

YET ANOTHER CONFLICT

Middle East is locked again in conflicts with the Yemen-based and reportedly Iran-backed Houthi rebels attacking Saudi Arabian as-sets and also firing one drone in the direction of the Holy city of Macca. India was among the first countries to expressed its concern over the drone attack near Makkah and condemn attacks on Saudi Arabia. The situation is complicated with many Houthi rebels having been nurtured by different vested interests as their proxies. The rag tag fighter groups’ link with Iran are always spoken about but today the USA, a former ally of Riyadh, being in touch with the Houthis and seeking their assurance that the American and Israelis assets will not be attacked. The Houthis who go by another name are in control of some territory of Yemen, a once bustling and modern nation now reduced to the one which produces many refugees for Europe. On the other hand military commanders from the United States, Israel, and seven Arab nations met at a venue in Germany recently to deliberate on the ongoing war with Iran. The Israel-US-Iran has a link to the Houthi attack as the latter are believed to be proxies for Iran. However, the most interesting part of this story is the stand of Pakistan that till the other day was boasting about the three-nation (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey) Macca Pact as the promise to treat attack on one member as attack on all the three, Pakistan has wriggled out by suggesting that the pact is defensive and not offense whatever it means. This new front that Houthi have opened as proxies for regimes is a bad news for the world. Firstly, the use of non-state actors to settle scores with rivals is not a stand that India and many other countries support. As such the world is yet to deal with the impact of COVID, Russia-Ukraine and US-Iran wars when this new front has been opened.

Why India must start the Agniveer conversation

Ashok K Mehta

Nepal’s ex-servicemen have made a remarkable turnaround, moving from opposition to Agniveer to demanding its acceptance on Indian terms. At a moment when Kathmandu faces unemployment, disaster and growing strategic uncertainty, India has a rare opening to revive the Gorkha recruitment relationship. Yet diplomacy appears to have missed the moment.

Nepal was recently afflicted by tragic and catastrophic climate events: the 2015 earthquake, the 2023 Jajarkot earthquake, and now the glacial outbursts triggering the Rasuwa flash floods. A man-made disaster obliterated Kathmandu’s iconic buildings and institutions during the 72-hour Gen Z movement in September 2025. The Rasuwa/Trishuli tragedy of 26 August did not prevent NDTV from holding its conclave the next day, along with prominent Nepali business sponsors such as MAW Enterprises, Fone Pay, Panchkanya, Padma Jyoti and Goldstar - the Maoist-branded footwear of the ten-year civil war - owned by Vidushi Rana, a nominated MP of the ruling Rashtriya Swatantra Party government. She portrayed the business face of Nepal through Goldstar, sharing star billing with three of the RSP’s top politicians: President Rabi Lamichhane, Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle and Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal.

How could they be persuaded to attend is a separate story. Never short of words, Shashi Tharoor led the Indian side in an exchange of ideas on India-Nepal relations, sans any real specialists on India and Nepal. As one Nepali filmmaker put it: “The conclave was to facilitate entry into the Nepali market of the owners of NDTV, the Adanis.” The human tragedy was ignored.

This social-calendar event robbed the devastating floods of focus, as did the fall-out from Indian COAS General Dhiraj Seth’s first visit abroad to Nepal the previous week, at a time when Nepal’s ex-servicemen (ESM) had launched their first-ever campaign to finally accept Agniveer on Indian terms - limited years of engagement and retention. This landmark about-



turn by the ESM was precipitated by the employment drought in the country but went unnoticed in Delhi. It is necessary to recall the events preceding Seth’s visit and the actions planned by the ESM to force their campaign to a successful outcome.

On August 15, for the first time ever, ESM and their families gathered outside Pokhara’s Rangshala Stadium, sang the Indian national anthem, unfurled the Tricolour and then marched to the Chief District Officer’s office, where they submitted a petition urging the Government of Nepal to accept the Agniveer recruitment package as it is. This was preceded by similar campaigns by ESM in Lamjung and Kathmandu. Previous campaigns had been critical of the new recruitment scheme and had sought the restoration of the old terms of recruitment, including pensionary benefits. So, when Seth arrived in Kathmandu to be anointed Honorary General of the Nepal Army - an honour not even exchanged with Britain (and the British Army), the founding fathers of the 300-year-old Gorkha legacy - the ground was set for him to break the long impasse over recruitment through military diplomacy. But, ironically, this was beyond his remit, his pay grade. Why? Because the Foreign Office will not let generals tread on its territory. Or is it because Agniveer is PM Modi’s personal idea and a political matter? Either way, an opportunity was apparently missed by the Army Chief to open the door for a conversation

leading to recruitment. IndiaLaw Justice Seth not only met his counterpart, General Ashok Sigdel, but also President Ram Chandra Paudel and Prime Minister Balen Shah, who doubles as Defence Minister. This was when the iron was hot. But Seth was again constrained by his brief and probably by the presence of Indian Ambassador Naveen Shrivastava, who was accompanying him. But unlikely.

