

Noise isn't leadership

Public life demands more than visibility. It demands restraint, clarity and a sense of responsibility. In a country like India, where diversity is both strength and sensitivity, the words of elected representatives carry weight far beyond the moment. When those words repeatedly slip into provocation, it is not just a personal lapse but becomes a matter of public concern. Recent remarks by NC leader and Member of Parliament, Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi in Lok Sabha have once again brought this concern to the forefront. His comment describing Israel as the 'fatherland' of BJP members was not part of a structured argument. It was a sharp aside, disconnected from the subject under discussion aimed more at scoring a point than contributing to debate. Such interventions may attract attention but they come at the cost of lowering the quality of parliamentary discourse. India's democratic framework has always allowed space for disagreement, including on international issues. Criticism of Israel or any other nation is not unusual. However, the manner in which such criticism is articulated matters. When arguments are replaced with taunts, the focus shifts from policy to personality. The result is noise, not nuance. What makes this episode more significant is that it is not an exception. It follows a series of statements that have kept Mehdi in the midst of controversy. His refusal to sing Vande Mataram in Parliament was seen by many as unnecessarily confrontational. National symbols, regardless of differing viewpoints, require careful handling. A more reasoned explanation could have opened space for dialogue. Instead, the tone hardened positions. His statement about Muslims having shed blood for the country's freedom and being ready to do so again also invited debate. The contribution of all communities to India's independence is unquestionable. Yet, invoking such assertions in the present context, without clarity, risks creating more unease than understanding. Perhaps even more concerning was his earlier description of tourism in Kashmir as a 'cultural invasion'. At a time when Jammu and Kashmir is working to rebuild its economy and restore confidence among visitors, such language sends the wrong message. Tourism sustains livelihoods and strengthens connections with the rest of the country. To portray it as something intrusive undermines both economic recovery and social cohesion. Alongside these statements are legal and ethical concerns that add to the unease. Mehdi has been booked for allegedly circulating misleading content on social media. In today's information landscape, where misinformation spreads quickly, public figures have a responsibility to exercise caution. Additionally, his name appearing in a chargesheet in a land compensation case raises further questions, even as the matter remains under legal consideration. While individually these episodes may be explained, but taken together, they point to a pattern that cannot be ignored. Public representatives are expected to elevate discourse, not reduce it to constant confrontation. The role demands a balance between conviction and responsibility. Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi stands at a point where reflection is necessary. The question is not about the right to speak but about the responsibility that comes with it. Leadership is ultimately judged not by the volume of statements, but by their value. A democracy does not weaken because of dissent. It weakens when debate is replaced by distraction.



“Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there someday.”

—A. A. Milne



India In Korean War

CAN IT BE REPLICATED IN IRAN?

DR D K GIRI

The war in Iran has taken unanticipated turns. American President Donald Trump seems to have got stuck in a war that does not appear to end as per his calculation. It is like the war in Ukraine where Russian President Vladimir Putin grossly miscalculated his war objectives and the duration. Trump may have realised that the strength of an army does not accurately reflect on the ground. He may also be reminded of America's defeat in Vietnam and pulling out of Afghanistan without considerable success. He has appealed to his allies and other countries for help. He sought help for keeping the Strait of Hormuz clear and secure; but observers hint at his desperation for ending the war.

Washington exhorted a few energy-dependent countries including South Korea, Japan, European NATO members and even China to help in demilitarising Strait of Hormuz, which is under Iranian control. But none of these countries has made any tangible response. In fact, NATO, which has US as the leading member, has said 'no'. China is most unlikely to extend any help. Other countries including a close friend of Washington, Britain, are prevaricating.

The negative or no response is a consequence of unilateral military action taken by Donald Trump against Iran. It is like inviting someone to join the meal while the person inviting is half-way through his lunch. Moreover, the unilateral steps without extensive coalition building and diplomatic footwork, has led European capitals including Berlin and Paris to react that action in Iran is not a NATO mandate.

The second option referred above is the conclusion of war that Trump is seeking to avoid the scars of Vietnam, Afghanistan and even Iraq. Although, these episodes were not a function of Trump's presidency, yet history repeats itself. This proverbial historical truth should be piercing Trump's swashbuckling leadership. A few international observers suggest that he may be turning to India for brokering a ceasefire. Trump has riled New Delhi with his rhetoric and unsubstantiated repeated claims on his mediation on India-Pakistan war that lasted for about 48 hours in 2025. However, he maintains that Prime Minister Modi is his close friend.

