



India foiled Pak attempts to target religious places

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

It was "new low even for Pakistan" as it targeted places of worship and sent 300 to 400 drones in 36 locations attacking Indian military installations on Thursday. The failed attempt spanned from Leh to Sir Creek and sending of drones was violation of Indian airspace, Government said here on Friday.

Making these assertions here, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said targeting places of worship was with a particular design. He also said Pakistan's farcical denial of its attempts to target installations in India is another example of its duplicity. Addressing the media, he said Pakistan's attack on places of worship and its "preposterous" attempts to put the blame on Indian armed forces is reflective of Islamabad's evil design and efforts to deceive and mislead the world.

Citing Pakistan's attack on a gurdwara in Amritsar and its subsequent attempt to blame it on Indian armed forces, Misri said Islamabad's thinking that India would attack its own cities is the kind of "deranged fantasy" that only the Pakistani state can come up with.

The foreign secretary blasted Pakistan's provocative and escalatory actions to try and target Indian cities and civilian infrastructure using drones on Thursday night.

Misri especially hit out at Pakistan for its "blatantly farcical denial" of these attacks saying it is yet another example of Islamabad's duplicity and the "new depths" that it is plugging in to its "quest for disinformation". Misri was severely critical of Pakistan for targeting religious places with an aim to give a communal colour to the current situation, and pointed to an incident of Pakistan attacking a gurdwara in Poonch and another religious place in Amritsar. "Instead of owning up to these attacks, Pakistan made the preposterous and outrageous claim that it was the Indian armed forces and the Indian Air Force that was targeting cities like Amritsar and try-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi, Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi and IAF chief Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh, during a high-level meeting on the security situation in New Delhi

ing to put the blame on Pakistan," he said.

"This is nothing but a desperate attempt by Pakistan to disown its acts of aggression; but it is also true to its efforts to deceive and mislead the world. It will not succeed," Misri said. He said that "we would attack our own cities" is the kind of deranged fantasy that only the Pakistani state can come up with. Perhaps they do it because they are well versed in such action as their history would show, he said.

Misri described it as a "blatant lie" Pakistan's allegations of India targeting the Nankana Sahib Gurdwara using a drone. "This is again yet another blatant lie and part of Pakistan's disinformation campaign. As we saw in the Pahalgalam attack, Pakistan is again trying desperately to impart a communal hue to the situation with an intention to create discord," he said. "Again, we are not surprised. India's steadfast unity in itself is a challenge to Pakistan," he said. Misri said in view of the existing security scenario, the Kartarpur Sahib corridor has been suspended.

On India's strikes on Bahawalpur's

Markaz Subhan Allah - the nerve centre of Jaish-e-Mohammed linked to the killing of Daniel Pearl, a journalist with The Wall Street Journal, Misri said the terror outfit was "directly or indirectly" responsible for his death. "Bahawalpur is the headquarters of the Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist group that is proscribed by the UN. Its leader Masood Azhar, is a proscribed individual," he said, responding to a question. "You brought up the connection with the tragic death or killing of Daniel Pearl of The Wall Street Journal."

The JeM was in some way directly or indirectly responsible for the death of Daniel Pearl," he said. "But the real connection is through Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, the British Pakistani jihadi who was held in India but was finally released in 2000 and he was the person who lured Daniel Pearl to his...Murder," Misri said.

Addressing the media at the press briefing, Wing Commander Vyomika Singh said Pakistan conducted an unprovoked aerial assault on May 7 at approximately 8.30pm.

Continued on >> P2

Enemy drones lose sight in India

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Pakistan, for the second consecutive night, launched drone swarm attacks on multiple locations across several North Indian cities of Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan. At the time of going to press, the Indian air defence systems were able to successfully neutralise the threat.

According to ground reports, a suspected drone attack was also reported from Srinagar airport and in the holy city of Amritsar near the revered Golden Temple late Friday evening. Both these attacks were thwarted successfully.

The attack came a day after India thwarted attempts by the Pakistan military to hit Indian military installations and religious sites using drones and missiles. The sky was lit up in the Baramulla district as the Indian military shot down Pakistani drones. Blasts were heard and sirens sounded in the Jammu region and south Kashmir as many parts of the Union Territory plunged into darkness. In Srinagar, mosque loudspeakers were used to persuade locals to switch off their lights as a precautionary measure.

Officials said the drones were also engaged in Udhampur and Nagrota of Jammu and Punjab. Heavy cross-border shelling was underway along the International Border (IB) in Suchetgarh and Ramgarh sectors of Jammu and Samba districts.

From Srinagar and Jammu to Punjab's multiple districts and Jaisalmer and Jodhpur in Rajasthan, a vast stretch of the border areas plunged into darkness with public announcements made, urging people to switch off their lights as a precautionary measure. According to defence sources, "Drones have been sighted at 26 locations ranging from Baramulla in the North to Bhuj in the South, along both the International Border and the Line of Control with Pakistan. These include suspected armed drones posing potential threats to civilian and military targets".

The locations include Baramulla, Srinagar, Avantipora, Nagrota, Jammu, Ferozpur, Pathankot, Fazilka, Lalgarh

Jatta, Jaisalmer, Barmer, Bhuj, Kuarbet and Lakhi Nala", they added.

Sirens rang out in Pokaran, and a complete blackout was imposed in the region. The blackout in Jodhpur, originally scheduled to begin at midnight, was implemented immediately. Barmer, Sriganganagar, and Phalodi also went completely dark.

According to them, an armed drone targeted a civilian area in Ferozpur, resulting in severe injuries to members of a local family. The injured have been provided medical assistance, and the area has been sanitised by security forces.

Defence sources maintained the Indian

In Samba, a major infiltration bid was supported by the Pakistani Rangers. According to BSF, cover fire was provided to them from a nearby Pakistani Rangers post

Armed Forces are maintaining a high state of alert, and all such aerial threats are being tracked and engaged using counter-drone systems. The situation is under close and constant watch, and prompt action is being taken wherever necessary.

Earlier, the alert troops of the Border Security Force (BSF) foiled a major infiltration attempt along the International Border in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district in the early hours of Friday, killing seven heavily armed terrorists.

The beleaguered Pakistan army had also fired 300-400 drones on Thursday across several Indian cities. The attacks were intercepted by India's air defence systems, including the S-400 missile defence system, preventing significant damage. "On the night of May 7 and 8, the Pakistan army violated Indian airspace several times over the entire western border to target military infrastructure. Not only this, the Pakistani army also fired heavy-calibre weapons along the Line of Control. Around 300 to 400 drones were used to attempt infiltration

at 36 locations," said the Government.

"The possible purpose of such large-scale aerial intrusions was to test air defence systems and collect intelligence. Forensic investigation of the wreckage of the drones is being done. Initial reports suggest that they are Turkish Asisguard Songar drones..." the Government added.

In Jammu, the drone attack was launched by the Pakistan army around 8.00 p.m. Jammu city plunged into darkness after blasts were heard and sirens sounded in the region.

"Intermittent sounds of blasts, probably heavy artillery, can now be heard from where I am," Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said in a post on X. He also posted a picture of the city in darkness, captioning the post as, "Blackout in Jammu now. Sirens can be heard across the city." "It's my earnest appeal to everyone in & around Jammu please stay off the streets, stay at home or at the nearest place you can comfortably stay at for the next few hours. Ignore rumours, don't spread unsubstantiated or unverified stories & we will get through this together," the Chief Minister added.

In Samba, the major infiltration bid was supported by the Pakistani Rangers. According to BSF, adequate cover fire was provided to the group of terrorists from a nearby Dhandhar post of the Pakistani Rangers. The suspicious movement of a heavily armed group of infiltrators was caught on camera with the help of thermal imagers by the BSF troops around 11.00 p.m. near the Samba border.

Confirming the same, the BSF spokesman of the Jammu frontier posted on X, "At around 2300 hours on 8 May 2025, BSF foiled a major infiltration bid at the International Boundary in Samba district, J&K".

A video also showed BSF troops causing extensive damage to the Pakistani post Dhandhar while killing at least seven terrorists to foil a major infiltration bid.

Tension between the two neighbours soared after the Indian Armed Forces on Wednesday conducted precision strikes targeting terror launchpads in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, PoK, in response to the April 22 attack.

The Bystander



Don't bring women Army officers' morale down: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court (SC) on Friday asked the Centre not to release from service Short Service Commission (SSC) women Army officers challenging the denial of Permanent Commission to them asking not to "bring their morale down" in "the prevailing situation". A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh which posted a batch of pleas filed by 69 officers for hearing in August, said they should not be released till the next hearing.

"In the prevailing situation let's not bring their morale down. They are brilliant officers, you can use their services somewhere else. This is not the time that they be asked to roam around in the Supreme Court. They have a better place to be and serve the country," Justice Kant said. Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre, said it was an administrative decision based on a policy to keep the armed forces young.

