

INDIAN SUPPORT FOR PALESTINE

India diplomacy and humanitarian approach in dealing with global issues is the reason why we are close to both Israel and Palestine. In fact, India was the first non-Arab country to recognize Palestine as a nation state. Interestingly, even after so much blood bath, both recognize India’s independent relation with the other and have never complained about it. As the United Nations session India has backed Palestine's bid for membership to the global body and reiterated its support for a two-state solution to the festering conflict between the Palestinian people and Israel. The two nation state solution envisages Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within recognised borders and consistent with international law. While India has a robust trade and political relationship with Israel and we import a lot of military equipment from the jewish state, India has always responded to the needs of Palestinian people. During the humanitarian crisis arising out of the Hamas and Israel conflict, Indian sent relief and humanitarian aid to Palestinians but at the same time, was the first to unequivocally condemn the horrific October 7 massacre of Israeli civilians by the Hamas terrorists. India doesn’t shy away from calling terrorists as they are and distinguishing between civilians and terrorists from among them.

However, India has been supporting a lot of developmental projects in Palestine and providing scholarships to students from the land. India has once again pledged. Recently India announced three new development projects for Palestine to address urgent humanitarian and economic needs of the people. EAM S Jaishankar announced at the meeting of the Palestine donor group in Brussels several projects for the region. This includes construction of a new hospital in the Palestinian territories. The hospital is all set to come up at Jenin in the West Bank. Besides, India has also promised to open an artificial limb fitment centre for thousands of Gazans who have suffered amputations during the ongoing conflict.

Ashok K Mehta

The ship tracker in Kota Kinabalu, where I am — on the eastern edge of Malaysia — shows that 281 ships passed through the Malacca Strait on July 14, compared with 134 ships which used to cross the Strait of Hormuz daily before the blockade. Four countries — Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore — monitor and regulate traffic across the Malacca Strait. Before its twin blockades by the US and Iran, the Strait of Hormuz was free for international passage. Iran has found it can use the choke point as leverage and even impose tariffs. As I write, the issue over passage rights remains unresolved despite tit-for-tat bombings and a fragile ceasefire. Not since the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, which led to a geopolitical tsunami, has another choke point rediscovered its importance.

The 900 km long and 65 km wide Strait of Malacca is flanked by Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, with which PM Modi signed a landmark BrahMos deal this week; it carries 24 per cent of global sea borne trade, 45 per cent of sea borne oil and 23 per cent of cargo shipments, and contains the world’s most critical port infrastructure: Singapore’s Port Klang, which is the world’s second busiest container hub, one of the busiest container trans-shipment points and the world’s largest ship refuelling hub. That the Malacca Strait remains free of disruption is critical for China, the US, India and Japan especially, and ASEAN; notably for the four custodian states, for whom control or leverage over it is necessary. They have been working on keeping the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean that the Malacca Strait connects, open and tranquil.

Tensions in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait are magnifying after the ongoing Gulf War, as Chinese coastguards have introduced new sea patrols off Taiwan’s eastern coast. China’s claims over the entire South China Sea are in violation of an UNCLOS ruling in 2016, which was re-endorsed by the West last week but rejected by China. For Beijing, Taiwan is an inalienable and vital component of its One China policy. China has maritime disputes with



seven ASEAN countries but enjoys cordial relations with all; North Korea is its only good-weather friend. China has long delayed accepting a South China Sea code of conduct first sought by ASEAN in 2003, and, like hedging with India over delineation of the LAC, China has dodged ASEAN over the code until it was nailed to a 2026 deadline by the ASEAN chair, the Philippines. Chinese President Hu Jintao, during an economic conference in 2003, first mentioned Beijing’s “Malacca dilemma”, as 80 per cent of crude oil, 70 per cent of gas and \$1.5tn of its exports pass through it. As its disruption would be catastrophic for China, it has been searching for alternate routes to reduce dependency on it.

First, detours from the south of the Malacca Strait through the Sunda and Lombok Straits within Indonesian waters. Maritime, geological and time and cost overrun issues have discounted these routes. Second, constructing oil and gas pipelines: the USD 62bn China-Pakistan Economic Corridor connecting Xinjiang with Gwadar Port; the USD 2.5bn China-Myanmar Economic Corridor from Kyaukphyu Port in the Indian Ocean to Yunnan, which are operational but in disuse due to civil war in Myanmar. In addition, oil pipelines from Kazakhstan and Russia are available. At this month’s World Peace Forum in Beijing, the centrality of the Malacca Strait was amply discussed.

