

West Asia Conflict: Actors in a New Script

By Vappala Balachandran

The author is a former special secretary, Cabinet Secretariat.

The developments in West Asia validate the words of British statesman and politician Lord Palmerston – 'a nation has no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests.'

As this is written, Iran has mocked President Donald Trump's call to "unconditionally surrender" – "Iran does not negotiate under duress, shall not accept peace under duress, and certainly not with a has-been warmonger clinging to relevance".

The world is awaiting Trump's response. Fierce aerial battles between Israel and Iran are destroying civilian lives. Meanwhile, panic is growing in Iran and neighbouring countries at the reported American preparations to attack Fordo, an underground Iranian uranium enrichment facility, and how Iran would respond. Trump has kept the world guessing: "I may do it, I may not do it."

There was, however, a time when America was helpless in checking Iran's onslaughts in the Middle East, beginning with their 1979 Tehran embassy siege when 52 of their staff were held as hostages for more than a year. During that period, no major power, not even Israel, was willing to mediate between Washington DC and the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini regime.

Declassified Soviet documents revealed that the Soviet leadership, worried over the developments in Afghanistan, had also feared that America would intervene militarily to prevent the collapse of the Shah monarchy. Although Moscow had felt confident that the Khomeini regime would terminate US influence, KGB officer Leonid Shebarshin, who was posted in Tehran from 1979, had said in his memoirs that his chief Yuri Andropov had no confidence that the Khomeini revolution would proceed according to Soviet plans. Shebarshin also claimed that he had proof that the failed attempt of America to rescue the hostages through 'Operation Eagle Claw' on April 24, 1980, had "more far-reaching aims" which was for a change of regime in Tehran. Would Trump manage to do that now?

According to Thomas L Friedman (The New York Times, Nov 22, 1986), Israel was busy in 1979 forging links through its intelligence with "certain senior Iranian Army officers and other elements in revolutionary Tehran" to connect with the Khomeini Government. This was to get Iranian Jews out of the country. Friedman said that Menachem Begin, then Israel's Prime Minister, began shipping small amounts of arms and spare parts to Tehran. However, he said that America did not support Israel's contention that Washington was kept informed. Friedman felt that Israeli relations with a section of the Khomeini regime were also a "tactical ploy" to "gain some useful intelligence before its Iranian military contacts 'died out' in the mid-1980s".

This was corroborated on January 29, 2025, by Rana Nejad, who had earlier worked with The Washington Post. She said records showed that both “countries felt that maintaining a secret relationship would be strategically beneficial”. As a result, Iran and Israel continued to engage in trade worth millions of dollars per year after the fall of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, “even as Tehran publicly denied Israel’s right to exist”.

According to Nejad, several reasons contributed to this secret alliance. The Khomeini regime had inherited “the world’s sixth-largest army, \$26 billion in foreign reserves, an oil industry producing \$105 million a day, and a close relationship with Israel”. The Shah had forged a close relationship with Israel due to the security threats from Egypt under President Gamal Nasser and the Soviet Union. Although Khomeini purged the Shah’s army to the extent of 60%, he wanted this secret alliance to be maintained as he needed Israel’s help in facing Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988.

Nejad says that by 1985, Danish cargo ships chartered by the Israeli government and private arms dealers had made over 600 trips carrying American-made arms through the Persian Gulf to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas. “As the war continued, Israel kept Iranian military planes flying, while Israeli military instructors trained the Islamic republic’s army commanders”.

The Times of Israel (June 14, 2024) added a new dimension to this relationship by quoting Trita Parsi, founder and former president of the National Iranian American Council, that Israel gained valuable intelligence from Iranians before the 1981 ‘Operation Opera’, which was the destruction of Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor, “a cornerstone of Iraq’s nuclear ambitions.” Forty-four years later, Israel is trying to destroy Iran’s nuclear projects!

A cornered US

During the 1980s, Iran gave repeated blows to America forcing it to negotiate under duress. On October 23, 1983, the Beirut Marine barracks housing US Marine “Peacekeepers” for intervention during the Lebanese Civil War was hit by a devastating truck bomb by Ismail Ascari, an Iranian suicide bomber, killing 241 American marines. The FBI described this bombing with 18,000 pounds of explosives as “the single-largest non-nuclear explosion on earth since the Second World War”. A few minutes later, another suicide bombing killed 58 French soldiers. As a result, President Ronald Reagan was forced to withdraw the US Marines from Lebanon.