She urged the SC not to grant any stay on their release and said the Indian Army needed young officers and every year only 250 personnel were granted permanent commission. Senior advocate Maneka Guruswamy, appearing for Colonel Geeta Sharma, referred to the case of Colonel Sofia Qureshi, one of the two women officers who had briefed the media on the Operation Sindoor on May 7 and May 8. Guruswamy said Colonel Qureshi had to approach this court for a similar relief related to permanent commission and now she has made the

country proud. The bench without commenting much on the submission said the case before the top court was purely a legal one, having nothing to do with the achievements of the officers. In its February 17, 2020, the top court said absolute exclusion of women from all

Senior advocate Maneka Guruswamy referred to the case of Colonel Sofia Qureshi, one of the two women officers who briefed the media on the Operation Sindoor

positions, except staff assignments, in the Army was indefensible and their blanket non-consideration for command appointments without any justification couldn't be sustained in law.

The SC, which allowed permanent commission to women officers in the Army, said an absolute prohibition of women SSC officers to obtain anything but staff appointments evidently did not fulfil the purpose of granting permanent commission as a means of career advancement in the Army.

The top court also referred to the distinctions achieved by women officers, and put out an example of Col Sofia Qureshi's achievements.

Since the 2020 verdict, the top court has passed several orders on the issue of permanent commission to women officers in Armed Forces and similar orders was passed in the case of Navy, Indian Air Force and Coast Guard.

Airport closures extended

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Centre on Friday extended the closure of 24 airports in northern and western parts of the country until May 15 leading to major disruptions in air travel. Airports including Chandigarh, Srinagar, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Bhuntar, Kishenghar, Patiala, Shimla, Dharamsala, Bathinda, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Leh, Bikaner, Pathankot, Jammu, Jamnagar, Porbander and Bhuj are among others, which have been temporarily closed for civilian flights.

Several airlines have also issued travel advisories for passengers and asked for them to remain updated on airport closures and enhanced security protocols. Air India in a post on X on Friday stated, "Following a notification from aviation authorities on continued closure of multiple airports in India, Air India flights to and from the following stations — Jammu, Srinagar, Leh, Jodhpur, Amritsar, Chandigarh, Bhuj, Jamnagar and Rajkot — are being cancelled till 0529 hrs IST on 15 May, pending further updates."

Air India also said customers holding valid tickets for travel during this period will be offered a one-time waiver on rescheduling charges or a full refund for cancellations.

In a post on X, IndiGo said in accordance with the latest directives from the relevant authorities, all flights to and from 10 destinations will remain cancelled until 0529 hours on May 15 due to temporary airport closures.

Continued on >> P2

Capital's siren Abhyaas

VAISHNAVI MISHRA ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government's Directorate of Civil Defence on Friday conducted testing of an air raid siren in the national Capital amid rising tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad.

The testing of the siren followed the Delhi Government's direction that all 11 districts of the Capital need to deploy air raid sirens, including manual and electrical, at important and critical locations and conduct trials.

The drill began at 3 pm and sirens were sounded at least twice for 15-20 minutes each. However, it was noticed by people that the sound of the first round of siren testing was low and some did not even notice it. People were also instructed to take shelter, preferably in the basement of buildings.

Officials said that this was a drill to

keep everything prepared in case of an untoward incident. "Accordingly, it is requested that adequate publicity may be made through social and electronic media so that the general public are advised to stay calm and not to panic during the said exercise," the order signed by district magistrate (Central) G. Sudhakar reads.

The Station House Officer (SHO) in Daryaganj also made public announcements on Friday morning saying: "Today, at 3 pm, there will be checking of air raid sirens at PWD HQ. The sirens will be heard at a radius of 4 km. Do not panic since this is only checking. Later on, whenever we use this, it would be a warning sign. But not today"

Delhi police teams were deployed to check the preparedness of the staff as well as equipment, an officer said.

Continued on >> P2



Delhi PWD Minister Parvesh Verma during the testing of an air raid siren installed atop the PWD building at ITO in New Delhi

1971 war memoirs

Jammu: Same theatre, new technology

ANIL ANAND ■ Jammu

As the sky lit the border city of Jammu, my home town, with Pakistani drones and other projectiles making futile bids to find targets in the City of Temples, it became reminiscent of the theatre of war one witnessed during my childhood and teens in 1965 and 1971. The only difference was the technology on display.

Circa 1965 — Pakistan thrust a war on India, my father was posted in hilly town of Batote, a safer place where I was studying in fifth class. But soon we were in Jammu on the first available opportunity as, perhaps, my father wanted all of us to see the remnants of armed conflict and become part of the social milieu engaged in relief work. He took us on a pilgrimage to a bombing site outside the then small Jammu airport followed by a visit to Srinagar (Kashmir) where a locality



Batmaloo, near the house of my maternal uncles, had been burnt to flush out the Pakistani infiltrators. The local Kashmiris

had played an important role in informing about the infiltrators under Operation Gibraltar. Back to Jammu: Our first task was to get familiar with the black-outs and related drills followed by getting in touch, there were hardly any phones those days, with relatives and friends to know their well-being. It was not an easy task as whenever we ventured out sirens went full-steam warning of air-raids. Nevertheless, soon we got accustomed to this culture and how to tuck ourselves to safe zones. Then followed the Herculean effort to find out the extent damage caused either by the air raids or the situation in the nearby borders.

The only source of news was the All India Radio- Radio Kashmir, Jammu as it was known then in Jammu and Kashmir. However, since the news bulletins were limited, most of the time it was the rumour mill at work.

Continued on >> P2

Operation Sindoor: Pakistan in a quandary

GEN ASHOK KUMAR MEHTA ■ New Delhi

Thursday was a long night; the night of the Generals. Pakistan unleashed its tentative response to India's lethal precision strikes on 7 May against nine terrorist infrastructure targets across the Line of Control (LoC) and the International Border (IB) in the heart of Punjab, including the infamous dens of Muridke and Bahawalpur. The strikes caused immense hurt and pain to the military state as India escalated the intensity of punishment through Operation Sindoor, compared to the earlier Uri and Balakot reprisals.

Pakistan's retaliation was targeting 36 military and aviation installations stretching from Leh to Sir Creek with 400 Turkish drones designed to test India's layered air defence systems. These were accompanied by intense cross border shelling that lit up the blackouts in Jammu and Kashmir (J and

K) notably Srinagar, Pathankot and Jammu. While India succeeded in blunting the drone strikes, several civilian and military casualties occurred. Rawalpindi had a similar futile attempt but on a lower scale on Wednesday night too.

In his interview to the BBC Pakistan Defence Minister Khwaja Asif made a farcical denial of the drone attacks demonstrating Pakistan's perfection in obfuscation and disinformation that is floating like confetti during Christmas. Indian media is not lagging behind this. As in the Middle East, drones and precision guided missiles are primary weapons of a stand-off war. The Indian Air Force is in the lead along with missile firing units. Not crossing the LoC or the IB does not lower or enhance the legitimacy of offensive strikes but reduces risks of attrition. Pakistan stonewalling acquisitions of drone strikes is crafted to show that its response to Operation Sindoor is still in the making and that it will be delivered at a time and place of its choosing.

India has maintained its domination of the escalation matrix. It is Pakistan which has to make the next move. Pakistan has pledged a 'one notch up' retribution. Delhi has changed the terms of escalation post Balakot and served Islamabad with a warning that any misadventure will have consequences. This was not the case during Balakot, where India had announced an end of its operations after the initial strikes. A Pakistani 'one notch up' response threatens to attract an Indian counterstrike. So here is the quandary: "Pakistan has to escalate to de-escalate risking an Indian riposte". Delhi has responded to Rawalpindi's testing of air defence systems with caution but selectively degraded adversary's air defences.

Asif told the BBC we did not respond as we did not wish to reveal our air defence locations. This is funny. While avenging Operation Sindoor the General will have to think out of the box in targeting to vindicate Pakistan military's honour and image. The ball is in Rawalpindi's court.

Punjab extends farishtey scheme for victims of war, terrorism

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA | Chandigarh

People affected by war and terrorism will now be included under Punjab's 'farishtey' scheme, which was originally aimed at providing free treatment to accident victims.

A decision to this effect was taken at the cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday.

A spokesperson of the Chief Minister's Office said coverage under the farishtey scheme 2024 has been expanded to provide immediate, hassle-free medical treatment to victims of war and terrorist activities, at government and empanelled private hospitals in the state.

The move is aimed at lowering the mortality and morbidity rates resulting from injuries sustained during war and terrorist activities, and to encourage common people to come forward and help such individuals get timely treatment, he said.

Under the original farishtey scheme, any person who voluntarily rescues accident victims and help save their lives will be considered a 'farishta' (angel) and conferred with a commendation certificate and Rs 2,000 cash prize.