Later, during the ESM’s massive rally at the Pokhara Indian Pension Camp, which is towered over by the Machapuchare massif, hundreds upon thousands of ESM and their families had gathered to welcome Indian Army Chief General Seth. Being from the Armoured Corps, Seth had probably only read about Gorkha fervour, even in its ESM avatar. Today, he was face-to-face with its awe and aura.

In a ten-minute speech, he said the usual glorious things about India-Nepal relations while remotely inaugurating the Kolhapur polyclinic. India has set up an elaborate network of welfare schemes inside Nepal. A former Indian Gorkha officer present noted that Seth was overwhelmed by the sentiment and affection expressed for India and the Indian Army by ESM. Seth realised that the Gorkha ESM was a strategic asset in a country where anti-India sentiment can spark and spread like wildfire. One classic video of an ex-serviceman telling Seth, “We’re ready to join the Indian Army”, meaning Agniveer, went viral. It is now known that Seth did

not raise the Agniveer issue with anyone, sticking to his military brief. NDTV’s erudite team of anchors did not either, though India-Nepal relations was the theme of the dialogue. They quizzed three top Nepali politicians but did not consider the five-year breach in Gorkha recruitment an issue of concern. Meanwhile, Tharoor was busy excavating the German word ‘schadenfreude’ with Wagle. Later, he called the flash floods “Nepal drama is continuing”, for which he subsequently apologised. A huge backlash followed on social media and will be remembered as anti-Nepal sentiment, thanks to Kathmandu’s selective memory. NDTV’s failure to raise the strategic fracture in bilateral relations was a missed opportunity. Or was it warped priority?

The ex-servicemen are likely to revive their campaign soon, though the tragic aftermath of the flash floods will continue to haunt Nepal. Dussehra and Tihar, soon to follow, will occupy their minds and time. India’s brilliant package of rescue and relief has impressed the Nepalese, as it did during the 2015 earthquake. Praise for India was resonant everywhere.

The momentum of the ‘Accept Agniveer Campaign’ launched by ESM recently should not be lost, even though the present Agniveer terms of engagement are iron-clad and unlikely to change despite the chatter. As the ex-servicemen are now prepared to accept it, a conversation needs to start at the diplomatic or political level. A two-thirds-majority government in Nepal has its ego and is unlikely to break the ice; India has a national interest. A key strategic issue has been reduced to ‘who will bell the cat’. IndiaLaw Justice In 1959, when I first trekked in Nepal, recruitment to become a soldier was the single biggest craze among the youth. The song that ran across Nepal was: “Chiso pani chara le piye na; Bharti hunu Lalumaya nidhara le diye na” (paraphrased: I went to get recruited, but fate did not allow it). “Daju” (big brother) should help.

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.

WE DON’T HAVE TO BE SO HELPLESS

Ajit Kumar Bishnoi

I am determined not to be defeated, feel resigned or fall sick, physically or otherwise. When I learn about people known to me who are suffering helplessly in old age, and not even in old age, I feel saddened. But soon the gloom lifts as I seek guidance and help from my Lord. In this article, I will share my personal experiences as I fight negative feelings, which rear their ugly heads not so infrequently.

The first thing I do when I wake up — yes, at 5 am — is freshen up and pray to my Lord. I have been writing about the large photograph of Lord Krishna in my room; there are eight other photographs of different manifestations of God. Lord Krishna has spoken about this in the Bhagavad Gita, in verse 9.15: “I have faces in all directions, in one form or in many different ways.” These are of Lord Ramachandra, Lord Shiva, Lord Narayana, Ma Durga, Lord Narasimha, my Laddu Gopal, Bal Gopal and my beloved Hanumanji.



Just as there are many manifestations of God, there are many prayers too. Some of them are: please give me pure devotion, ‘atmabala’ (inner strength), freedom from depression, protection, peace and happiness, good sense and sustenance, of course. I am not ashamed to admit that I am very small, but I don’t have to be so helpless. I am like a toddler for whom his mother is everything; my Lord is every-

thing to me (7.19). He takes care of me. And He is available to me 24x7, in not one but nine different forms. There is no loneliness for me. I feel like I am living in a temple — a Sanatana Dharma Mandir in my bedroom. And there is a very responsive God who gives guidance and help in all matters. Isn’t God omniscient and omnipotent? Why succumb to negative feelings when you are armed with the

‘Narayan Kavach’ (the armour provided by God)?

There are solutions to every problem I face. But let me warn readers that these solutions include tough realisations. What has Lord Krishna said about getting nectar in verse 18.37? You have to undergo austerities, which are like poison. I must walk after every meal for five minutes, yes, in my room only. I don’t need muscles; I need good health. I need to eat foods that agree with me; they have begun to taste good. I must be useful at all times - that is, I must do what human beings are supposed to do, which is ‘seva’ (service).