Years later, a US National Security Agency (NSA) intercept revealed an oral instruction by Iranian Intelligence headquarters to Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, then Iranian Ambassador in Damascus, asking him to direct Hussein Musawi, leader of the terrorist group Islamic Amal, to do a “spectacular act” against Americans.

The hostage crisis of 1982 during the Lebanon civil war when nearly 104 foreign nationals, mostly American and West European, were abducted by Islamic Jihad/Hezbollah compelled President Reagan to negotiate with Iran. Among these were CIA station chief William Buckley and Marine Colonel William Higgins who were tortured to death. The release of some of these hostages was among the subject matters of the “Iran-Contra Affair” which shook the Reagan presidency for covertly agreeing to sell arms to Iran through Israel and diverting sales proceeds to fund the anti-Sandinista rebels (Contras) which was banned by the US Congress. The aim was to prevent the CIA funding of rebels opposed to the Government of Nicaragua.

All these validate the words of British statesman and politician Lord Palmerston – “a nation has no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests.”

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India's Green Diplomacy and Domestic Action: Policy, Participation, and Planetary Leadership

By Alok Virendra Tiwari

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The rapid growth of industrialization and technological innovations in the twentieth century brought about unprecedented environmental challenges, prompting the global community to prioritize the degradation of natural ecosystems and the sustainability of human development. Recognizing the necessity for a coordinated international response, the United Nations convened the Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972. This landmark event represented a pivotal moment in the evolution of environmental justice and governance, resulting in the adoption of the Stockholm Declaration—a foundational document consisting of 26 principles that underscored the interdependence of environmental protection, human well-being, and economic development. Among its notable outcomes was the establishment of World Environment Day, celebrated annually on June 5 to promote ecological awareness and mobilize global action. In the subsequent decades, countries have increasingly woven environmental considerations into their national policies. India's ecological trajectory is particularly noteworthy, characterized by its evolving legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and grassroots initiatives in harmonizing ecological sustainability with socio-economic development.

Post the Stockholm Conference of 1972, India's environmental governance started coming into being. As an essential participant, India had stressed the issue of equity concerning ecological responsibility, underpinning the ideologies of environment and development. In this respect, it was stressed by India at the conference that environmental policies must be sensitive to the developmental needs of the South. The conference, in the backdrop of landmark principles, established the world environment ethic, laying deep resonance with India's stand. These included the following key principles: Principle 1 states that man has the prima facie right to freedom, equality, and adequate conditions of life in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being. This was followed by Principle 11, which warned against the use of environmental measures as a means of pursuing trade restrictions or other economic barriers against developing countries. Together, these principles helped anchor India's subsequent environmental policy in the twin imperatives of ecological sustainability and socio-economic equity.

The period from 1981 to 2000 formed a very critical phase in the institutionalization of India's environmental governance, with a strong legal and regulatory framework established over this period. The Forest Conservation Act of 1980 was one such important legislation wherein the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes was prohibited unless the central government gave prior approval. This was followed by another law, the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1981, used for the oversight and regulation of air pollution. Later, following the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, the government passed another landmark legislation, namely the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986, which conferred upon the central government immensely vast powers to take all necessary measures for protecting and improving the environment. While strengthening the environmental institutions, these legislations also paved the way for active judicial interventions, which propelled public interest litigation in the arena of environmental justice. Against the backdrop of this domestic legal regime, between 1992 and 2015, the country aligned itself more with international ecological norms and frameworks. As a party to the Montreal Protocol, India committed itself to eliminate 98% of substances harmful to the ozone layer by 2010, thus asserting its intent to comply with environmental regulations at the global level.

After the 2015 Paris Agreement, India became a key player amongst developing countries in the world climate regime. Recognizing the imperative to reckon with the ecological side of development, India pledged that its emissions intensity of GDP would be reduced by 33-35% from 2005 levels by the year 2030. This commitment was further enhanced in 2022 during the submission of updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), proposing a revised target of a 45% reduction with 50% of cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel sources by the year 2030. These targets significantly indicated policy-level shifts toward low-carbon development, along with consideration of the energy requirements of a fast-growing economy. On the other hand, severe domestic regulatory measures were brought in for some key environmental issues. The Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules of 2022 banned single-use plastics that have limited utility and direct littering potential nationwide. Complementing this ban is the enforcement of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme, requiring manufacturers and brand owners to take responsibility for managing plastic packaging waste through its life cycle. These legal instruments, some of them related to ecosystem pollution, some others excluded in the beginning-intention to integrate circularity and responsibility into India's industrial ecosystem.

