

## NAMO BHARAT DIALOGUES

### The Indian Futures

In collaboration with Dr. Ambedkar International Centre

## “A New West Asia Implications for India and the World”

Date: Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2026

Session Commencement: 5:30 PM

Venue: Nalanda Auditorium, Ambedkar International Centre

#### Panel of Speakers

- **AMB Javed Ashraf:** Chairman, India Trade Promotion Organisation and former Ambassador to France and High Commission in Singapore
- **Shri Narendra Taneja:** Chairman, Independent Energy Policy Institute
- **Dr. Syed Mubin Zehra:** Associate Professor, Department of History, ARSD College, University of Delhi
- **Dr. Manish Dabhade:** Founder, The Indian Futures and Associate Professor of Diplomacy, School of International Studies, JNU

Dr. Dabhade opened by contextualizing the shifting dynamics of West Asia within a broader global framework. He pointed to Prime Minister Modi's recent European visit as reflective of India's search for strategic alternatives amid regional turbulence, emphasizing that realism and statecraft are indispensable to ensuring security. He also highlighted the emerging multipolarity in West Asian supply chains and its cascading effects on India, situating the long-term energy debate within the intersecting pressures of climate change, reactive alternatives, and new power configurations.

Dr. Javed Ashraf offered a historical sweep, tracing West Asia's identity as the cradle of three Abrahamic religions and a culturally unified region before the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War. The post-Ottoman rearrangement shaped by colonial consolidation, the rise of Zionism, the discovery of oil, and the unresolved question of Palestinian statehood laid the foundations for the region's fractured present. He traced the post-colonial arc through Nasser and Nehru's Non-Aligned Movement in the 1950s, the rise of Saddam Hussein and the Iran Contra affair in the 1980s, the Gulf War of 2003, and the Arab Spring of 2010, each episode fundamentally reorienting regional alignments. He noted that Gulf states, grappling with internal tribal tensions and asymmetrical power, have increasingly sought global relevance through economic diversification away from oil, with the UAE leading this transition. On the ongoing Iran-Israel-USA conflict, Dr. Ashraf assessed that war can only conclude either on a battlefield which he considered unlikely or at the negotiating table. He flagged America's rising interest rates as a potential trigger for global inflationary pressures, while noting that Iran's resilience comes at significant internal cost, compounded by the death of its Supreme Leader. For Israel, the war has substantially damaged its international standing and rendered the vision of a Greater Israeli region increasingly untenable. A resumption of kinetic conflict, he warned, could produce economic consequences graver than the COVID-19 pandemic. For India, he identified a broad spectrum of interests geopolitical, labour, energy, and diasporic and underscored the evolution of Indian diplomacy toward techno-economic and nationally-driven objectives, including the strategic importance of the India-Iran corridor as an access route to Central Asia and the Gulf.

Mr. Narendra Taneja anchored his remarks in the imperatives of energy security. He argued that fossil fuels still constitute roughly 80% of the global energy economy. He cautioned that the green energy push advanced under

the Biden administration may partly serve as strategic misdirection. Over the next two decades, India will require significantly greater oil and gas, making West Asia with its low production costs and a maritime distance of only four to five days, the most viable source. He recommended that India seek equity stakes in Saudi Arabian oil fields and establish formal security arrangements with the UAE. He also called for the adoption of West Asia's advanced research, logistics, and energy management practices in Indian markets, and urged the formulation of a robust energy diplomacy doctrine to fill the vacuum left by declining singular reliance on the United States.

Dr. Zehra contributed three analytical threads: historical and social ties, India's role through a historical lens, and the gender dimension. She traced Indo-West Asian connections back to the Meluha-Mesopotamia civilizational exchange, noting shared colonial resistance as a modern binding force, while highlighting the continued relevance of Sufi traditions across both regions, including among younger generations. On gender, she argued that women despite their active participation in events like the Jasmine Revolution and their disproportionate suffering in conflict zones remain at the political periphery, rendered invisible by patriarchal structures. She noted Iran's regression from a relatively progressive society with access to higher education for women toward enforced state morality. She also raised the destructive impact of the Arabization of Islam on other Islamic traditions, and drew attention to the devastating loss of cultural heritage sites across the region, citing museum lootings as emblematic of an irreplaceable erosion of human civilizational memory.

The session concluded a question-answer engagement. With West Asia emerging as a central axis of contemporary geopolitics, the speakers agreed that a transformed region demands, in equal measure, a transformed Indian foreign policy imagination.

