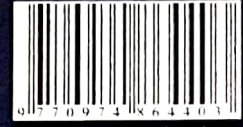


POWER SHIFT IN PATNA RAPPER AS NEPAL'S REDEEMER MOJTABA KHAMENEI UP CLOSE  
RESISTANCE CINEMA FROM IRAN MOHAMMED HANIF'S PAKISTAN MASTERS OF THE GAME

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## BRAVING THE BAD NEW WORLD

NATIONAL INTEREST GUIDES MODI AS HE NAVIGATES THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT AND THE OIL CRISIS

+ LESSONS FROM THE WAR BY BRAHMA CHELLANEY



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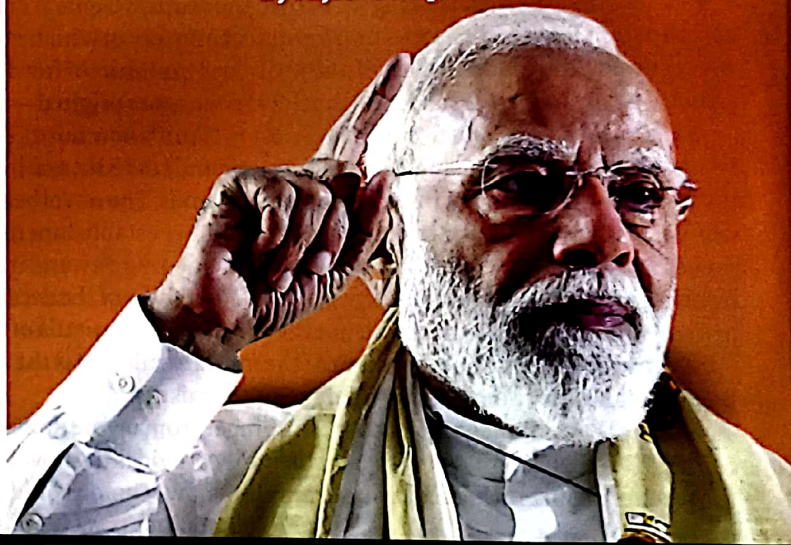
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## OPEN MAIL

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

For nearly half-a-century, the Islamic Republic built its regional power not through conventional might but through a web of militias and movements stretching from the Levant to the Gulf ('The Axis of Resistance Has Broken', by Jason Burke, March 16, 2026). This so-called "axis of resistance" allowed Tehran to claim ideological leadership over the Shia while keeping the battlefield at a distance from its own territory. Recent events suggest that this model has reached its limits. Groups that were once portrayed as parts of a single strategic design have acted cautiously, often guided more by their own local compulsions than by Tehran's larger ambitions. A network built for deterrence looks far less formidable when its centre itself comes under direct attack. None of this means Iran's influence has vanished. Structures created over decades rarely collapse overnight. But the mystique surrounding this axis has eroded. What once appeared to be a disciplined geopolitical project now seems increasingly like a loose collection of actors bound by circumstance rather than a chain of command.



Shikhar Kapoor

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**RETURN OF PARTNERS**

The Gaza war damaged Israel's relations with many Arab countries ('The Siren and the Bait', by Anat Bernstein-Reich, March 16, 2026). Public anger across the region made cooperation politically risky. But West Asian politics is often shaped more by security fears than by sentiment. Iran's attacks and influence across the Gulf have reminded several Arab governments where their bigger worries lie. For many of them, Iran still feels like the more immediate threat. That reality is slowly pushing some Arab states back towards quiet engagement with Israel. The partnerships may not be loud or public yet, but they are returning. In this region, strategic interests tend to outlast political anger. The Gaza war may have shaken Israel's regional ties, but Iran's actions are helping restore

them. Security concerns are once again bringing unlikely partners back into the same conversation.

Biswajit Das

**INDIA NEEDS PEACE**

For India, the war in West Asia is not someone else's problem ('National Interest First', March 16, 2026). Too much is at stake. Much of India's oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz, and even a small disruption can push fuel prices up at home. Just as important, nearly one crore Indians live and work across the Middle East. Their safety, jobs and remittances matter to millions of families in India. A long war would put all of this under strain. That is why Delhi cannot afford to watch the conflict from a distance. It needs calm in the region, and it needs it quickly. Diplomacy, pressure for de-escalation and constant engagement are not optional. For India, the sooner

the fighting stops, the better. A prolonged conflict will only deepen uncertainty. And uncertainty is the last thing India needs right now.

KT Gopalakrishnan

**POWER OF FRIENDSHIP**

For many millennial and Gen Z women, female friendships are no longer secondary to romantic relationships ('The Sisterhood of Soulmates', by Saumyaa Vohra, March 16, 2026). They are often the most dependable bonds. Friends offer emotional support, honest advice and a sense of belonging that many women feel is missing elsewhere. Many women also feel tired of carrying the emotional load in relationships. With friends, the support often feels more equal. Female friendships today are not casual connections. They are chosen support systems that many women value deeply.

Sanjana Bhasin