The early days after 2023 saw an accelerated interest in and play in multilateral environmental discussions, especially during the G20 presidency. It was during this stint that India launched its LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) movement to promote a shift in the behaviours linked with sustainable consumption and production practices. This campaign placed India as a climate-resilience thought leader at the microscopic and macroscopic levels of mobilization. Beyond this, global climate finance worth USD 5.8 billion stands as proof of India's commitment to aid the developing and least-developed countries in the low-carbon transition. The International Solar Alliance (ISA) formed the foundation around which India crafted its climate diplomacy strategy during this period. With over 120 countries as members, the ISA set an ambitious target of creating more than USD 1.1 trillion in investments for solar infrastructure by 2030. The principal aims included bringing down solar technology and financing costs, as well as energy access and security in the Global South. On the clean air front at home, the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) contemplated reducing PM2.5 and PM10 levels in cities vis-à-vis the 2017 baseline by 20-30% by 2024. This set of actions paints a picture of the country holding simultaneous interests in fostering solid environmental outcomes at home and asserting its influence in shaping global environmental governance.

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The Indian Shipbuilding Imperative: Lessons from Operation Sindoor

By Krishna B Kotak

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The recent success of Operation Sindoor would have made every Indian not only heave a sigh of relief but also feel a sense of safety and security. As has been covered by many expert commentators, Operation Sindoor was a combination and synchronization of all the arms of the defence forces in a flawless manner. This article and author would specifically refer to the role of the Indian Navy and how its strength played a great role in the overall success. The Indian Navy is ranked among the top five navies in the world and is the pride of our nation. One of the major strengths of our Navy is India's shipbuilding capability and the excellence of great shipbuilders like Mazagon Dock, Hindustan Shipyard, Cochin Shipyard, Garden Reach Shipbuilders, L&T, Swan, and a few others.

There is a big lesson that commercial shipping in India needs to learn from this example. It has been an often-discussed subject in the past that the Indian Commercial Shipping fleet is a very small fleet in relation to the seaborne trade of India. It is estimated that Indian ships carry only 25% to 28% of India's seaborne trade, and Indian ships constitute only 1.3% of global ship tonnage and 1.4% of the global fleet.

In specialized ships like containers, the numbers are even lower, where Indian ships carry less than 5% of India's containerized trade. Unlike the Indian Navy and its strong shipbuilding capability and capacity, we have not yet seen major commercial shipbuilding. For a few years, the Government of India has been enhancing encouragement for shipbuilding in India, which is laudable. It is interesting to bear in mind that the international trade-carrying shipping fleet consists of almost 46,000 ships, with 6,700 container ships, 7,500 tankers, 14,200 bulk carriers, and 17,500 break-bulk type ships.

Furthermore, it is estimated that approximately 1,000 new ships are built every year by the main shipbuilding nations such as China, South Korea, and Japan, which together constitute almost 70% of global shipbuilding output.

These above-mentioned figures clearly show that the demand for shipbuilding is robust. Apart from the demand and supply paradigm, when one considers a nation's logistics security, a strong commercial fleet is as imperative as a strong naval fleet.

In today's times, where the Trump Tariff strategy is upending global trade as one knows it, in the new unfolding landscape, it is increasingly clear that it will not be enough to just have a much larger Indian-flagged ship but also to have Indian-built ships.

As many readers already know, shipbuilding is both a science and an art. It is an activity which cannot be implemented as if one is opening a factory to produce a type of product. A vast arena of specialized components has to be covered, from metallurgy, electricals, electronics, naval architecture, design, engines, mechanical and electrical equipment, etc.

Shipbuilding is a skilled process requiring an experienced and skilled workforce at all levels of the hierarchy. To build such expertise takes its own level of time and effort. One of the great advantages that India has is a large waterfront, which is absolutely a necessity for shipbuilding.

It is hoped that just as the Indian Navy has always made India proud, it should not be a long wait for the Indian merchant navy to also be a pride of India.

Missiles, Misinformation, and Minds: Why India Must Build Information Warfare Infrastructure

By Animesh Roul

The Author is the Executive Director of the Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict (SSPC)

The May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict offered a sobering demonstration of how modern wars are no longer confined to physical battlefields alone. Alongside precision strikes and conventional military operations, both countries engaged in a fierce struggle for control over public perception, media narratives, and psychological advantage. The widespread use of misinformation and disinformation across platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Telegram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube transformed the conflict into a full-spectrum hybrid war. For India, this underscores an urgent strategic imperative: the need to systematically develop a robust information warfare infrastructure, including the capacity to conduct offensive, defensive, and counter-misinformation operations.

