EID AMID WAR

Islamic world is celebrating Eid-al-Fitr amid escalating tensions in their countries. On one hand, Iran is pitted against US-Israel and, on the other hand, Afghanistan is faced with the tragedy of 400 people being killed by Pakistan in a strike on a hospital-cum rehabilitation center in Kabul. Despite the bravado, Tehran has faced many setbacks in the ongoing conflict including the killing of its supreme leader and several commanders in the US-Israeli attacks. This is besides the heavy damage to the infrastructure including the world's largest oil field and the possible nuclear assets. The country was already reeling under shortages due to the sanctions and public anger for suppression of women's rights. The attacks by US-Israel have also meant a kind of censorship on the media so that the local news doesn't come out of the country. For some inexplicable reason, Tehran is retaliating on all its neighbouring countries, probably trying to hit the US bases there or for some other reason. However, the interesting part is that it is also hitting some countries which have no presence of the US. More so because after attacking these countries – attacks are also on oil refineries which causes too much damage – the Iranian leaders seek their forgiveness and give some vague excuses for the attacks. Iran is, indeed, a difficult country to understand.

The Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions somehow get eclipsed amid the big war scenario in the gulf. However, slowly the world is recognizing the Pakistan's inhuman act of attacking a hospital. India has raised this issue in the UN, while the envoys of the European countries and others have visited the victims and called Pakistani aggression unacceptable. Pakistan's ISI leaders were dancing when the Taliban stormed into Kabul with their blessings a few years ago and called it "brotherly Islamic country." Where has that spirit of brotherhood gone?

The West Asia conflict: Trump's hegemony is fading

BK Singh

Trump's promise to stop all ongoing wars and not start any new ones got him a second term in the White House. He claimed to have brought a ceasefire between eight pairs of warring countries in the first few months of this term and then pitched for the Nobel Peace Prize for himself, while the major wars between Russia and Ukraine and Israel and Hamas continued. In the middle of a 12-day-long war between Israel and Iran in June 2025, US forces bombarded Iranian nuclear sites in Operation 'Midnight Hammer', and Trump claimed to have obliterated all nuclear enrichment facilities in Iran. Even after this, he continued claiming the Nobel Peace Prize. However, Maria Corina Machado, a Venezuelan activist and prominent opposition leader, was awarded the 2025 Peace Prize.

Keeping an eye on Venezuelan oil and Greenland's rare earth and critical minerals, his desire for controlling regimes gained prominence. In 'Operation Absolute Resolve' on 3 January 2026, he extracted Venezuelan President Maduro and his wife and brought them to Washington for trial. Vice President Delcy Rodríguez was sworn in as Acting President three days later. Trump dictates to her and has full control over the regime's oil and gas. His desire to grab Greenland, an autonomous island under Denmark's administration, angered his NATO allies and was opposed by all of them. On some occasions, he uttered disrespectful words on public forums against the Canadian PM, French President, and UK PM. Some of them took the opportunity to retort.

On the advice of Tel Aviv, he joined Israel in attacking Iran. Since 28 February, missiles and drones have been flying in the Middle East. There has been a flip-flop from Trump in specifying the objectives of the conflict. He has been changing the goalposts every time he speaks. Whether he wanted regime change, to damage the nuclear programme, to destroy long-range missile manufacturing capabilities, or to obliterate the Iranian Navy-none has been specified.

The US and Israeli offensive began with the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several senior Iranian figures. It was followed by precision strikes on nuclear facilities, attacks on missile sites, naval infrastructure, and an Iranian girls' primary school, killing 165 children and teachers. Iran has also responded by attacking Israel and US bases in the Middle East. Iranian Security Chief Ali Larijani was also killed in an Israeli attack on the 18th day of the war. Iran has retaliated strongly to this as well. After two weeks of war, Trump claimed that he had won a war that could end in a few more days. Despite his claim, Iran continues to launch extensive missile barrages against Israel and US-linked sites, using hard-to-intercept weapons such as the Sejjil ('dancing missile'), Khorramshahr-4, and Qadr ballistic missiles. These missiles often use cluster warheads to overwhelm air defences, targeting Israeli and US military bases.

A total war of destruction on Iran, however, has threatened Chinese and Russian interests. Both countries have condemned the strikes and offered only restrained diplomatic support, and neither is engaging in direct confrontation with the US. Before the war started, Trump's approval rating was below 40%, which has further dipped as the war has progressed. US citizens are facing high commodity prices and inflation, and a few Republicans have joined Democrats in denouncing the administration for going to war. Trump's Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, Joe Kent, has resigned from his post, saying that he could not back the war as Iran posed no imminent threat to the US. Last week, a lower-level Trump appointee, Sameera Munshi, resigned from the White House Religious Liberty Commission, citing the war as a major factor.