Stung by its failure to keep open the Hormuz Strait, the US is taking no chances in ensuring freedom of passage across the Malacca Strait. On April 14, 2026, the US and Indonesia, the key watchkeeper of the waterway, announced a major defence cooperation partnership, strengthening their military ties. After renaming the US Department of Defence as the Department of War, it has reverted from the US Indo-Pacific Command to the old nomenclature, US Pacific Command — deleting “Indo” — and undertaken several defence and security projects with allies and partners in safeguarding the Malacca Strait. Indonesia’s vast archipelago sits astride the Malacca Strait and other vital sea routes of the world. The narrowest portion of the Malacca Strait is the 2.8 km Phillips Channel near Singapore, which is a vulnerable point. Contingency plans for keeping it free of disruption are available and are being augmented by the new entity “ASEAN Maritime Centre for Protection of Strait of Malacca and South China Sea from Encroachment by Major Powers”, set up in May 2026. This will be similar to the Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region at Gurugram, India.

On June 18, 2026, Thailand’s Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul highlighted the criticality of strategic maritime choke points like the Malacca Strait. ASEAN countries were all affected by the closure of the Hormuz Strait except Petronas-rich Malaysia.

ARE SCHOOLS PREPARING CHILDREN FOR THE FUTURE?

Sakshi Sethi

When families who can afford the finest schools begin looking beyond them, education systems should pay attention. For generations, success followed a familiar route: admission to a reputed school, good examination results and entry into a prestigious university. That pathway still exists, but its adequacy is increasingly being questioned.

As artificial intelligence reshapes knowledge and work, many affluent families are investing in experiences that classrooms often treat as optional — entrepreneurship, financial literacy, AI awareness, internships, public speaking and problem-solving. Their choices should not be copied blindly, but they raise an important question: if conventional schooling is enough, why are those with access to the best schools still searching? Artificial intelligence has changed the value of information. Knowledge that once required hours of research is now instantly accessible. AI tools can generate presentations, analyse data, write code and answer complex questions. Possessing information is no longer enough. The real advantage lies in knowing how to question, verify and apply it responsibly. This makes human capabilities such as critical thinking, creativity, commu-



nication, emotional intelligence, ethical judgement and adaptability more valuable than ever.

Yet these abilities remain underdeveloped in many classrooms. Schools continue to reward compliance over curiosity, speed over depth and standardised responses over original thought. Examinations serve an important purpose, but performance should not become the sole measure of success. A child may score highly without learning to think independently, collaborate effectively or make sound decisions. Many affluent families are responding by exposing children to experiences beyond academics. Outdoor exper-

ditions, internships, entrepreneurial projects, community service and debates help develop resilience, leadership and problem-solving skills. Equally important is the willingness to let children struggle. Failure, when supported by reflection and guidance, is a powerful teacher. A failed project can

improve planning, a difficult presentation can build confidence and disagreement can strengthen negotiation skills. Artificial intelligence reinforces this need. As routine tasks become automated, education must move beyond memorising information. Students should learn to evaluate AI-generated content, identify bias, verify sources, protect privacy and make ethical decisions. Technological literacy should include understanding both the capabilities and the limitations of intelligent machines.

Traditional schools remain indispensable. They provide structure, discipline, mentorship and foundational knowledge. The real

Thailand announced on 18 June the revival of the pending USD 36bn land corridor project connecting two deep sea ports - Ranong in the Andaman Sea, Indian Ocean, with Chumphon in the Gulf of Thailand, South China Sea in the Pacific Ocean.

China, one of the investors, would be a key beneficiary of this alternate route. The corridor will reduce logistics costs by nearly 30 per cent and cut transit time by 14 days, especially for large cargo containers. But Singapore will lose its pivotal position as the infrastructural hub along the key waterway.

India sits 40 nautical miles on the 6-degree channel covering the western approach to the Malacca Strait. The controversial USD 5bn Great Nicobar Project, involving construction of a deep-water port at Galathea Bay, will become the pivotal hub of global shipping and a new international container trans-shipment port near the entrance to the Malacca Strait. On July 4, former naval chief and LG of Andaman Adm DK Joshi and Nicobar Adm DK Joshi examined its strategic value with advisers. INS Baaz, India’s southernmost air and naval base, is close by but the runway is still not fit for large jet aircraft.

I recall my visit with Defence Planning Staff in 1989 when Indonesia protested India’s proposal to enlarge the air base and the issue became a Time magazine cover story. PM Modi’s recent visit to Indonesia has turned the tide. Many ideas have recently been floated about blunting Chinese advantage along the LAC by augmenting China’s Malacca dilemma, should India have the political will and military finesse for it.

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The writer, a retired Major General, served as Commander, IPKF (South), Sri Lanka, and was a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, now the Integrated Defence Staff; Views presented are personal.

Five water stories from Dhanbad that can shape Jharkhand’s water future

Eklavya Prasad

Dhanbad is rarely associated with water. It is known as India’s coal capital, a landscape of mines, industries and expanding urban settlements. Yet, beneath this industrial identity lies another Dhanbad, one where aquifers sustain millions, ponds continue to recharge groundwater, streams silently carry the burden of urbanisation, and communities negotiate water every single day.