The scheme applies to all victims of road accidents in Punjab and provides comprehensive treatment to accident victims, without a cap on the cost.

The cabinet has also approved a pilot project to promote kharif maize in three



Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann delivers a video message after a cabinet meeting, in view of the ongoing military conflict between India and Pakistan

regions, in order to push for crop diversification in the state. The project will be launched in three regions -- Gurdaspur-Pathankot, Bathinda and Jalandhar-Kapurthala -- spread over 12,000 hectares. The government will evolve a foolproof mechanism to ensure marketing of kharif maize to benefit the state's farmers, the spokesperson said.

"The government has decided to buy maize crop at the minimum support

price," he said.

In another decision aimed at preserving the rich Punjabi culture, the cabinet gave its consent to bring an ordinance to start bullock cart races in the state. The game was once an integral part of Punjabi culture. A special clause in the ordinance lays emphasis on ensuring that no bulls are tortured during the race.

The other decisions taken included cover under the Old Pension Scheme for

2,053 state government employees whose joining process started before January 1, 2004, and the installation of high-end 5G-enabled V-Kavach jammers for better security in 13 high-security jails.

These jammers have already been successfully tested and they will be installed in all the jails in the state gradually, the spokesperson said.

The cabinet also approved the transfer of 135 acres of the housing department's land at Faridkot to the industries department.

The land, which originally belonged to a cooperative sugar mill and was transferred to the housing department, has huge potential for industrial use and hence will be developed into an industrial zone, he said.

The creation of a 'Rangla Punjab Fund' was approved in order to give Non-Resident Indians (NRI) a stake in the state's development. NRIs or resident Indians can contribute to this fund that would give a fillip to the state's growth.

Managed by the finance department, the Rangla Punjab Fund will be used to accelerate growth in education, health, industry and other sectors.

The cabinet also gave green signal to set up a 'centre of excellence for mining' at Indian Institute of Technology, Ropar.

The centre of excellence will assess the area covered under mining and the extent of exploitation being done in the sector.

"48 anti-nationals arrested in Assam for treachery," says CM Himanta

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA | Guwahati

Three more persons have been apprehended in Assam on Friday for "defending Pakistan on Indian soil", following the Pahalgam terror attack, taking the total number of arrests to 48 so far, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The arrested are Arif Rehman and Abubin Meraz Uddin SK from Dhubri district and Nasim Uddin Laskar from Cachar, the chief minister posted on X.

"Update on crackdown against traitors for defending Pakistan on Indian soil. So far 48 anti-nationals have been arrested for their treachery," he said.

The chief minister had earlier this week said at a press conference here that the National Security Act (NSA) will be clamped on certain people arrested, but not on all. Some have already apologised and said that they will not do it again, he said. There will be categorisation of the arrested persons as some are habitual offenders, while some have done for publicity, Sarma said.

"There is another category with left leanings who have done it for political reasons. A committee will take the decision on whom NSA will be imposed and it is not going to be a political decision," he added. Earlier, opposition AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam was arrested on sedition charges for allegedly defending Pakistan and its complicity in the Pahalgam terror attack.

Sarma had also threatened to break the legs of those who raised the 'Pakistan zindabad' slogan in the aftermath of the Jammu and Kashmir terror attack.

Centre asks all states to give emergency procurement power to civil defence authorities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE | New Delhi

In view of an ongoing military conflict between India and Pakistan, the Centre has asked all states to give emergency procurement power to the heads of the civil defence authorities so that they can make the required purchases in case of an emergency situation.

In a communication to the chief secretaries of all states and Union territories, Director General of Fire Services, Civil Defence and Home Guards Vivek Srivastava said preparing the civil administration and adopting precautionary measures against hostile attacks in the states and Union territories are governed by the Civil Defence Act and Rules, 1968.

Citing the current hostile-attack scenario, the attention of the chief secretaries was drawn to section 11 of the Civil Defence Rules, 1968 that empowers the states to take certain measures deemed necessary for the protection of people and properties from injury or damage or for ensuring the due maintenance of vital services in the event of a hostile attack.

The communication said the funds of the local authority shall be applicable to the payment of the charges and expenses incidental to such compliance, and priority shall be given to such compliance over all other duties and obligations of the local authority.

"I shall be grateful if section 11 of the CD (Civil Defence) Rules, 1968, can be

invoked and necessary emergency procurement powers to the director civil defence of your state/UT may be granted so that efficient implementation of the necessary precautionary measures can be implemented," the communication said.

There has been a rising military conflict between the two neighbouring countries following India's strikes on multiple locations in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) on Wednesday and Pakistan's attempts to hit Indian military sites on Thursday, which were thwarted by the Indian armed forces.

The Indian strikes were carried out in the wake of the April 22 terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed.

Karnataka cabinet defers caste census discussion again

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA | Bengaluru

The Karnataka cabinet on Friday decided to take up the caste census report in the next meeting, state Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil said.

The Minister stated that some ministers had not yet given their opinion as requested by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

"It was decided in the cabinet meeting today that the Social and Educational Survey Report will be discussed in the next cabinet meeting," Patil briefed reporters.

He said some ministers had provided their opinion in writing, while others were yet to submit their viewpoints on the Social

and Educational Survey Report, also known as the caste census.

This is the third time the discussion has been deferred.

After being tabled on April 11 before the cabinet, it was initially scheduled for discussion on April 17. However, the cabinet meeting remained inconclusive, and the discussion was postponed to May 2.

On May 9, no decision was taken, and the matter was again deferred.

Various communities, including the dominant Vokkaliga and Lingayats, had opposed the survey, warning the government of serious consequences. They were upset, alleging that the entire survey was faulty.

The cabinet also decided to implement the Greater Bengaluru Act from May 15, the Minister said.

The bill was passed during the budget session earlier this year.

The Act proposes the decentralisation of governance in Bengaluru through multiple municipal corporations.

It aims to establish a maximum of 10 city corporations to decentralise municipal administration.

The Act suggests the founding of the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), in which the Chief Minister will be the ex-officio chairperson, the Minister in charge of Bengaluru will be the vice-chairperson, and the Chief Commissioner of the

PM Modi conveys felicitations to Pope from people of India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday conveyed felicitations and best wishes from the people of India to Pope Leo XIV, and said India remains committed to continued dialogue and engagement with the Holy See to further shared values.

Robert Prevost was elected on Thursday as the first pope from the United States in the history of the Catholic Church. Prevost, a 69-year-old member of the Augustinian religious order, took the

name Leo XIV. "I convey sincere felicitations and best wishes from the people of India to His Holiness Pope Leo XIV."

His leadership of the Catholic Church comes at a moment of profound significance in advancing the ideals of peace, harmony, solidarity and service," Modi said in a social media post. India remains committed to continued dialogue and engagement with the Holy See to further our shared values, he said. The Holy See, also known as the Apostolic See or See of Rome, is the central governing body of the Catholic Church and Vatican City State.

Jammu: Same theatre, new

In the mean while our elders encouraged us to indulge in some social work. So, all our cousins got together and decided to raise funds which we did through celebrating some festival that came in between. We bought fruits, biscuits to distribute among injured soldiers admitted in the local hospital and civilians displaced from the border towns.

Still etched in memory is the horrific sight of a Sikh soldier writhing in pain with splinters all over his body. One quickly kept some fruit by his bed side and left.

1971 war came with different dimensions. As a new college entrant, one had to take care of one's grandmother, as my father was on a posting in Delhi, and shut-

tle between my paternal and maternal homes in the tense city.

No one was scared this time. Despite instructions, people would go to the rooftop to witness air-raids by Pak Saberjets which, invariably, were brought to the ground by IAF Migs in the combat. What followed was a round of applause from people.

The other take-away from this war was the decision of our college principal Dr S M Iqbal to keep the college open. We were asked to take care of people displaced from border villages and housed in classrooms. Organising blood donation camps and arranging and distributing food to them was the regular duty.

India foiled Pak attempts to target religious places

Despite the aggression, Pakistan chose not to close its civilian airspace, a move India said was a deliberate tactic to use commercial flights as shields against a potential counterstrike.

"Pakistan did not close its civilian airspace despite launching a failed, unprovoked drone and missile attack on Indian cities," said Wing Commander Singh. "They are using civil airliners as a shield, knowing fully well that their actions would elicit a swift air defence response from India."

Singh highlighted the dangers posed to both domestic and international flights operating in the vicinity of the International Border (IB) during the high-alert situation, particularly in the Punjab sector.

During the briefing, the Indian Air Force (IAF) displayed radar data showing active

civil aviation traffic over Pakistan, contrasting with India's immediate and complete closure of its own airspace in the affected regions.

