

Delhi Forum for Strategic Studies 2026 India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy' under scrutiny



(L-R) Former External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid, Lt Gen Kamal Davar, Montek Ahluwalia (an Indian economist and former Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of India) and Bharat Karnad (an emeritus professor in National Security Studies at the Centre for Policy Research, Delhi and a national security expert).

The DFSS January 2026 conclave critically examined the erosion of India's strategic influence in its neighbourhood, concluded that goodwill based diplomacy must give way to a recalibrated mix of hard power, technology and youth centric engagement. Experts warned that terrorism, emerging warfare technologies, foreign influence and doctrinal rigidity demanded urgent policy renewal if India was to reclaim strategic heft in South Asia.

The Delhi Forum for Strategic Studies (DFSS), under the leadership of Lt Gen Kamal Davar, held its annual January conclave on 17 January 2026, at New Delhi. The theme, "India's Neighbourhood and the Evolving Security Paradigm," was highly relevant given the current flux, friction and foreign intrusion shaping India's regional environment, making the discussions timely and impactful.

During a concise 2.5 hour session, the forum critically assessed whether India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy had adapted to changing geopolitical realities. The consensus was clear: goodwill alone no longer guaranteed influence

in India's immediate strategic periphery, underscoring the need for strategic recalibration.

The conclave assembled a diverse group of strategic thinkers, including former ministers, diplomats, senior military commanders and regional experts. The forum enabled candid discussions, with notable attendees

Delhi Forum for Strategic Studies			
2026: India's Neighbourhood and Evolving Security Paradigm			
17 Jan 2026			
Detailed Programme			
TIME	EVENT	SPEAKER	Remarks
9.30 am - 10.00 am	Registration and Tea	-	Pergola Terrace, IIC
10.00 am - 10.15 am	Introductory Remarks	Lt. Gen. Kamal Davar (Retd), President, DFFSS	
10.15 am - 10.45 am	Terrorism in South Asia - Emerging Dynamics	Dr Ajay Sahni, Executive Director, Institute for Conflict Management	
10.45 am to 11.15 am	Employment of UAVs, AI, and Quantum Computing in Future Wars	Lt. Gen. RS Pannu (Retd), Former GOC 14 Corps	
11.15 am - 11.30 pm	Tea	-	Pergola Terrace, IIC
11.30 am - 12.00 pm	Resetting India-Nepal Ties	Maj. Gen. Ashok Mehta (Retd), Defence and Strategic Analyst	
12.00 pm - 12.30 pm	Revisiting India's Nuclear Doctrine	Mr. Bharat Karnad, Strategic Analyst	
12.30 pm - 13.00 pm	Question Answer Session	To be moderated by Lt. Gen. Kamal Davar, President DFFSS	
13.00 pm - 13.30 pm	Closing Address	Mr. Manish Tewari, MP	
13.30 pm	Lunch	-	Pergola Terrace, IIC