

## From The Editor

# The small world we live in

Received 17 May 2026; accepted 18 May 2026  
doi:10.46475/asean-jr.v27i2.1031



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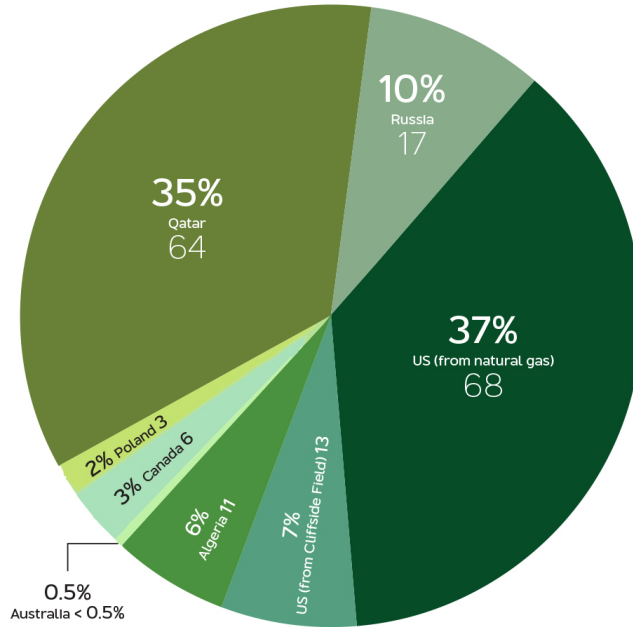
The current 2026 Iran war disrupted the Strait of Hormuz, where about a third of the global crude oil passes daily [1]. It is the only waterway connecting the Persian Gulf and Gulf countries; including Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and UAE; to the open sea, causing severe supply shortage of petroleum products and gas to Europe and Asia. Similar to what has happened to the major Asian importers, including China, Japan, South Korea, and India; Thai people are suffering from the rising prices of gasoline, diesel, gas and fertilizers. The gasoline (Benzene 95), which was at the lowest point in the decade at 26.75 Baht/liter during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, increased to 52.06 Baht/liter during the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, and has currently reached 57.51 Baht/liter in Thailand, and is even higher in Laos and Singapore [2]. The rising price of gasoline directly raises the cost of traveling which will eventually affect tourism. Tourism, which accounts for 20% of the country's GDP, is the most important sector that distributes income to Thai people of all levels, from street vendors to hotel owners. Recently, the government has limited the travel of its officers to meetings, either domestic or international.

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Price controls on consumer goods and electricity are a short-term effort of the government to relieve the people's distress. However, it is estimated that prices will finally rise after this month especially for consumer goods because of not only the rising transportation costs, but also the rising price of plastic containers. Essential hospital consumables made of plastic—including bottles, bags and lines, cannulas, and syringes—could face disruptions as early as next month. Currently, many manufacturers are operating with barely 15–20 days of inventory. If supply chains remain unstable, hospitals could soon encounter shortages of these critical consumables.

Apart from oil and petroleum products, the supply shortage of helium, which is a byproduct of natural gas processing that rarely draws public attention, has become one of the critical issues, as Qatar ranks second after USA in terms of the amount of helium resources, production and exports in the world (Figure 1) [3]. Helium, a gas having the lowest boiling point of any element on earth, is widely used as a coolant in aerospace, semiconductor manufacturing, cutting-edge scientific research and other fields, including providing extremely low temperature (-269 degrees Celsius) for superconducting magnets, enabling modern MRI machines to operate. With the development of high-tech industries and scientific research, the global demand for helium, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, has increased year on year, mainly from high-end manufacturing, low-temperature superconductivity and the cooling gas used in the fourth-generation nuclear reactors. It is estimated that the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz will affect 30% of the global helium supply, as previously occurred in 2017 when, due to political factors, many Arab countries closed their borders with Qatar, interrupting helium production and transportation for several weeks [4]. Conventional MRI machines, depending on the device, use more than 1,000 liters of liquid helium, the only medium able to provide temperatures low enough for the coil to become superconducting (permitting electricity to flow with virtually zero resistance) and generate the stable powerful magnetic fields necessary for detailed images of the human body. Some of that helium naturally evaporates over time, so it needs periodic top-offs [5,6]. Currently, hospitals that operate MRI machines have not yet experienced severe shortages of helium. However, the price of helium in Thailand is around 20-30% higher.

### World Helium Gas Production 2024 in million cubic meters



World production of helium gas in 2024 [2].



Qatar, and other gulf countries, bordering the Persian Gulf which connects with the Arabian Sea through the Strait of Hormuz.

When one door closes, another opens. While the conflicts in the Persian Gulf countries have reminded us that the global supply chain lacks flexibility, several medical imaging companies have accelerated the development of helium-efficient or even helium-free MRI systems. These new MRI systems will also have less weight and smaller dimensions, likely saving more money and paving the way for delivering MRI systems to locations where access to this technology was previously considered impossible.

This crisis of helium shortage felt variably globally should be a catalyst for many imaging departments to reduce low-value imaging, where unnecessary imaging examinations are done that did not change the management of the patient, such as overuse of MRI in low back pain or headaches without any red flags. The environmental impact and wasted resources is not just the MRI, but includes patient travel, to occupying the MRI scanner preventing another patient who really needs it, to use of contrast media, human resources, consumables, energy consumption to adding to the work burden of the radiologists and radiographers [7,8]. The "Hormuz effect" also pressures governments and consumers to rethink their reliance on petrol and diesel, leading to fast-track adoption of electric mobility and a surge in demand for clean energy storage systems, both of which are significantly manufactured in China.

MV Hondius, the ship named after the Flemish cartographer Jodocus Hondius, is an expedition cruise ship owned by Oceanwide Expeditions, based in the Netherlands. The vessel entered service in 2019 and operates primarily in the Arctic and Antarctic regions [9]. In April 2026, an outbreak of Andes virus, most commonly reported in Latin America and the only known species of the rodent-borne hantavirus that spread via human-to-human transmission, was identified on board after sailing from Argentina [10]. The route of transmission is still unknown but people are usually infected by breathing air contaminated with virus particles from rodent urine, dropping or saliva. There have so far been nine confirmed cases with 2 other probable cases, two confirmed deaths and one other probable death from the hantavirus [11]. The original passengers have now all disembarked and been evacuated; many are quarantined in their home countries. All 38 Filipino crew members have tested negative for the virus and are undergoing a 42-day quarantine in the Netherlands before repatriation to the Philippines to ensure they remain disease-free [12]. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has classified the outbreak as a "level 3" emergency response while the World Health Organization (WHO) has not declared a specific level of emergency response. Symptoms of hantavirus infection varies from fever, extreme fatigue, muscle aches, abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting, and diarrhea to the most severe form, hantavirus cardiopulmonary syndrome (HCPS), which causes irregular heart rate and pulmonary microvascular leakage leading to acute pulmonary distress syndrome responsible for up to 50% mortality rate [11,13].

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