On the drone attacks by Pakistan on Thursday night, she said "Our armed forces shot down many of these drones using both kinetic and non-kinetic means. One armed unmanned aerial vehicle was sent to strike the Bhatinda military station, but the attempt was foiled." She added that in retaliation, India deployed armed drones against four Pakistani air defence sites, successfully destroying one radar system.

The Government confirmed that Pakistani drones and missiles violated Indian airspace during the intervening night of May 8 and 9. In response, India activated its air defence network, includ-

ing S-400 Triumph systems, Barak-8 and Akash missiles, and DRDO's anti-drone technologies, to neutralise the threats, it was learnt.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, meanwhile, on Friday carried out a comprehensive review of the national security scenario with the top military leadership, a day after Pakistan's attempts to target Indian military installations were repelled. Every aspect of the evolving security situation was discussed in the meeting, it is learnt.

The meeting was attended by Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi, Air Chief Marshal A P Singh, Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi and Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh.

Home Minister Amit Shah reviewed the prevailing situation along India's border

with Pakistan and airports in the country amid the military conflict between the two countries, sources said.

The meeting came hours after the Border Security Force said it has foiled an infiltration bid from across the International Border in Jammu, killing at least seven terrorists and destroying a Pakistan Rangers post.

Apart from reviewing the security situation along the India-Pakistan border, Shah also took stock of the steps taken to strengthen security at airports across the country, the sources said.

Those who attended the meeting included Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, Director of Intelligence Bureau Tapan Deka, Directors General of the BSE, CISF and the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security.

Centre-run hospitals cancel leaves of staffes in Capital

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE | New Delhi

The Union Health Ministry and the Centre-run AIIMS, Safdarjung and Ram Manohar Lohia hospitals in the national capital have cancelled leaves of all its officers and staffers indefinitely and activated emergency protocols amid a military standoff between India and Pakistan.

The development came after Health Minister J P Nadda reviewed the preparedness of hospitals in the country on Friday and directed officials to ensure all medical emergency response systems are fully equipped and functional.

"In view of the impending situation, no leave of any kind, including station leave, is to be granted to any officer, except on medical grounds, till further orders. Further, the already sanctioned leave, if any, stands cancelled and the officers who are on leave are directed to resume their duties immediately. The controlling officers may instruct their officers/officials accordingly," the ministry order stated.

This was followed by similar orders from the AIIMS Trauma Centre, Ram Manohar Lohia and Safdarjung hospital administrations.

"In pursuance of the office order dated May 9, 2025, by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and in view of the impending situation and preparedness of the emergency response system, it has been decided that no leave of any kind,

including station leave, will be granted to any officers/officials regular or out-source except on medical grounds, till further orders," the AIIMS Trauma Centre order read.

"Further, leaves already sanctioned, if any, stands cancelled and the officers/officials who are on leave are directed to resume their duties immediately," it said.

The order referred to a mass casualty management mock drill held at the facility last week and said it was fully prepared to receive patients in case of any eventuality be it with burns, gunshot injuries and head, neck, spinal and chest injuries.

"We have already made arrangements for normal and ICU beds and our operation theatres are fully equipped to handle a large number of patients. If needed, doctors, nurses and paramedical staff can be shifted from the main AIIMS to the trauma centre," said Dr Rima Dada, the professor in charge of the media cell at AIIMS, Delhi.

The Safdarjung Hospital's Additional Medical Superintendent Dr Charu Bamba chaired a meeting with officials and directed them to stack up the hospital and its blood bank, and emergency facilities be primed with adequate manpower.

The meeting also decided that patients from the hospital's New Emergency Block may be shifted to the super-speciality block in case of any exigencies.

War is not solution to any issue, says AIMPLB

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE | New Delhi

In the wake of the India-Pakistan military conflict, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) has asserted that war is not a solution to any issue and that countries should resolve their matters through dialogue and diplomatic means.

The board has also said it will continue with its "Save Waqf Campaign" as usual but in light of the current situation, its public meetings and events are being postponed for the next week, until May 16. The AIMPLB made the assertions in a resolution passed at a special online meeting of its office-bearers on Thursday. The board expressed concern over the increasing tension on the India-Pakistan border.

"It (the AIMPLB) supports every necessary step taken for the defence and protection of the nation and its people and emphasises that in these critical times, the public, political parties, armed forces, and the government must come together to face these threats," a statement issued by the board said.

Noting that terrorism and the killing

of innocent civilians is a matter of grave concern, the AIMPLB said there is absolutely no place for terrorism in Islamic teachings, globally recognised principles and human values.

"Therefore, countries should resolve their matters through bilateral dialogues and discussions. It is also a fact that war is not a solution to any issue -- especially in the presence of nuclear weapons, India and Pakistan cannot afford a war," the statement issued by the board said.

Such a conflict could plunge the people of both countries into insurmountable difficulties and suffering and hence, all issues should be resolved through dialogue and other diplomatic means, it added. The AIMPLB will continue with its "Save Waqf Campaign" as usual, it said. However, in light of the current situation, its public meetings and events are being postponed for the next week, until May 16, the board added.

Indoor programmes, such as round-table meetings with fellow citizens, inter-faith dialogues, sermons in mosques, submission of memorandums via district magistrates and collectors, and press conferences, will continue as scheduled.

Capital's siren Abhyaas

Continued from >> P1

After the testing, Delhi PWD minister Parvesh Verma, who was present at the PWD building, said air raid sirens will be installed at multiple high-rise buildings across the national Capital. He said, "The work of installing sirens in Delhi has started. Sirens will be installed on all the high-rise buildings in Delhi. Its range is 8km. Starting tonight, 40-50 more sirens will be installed in high-rise buildings in Delhi. We will run it in case of any emergency. We can run it from a single command centre..." Officials said New Delhi district will conduct similar testing of air raid sirens at the NDMC Palika Kendra building in the evening between 6 pm and 7 pm, said an officer. The South West

district, meanwhile, has installed manual and electrical sirens at BPCL, Bijwasan, Vegas Mall Dwarka, Uttam Nagar police station, Dwarka Mor Metro station, India Gandhi Hospital in Dwarka Sector 10, Dwarka Sector 21 Metro station, and Najafgarh SDM office.

According to officials, the 11 district administrations in Delhi will conduct the trials at different timings in the evening and check the response from the departments concerned. Officials said the Delhi Government has decided to procure 500 sirens to be installed across the city and train 1,800 Aapda Mitras (friends for disaster management) through an agency suggested by the National Disaster Management Authority.

Airports closed till May 15

Continued from >> P1

"These precautionary measures have been instituted with your safety and security as our highest priority," the airline said. At Delhi's India Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), authorities stated that flight operations had been affected due to tightened security protocol. According to sources, over 160 flights to and from the IGIA were cancelled by various airlines on Friday.

"Delhi airport operations remain normal. However, due to evolving airspace conditions and heightened security measures, some flight schedules and security processing timings may be impacted," Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) said in a post on X on Friday.

DIAL operates IGIA, which is the country's largest and busiest airport. DIAL also advised passengers to be prepared for additional time at security checkpoints and cooperate with airline and security staff for smooth processing.

With security being stepped up at the airports, airlines have asked passengers to reach the airport three hours before departure of domestic flights in the wake of stepping up of checks and other security measures at the airports. "Delhi airport operations remain normal."

Mumbai airport operator MIAL, in a post on X said that in view of enhanced security measures, passengers may experience longer wait times at the airport.

"We recommend arriving well in advance to ensure a smooth travel experience," it added.

The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has earlier instructed all airlines and airports across the country to enhance security measures. "In view of the recent attack in Pahalgam and subsequent surcharged security scenario, it is necessary to enhance security measures at all the civil aviation installations like airports, airstrips, airfields, air force stations, helipads, flying schools, aviation training institutes... So that no untoward incident takes place in the country," BCAS said in an advisory on Thursday. As part of stepping up security arrangements, the agency has made Secondary Ladder Point Checking (SLPC) compulsory for all flights at all airports.

Generally, it refers to checking passengers and their hand baggage just before boarding a flight. This is in addition to the primary security checks. Besides, the entry of visitors to the terminal building of the airports and the sale of visitor entry tickets have been banned.

The military conflict between India and Pakistan has intensified. Under Operation Sindoor, armed forces had carried out strikes on terror targets in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on Wednesday in retaliation against the Pahalgam terror attack that had killed at least 26 people last month.

Delhi prepares in wake of military conflict

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

From installing air sirens to deploying civil defence personnel, setting up control rooms to conducting mock drills; authorities in Delhi are preparing themselves in the wake of a military conflict between India and Pakistan.