Some other notable leaders like Finland's President Alexander Stubb have urged India to give a hand citing New Delhi's diplomatic outreach and relations with both Iran and the US/Israel. In an interview with Bloomberg, Stubb said that global efforts should focus on halting hostilities. He added, "We need a ceasefire... I am wondering if India can actually get involved. We saw Foreign Minister Jaishankar call for a ceasefire to calm things down".

Some of us have been urging Prime Minister Modi to give a hand in ending the war in Ukraine. But since there are many actors in the Ukrainian drama, it may have been a tall order for Modi to deal with them. But in Iran, there are only three countries at war, notwithstanding the reports about China and Russia actively helping Iran. It may therefore be easier for Modi to mediate.

It is worth recalling India's successful mediation in the Korean War (1950-53). This experience showcases India's ability to contribute to international conflict resolution

and diplomacy. India can leverage its neutral stance and diplomatic relationship. In Korean War, as a part of armistice talks, India chaired the Neutral-Nations Repatriation

UN, BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), even Quad to advocate for diplomacy and dialogue. Prime Minister Modi has already spoken

and supporters. There is a theory emanating from the US that Trump went to Iran to divert the attention on Epstein files and from criticisms, court cases including the attempt

It is worth recalling India's successful mediation in the Korean War (1950-53). This experience showcases India's ability to contribute to international conflict resolution and diplomacy. India can leverage its neutral stance and diplomatic relationship. In Korean War, as a part of armistice talks, India chaired the Neutral-Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC) overseeing the exchange of prisoners of war. India's diplomatic efforts helped bring the US, China and North Korea to the negotiating table. New Delhi's neutral position and relations with both sides facilitated communication and confidence-building. Admittedly, the Korean War in reference took place 75 years ago. But the logic and logistics of war and the human proclivities of actors involved remain just the same. So, the Korean experience could inform India's approach to mediating the Iran conflict in several ways. India can offer itself as a neutral platform for talks, just as it did in Korea. India's relationships with all three warring parties can help build trust and facilitate communication. India can explore creative diplomatic frameworks, like the NNRC model to address specific issues. India can engage with international partners like EU and Gulf countries to build a consensus. New Delhi can propose humanitarian aid and support for affected civilians, demonstrating India's commitment to regional stability. It can explore economic cooperation and investment opportunities to encourage de-escalation and a ceasefire. India can use the multilateral platforms like the UN, BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), even Quad to advocate for diplomacy and dialogue.



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with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian expressing concern over the escalation of tensions and underscoring dialogue. New Delhi has also maintained communication with other regional leaders, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Israel. With some initial hesitation, New Delhi has made up with Iran which has allowed Indian cargo ships to sail through the Strait of Hormuz.

Experts believe India's neutrality and balanced stance on the Middle East make it an ideal mediator. India's relations with both Iran and Israel as well as its strong ties with Gulf countries, position it as a credible interlocutor. India could initiate diplomatic steps like hosting a summit in India to facilitate talks between Iran and the US/Israel. It can offer India's good offices to facilitate backchannel negotiations. New Delhi can share its experiences in conflict management with China and Pakistan although it still experiences sporadic tensions with both countries. At the moment, India's relations with Pakistan are stalled. But I am referring to India-Pakistan relations since 1947.

The scope of India's involvement as a mediator relies solely on Donald Trump who is whimsical at his best. But he is a politician and will certainly be wary of his constituency

for his impeachment. The continuation of war in Iran is exasperating his traditional supporters.

A middle-aged woman, who has won several beauty contests, a close supporter of Trump over 20 years, was heard saying on television that she did not know Trump anymore. Many of his supporters are anguished that a President who vowed not to get involved in military conflicts, claimed to have ended at least seven wars, pulled all stops to end the war in Ukraine, has himself launched a war.

Trump along with Netanyahu call the assault on Iran a pre-emptive strike. Trump's critics strongly argue that Iran had no plan whatsoever to attack either Israel or the United States. Trump was talked into the war by Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu who has been itching to invade Iran. This perspective was expressed by Joe Kent, the Director of the National Counterterrorism Centre, who resigned from his post on Tuesday (17 March) in protest against the military strikes in Iran.