A key case in point was the rumours of an Indian Navy attack on Karachi port on May 9, where Indian precision strikes allegedly targeted military-use infrastructure linked to terrorist supply chains. In response, Pakistani-linked social media networks unleashed an intense disinformation campaign, falsely portraying the attack as a massacre of civilians. Manipulated images from Syria or Gaza, even the Russo-Ukrainian war theatres, were recycled to fabricate claims of war crimes under hashtags such as ##KarachiPortAttack and #indiaattackpakistan, amplified by bot networks and sympathetic influencers across the Subcontinent and diaspora communities. Indian government agencies and civil society fact-checkers were caught reacting belatedly, trying to debunk viral content after it had already shaped international perceptions.

This pattern of disinformation was widespread, contributing to the four-day conflict in May 2025 and its aftermath. The Pahalgam terror attack, where Islamist militants targeted civilians, was spun by Pakistani and Islamist digital networks as an act of "indigenous resistance." At the same time, Indian responses struggled to maintain narrative coherence. Simultaneously, Pakistan-based social media accounts circulated old and unrelated videos to propagate false claims. India's Press Information Bureau (PIB) debunked numerous #IndiaAttackPakistan,

a farm fire misrepresented as a drone strike in Jalandhar, footage of a Beirut blast falsely portrayed as an attack in India, and fabricated reports of a Pakistani missile hitting an Indian S-400 system. Further adding to the information chaos were AI-generated deepfake videos of Indian and Pakistani leaders making inflammatory statements, spoofed ceasefire announcements, recycled IAF helicopter crash footage, and rumours of a suicide attack in Rajouri, ATM shutdowns, and airport entry bans. Collectively, these efforts aimed to sow confusion, distrust, and panic, particularly among border populations, highlighting the aggressive information warfare tactics employed in the conflict.

However, none of this is novel. Misinformation and disinformation are integral tools of modern warfare, just as missiles and predator drones are. From the Cold War era's "active measures" deployed by Soviet intelligence to today's AI-enabled influence operations by both state and non-state actors, information warfare has become institutionalized as a central pillar of strategic competition. To treat it as a surprising or scandalous development, as some media narratives tend to do, is to miss the point entirely. In conflicts where "winning hearts and minds" is as vital as achieving battlefield success, mastery over information ecosystems is indispensable.

Exposing the Asymmetry in the Information War

In the aftermath of the May 2025 conflict, various international media outlets and analysts sought to document the role of misinformation during the crisis. Among these, reports by Karishma Mehrotra in the Washington Post (June 04), Waseem Mushtaq for BBC Monitoring (May 14) and Raksha Kumar for the Reuters Institute (May 29) have received notable attention. These articles collectively highlight how rapidly false narratives spread across digital platforms and how both state and non-state actors exploited the information domain. However, a closer examination of these reports reveals certain analytical gaps and biases that warrant critical reflection, particularly concerning the asymmetric nature of the information warfare waged by Pakistani-linked networks.

While these reports provide valuable documentation of the disinformation environment surrounding the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict, they exhibit a notable inherent bias in framing the Indian information ecosystem as disproportionately culpable, while largely underplaying the deliberate and systematic information warfare tactics employed by Pakistan-based networks. Kumar's piece positions Indian fact-checkers as reactive and insufficiently transparent but fails to critically assess the state-sponsored orchestration of Pakistani propaganda, which was far more coordinated and aimed at manipulating international narratives. Similarly, Mehrotra's article focuses extensively on the lapses and sensationalism within Indian newsrooms while giving only cursory treatment to Pakistan's aggressive use of bot networks, recycled content, and AI-generated disinformation.

Lastly, Mushtaq's BBC Monitoring explainer, though appearing neutral, subtly reinforces an equivalence between Indian and Pakistani disinformation efforts without adequately contextualizing Pakistan's history of state-driven psychological operations and cross-border information warfare. Taken together, these reports risk creating a false balance that obscures the asymmetric nature of the information war, inadvertently lending credence to narratives that undermine India's legitimate security and diplomatic concerns in the conflict.

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G7 is No More Than a Relic of the Past. India should Focus More on G20, BRICS

By Dr. Seshadri Chari

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Canada has missed a golden opportunity to reset its relationship with India and begin a new chapter of peace and development.