Heavy security has been deployed at vital installations, including government buildings and areas with high footfalls in the national capital. Police have also strengthened vigil in areas with high footfalls, including markets, railway stations, malls, parks and metro stations. The Delhi government cancelled all employee leaves and district magistrates convened emergency meetings to review health and disaster response readiness. Following which, New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), Delhi Police also cancelled leaves of all employees till further orders, said the notice by



Police personnel stand guard at the Red Fort in New Delhi

RANJAN DIMRI

NDMC and Delhi Police respectively. Bomb Disposal Squads (BDS) and anti-sabotage teams conducted sweeps

across malls, markets, hotels, and public spaces to guard against potential threats. Police checks were also intensified at

Delhi's border points and metro stations, with paramilitary reinforcements stationed across key locations.

At the administrative level, the 11 revenue districts are making preparations to deal with any eventuality. According to a senior official from the revenue department, air-raid sirens are being installed across Delhi.

"Locations have been identified and air-raid sirens are being installed. The Civil Defence Directorate carried out the testing of an air-raid siren installed atop the multi-storey PWD building at ITO on Friday afternoon. Similar testing exercises will be carried out in other areas also in the coming days," the official said.

Another official said 10 sirens are being installed in each of the 11 revenue districts. "Each air raid siren is designed to be heard within a particular radius. For instance, some sirens can be heard within a radius of two kilometres, some with-

in four kilometres and some within 16 kilometres. We are installing these sirens so that there are no dark patches," he added. An official from the East district said the administration is installing air-raid sirens and has deployed civil defence personnel at the office of the district magistrate. He said the district control room has also been activated.

In the Central district, civil defence volunteers are being trained and 50 of them will be deployed in different areas.

"Alongside the upcoming mock drills, awareness campaigns will also be conducted to educate people on how to respond to emergency situations like air raids. Control rooms are being further strengthened and meetings will be held to ensure better coordination," an official said.

In an order issued on Thursday, the Delhi government's services department has barred employees from going on leave until further orders.

Prayers offered in Delhi for army personnel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

As tensions escalate between India and Pakistan, prayers were offered across several temples in Delhi to seek divine protection for personnel of the armed forces and the nation's well-being on Friday. At the Chhatarpur temple, various spiritual rituals are being performed, including the recitation of the 'Durga Saptashati' to invoke blessings from goddess Durga for protection and victory over adversaries. The temple official said that the "Durga Saptashati" is being recited to seek blessings from Goddess Durga for protection, power and victory over negativity, and the "Hanuman Chalisa" or the "Sundarkand" is being chanted to draw strength and devotion from Lord Hanuman's example, especially in these times of crisis.

The "Vishnu Sahasranama," a revered hymn dedicated to Lord Vishnu, is being recited with prayers for national balance, collective well-being and divine safeguarding, he said. Peace mantras, such as the "Shanti Path", which includes the universal prayers, are being offered with a focus on peace for the world and especially, for Bharat Mata, the official added.

Additionally, the Bhudevi "Stuti" is also part of the routine, expressing gratitude toward Mother Earth and praying for India's continued growth and prosperity, he said. In addition to these rituals, a collective "havan" is being organised once a week, bringing together devotees in a shared spiritual effort to foster unity and strength, he said. Each session concludes with the resonant chants of "Bharat Mata ki Jai" and "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," affirming the spirit of national pride and universal brotherhood, he added.

"These efforts aim to build collective consciousness for peace, spiritual resilience and national harmony," the official said. Ramavtar Singh, a priest at the Jagdamba temple in Rohini, said they are preparing for an evening prayer for India and everyone's safety. "We are sitting in the comforts of our home but those who are living at the border and fighting for us, we must pray for their safety," Singh said.

He added that a prayer with evening "aarti" will be conducted on Friday. An official of the Jagannath temple at Hauz Khas said police officials are installing checking machines outside the temple premises for the safety of devotees.

DDCA receives hoax threat to blast Arun Jaitley Stadium

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) on Friday received a hoax threat email claiming to blast the Arun Jaitley Stadium in retaliation for the ongoing "Operation Sindoor" carried out by the Indian armed forces against Pakistan.

A police complaint has been registered against the sender of the mail, and teams of Bomb Disposal Squad (BDS) and dog squad, along with Delhi Police teams rushed to the stadium, after which, the threat turned out to be hoax, an official said.

"We received a bomb threat via email on the address of Delhi and District Cricket Association. We immediately forwarded it to Delhi Police. The Delhi Police bomb squad came and inspected the whole venue. Nothing was found," DDCA secretary Ashok Sharma said.

Sources in the Delhi Police said that multiple teams were immediately rushed to the stadium and the location was checked thoroughly.

"Nothing suspicious was found. Further, we have stepped up security in and

A police complaint has been registered against the sender of the mail, and teams of Bomb Disposal Squad and dog squad, along with Delhi Police teams rushed to the stadium, after which, the threat turned out to be hoax

around the stadium," said the source.

According to officials, the email read, "There will be a bomb blast in your stadium. We have a committed Pakistan sleeper cell active in India. The blast will be our revenge for "Operation Sindoor."

Prior to the bomb threat, the Arun Jaitley Stadium in Delhi had already hosted four home matches of DC in the IPL 2025 season.

Their final home match of the campaign for Delhi Capitals at this venue was slated to happen on Sunday, May 11, against Gujarat Titans, but with the immediate suspension of the league, everything is now up in the air in regards to the schedule.

Air siren: Residents reminded of wartime tales

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

An air raid siren set off Friday as part of a drill in central Delhi's ITO perked many an ear in the vicinity and jolted a few out of their afternoon torpor. The civil defence directorate tested an air raid siren installed atop the multi-storey PWD building in ITO for 10 to 15 minutes. Many in the neighbourhood said they had heard it for the first time.

"Around 3 pm, we heard a loud sound, which gradually became feeble. Although since yesterday I have been seeing videos of sirens being blared in places where attacks happened, hearing it for real was a first-time experience," Namantullah, 21, who has a shop near the building, said.

"My grandfather used to tell me about the Kargil War or the 1971 Indo-Pak war. We could not grasp the ominousness of it because we weren't there. These sirens, though only a test, made it all too real," he added.

Gaurav Gupta, 45, another shopkeeper, said that while the siren wasn't as loud as he had expected, it helped him understand what to do when an emergency strikes. If god forbids something happens, we have a metro nearby and also a big mosque where we can rush to take



An air raid siren installed atop the multistorey PWD building at ITO

RANJAN DIMRI

shelter. As citizens, it is our duty to support our armed forces and act responsibly without creating panic," Gupta said.

Police and civil defence volunteers briefed people on the steps they must take when an air raid siren is sounded. A PCR van of the Delhi Traffic Police was stationed on the road to regulate the traffic in case people panicked because of the siren.

"Rush to the safest place you can find, preferably under the tables or in the basement of a building. One should come on their knees or lie on the ground with their hands covering their ears so that the sound doesn't make you uncomfortable," a civil defence volunteer said. She advised people against taking shelter under the trees as they can fall on them.

MCD to hold standing, wards committee polls on May 22

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) will conduct elections on May 22 to fill two vacancies in its Standing Committee, while also holding elections for chairpersons and deputy chairpersons of various ward committees, a notice issued on Friday said.

Following the resignation of two councillors — representing ward numbers 164 and 74 — who were recently elected as MLAs, the MCD will conduct elections to fill their vacancies in the Standing Committee. These councillors were earlier elected to the Standing Committee from the South Zone and City-SP Zone ward committees, respectively.

The elections are scheduled to be held on Thursday, May 22 and voting will be conducted through a secret ballot

As per the provisions of the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, the respective ward committees will now elect new members to the Standing Committee from among their own councillors.

The elections are scheduled to be held on Thursday, May 22, and voting will be conducted through a secret ballot.

On the same day, elections will also be held for the posts of chairpersons and deputy chairpersons of various ward committees, as mandated under Section 51 of the DMC Act, 1957 (as amended in 2022). These include committees from zones such as Najafgarh, Rohini, Karol Bagh, Central, Narela, South and City-SP.

The entire election process will be governed by the Delhi Municipal Corporation (Procedure & Conduct of Business) Regulations, 1958. Additionally, elections for the MCD's Standing Committee — the top decision-making body of the civic agency — are expected to be held in the first week of June, an official told to media earlier, adding that the committee is likely to become operational by mid-June.

The formation of the Standing Committee had been delayed for the past two years due to a tussle between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the BJP, and subsequent legal proceedings.

The Standing Committee of the MCD, an 18-member body responsible for financial oversight, plays a crucial role in clearing projects worth over ₹5 crore, reviewing policies with financial implications, approving layout plans, and supervising audits.

PWD to install CCTVs at two underpasses before monsoon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Public Works Department (PWD) plans to install CCTV cameras at South Delhi's Moolchand and Pul Prahladpur underpasses to increase monitoring of waterlogging hotspots.

Through the installation of CCTV cameras, the real-time situation at the underpasses would be received at the PWD's flood control room and further decisions would be taken depending on the status, they said.