The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and is used for trade between Persian Gulf countries and the rest of the world via the Arabian Sea. Besides a wide range of goods, the strait provides passage for nearly one-fifth of global energy requirements. The shipping lane is restricted to 3 km, out of a 33 km-wide strait at its narrowest point, as large ships pass through lanes where the water depth is more than 100 metres.

The strait is guarded by the Iranian Navy and IRGC and has been made into a choke point. Iran has vowed to block US and European ships through the strait and permit only ships to and from friendly countries. Beijing's discounted oil and gas continue to flow through this choke point. With supply disrupted, oil prices have soared from $70 a barrel to $110 a barrel. Iran's main purpose in blocking ships through the Strait of Hormuz is to force a surge in oil prices up to $200 a barrel. This would lead to a major global economic crisis.

Inflation would rise and the prices of all commodities would spike. This is the last thing Trump wants when the midterm national election is six months away. After denouncing Starmer for rejecting military support for the war on Iran, he requested allies, as well as China, to send warships to the Strait of Hormuz to protect shipping. China is a competitor of the US, so why should it safeguard ships to and from the US and the European Union? Even NATO allies have refused to send warships to protect ships and unblock the choke point. None of the allies wanted to involve themselves in US military operations in Iran. Trump wants Greenland and does not miss an opportunity to humiliate his allies-how can he expect them to support him in the war?

As the war continued towards the end of the third week, the US, in its effort to unblock the choke point, used its B2 stealth (special bunker-buster) and bombarded Iranian land near the Strait of Hormuz. 2,200 kg bombs penetrated 100 metres below the ground and damaged stocks of anti-ship missiles as well as 30 mine-laying ships. Iran responded by bombarding Israeli military facilities.

At home, Trump finds that his MAGA base and its ideologues, wary of endless wars, are rejecting any military intervention. Polls show that his core supporters, who once cheered 'America First' against US actions in the Bush era, are denouncing what they see as betrayal in Gaza, Venezuela, Greenland, and more strongly in Iran. This may hand Democrats major gains in the midterm elections.

Trump's assessment that there would be an uprising in Iran after the leaders were eliminated has also proved wrong. People are seen rallying around the flag after the death of the Supreme Leader earlier and now Ali Larijani. Continuous bombardment has weakened Iranian capabilities, yet Iran continues to respond to aggression from the US and Israel.

Bombardment of oil infrastructure, refineries, and depots in Iran, Israel, and other Middle Eastern countries has posed one of the biggest environmental challenges. The air in the region is full of smoke and flames, releasing poisonous pollutants into the atmosphere. Billowing smoke

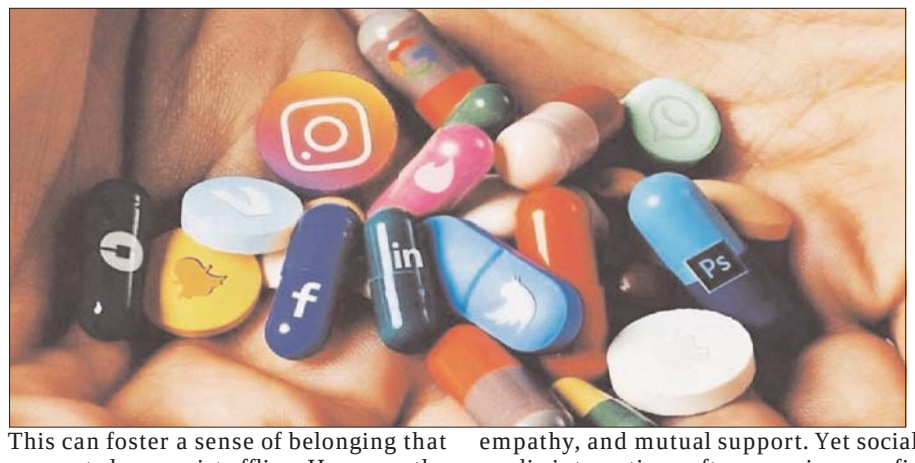
and towering oil fires have turned the horizon orange, and oily smoke hung over Tehran the next morning. Unburnt oil drained into the lanes. Human health in the region is the immediate casualty, and as toxic air mixes into the atmosphere, emissions intensify and their consequences are not localised to the region but extend globally.