Over the past several years, my work with Megh Pyne Abhiyan (MPA) across rural and urban Dhanbad has convinced me that the district is much more than a mining region. It is a microcosm of Jharkhand’s water realities. The challenges that emerge here-groundwater depletion, contamination, urban flooding, disappearing recharge spaces and climate uncertainty-mirror those confronting the rest of the State. At the same time, Dhanbad has also become a testing ground for innovative solutions. Five stories from the district offer valuable lessons for reimagining water governance in Jharkhand.

The first story comes from rural Dhanbad. Across the blocks of Balia-pur, Tundi and Purbi (East) Tundi, covering seven gram panchayats and thirteen villages, MPA’s groundwater assessment found what villagers had always known: groundwater is the backbone of everyday life. It supports drinking water, household needs and agriculture. More importantly, the assessment revealed that local communities possess an intimate understanding of their aquifers. They know when hand pumps begin to fail, which ponds once recharged wells, how mining has altered drainage, and how rainfall has become increasingly unpredictable.

What was striking was that villagers did not merely describe problems. They proposed solutions. Rainwater harvesting, aquifer recharge, the revival of traditional ponds, improved irrigation and safe drinking water emerged as their priorities. Their responses remind us that groundwater governance cannot depend solely on engineering designs and hydrogeological maps. It must also recognise local knowledge as a valuable planning resource. Communities are not

passive beneficiaries; they are indispensable partners in water management.

A very different story unfolds in Bartand, Dhanbad, inside my mother’s home, called Uttarayan. Since 2018, this residence has quietly become a living laboratory for understanding groundwater. Rainfall has been measured every day, rainwater harvesting carefully documented, and groundwater levels in a dug well systematically monitored. During this period, nearly 5.8 million litres of rainwater have been harvested to recharge the shallow aquifer, while seasonal groundwater fluctuations have improved by almost eleven feet between May 2018 and May 2026.

The significance of Uttarayan extends far beyond one household. It demonstrates that water consciousness begins with measurement, not assumptions. When people measure rainfall, monitor groundwater and observe recharge, conservation becomes evidence-based rather than symbolic. Imagine if every school, college, government office and public institution in Jharkhand became a similar water observatory. Such citi-

zen-generated datasets would not only deepen scientific understanding but also strengthen the Government’s Catch the Rain campaign through informed public participation.

The third story shifts from one home to an entire city. It began with an inspiring initiative called the Gang of Twenty, a group of students from Carmel School, Dhanbad, who started engaging with local water issues. Their enthusiasm sparked wider conversations about groundwater and eventually contributed to Dhanbad being selected as one of the pilot cities under the National Institute of Urban Affairs’ Shallow Aquifer Management (SAM) programme. Implemented by the Dhanbad Municipal Corporation in partnership with MPA, and mentored by Dr Himanshu Kulkarni of ACWADAM, Pune, and S Vishwanath of Biome Environmental Trust, Bengaluru, the initiative marked an important shift in urban water planning.

Instead of viewing groundwater as an invisible reserve beneath the city, the pilot treated the shallow aquifer as an asset that could be mapped, monitored, protected and recharged.

Recharge interventions and groundwater monitoring were undertaken at Jeevan Jyoti School and Bera Colony in Dhanbad Circle, Bhagatdih and Neeche Mohalla in Jharia Circle, and Laxmi Colony in Sindri Circle. Subsequent monitoring showed encouraging improvements, with groundwater remaining available for longer periods during the summer months. The experience demonstrates that even rapidly growing mining cities can improve groundwater security when urban planning begins with the shallow aquifer rather than ending with pipelines.

Urban groundwater, however, cannot be protected without addressing sanitation. This is perhaps one of Dhanbad’s most important lessons. In the absence of underground sewerage systems, drains, streams and rivers frequently become carriers of sewage. Stormwater drains meant to convey rainwater gradually turn into wastewater channels, contaminating surface water and threatening groundwater quality.

The lesson is straightforward but often ignored. Water supply, drainage, sanitation, rivers and

groundwater cannot be planned separately. Healthy drains, streams and wetlands are not vacant land waiting for development. They are essential urban infrastructure that supports recharge, reduces flooding and protects public health. Sustainable cities will emerge only when sanitation and groundwater are planned together.

The final story takes us back to rural Dhanbad, where the challenge is not water availability but water safety. In Gharbar Panchayat of Balia-pur Block, studies conducted by MPA in collaboration with the School of Environmental Studies, Jadavpur University, found widespread fluoride contamination in groundwater. In several habitations, more than half of the drinking water sources exceeded the permissible fluoride limits. Significantly, this situation persisted even after piped water supply had reached many villages because people continued to depend on groundwater for convenience, reliability and everyday needs.

This experience reminds us that water security cannot be judged simply by counting household tap connections.