As per the existing standard operating procedure set by the PWD, if the depth of water accumulation in an underpass at any location is observed to be 6-8 inches, the control room is supposed to immediately inform the field unit and check with pump operators if the pumps are working.

If the water level keeps rising, the traffic police are alerted to divert traffic away from the underpass. "We plan to install eight bullet cameras and three dome cameras for Moolchand and Prahladpur underpasses along with other equipments to support the live feed to the online cloud data system developed for monitoring and issuing timely alerts to our teams and other agencies," said a PWD official. "Tenders have been floated for the project," he added.

Both underpasses witnessed waterlog-

ging after heavy rainfall in the month of June last year. Despite the PWD's claims of taking steps to avoid flooding, the Pul Prahladpur underpass remains a waterlogging hotspot.

The closure of the underpasses has an impact on the movement of traffic in South and South-East Delhi areas. In addition to increased dewatering efforts in South Delhi, the PWD plans to hire 1,800 temporary water pump sets for Central Delhi's ITO and adjoining areas for the entire monsoon season. This is another waterlogging-prone area due to its proximity to the Yamuna bank. The estimated cost of this project is Rs 88 lakh for four months, according to the tender floated by PWD.

To avoid flooding in ITO, the PWD is also laying down two new drain lines and carrying out desilting work on the existing drains.

According to the PWD, 308 waterlogging points were identified in Delhi in 2023. In 2025, a total of 445 waterlogging points have been identified in the capital based on data shared by the traffic police. Of these, 335 points fall under the PWD's responsibility.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta held a meeting in this regard last month during which vulnerable spots were identified and corrective measures like construction of drains, desilting work and automation of pumps was proposed.

Speaker Vijender Gupta forms eight committees to boost governance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta has constituted eight committees of the House for the financial year 2025-26 to ensure efficient functioning of legislative business. The newly constituted committees include six new committees, in addition to two existing ones — the Business Advisory Committee and the Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions.

The newly formed committees are the Committee on Government Assurances, Committee on Petitions, Rules Committee, Questions & References Committee, General Purposes Committee, and Library Committee.

Speaker Gupta will chair multiple committees, including the Business Advisory Committee, General Purposes Committee, Library Committee, and the Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions. Deputy Speaker Mohan Singh Bisht and several senior MLAs have also been appointed to key roles across various committees.

The Business Advisory Committee, led by Speaker which includes Deputy Speaker Mohan Singh Bisht, Chief Whip Abhay Verma, OP Sharma, and five other MLAs. This committee will plan and schedule Assembly business.

The Committee on Government

Assurances will be chaired by MLA Neeraj Basoya. It will monitor the fulfilment of promises made by ministers in the House. Members include Raj Karan Khatri, Ajay Kumar Mahawar, Poonam Sharma, and four others.

MLA Surya Prakash Khatri will head the Committee on Petitions, which will examine petitions submitted by the public. Its members include Harish Khurana, Sandeep Sehrawat, and Shikha Roy, among others.

The Rules Committee, responsible for reviewing Assembly procedures and rules, will be chaired ex-officio by the Speaker. It will include the Deputy Speaker and seven MLAs.

In the Questions & References Committee, which deals with matters raised during Assembly sessions, Deputy Speaker Bisht will serve as Chairperson. Members include Ravinder Singh Negi, Arvinder Singh Lovely and Tarvinder Singh Marwah.

The General Purposes Committee, which handles administrative and procedural matters, will again be headed by Gupta and include Bisht and seven MLAs. Speaker Vijender Gupta will also chair the Library Committee, with Deputy Speaker Bisht and MLAs Pradyumn Singh Rajput, Neelam Pehalwan, and Sanjay Goel among its members.

The Committee on Private Members'

Bills and Resolutions will review bills and proposals introduced by non-ministerial MLAs. Gupta is the Chairperson, with members including Abhay Verma, Anil Kumar Sharma, and Arvinder Singh Lovely.

Additionally, on April 1, the Speaker announced the formation of three critical financial committees: the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), Committee on Government Undertakings, and Committee on Estimates. These nine-member committees include six BJP MLAs and three from the opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

The PAC, which will examine recent CAG reports on the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), health, air pollution, and excise, includes BJP MLAs Ajay Mahawar, Arvinder Singh Lovely, and Shikha Rai, along with AAP's Atishi, Kuldeep Kumar, and Virendra Singh Kadiyan.

The Committee on Government Undertakings will review financial mismanagement revealed in CAG reports of the AAP government. Members include BJP's Deepak Chaudhary and Gajendra Dral, as well as AAP's Sanjay Jha and Ajay Dutt.

The Estimates Committee, which reviews budget allocations, includes BJP MLAs Gajendra Singh Yadav, Harish Khurana, and AAP MLAs Imran Hussain and Vishesh Ravi.

CM meets health officials to review preparedness

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Friday held a meeting with senior health officials of the Delhi government hospitals to review emergency preparedness in the light of the ongoing military conflict between India and Pakistan.

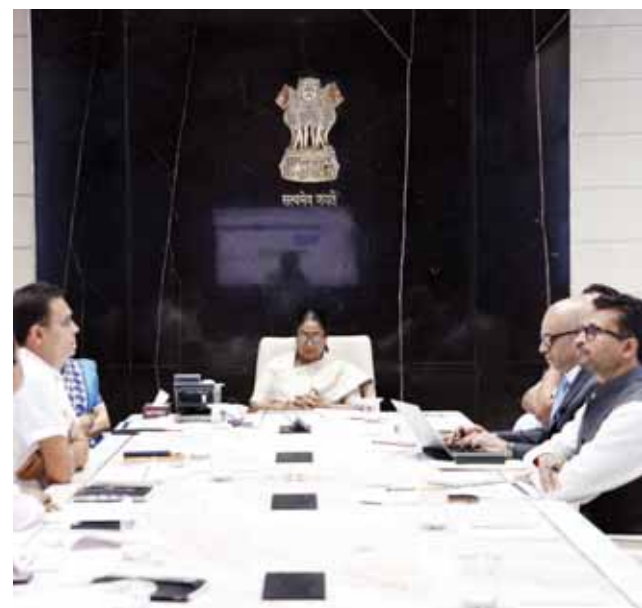
The Chief Minister after the meeting said it is being ensured that there is no shortage of staff or medicines in the hospitals so that they are ready to meet any circumstances.

"Our hospitals should be ready to meet any circumstances and serve people. I got update of the arrangements in the hospitals from the medical directors," she told reporters.

Gupta said it is being ensured that there is no shortage of staff or medicines, adding the hospitals and doctors should be ready for any circumstances.

Health Minister Pankaj Singh said the Delhi government hospitals and staff are ready for any emergency.

Singh said that although there was no need of disaster wards as of now, but some beds were reserved especially for emergency situations.



Our hospitals should be ready to meet any circumstances and serve people. I got update of the arrangements in the hospitals from the medical directors. It is also being ensured that there is no shortage of staff or medicines
— REKHA GUPTA, CHIEF MINISTER

"All our hospitals are ready for any emergency with all necessary equipments. We discussed the issue in the meeting. Every facility will be provided in our hospitals in case of any eventuality," he added.

Singh further said all emergency medicines are available in the hospitals.

"Delhi government hospitals and staff are ready for any emergency," he added.

It was the chief minister's first meeting with the medical superintendents and directors of the Delhi government hospitals.

Earlier last month, the government had transferred the directors and medical superintendents of 26 Delhi government hospitals.

Traffic restored on Rafi Marg after NDMC clears uprooted tree

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Traffic was restored on Rafi Marg after an uprooted tree near the RBI building was cleared by the New Delhi Municipal Council's (NDMC) Quick Response Team on Friday afternoon, officials said.

The tree, which fell early in the day, had briefly disrupted vehicular movement near Patel Chowk and the RBI premises. The team responded promptly to clear the obstruction, an NDMC official said.

"Our Quick Response Team reached the spot shortly after receiving information and cleared the road. The reason behind the tree fall is still unknown," the official said. "The cement around tree bases blocks water and air from reaching the roots, weakening them," environmentalist Verhaan Khanna said.

Khanna also urged authorities to consider reviving fallen trees instead of removing them outright.

Jaishankar speaks to UK counterpart David Lammy on India-Pakistan tensions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

As the conflict between India and Pakistan spirals, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday held a phone conversation with his British counterpart David Lammy and conveyed to him that there must be “zero-tolerance” to terrorism.

The Jaishankar-Lammy conversation came against the backdrop of efforts by India’s strategic partners to reduce tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad. “Our discussions centered around countering terrorism, for which there must be zero-tolerance,” the external affairs minister said in a social media post.

Jaishankar held phone conversations with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Italian Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas on Thursday.

Tensions between India and Pakistan soared significantly following India’s Operation Sindoor on early Wednesday and Pakistan’s subsequent unsuccessful attempt to attack 15 Indian cities.

