

## WEST ASIA WAR

## The Conflict

The conflict in West Asia is of concern for India as around one crore Indians live in the region. The conflict has implications on oil prices and global supply chain, affecting the trade and economy of nations. India too cannot remain untouched by the multipronged conflict which is getting serious with each passing day and no side seems to in a mood to relent. What should India do? If you believe the Indian opposition parties, the government of India should have jumped into the conflict on day one and supported one side – preferably Iran and condemned the US-Israel.

India's foreign policy doesn't work that way. Like a matured nation which has multiple interests, India has to give priority to its interest than to jump into the others' wars. The government took cognizance of the war as soon as it erupted with the joint attack on Iran by US-Israeli forces killing its supreme leader Ali Khamenei. In fact the attack didn't come as a major surprise though the targeting of Khamenei was. Tensions had been simmering between Iran and Israel (Plus the USA) for long. Many countries including India has warned their nationals about staying in Iran and issued advisories asking them to leave the country immediately. The Modi government had to make alternative arrangements for oil supplies and launch a campaign to rescue Indians from the war torn zone. These are difficult choices to make than taking a moralistic stand on issues that are not of our making. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke with all the stakeholders Iran and the neighbouring countries which faced attacks from Tehran for no specific reasons. India counseled peace and diplomatic negotiations to resolve the crisis. This is the policy India adapted in the case of Russia-Ukraine war, despite Moscow being a longstanding friend.

## Nepal: A Strategic Opportunity for India

Shishir Priyadarshi

Nepal's 2026 parliamentary elections have produced one of the most dramatic political upheavals in the country's democratic history. The reformist Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), led by the 35-year-old Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah, has surged past Nepal's traditional political establishment and emerged as the central force in the country's new parliament.

The result represents far more than a routine change of government. It reflects a generational political revolt driven by young voters frustrated with corruption, stagnation, and decades of unstable coalition politics. The election follows the youth-led protests of 2025 that forced the resignation of the previous government and exposed deep dissatisfaction with Nepal's political elite. For India, Nepal's political upheaval raises a critical strategic question: is this a moment of uncertainty - or a rare opportunity? The answer may depend less on events in Kathmandu than on how New Delhi chooses to respond.

A generational revolt against the old order

The scale of the political shift in Nepal is striking. Established parties that dominated the country's politics for decades, including the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), have suffered major setbacks.

Perhaps the most symbolic moment of the election was Balendra Shah's defeat of former Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli, a towering figure of Nepal's political establishment.

The result captures a broader mood among voters: a rejection of entrenched elites and a demand for a new political culture centred on accountability and governance. The rise of leaders like Shah reflects the growing influence of urban voters, diaspora networks, and digitally connected youth. Campaigns were organised through



social media and grassroots mobilisation rather than traditional party machinery.

For India, this shift carries an important implication. New Delhi has historically relied on long-standing relationships with established political leaders in Nepal. Those networks may now matter far less in shaping Kathmandu's political direction.

Why Nepal matters strategically for India Nepal occupies a uniquely important place in India's foreign policy landscape. The two countries share an open border stretching nearly 1,800 kilometres, extensive cultural and religious ties, and deeply integrated economies. Millions of Nepali citizens live and work in India, and bilateral trade forms a central pillar of Nepal's economy.

At the same time, Nepal sits at the heart of a sensitive geopolitical triangle between India and China. Over the past decade, Beijing has steadily expanded its presence in Nepal through infrastructure investments and connectivity initiatives. Nepali governments have traditionally sought to balance relations with both neighbours, a strategy that is likely to continue under any leadership. However, the nature of that balance can vary significantly depending on political circumstances in Kathmandu. The emergence of a new political leadership therefore comes at a particularly im-

portant moment for India's neighbourhood diplomacy.

A new leadership focused on governance

One of the most striking features of Nepal's new political wave is its pragmatic orientation. Unlike earlier political movements shaped by ideological rivalries, the current generation of leaders appears focused primarily on governance reform and economic development. Their legitimacy rests on delivering tangible improvements in everyday life—better infrastructure, jobs, and economic opportunity. This focus aligns closely with areas where India can play a decisive role. India remains Nepal's largest trading partner and its

principal transit route to global markets. Cross-border energy trade, particularly hydropower exports from Nepal to India, holds enormous potential for both economies. Connectivity projects—from rail links to integrated check posts—could further deepen economic integration. If the new government prioritizes development, India is uniquely positioned to become its most natural partner.