Tehran has experienced acid rain, which can cause skin and throat irritation. Oxides of nitrogen and sulphur pose risks to the lungs and heart, while cancer-causing benzene and acetone present even greater health risks. Trump has to be blamed for this.

Wherever the US has been involved in prolonged wars-be it Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, or Vietnam — it has suffered loss of human life and humiliation. Trump knows this, but he does not know how to come out of the current conflict.

Connected yet alone: The reality of modern friendships

Sakshi Sethi



A teenager today may have over a thousand followers on social media, yet struggle to name one person they can call in times of distress. This paradox reflects the reality of modern friendships: never before have we been so connected, and yet at times so alone. Not very long ago, friendships were built on shared experiences such as walking home from school, playing in neighbourhood parks, or engaging in long, unhurried conversations. These interactions nurtured bonds rooted in trust, understanding, and emotional security. Today, however, friendship is increasingly shaped by social media, where connections are formed, maintained, and sometimes judged through likes, comments, and shares.

India, home to one of the largest youth populations in the world, is witnessing this transformation rapidly. With widespread smartphone use and affordable internet, young people spend much of their time online. Friendships are no longer limited to physical spaces but extend across cities and continents. Social media allows individuals to stay connected despite distance and to find communities based on shared interests-be it art, music, gaming, or academics. This can foster a sense of belonging that may not always exist offline. However, the ease of digital interaction often creates a false sense of closeness. A large following may increase visibility, but it does not ensure meaningful emotional connection. A 'like' cannot replace a genuine conversation, nor can an emoticon convey true empathy. Increasingly, young people feel more comfortable expressing themselves online than in face-to-face settings.

Many communicate confidently in digital spaces but hesitate in real-life interactions, raising concerns about the depth and authenticity of modern friendships. True friendship has always been based on trust, empathy, and mutual support. Yet social media interactions often remain superficial.

The culture of constant sharing and curated images can lead to comparison and insecurity. Exposure to seemingly perfect lives may turn friendships into spaces of silent competition rather than comfort. Moreover, meaningful conversations are often replaced by brief exchanges, where tone and emotion are easily misunderstood, weakening emotional bonds.

At the same time, it would be unfair to blame technology alone. Social media itself is not the problem; its impact depends on how it is used. When used mindfully, it can strengthen relationships. A timely message or video call can bridge distances and provide support. The challenge lies in balancing digital and real-world interactions. Spending time together without screens, engaging in meaningful conversations, and being emotionally present can help nurture genuine friendships.

It is important for young people to distinguish between popularity and friendship. Popularity may bring attention, but friendship offers emotional security and belonging. One sincere friend who stands by us in joy and adversity is far more valuable than countless online connections. Ultimately, while the form of friendship may evolve, its essence remains unchanged-people continue to seek understanding, trust, and companionship. In a world dominated by notifications, the true measure of friendship is not how many react to our posts, but how many stand by us in difficult times.

When screens go dark, it is real connections that light up our lives. Friendship is not about constant communication but about trust and understanding. True bonds do not fade with silence; they grow stronger with time. Instead of counting messages, we should value the moments that still feel like home when we reconnect.

Turning gas crisis into an opportunity

Abhinav Walia

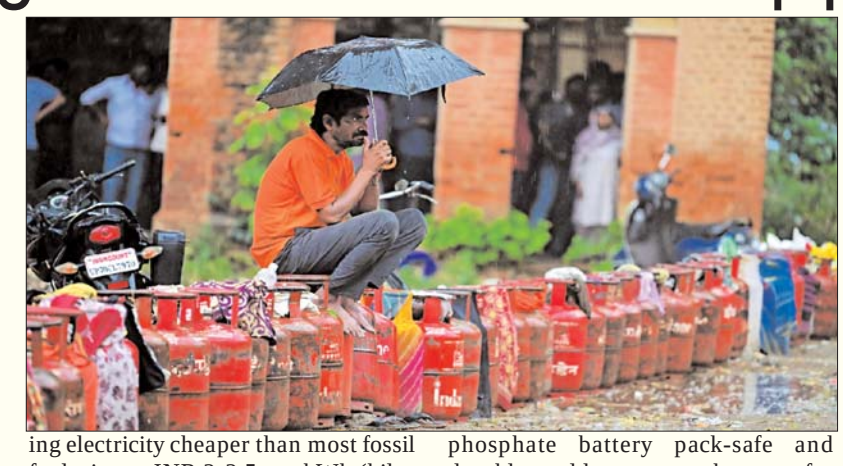
In neighbourhoods from Delhi to the Deccan, a grimly familiar tableau has emerged. Lines of anxious families snake around gas agencies, where heavy steel cylinders roll slowly along the pavement like reluctant passengers in an endless queue. The crisis is hitting the heart of the home and the heat of the kitchen. In restaurants, chefs trade worried whispers while glancing at their final reserves. Meanwhile, small roadside eateries that fuel India's workforce are being forced into a corner-trimming menus, delaying service, or quietly raising prices just to keep the blue flame alive. Driving this unease is a global tremor.