US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce said Rubio emphasised the need for immediate de-escalation. “He expressed US support for direct



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday held a phone conversation with British counterpart David Lammy

dialogue between India and Pakistan and encouraged continued efforts to improve communications,” she said.

“The secretary reiterated his condolences for the horrific terrorist attack in Pahalgam and reaffirmed the United States’ commitment to work with India in

the fight against terrorism,” Bruce added. On his phone talks with Kallas, Jaishankar said: “Discussed ongoing developments with EU HRVP @kajakallas.”

“India has been measured in its actions. However, any escalation will get a firm

response,” he added.

On India-Pakistan tensions, the European Union said it is “monitoring closely and with great concern the growing tensions in the region and the ensuing consequences, including the possible loss of more lives.”

“The EU calls on both parties to exercise restraint, to de-escalate tensions and desist from further attacks to safeguard civilian lives on both sides,” it said. “The EU urges both sides to engage in dialogue.”

“It is vital that India and Pakistan also live up to their obligations under international law and take all measures possible to protect civilian lives,” it added.

The EU said it will work with all parties to de-escalate the situation.

The British foreign secretary on Wednesday said current tensions between India and Pakistan are a serious concern. “The UK government is urging India and Pakistan to show restraint and engage in direct dialogue to find a swift, diplomatic path forward,” he said.

“The UK was clear in its condemnation of the horrific terrorist attack in Pahalgam last month.”

“We need all sides to work urgently to see regional stability restored and ensure protection of civilians,” he added.

IDY 2025 to be globally inspiring: Ayush Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The International Day of Yoga (IDY) this year will not just be successful but also inspirational for the entire world, Union Ayush Minister Prataprao Jadhav said.

International Day of Yoga, observed annually on June 21, has grown into a global cultural and wellness movement since its inception by the United Nations in 2015 at the initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The minister chaired a review meeting on May 7 here to assess the ongoing preparations for the upcoming IDY which will be celebrated on June 21 across the globe. During the meeting, Jadhav reiterated the government’s vision to make this year’s celebration of yoga truly extraordinary and globally impactful. While addressing the officials, he stated that “we will work with utmost sincerity and commitment to ensure that International Day of Yoga 2025 is not only a grand success but also serves as a source of inspiration for the entire world”. He encouraged all stakeholders to approach the event with renewed energy and unity, stating that the efforts should reflect the spirit of “Yoga for One Earth, One Health”. “Let us reach every corner of the country and every part of

the globe with the message of holistic well-being through yoga,” he added.

The meeting saw participation from senior officials of the Ministry of Ayush.

The review focused on the planning and implementation of major initiatives such as Yoga Sangam, which

Four accused, identified as Vikash Kumar, Satyam Kumar, Devmani Rai and Ahmad Ansari, were previously charged by the local police under the Arms Act

integrates yoga with institutions like schools, hospitals and corporates and Harit Yoga, which promotes eco-consciousness through yoga-linked plantation drives.

The other initiatives such as Yoga Connect, which engages global and diaspora communities in yoga celebration and Yoga Bandhan, which fosters social unity and shared wellness through mass participation, were also reviewed.

Jadhav also emphasised the importance of engaging the youth, educational institutions and community leaders to amplify the message and participation in IDY 2025.

Delhi HC closes case after Ramdev pledges no more offensive remarks against Rooh Afza

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday closed a case after Yoga guru Ramdev pledged not to pass any further disparaging remarks against Hamdard’s Rooh Afza.

Justice Amit Bansal said the averments of Ramdev and Patanjali Foods Ltd in their affidavits were binding on them and decreed the suit in favour of Hamdard National Foundation India.

The court had previously ordered removal of the controversial online content and asked Ramdev and Patanjali to file their undertaking.

The court passed the order while dealing with a lawsuit by Hamdard National Foundation India against Ramdev and his Patanjali Foods Ltd over the controversial remarks.

Hamdard claimed while promoting Patanjali’s “gulab sharbat”, Ramdev alleged the money earned from Hamdard’s Rooh Afza was used to build madrasas and mosques.

On April 22, the court sought an affidavit from Ramdev and Patanjali assuring to “not issue any statements, social media posts or disparaging videos or advertisements in future similar to those which are subject matter of the present suit in respect of products of the competitors”.

Ramdev’s remark of “sharbat jihad” on Hamdard’s Rooh Afza, the court said, was indefensible and shook its conscience, prompting the Yoga guru to assure he would immediately take down the related videos and social media posts.

Hamdard’s counsel had said instead of taking down the objectionable YouTube video in terms of an earlier order, the defendant had only made it private.

Ramdev’s counsel, on the other hand, said he had “great respect for the court” and its directions would be complied with.

On May 1, after the court warned of initiating contempt action against Ramdev, his lawyer assured that certain objectionable content which was subsequently published would also be deleted within 24 hours.

NIA chargesheets four for supplying arms to Naxals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has chargesheeted four accused for their involvement in supplying weapons to the Naxals and other criminal elements, an official statement issued on Friday said. The four accused, identified as Vikash Kumar, Satyam Kumar, Devmani Rai and Ahmad Ansari, were previously charged by the local police under the Arms Act, it said.

As per the NIA, which has been investigating the case since May last year, the accused “had conspired and were actively involved in the illegal procurement and smuggling of prohibited bore weapons to Naxalites and other criminal elements”, said the statement issued by the probe agency. They had also raised and utilised funds for procurement of these arms as part of a conspiracy, aimed at disturbing the nation’s unity, integrity, security and sovereignty, it added.

In its supplementary chargesheet filed before the NIA Special Court in Patna on Thursday, the NIA has now charged all four under Section 120B of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Sections 13 and 18

of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, the statement said.

The chargesheet followed an investigation in a case related to the seizure of an AK-47 rifle in Bihar’s Muzaffarpur.

The NIA said that the Muzaffarpur Rail Police had initially on May 7, 2024, recovered an AK-47 butt and a rifle lens from Vikash and Satyam.

Four accused, identified as Vikash Kumar, Satyam Kumar, Devmani Rai and Ahmad Ansari, were previously charged by the local police under the Arms Act

“The duo disclosed during investigation that they had supplied an AK-47 rifle and five live rounds to Devmani Rai alias Anish, a resident of Mankauli under Fakuli PS, Muzaffarpur,” the statement said. “A search of Devmani’s house later led to the recovery of the rifle and the live rounds. All three, along with accused Ahmad Ansari, were arrested in the case,” it added.

Birla urges IAS officers to build legacy of service guided by Indian values and democratic deals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla urged the young civil servants to leave a legacy of service, guided by Indian values and democratic ideals. He also urged them to bring the sense of purpose, discipline, and service to their own roles in governance and public administration. Birla made these remarks while addressing IAS Officer Trainees of 2023 batch, in Parliament premises on Friday.

Birla exhorted the young officers to dedicate themselves to the vision of Viksit Bharat—a developed India that is just, inclusive, innovative, and globally respected. He called on them to make this vision their daily motivation and guiding principle. Whether it is addressing the needs of backward and tribal areas, using technology to improve the lives of the poor, or ensuring last-mile delivery of services, he said the future of India depends on the strength and dedication of its civil servants.

He encouraged the trainees to engage in daily self-evaluation and strive to make tangible differences in the lives of citizens through transparent, responsive governance. He invoked the vision of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who believed



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla with IAS officer trainees during a group photo before the inauguration of their study visit to the Parliament House in New Delhi on Friday

that a strong and principled administrative system was essential for safeguarding India’s unity and democracy in the turbulent period following independence. Shri Birla emphasised that the Indian civil service must always be guided by the spirit of Indian culture, remain sensitive to public sentiment and support the continuous deepening of democracy.

He said that administrative systems should ensure vigilant compliance with policies while always remaining people-

centric and transparent. Lok Sabha Speaker has emphasised the need for greater adoption of technology by IAS officers to enhance governance efficiency, transparency, and service delivery.

Highlighting the transformative role of digital tools in today’s administrative landscape, the Speaker urged officers to proactively integrate emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and e-governance platforms into their daily functioning.

BHISHM cubes deployed at Jammu hospital amidst India-Pakistan conflict

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Bharat Health Initiative for Sahyog Hita and Maitri (BHISHM) cubes, the indigenous portable modular medical facility, are being deployed at prominent hospitals such as AIIMS Jammu and Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS) Srinagar near India’s border under the government’s Aarogya Maitri project to bolster medical readiness, officials said on Friday.

The development comes on the heels of Union Health Minister JP Nadda on Friday reviewing health infrastructure preparedness across hospitals in the country amid the ongoing Operation Sindoor and the ongoing India-Pakistan military conflict, official sources said.

These BHISHM cubes are also being stationed in other Institutes of National Importance (INIs) across India, including AIIMS in Rishikesh, Bilaspur and Delhi, they said.