The opportunity for a reset Paradoxically, Nepal's political upheaval may offer India an opportunity to reset its engagement with Kathmandu. In recent years, bilateral relations have occasionally been strained by political controversies, border disputes, and lingering suspicions

within Nepal about Indian influence.

A new political leadership creates space to move beyond those tensions. Rather than framing the relationship primarily through a geopolitical lens, India could emphasise practical cooperation in areas that directly benefit Nepal's citizens: infrastructure, energy, tourism, digital connectivity, and cross-border trade. Such an approach would resonate with the priorities of Nepal's younger political generation.

India's next move matters

For India, the challenge is not to shape Nepal's political choices but to adapt to them. Nepal's democracy is entering a new phase driven by younger voters and new political actors. Attempts to influence domestic politics would likely provoke backlash and undermine goodwill. Instead, India's engagement should be guided by patience, respect for Nepal's sovereignty, and a clear focus on mutually beneficial economic cooperation. The most effective strategy for India is simple: become the partner that helps Nepal succeed. For policymakers in New Delhi, the lesson from Nepal's election is straightforward.

A new political generation has emerged in Kathmandu—one that is less tied to the political networks of the past and more focused on governance, development, and opportunity.

India cannot assume that historical ties alone will sustain the relationship. This moment calls for early engagement, faster delivery of economic projects, and a diplomatic tone that emphasises partnership rather than influence.

If India responds with strategic imagination and humility, Nepal's political transition could mark the beginning of a stronger and more modern partnership between the two countries. The message from Kathmandu is clear: Nepal's politics are changing. India must ensure its approach changes with them.

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## THE NEXT CHAPTER OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN INDIA

RACHNA LAKHPATI

Every year, the arrival of International Women's Day brings with it a wave of admiration, gratitude, and well-deserved recognition for women across sectors. Offices celebrate their women employees, social media is filled with inspiring tributes, and conversations around empowerment dominate public discourse. Yet, once the day passes, a deeper question quietly lingers: how far have we truly travelled from celebration to representation?

India has made undeniable progress over the past few decades. Women today are visible in boardrooms, start-ups, scientific research, politics, and the armed forces. They are entrepreneurs, innovators, and decision-makers shaping the country's economic and social future. But despite these strides, leadership spaces across institutions still reflect a noticeable imbalance.

Representation is not simply about numbers; it is about influence. True empowerment begins when women are not just participants in systems but architects of them. When women occupy positions where policies are drafted, strategies are defined, and organisations are led, their perspectives reshape priorities in meaningful ways.

Women leaders often bring a unique blend of emotional intelligence, resilience,



and collaborative thinking to leadership roles. These qualities are not merely personality traits; they are leadership strengths in an increasingly complex world. In environments marked by rapid change and uncertainty, the ability to build trust, foster inclusive teams, and navigate human dynamics has become as valuable as technical expertise.

However, the journey toward equal representation is not without its challenges. Structural barriers, unconscious biases, and societal expectations continue to influence

professional trajectories. Many talented women step away from leadership pipelines due to the difficulty of balancing professional aspirations with caregiving responsibilities. Others find themselves navigating workplaces where mentorship and sponsorship opportunities remain limited.

Addressing these challenges requires a shift in mindset as much as policy. Organisations must move beyond symbolic gestures toward systemic change. Flexible work environments, equitable hiring practices, and leadership development programmes tai-

lored for women can create pathways that allow talent to flourish. Equally important is the role of visibility. When young professionals see women leading organisations, managing large teams, or shaping national conversations, it expands their imagination of what is possible. Representation becomes inspiration.

India stands at an interesting crossroads. The country is home to one of the youngest workforces in the world and an increasingly dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem. If this energy is channelled through inclusive leadership structures, the benefits could be transformative. Companies with diverse leadership teams often demonstrate stronger innovation, better decision-making, and improved long-term performance.

The next chapter of women's empowerment in India therefore lies not in annual celebrations but in sustained representation.

It lies in creating environments where leadership is defined by capability rather than convention. As the conversations sparked by Women's Day fade into routine workdays, perhaps the real measure of progress is simple: when women's leadership becomes so natural, so visible, and so integral that it no longer requires a special day to acknowledge it. That is when celebration will truly evolve into representation.