As things are hotting up for Trump at home, he may be inclined to take any help to get out of the Iran imbroglio. New Delhi has an opportunity to step in. ---INFA

Heeding the Call of Forests for Ecological Balance

LALIT GARGG

The International Day of Forests, observed every year on 21 March, is not merely a symbolic celebration; it is a profound reminder of a serious challenge confronting human civilization. Declared by the United Nations in 2012, this day aims to inspire global awareness about the significance of forests, encourage collective efforts for their conservation, and promote a harmonious coexistence with nature. In an era when the Earth is grappling with unprecedented environmental crises, the relevance of this observance has grown even more urgent. The 2026 theme, "Forests and Food," clearly emphasizes that forests are not just green cover but foundational pillars of global food security.

Today, environmental imbalance has reached alarming levels. Climate change has triggered rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, droughts, floods, and an increasing frequency of natural disasters, placing human life under severe threat. In such circumstances, forests emerge as a vital natural system that plays a central role in maintaining the Earth's equilibrium. They absorb carbon dioxide, thereby helping to mitigate global warming, regulate

the water cycle, and prevent soil erosion. Despite this, the irony remains that human beings, driven by short-term needs and blind economic ambition, continue to exploit forests indiscriminately. This is why initiatives like Van Mahotsav and similar awareness campaigns are no longer mere formalities—they have become essential instruments of widespread social awakening.

The importance of forests extends far beyond ecological balance; they are deeply intertwined with economic and social life as well. The emerging theme of "Forests and Economy" in 2026 highlights the reality that forests are fundamental to sustainable economic development. Millions of people around the world depend directly on forests for their livelihoods. Minor forest produce such as medicinal plants, resins, gums, honey, and bamboo not only strengthen rural economies but also contribute significantly to international trade. Additionally, eco-tourism has opened new avenues for employment and income generation. In this way, forests present themselves as a unique economic resource capable of balancing development with conservation.

The social and cultural significance of forests is equally profound. For indigenous and tribal communities, forests are an inseparable part of life. Their traditions, beliefs, and

entire way of living are deeply rooted in forest ecosystems. For them, forests are not merely resources but the very foundation of existence. Therefore, forest conservation is not only an environmental concern but also a matter of social justice and cultural preservation. Observances like Van Mahotsav bring together diverse sections of society and reinforce the understanding that protecting forests is not solely the responsibility of governments—it is a shared moral obligation of every individual.

In the context of India, the importance of forests becomes even more expansive and multidimensional. Here, forests are not just natural assets but symbols of cultural and spiritual consciousness. In Indian tradition, trees are revered as sacred entities. Species such as Peepal, Banyan, and Neem are not merely biological organisms but are worshipped as life-sustaining forces. India's rich biodiversity is heavily dependent on forests, and its conservation is essential for the nation's ecological security. Forests play a crucial role in regulating the climate, controlling rainfall patterns, and ensuring the stability of agricultural production.

Another significant aspect of forests in India is their role as the backbone of rural and tribal life. Millions depend on forests for food, fuel, fodder, and medicinal needs. Moreover,

forests are critical for water conservation, helping sustain rivers and other water sources. At a time when water scarcity is intensifying across many regions of the country, the importance of forest conservation becomes even more evident. Without forests, the survival of natural water systems—and consequently human life—would be at serious risk.

In recent years, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, several noteworthy initiatives have been undertaken to promote forest conservation and green development. Programs such as the Green India Mission have led to large-scale afforestation efforts aimed at expanding forest cover and restoring ecological balance. The Namami Gange project has focused on plantation drives along riverbanks to support water conservation and reduce pollution. Additionally, the effective utilization of the CAMPA fund has accelerated forest restoration and conservation activities. In urban areas, innovative approaches like the Miyawaki method are being encouraged to develop dense forests even in limited spaces. These initiatives reflect a growing commitment to integrating environmental sustainability with developmental goals.

Such policy measures demonstrate that it is indeed possible to harmonize economic

growth with ecological preservation, provided there is a clear vision and determined effort. However, it is equally important to enhance public participation in these initiatives. Forest conservation cannot succeed through government policies alone; it requires active involvement and awareness at the societal level. Only when people recognize forests as integral to their own survival will meaningful and lasting change be possible.

Ultimately, the International Day of Forests and celebrations like Van Mahotsav convey a powerful message: maintaining harmony with nature is the foundation of human sustainability. It is imperative that we move beyond viewing forests merely as exploitable resources and begin to see them as an essential part of our existence. Without this shift in perspective, addressing environmental crises will remain an elusive goal.

If we are truly committed to securing our future, we must prioritize the protection and restoration of forests. This is not just an environmental necessity but a moral and existential imperative. The real essence of the International Day of Forests lies in awakening this consciousness—a call to listen to the silent yet urgent appeal of forests, and to act before it is too late.