Canada, which took over the G7 presidency from Japan in December 2024, has made a surprising and controversial decision: to exclude India from the upcoming G7 summit. At a time when the world's economic centre of gravity is shifting towards Asia, and when India has proven its leadership on multiple global platforms — including its recent G20 presidency — this move is not just irrational, it may be self-defeating.

By keeping India out, Canada has missed a golden opportunity to reset bilateral ties and make a new beginning for peace and development. The exclusion is not only unfortunate but might prove to be a great setback for the G7's own ambitions, whether it is addressing climate change and global inequality or building cooperation with emerging economies, agendas it has taken up in the last three decades or so.

From Castle Rambouillet to a crisis of relevance

It's worth remembering how the G7 began. A 'fireside chat'-turned-'Library Group' started by US treasury secretary George Shultz in 1970 to address currency turbulence bloomed into G6 five years later. On 15 November 1975, about five months after Indira Gandhi had imposed Emergency in India, leaders of six democracies — the US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan — met at the Castle of Rambouillet near Paris.

Today, none of the leaders from the "Summit of the Six" — James Callaghan (UK foreign secretary), Henry Kissinger (US secretary of state), Gerald Ford (US president), Takeo Miki (Japan prime minister), Helmut Schmidt (German chancellor), Jean Sauvagnargues (French foreign minister), Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (French president), and Mariano Rumor (Italian foreign minister) — are alive, and most of the countries no longer dominate the global economy.

The G6 became the G7 in 1976 with Canada's inclusion, and the G8 between 1997 and 2013 with Russia onboard— until Russia's suspension after the Crimea annexation in 2014.

Collectively, the group expressed concern about their respective economies, donned the mantle of the "white man's burden" to discharge their responsibilities toward the 'Third World', and decided to meet again. Fifty years later, none of the world's problems have been solved by these countries, and except for the US, the rest are no better off than the countries of the "poor South."

G7's expanding mandate, shrinking impact

Over the years, G7 summits have taken on a broad agenda: gender equality, global health, climate change, and sustainable development. In 2021, the UK-led summit committed itself to a "green revolution" and net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Germany's 2022 presidency established a "Climate Club" to implement the Paris Agreement, and the 2023 Hiroshima summit reaffirmed commitment to phasing out fossil fuels.

India participated in all these meetings, contributing immensely to the resolution and their implementation. Ironically, it was Donald Trump-led "G1 within G7" that derailed consensus, dismissing global warming as a "hoax." Now, with Trump 2.0 back in the mix and India 3.0 out, can the G7's green agenda survive?

Patronising rhetoric, no real support

The G7's agenda of connecting with emerging economies and adopting an inclusive approach has often rung hollow. Italy included an "African Segment" in the 2001 summit, but without serious financial commitments and steps to resolve issues of poverty and migration. African leaders left disappointed, questioning the G7's sincerity. In contrast, India, during its G20 presidency, successfully pushed for the African Union—representing 55 African countries—to become a permanent G20 member.

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Modi and The G7 Summit: Engaging with a Divided West

By C Raja Mohan

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The Prime Minister's participation in the summit is an opportunity for India to assess the bloc's changing dynamics

As one reflects on the ongoing G7 summit in Canada, it's easy to be distracted by the anti-India protests orchestrated by Khalistani groups or to be perturbed by US President Donald Trump's recurring assertions about mediating peace between India and Pakistan. But the summit has much bigger fish to fry. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation comes at a time of profound geopolitical flux and mounting divisions within the G7 itself.

Once a symbol of strategic unity among the world's leading democracies, the G7 now reflects deep internal contradictions — across trade, technology, climate, and regional security in Europe, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. Though India is not a member, its regular presence at the summit affords Delhi a critical platform to advance national interests, elevate its diplomatic profile, and contribute to shaping a new multipolar order. For Modi, this is an opportunity to assess first-hand the new dynamics within the West and make the best of them to promote India's security and prosperity.

Indian elites have long viewed the West as a monolith. But a longer historical perspective reveals that contestation among Western powers was a central theme, especially in the centuries preceding India's independence. As European powers built capitalist economies at home, they competed fiercely abroad for colonies, resources and markets. These inter-imperialist rivalries were key drivers of global politics.

The emergence of the Soviet Union during World War I complicated equations but did not end intra-Western rivalry, which remained dominant through World War II. Only in the aftermath of the War did the East-West dichotomy become the primary lens through which global politics was viewed. Despite Cold War unity against communism, intra-Western differences persisted — though largely tactical in nature. The collapse of the Soviet Union did not immediately disrupt Western coherence. A sense of triumphalism, anchored in the apparent victory of capitalism and liberal democracy, held the alliance together. But fault lines soon emerged.

