3. Pellet Guns in India

- I. First widely deployed in Jammu & Kashmir (2010) during protests.**
- II. Extensively used after the 2016 Kashmir unrest, leading to severe eye injuries and criticism.**
- III. Used during the 2023 Manipur violence and allegations of use were also made during the 2024 farmers' protest, though police denied them.**

4. Issues Associated with Pellet Guns

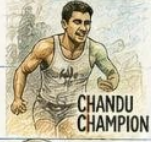
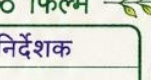
- I. Though termed non-lethal, they can cause permanent disability, especially blindness.**
- II. Raise concerns over proportional use of force and protection of human rights.**
- III. Highlight the need for clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), accountability and safer crowd-control methods.**



72^{वें} राष्ट्रीय फिल्म पुरस्कार (2024)

प्रमुख विजेता और विवरण



पुरस्कार / श्रेणी	विजेता / विवरण	ARTICLE 370
★ सर्वश्रेष्ठ फीचर फिल्म 	आर्टिकल 370 (हिंदी) - आदित्य सुरेश	
★ सर्वश्रेष्ठ अभिनेता 	भ्रमयुगम (मलयालम) - ममूट्टी	
★ सर्वश्रेष्ठ अभिनेता 	चंदू चैंपियन (हिंदी) - कार्तिक आर्यन	
★ सर्वश्रेष्ठ अभिनेत्री 	आर्टिकल 370 (हिंदी) - यामी गौतम	
★ सर्वश्रेष्ठ निर्देशन 	अमरन (तमिल) - राजकुमार परेरियासामी	
★ सर्वश्रेष्ठ लोकप्रिय फिल्म 	कल्कि 2898 एडी (తెలుగు) - नाग अश्विन सिंगिरेड्डी	
★ निर्देशक की सर्वश्रेष्ठ पहली फिल्म 	स्वातंत्र्य वीर सावरकर (हिंदी) - रणदीप हुड्डा	
★ सर्वश्रेष्ठ गैर-फीचर फिल्म 	भंगार (मराठी और अंग्रेजी) - सुमिरा रॉय	
★ सर्वश्रेष्ठ वृत्तचित्र (डॉक्यूमेंट्री) फिल्म 	रणम (हिंदी) - भारतबाला गोपति	



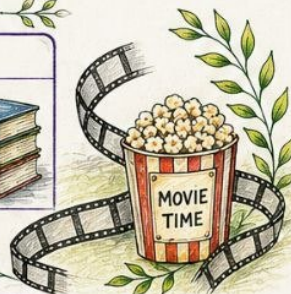
क्षेत्रीय और अन्य प्रमुख भाषा श्रेणियों में सर्वश्रेष्ठ फिल्में

भाषा / श्रेणी	विजेता फिल्म	निर्देशक
• हिंदी फिल्म 	श्रीकांत	तुषार हीरानंदानी
• तमिल फिल्म 	रायन	धनुष
• तेलुगु फिल्म 	कमेटी कुरल्लू	यदु वामसी
• मलयालम फिल्म 	फेमिनी ची फातिमा फासिल	मोहम्मद
• मराठी फिल्म 	मुक्काम पोस्ट बॉम्बेलवाडी	परेश मोकाशी



सिनेमा पर सर्वश्रेष्ठ लेखन

श्रेणी	विजेता / विवरण
सर्वश्रेष्ठ पुस्तक 	- नानीकरु वूद्दा निमगागी - नादिरु वूद्दा नगागी - कांचारु प्रदीप कुमार शेटी 
सर्वश्रेष्ठ फिल्म समीक्षक 	संजीव श्रीवास्तव

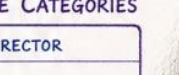




72nd NATIONAL FILM AWARDS (2024)



MAJOR WINNERS AND DETAILS

AWARD / CATEGORY	WINNER / DETAILS
★ Best Feature Film	Article 370 (Hindi) - Aditya Suresh 
★ Best Actor (Male)	Bramayugam (Malayalam) - Mammooty 
★ Best Actor (Male)	Chandu Champion (Hindi) - Kartik Aaryan 
★ Best Actress (Female)	Article 370 (Hindi) - Yami Gautam 
★ Best Direction	Amaran (Tamil) - Rajkumar Periasamy 
★ Best Popular Film	Kalki 2898 AD (Telugu) - Naga Ashwin Singireddy 
★ Best First Film of a Director	Swatantrya Veer Savarkar (Hindi) - Randeep Hooda 
★ Best Non-Feature Film	Bhangar (Marathi and English) - Sumira Roy 
★ Best Documentary Film	Ranam (Hindi) - Bharatbala Gopati 



BEST FILMS IN REGIONAL AND OTHER MAJOR LANGUAGE CATEGORIES

LANGUAGE / CATEGORY	WINNER / FILM	DIRECTOR
• Hindi Film 	Shrikant	Tushar Hiranandani
• Tamil Film 	Rayan	Dhanush
• Telugu Film 	Kameeti Kurrallu	Yadu Vamsi
• Malayalam Film 	Femini Chee Fatima Fasil	Mohammed
• Marathi Film 	Mukkam Post Bombilwadi	Pareesh Mokashi



BEST WRITING ON CINEMA



BEST BOOK

- Nanikaru Vudu
Nimagagi Nadiru
Vudu Nagagi
- Kancharu Pradeep
Kumar Shetty



BEST FILM CRITIC

- Sanjeev Shrivastav



“ Cinema is a reflection of our society, culture and values.
These awards honour the best of Indian storytelling. ”