

Smallstraits, bigstakes

Just as our bodies rely on jugular veins to keep blood flowing, the global economy depends on a few waterways to keep trade moving. Aastha Narayan & Garvita Ghugh, AIS MV, XII D, explore these critical maritime lifelines.

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Strait of Hormuz



The world's oil tap

📍 Location: Between Iran and Oman, connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.

🚢 Significance: A major chokepoint, it carries roughly 20 million barrels of oil and petroleum products daily.

⚠️ Vulnerability (Extreme): At its narrowest, the 39-km-wide strait splits into 2 shipping lanes, each 3.7 km wide.

📖 Historical footnote: The 1st-century Periplus of the Erythraean Sea is among the earliest texts documenting maritime trade in the region.

Strait of Gibraltar



The Mediterranean's gate

📍 Location: Between Spain and Morocco, linking the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.

🚢 Significance: A major shipping route and an important corridor for submarine fibre-optic cables.

⚠️ Vulnerability (Extreme): Shipping accidents, anchor damage, and threats to undersea infrastructure can disrupt both physical and digital connectivity.

Illustration: Akshita Rathore,
AIS Mayur Vihar, XI F

Panama Canal



The oceans' shortcut

📍 Location: Crosses the Isthmus of Panama, linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

🚢 Significance: A vital shortcut, it eliminates the need for ships to sail around South America.

⚠️ Vulnerability (High): The canal depends on freshwater from Gatún Lake, making droughts and El Niño a major concern.

📖 Historical footnote: Its name inspired the famous palindrome: 'A man, a plan, a canal, Panama!'

Bab el-Mandeb



The gate of tears

📍 Location: Between the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, connecting Red Sea with Gulf of Aden.

🚢 Significance: A crucial route for container shipping and energy supplies between Europe, Asia & West Asia.

⚠️ Vulnerability (Critical): Closure forces ships to go around Africa, surging fuel, insurance & freight costs.

📖 Historical footnote: Its name means 'Gate of Tears', traditionally linked to an ancient legend of an earthquake that separated Arabia from Africa.

Strait of Malacca



Asia's shipping highway

📍 Location: Between Sumatra & the Malay Peninsula.

🚢 Significance: One of the world's busiest shipping routes and a key energy corridor connecting West Asia with East Asia.

⚠️ Vulnerability (High): At its narrowest, the passage is only 2.8 km wide, increasing congestion, collision risks.

📖 Historical footnote: The Srivijaya Empire of Southeast Asia controlled key parts of the strait in the 7th century, profiting from maritime trade.

Educational
Poster