The rewards are many. My Lord has become the ‘karta’ (doer) in my life; inevitably, 100 per cent success is assured. I just have to focus on my part, which is to remain in the shelter of my Lord and perform all the duties assigned to me as His ‘nimitta’ (instrument). And, in order not to forget all these things, I have sticky notes everywhere reminding me about what I must do or must not do. Life is blissful (theek chal rahi hai).

India’s leap toward sustainable mobility

Shehzad Poonawalla
| Vijeta Rattani

Last week, as the world marked EV Day, India’s electric mobility journey of speed, scale and sustainability stood out as a useful case study. Being the third-largest automotive market globally, India seeks to leverage its position to strengthen industrial competitiveness and boost economic growth while reducing oil dependence and advancing the sustainability transition. At the heart of this transition is its rapid shift to electric vehicles. The year 2025 saw a transformational surge, with 2.3 million units sold, from a modest 50,000 EVs sold in 2016, representing 46 times growth, outpacing global trends, and exports of USD 84 million in 2024 from just USD 1.2 million in 2020. This trajectory marks not just a technological change but a structural transformation of the mobility sector, while positioning India to emerge as a global hub of the EV ecosystem.

This transformation was driven primarily by motorised two-wheelers (12.8 lakh units) and three-wheelers (8

lakh units) sold in 2025, with the state of Uttar Pradesh leading the sales of EVs, with strong consumer demand.

Rightly hailed as the future of mobility, EVs present clear advantages over petrol- or diesel-run vehicles, such as zero tailpipe emissions, curbing air pollution; high efficiency; lower upkeep and maintenance costs; home-charging convenience; and smoother rides with no complicated controls. Government incentives such as tax deductions, reduced or waived road tax, vehicle registration fees and lower GST rates aim to integrate EVs into India’s broader sustainability and industrial competitiveness agenda. IndiaNews Coverage

Govt pushes for EVs, states leading the transition

In the last decade, India’s EV policy architecture has matured into a diversified set of schemes, incentives and mandates. The PLI-ACC Scheme promotes domestic battery manufacturing, while the National Manufacturing Mission (2025) identifies EVs as a “seed” sector for innovation-led growth, integrating production into global value chains. The PM E-DRIVE



Scheme prioritises public transport for EV adoption through targeted demand incentives, expansion of charging infrastructure and domestic manufacturing of specified EV components, reinforced by the Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP). Additionally, the PM e-Bus Sewa-PSM Scheme (2024) provides payment security coverage for electric buses, while the Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India (SP-MEPCI) facilitates the manufacturing of electric cars in India. India aims for 30 per cent of all vehicle sales to be electric by 2030, aligning with the global

EV30@30 initiative, and targets 1.32 million charging stations across India by 2030. These measures add structural depth to India’s electric vehicle ecosystem through the development, expansion and strengthening of the entire EV ecosystem.

With the central framework in place, states are leading the transition, tailoring their strategies to comparative advantages, local needs and development priorities. By the end of 2025, 29 states and UTs had notified EV policies, implying greater awareness of the urgency for EVs. Therefore, while Delhi’s EV policy is centred more on regula-

tory phase-out timelines regarding ICE (Internal Combustion Engine) vehicles in light of pressing air pollution challenges, states such as Gujarat, Assam, Meghalaya, Haryana, etc. offer attractive demand-side subsidies. However, subsidies alone cannot steer the big shift to EVs. A local manufacturing system is critical. States like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, etc. are leading the effort with heavy capital subsidies, easing processes for land allotment, registration fees, etc. Uttar Pradesh offers a mix of incentives for buyers, charging infrastructure developers, battery companies, fleet operators, manufacturers and businesses. Collectively, these approaches are fuelling India’s shift from an assembly-led market to an EV manufacturing hub, aligned with Make in India, Viksit Bharat 2047, climate and net-zero goals. This evolution represents a convergence of climate goals, industrial competitiveness and energy security.

Looking Ahead

Persistent deficits in infrastructure and the high cost of adoption continue to challenge India’s electric mobility

trajectory. Yet, with the government’s focus on the next phases of Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) norms and global players such as VinFast and Tesla joining domestic leaders in investments in manufacturing and innovation, the sector is entering a crucial phase of expansion. Further, emerging technologies, including LMFP and sodium-ion batteries, etc. are reshaping the innovation frontier, promising efficiency gains, cost reductions and consumer confidence. Such developments would diversify consumer choices, boost growth and create new livelihoods while embedding sustainability into production systems. IndiaNews Coverage

Rising global demand for electric vehicles and India’s expanding network of free trade agreements are creating newer avenues for exports of EV equipment, batteries and components, projecting India as a competitive supplier in global value chains.

India’s EV transition is not a policy experiment. It is reconfiguring India’s transport sector’s sustainability shift while aligning industrial growth with global competitiveness.