## Rethinking social media for children

Archana Datta

Recently, three minor sisters ended their lives after jumping off the balcony of a ninth-floor flat in Ghaziabad, when their parents restricted their mobile phone usage. The preliminary police reports indicated that the tragic incident is linked to severe addiction to online gaming. While experts opined that it reflected 'a fatal outcome of a digital dependency'. Recent data indicate that globally about 25.89 per cent of adolescents suffer from internet addiction, with 40 per cent experiencing addictive use of social media. A WHO 2022 study of 44 countries in Europe, central Asia and Canada, found that 11 per cent of adolescents, 13% of girls and 9% of boys, exhibit signs of problematic social media use, and that 12 per cent of adolescents are at the risk of troublesome gaming, with boys significantly more affected (16 per cent) than girls (7 per cent).

While socio-psychologists maintain that a combination of factors,

such as biological vulnerability, tailored platform designs with the ease of access and personalisation of algorithm-driven content, and a shifting social landscape drawing children more towards the world of social media. A Pew Research Centre study in 2025 noted that 36 per cent of the US teens use one of five platforms, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook, 'almost constantly', and around 64% of use AI chatbots, with 30% doing so daily. In its 2024 poll, it was revealed that many teenagers themselves have reported becoming more uneasy about the time they spend online, with girls in particular telling that apps were affecting their self-confidence, sleep patterns and overall mental health. While Jason Nagata, an associate professor of paediatrics, University of California, has alerted that the social media exposure has a detrimental impact on sleep, future depression and weight gain in adolescents. One recent study also found that even low levels of social media use, about an

hour per day in children under 13 was associated with poorer cognitive outcomes. As of 2021-25, globally, approximately 1 in 7 (or nearly 15 per cent) 10 to 19-year-olds experience mental health disorders, accounting for 13-15% of the total global burden of disease in that age group, with anxiety and depression being the most common (World Health Organisation (WHO) & UNICEF data). In India, nearly one in four adolescents reports symptoms consistent with anxiety or depression, while the NCRB has documented a steady rise in students' suicides over the past decade.

However, Tech companies claim to implement several layers of child safety measures, ranging from automated content filtering to advanced parental supervision and age verification tools. But, experts from Common Sense Media, a non-profit that evaluates entertainment and technology options for kids and families, and Stanford Medicine regarded the current safeguards as insufficient for minors. The European Commis-

sion recently found that TikTok's 'addictive design' features, bypass the current safety efforts. While many regulators and advocacy groups argued that the AI driven age-verification systems raise serious privacy and data security concerns for minors, as they are increasingly centred on 'Safety by Design'.

Now, an ongoing 'bellwether' trial in a Los Angeles superior court (K.G.M. v. Meta et al.), the first representative 'test case' against social media companies for their 'defective platform design products', in which the plaintiff, a 20-year old Californian woman, who started using YouTube since the age of 6 and Instagram from nine, and now suffers from anxiety, depression and body dysmorphism, makes them liable under product liability standards. Platforms, earlier, got away from accountability under section 230 of the Communications Decency Act for users' content. Her lawyer compared the social media's product designs to dopamine-seeking 'slot machines' and 'digital casinos'. Mark

Zuckerberg, CEO, Meta, first time before the jury, defended Meta's safety efforts, and denied that Meta maximises user time through addictive features. On the issue of user age, he underlined the need for better parental control at the device level. The case has drawn comparisons with the war against Big Tobacco companies in the 1980s, which had been accused of downplaying risks about cigarette smoking.

While a Pew Research Centre survey of US parents in 2025, revealed that a majority of the parents felt that parenting today meant making tough choices about technology. Eight-in-ten said the harms of social media outweigh the benefits. Two-thirds of parents (67%) said tech companies should do more to set rules around what kids can do or see online, and a 55% said that lawmakers should do more. The updated screen time guidelines issued by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2016, impose an additional responsibility on parents and caregivers to establish rules that fit their lives and

families.

Meanwhile, Australia, the world's first, has imposed a social media ban for children under 16, targeting major platforms with massive non-negotiable fines for non-compliance. Many countries like Denmark, France, and Greece, are set to follow suit. While the US federal Govt. is still at a crossroads to regulate the industry, and many state laws face First Amendment challenges. In India, the Economic Survey of India (2025-26) has called for age-based limits for social media usage by children, and two states, Andhra Pradesh and Goa are mulling over such legislation. But, critics consider bans are technically difficult to implement, and mostly lead to a mass migration to Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), the unchecked web corners. In India, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, has also come under criticism for its 'consent gating' provisions which may result in either false declarations or exclusion.