In the mid-1990s, France was already warning against the dangers of America's unrestrained "hyperpower", a concern that resonated even among US allies.

Before Beijing, Moscow or even Delhi began advocating a multipolar world, it was Paris that championed the concept. France also reached out to India to help shape that order. While Delhi engaged with Russia and China in promoting multipolarity, it also drew closer to the West to build economic and technological capacity. This duality defined India's multi-alignment strategy. It is worth recalling that France and Germany openly opposed the US at the UN Security Council over the planned invasion of Iraq in 2003. Today, divisions over the Middle East run deeper. Europe is increasingly critical of Israeli policies, while the US remains staunchly supportive.

The 2018 G7 summit in Canada, held during Trump's first term, was marked by tension after he imposed steel and aluminium tariffs on European allies. A now-iconic image captured Chancellor Angela Merkel and other leaders confronting a defiant Trump. He left early, later accusing Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of dishonesty regarding summit discussions. While the Biden administration sought to restore Western unity, Trump's return to power signals a renewed shift toward American unilateralism. His focus is on promoting American interests, often at the expense of presumed collective Western goals. His MAGA coalition targets not only European economic policies but also their social norms. Trump's anti-woke campaign has morphed into a broader critique of European liberalism, and his support for far-right parties across Europe marks a new level of political intervention.

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India is Proud of:

Priti Gandhi

A Government School Teacher Who Is Creating a Library in Every Home



Priti Gandhi, principal of a government school has introduced mobile library kits to inculcate the reading habit in students.

Teaching is probably one of the oldest professions in India. From the old Gurukuls to the modern times' international schools, one thing that remains common between then and now is the teacher.

No matter how much technology advances, we will still need teachers to guide us. They share a unique bond with their students which goes much beyond just the academic walls.

There are some teachers who fulfil their duty perfectly – teach students, give them grades and go home. Then there are those who give their heart and soul to this profession. Teaching is not just a source of income to them but an opportunity to bring a change. And, when such people come forward for a larger good, we see the impact.

Priti Gandhi, principal of Kalol Primary School, Gandhinagar, Gujarat is among those few who go an extra mile to impart knowledge and wisdom to the young minds.

She started an initiative to inculcate a reading habit among the students of a government school by starting a home library and a ‘reading corner’ project for those who can’t afford to buy books.

“I always wanted to do something which could benefit kids at large and, with great support from my husband Yogesh Acharya, I managed to take forward the initiative,” she says.

“Reading is a great habit, it not only gives you good knowledge but also gives you a sense of language, improves your vocabulary and enhances your imagination. Children should enjoy reading,” she says.

Gandhi did a survey of the Kalol taluk and found that there was not a single library for kids. The students she used to work with belonged to a very economically weak community that could not afford to buy new books.

She decided to give a book kit to the students. She purchased an aluminium bag and put 20 books in that. The books covered various topics and subjects, and then she gave that bag to a student for a month. Once the student is done reading the books from the bag, he or she would return it at the end of the month.

“We used the aluminium bag as the living condition in the houses of these kids is not very good. So, rats and other creatures might spoil the books,” Gandhi says.

Slowly the idea picked up and she started it as a regular activity. She now has around 54 such kits which she distributes to the students on a monthly basis. Various donors have come forward to help Gandhi with this initiative and funded the project.

She also converted a waste land into a reading corner.

“I saw a corner of the land being misused by some people, so I thought to use it for a better purpose. I got it cleaned and put some chairs and reading tables. Now a lot of children come there every day after school to read and spend time,” she says.

She decorated the space by colouring the walls and putting up posters and involved the students in the decoration. She also organized books according to levels and keep them in the reading corner for students to pick up freely. In the end, the students’ progress was tracked through tests.

Gandhi has seen a lot of changes in the students since the time they started reading. “The kids have started taking an interest in the classes as they already know most of the things through the books they read. Their vocabulary has also improved,” she says.

Currently Gandhi has supported 150 students through her books. She wants to greatly increase the number in the future.

“Currently we don’t have enough resources to distribute bags and kits to every student. I would like to expand this initiative and make the materials available to all the students,” she says.

Gandhi was also included in the list of 100 teachers as part of “Teachers as Transformers: Innovations in Gujarat’s State Schools”

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