The ongoing tensions in West Asia have disrupted energy flows and pushed liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) prices sharply upward-by some estimates nearly 77 per cent earlier this month. As India imports a large share of its cooking gas, the effects ripple quickly into everyday life. Shortages appear, delivery dates stretch, and the familiar spectre of black marketing lurks in the background. It is another reminder of how deeply daily life depends on energy that travels thousands of kilometres before reaching an Indian kitchen.

There are two ways to read such an event. One is the familiar way: wait patiently until global tensions ease, prices fall again, and the old routine resumes-until the next geopolitical storm arrives. There is another way to read this crisis. Sometimes, a disruption is not merely an inconvenience; it is an invitation.

A moment when a country can convert vulnerability into strength; when a country can convert a crisis into an opportunity. India could well be at the cusp of such a transformation, depending upon how the situation is seized. To convert this crisis into an opportunity does not require waiting for futuristic technologies.

The elegance of the idea lies in its simplicity. Technologically, the pieces already exist. Firstly, India today possesses a remarkable advantage that did not exist previously: abundant solar power. From the sun-drenched plains of Rajasthan to the vast solar parks of Gujarat, India's solar capacity has grown immensely. It already has an installed capacity of 85 gigawatts, producing electricity cheaper than most fossil fuels, i.e. at INR 2-2.5 per kWh (kilowatt-hour). Secondly, imagine a familiar object in an unfamiliar form: a cooking cylinder, but instead of gas, it contains stored solar energy.



These "solar cylinders" could be modular battery packs charged at solar-powered hubs. Each pack, storing about 5-6 kWh of energy, could power an induction stove for two or three days of ordinary household cooking. When depleted, it would simply be exchanged for a freshly charged unit.

Thirdly, each 5-6 kWh lithium iron phosphate battery pack-safe and durable-could store enough energy for two to three days of household cooking, plugging straight into induction cooktops that convert electricity to heat far more efficiently than gas burners, i.e. at around 85-90 per cent efficiency, far surpassing that of gas stoves.

Fourthly, India has one of the world's largest cooking fuel distribution systems. Over 25,000 LPG distributors, fleets of delivery trucks, and established supply routes already serve more than 330 million households. These networks that transport gas could just as well transport charged batteries. The kitchen experience remains familiar: a cylinder arrives, and cooking continues.

Fifthly, battery swapping-already common in electric vehicle ecosystems-allows quick exchanges in minutes rather than long charging waits at centralised stations.

As such, the need is to create a seamless loop: from battery manufacturing, to solar-charged batteries, induction appliances, delivery by agents, and the return of empty units for recharge. The national implication of this is stark: India spends around INR 70,000 to INR 72,000 crore annually on importing LPG. Every meal cooked with domestically generated solar power is one step towards reducing that dependence. Cleaner kitchens, reduced pollution, and greater energy security would follow naturally.

Doubtless, challenges remain. Batteries would need more frequent replacement cycles than gas cylinders, requiring efficient logistics or enhanced capacity over time. Early deployment might focus on solar-rich states such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, or Tamil Nadu before expanding nationwide.

Yet every transformative system begins somewhere-with a pilot, a partnership, a policy push. Government programmes could provide the launchpad. The Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana may subsidise solar setups and could fund charging hubs. The Production Linked Incentive for Advanced Chemistry Cells (PLI-ACC) may drive affordable battery production. Viability Gap Funding for Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) may support large-scale solar-linked storage. The Bureau of Energy Efficiency's Energy Service Companies (ESCOs) framework may enable performance-based swaps.

To accelerate this, NITI Aayog or relevant ministries could convene a meeting among solar farm operators, battery manufacturers, induction stove producers, swapping firms, and gas distributors-leading to collaborations that turn concepts into reality.

Now, we could simply wait for the global gas market to calm down, or we could seize the opportunity to build something quietly revolutionary: a cooking system powered not by distant oilfields, but by the 'Indian sun'-an Atmanirbhar energy future.