“We are also providing operational training to the respective medical institutes where BHISHM cubes have been

deployed. So far two BHISHM cubes have been deployed at AIIMS, Jammu and more are being diverted to this centre.

“Besides, around 35 other BHISHM cubes so far have been deployed across other Institutes of National Importance (INIs) across India,” said Air Vice Marshal Dr Tannoy Roy, HLL Lifecare.

Dr Roy said HLL Life Care Ltd under the Union Health Ministry is the nodal agency for the procurement and deployment of Aarogya Maitri Cube.

BHISHM cubes are portable and rapidly deployable modular medical facilities to provide emergency lifesaving clinical care in the event of disaster or public health emergencies.

Each cube is equipped with medicines and surgical equipment for basic operations, and it has the capacity to handle around 200 diverse emergency cases.

The cube comprises 72 easily transportable components, designed for versatile delivery methods including hand-carry, bicycle or even drone transport.

The aid cube is equipped with several innovative tools designed to enhance disaster response and medical support dur-

ing emergencies. It integrates Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics to facilitate effective coordination, real-time monitoring and efficient management of medical services in the field.

Being robust, waterproof and lightweight, the cubes are also built to withstand harsh conditions. Their flexible configuration allows deployment in diverse emergency scenarios. The system can be quickly dispatched via air-drop or ground transportation, ensuring swift response to crises anywhere.

In the wake of Operation Sindoor, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday chaired a high-level meeting with secretaries of various ministries and called for continued alertness and clear communication, while reaffirming the government’s commitment to national security and operational preparedness.

The Indian armed forces are on high alert in the wake of the current hostilities between New Delhi and Islamabad following the Pahalgam terrorist attack of April 22 and India’s strike on terror targets in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) in retaliation.

Congress launches Jai Hind Yatra to back Indian soldiers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

History is witness that whenever someone challenged India’s self-respect, they got a befitting reply, the Congress said on Friday and asserted that its Jai Hind Yatra, being taken out across the country, was in support of India’s brave soldiers.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said once again India had been challenged and its tolerance and patience tested, with terrorists having ruthlessly killed innocent people.

They will have to pay the price for this, Ramesh asserted. “History is witness... Whenever someone has challenged the self-respect and self-esteem of India, we have given them a befitting reply,” the Congress leader said in a social media post in Hindi.

“When our soldiers roar with passion to sacrifice every drop of their blood to protect this land, the heart of the enemy shivers. Once again we have been challenged, our tolerance and patience tested. The terrorists have ruthlessly killed our innocent

people, they will have to pay the price for this,” Ramesh said.

Every single Congress worker stands with the country’s army in this difficult time, he added. “We are taking out a Jai Hind Yatra across the country today in support of our brave soldiers. We are proud of our soldiers. ‘Jai Hind ki Sena,’” Ramesh said. The Congress also reiterated its solidarity with the government in whatever decision it takes against Pakistan.

Congress spokesperson Ragini Nayak said Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi had consistently said “we are with the government of India in thought, word and deed”.

“If the Indian government takes any major decision against Pakistan, then our full cooperation and support is with the government. Today, we will reiterate this message through the Jai Hind Yatra,” she said during a press conference at the party’s 24, Akbar Road, headquarters.

The Indian Army is working day and night to give a befitting reply to the attacks of Pakistan and, in such a situation, “it is

On the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday, India neutralised the Pakistan military’s attempt to hit military stations in Jammu, Pathankot, Udhampur and some other locations with missiles and drones

our duty to come together to boost the morale of the Indian Army,” she said.

The Congress appeals that it is the responsibility of the government to prioritise the safety of people in all villages and cities near the India-Pakistan border, Nayak said. “We express our deepest condolences to those who lost their lives in Poonch and it is also the government’s responsibility to take care of their families and provide prompt treatment to the injured,” she said.

“It is hoped that the government will take strong steps in this direction. The Indian Army will take revenge from

Pakistan for the blood of innocent Indians,” she added. On the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday, India neutralised the Pakistan military’s attempt to hit military stations in Jammu, Pathankot, Udhampur and some other locations with missiles and drones.

On Thursday afternoon, the defence ministry said the Indian Armed Forces had foiled Pakistan’s attempts to target military installations in 15 cities in the country’s northern and western parts.

It said the Pakistani military attempted to target Awantipura, Srinagar, Jammu, Pathankot, Amritsar, Kapurthala, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Adampur, Bhatinda, Chandigarh, Nal, Phalodi, Urtalrai and Bhuj. Defence Minister Singh on Thursday said no limit would become an obstacle to protect India’s sovereignty and the nation was fully prepared for such responses.

Early on Wednesday, the Indian Armed Forces carried out missile strikes on nine terror targets in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Pakistan under Operation Sindoor in response to the April 22 Pahalgam attack.

Government dismisses Rajouri, Jalandhar attack claims as fake

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi/Jammu

The government on Friday dismissed claims of a suicide attack on an Army brigade in Jammu and a drone attack in Punjab’s Jalandhar by certain social media handles as “fake news”.

The Press Information Bureau (PIB) Fact Check Unit found that there was no “fedayeen” or suicide attack on any Army cantonment in Jammu and Kashmir, while the video claiming to be that of a drone attack in Jalandhar pertained to a farm fire.

The district collector of Jalandhar has confirmed it to be disinformation, the PIB said.

“A total of seven videos were fact-checked between 22:00 hours on May 8, 2025, and 06:30 hours on May 9. A list of the fact-checked videos, along with their links, has been compiled,” the

PIB said. It found that an old video shared on social media claiming to be of Pakistan’s missile attack on India was actually of an explosive attack that took place in Beirut, Lebanon, in 2020.

In another case, a video claiming the destruction of an Indian Army post by Pakistani forces was found to be fabricated.

The Fact Check Unit verified that there was no such unit as the “20 Raj Battalion” in the Indian Army, as claimed in the video. “A barrage of coordinated disinformation has been carried out by certain social media handles in general and mainstream media in particular in Pakistan with the sole objective to instill fear among the Indian masses,” a PIB statement said.

The Fact Check Unit also said that a video of an explosion on an oil tanker dating back to July 7, 2021, was passed off as an attack on the Hazira Port in Gujarat.

Bookings slump on Jammu-bound trains amid tensions on border

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

At a time when trains to the north are typically packed beyond capacity, the Jammu-bound trains from Lucknow are now running with hundreds of vacant seats. This rare development during the summer rush is being attributed to rising tension along the India-Pakistan border following Operation Sindoor.

What once was a travel route with lengthy waiting lists now tells a story of growing unease and uncertainty.

Railway data accessed by this reporter reveals a stunning drop in bookings. On Friday, the Jammu Tawi Summer Special (04609) had over 125 vacant berths.

Even more striking, as many as 557 seats in the Third AC Economy class remain unbooked for May 16, with similar vacancies observed on subsequent dates — 496, 531, 543 and 557 seats going unsold.

"We have not seen this kind of slump in summer bookings to Jammu in years," said Kuldeep Tiwari, Senior Divisional

Commercial Manager (DCM), Northern Railway, Lucknow Division. "Usually there is a long waiting list by March-end, especially with pilgrims and families visiting Jammu and Kashmir. But this year, there has been a clear drop after tensions flared."

As many as 557 seats in the Third AC Economy class remain unbooked for May 16, with similar vacancies observed on subsequent dates — 496, 531, 543, and 557 seats going unsold

The impact is not restricted to a single train. The Kolkata-Jammu Tawi Express (13151) and Begumpura Express are also showing thin waitlists. The once-overbooked Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Express, popular among pilgrims, now has just one waitlisted passenger in Sleeper Class and six in Third AC for Friday. Among the affected is Neelam Sharma, a resident of

Alambagh, Lucknow, who had planned a family trip to Vaishno Devi. "We booked tickets in April, but after hearing about the border tensions and watching the news about troop movement and air alerts, we decided to cancel," she said. "It is not worth the risk — our children were scared."

In a startling development on Thursday, several passengers traveling on Jammu-bound trains — including the Begumpura Express and Kolkata-Jammu Tawi Express — chose to disembark mid-journey. According to railway sources, nearly 580 passengers departed Lucknow for Jammu that day, but many got off at intermediate stations such as Bareilly, Moradabad, and Saharanpur, opting instead to return home via buses or private vehicles.

"We have never seen passengers alighting en masse before their destination like this," said a train conductor who requested anonymity. "Some cited family pressure, others spoke of fear from news about airspace closures and security alerts." DCM Kuldeep Tiwari added, "There are no plans to curtail train routes at this

moment. However, any decisions regarding route termination or travel suspension will be made only after orders from the Railway Board, based on intelligence inputs."

The travel disruption is not limited to the railways. Flight operations between Lucknow and Chandigarh — a key transit point to Jammu — have been suspended until May 10. IndiGo confirmed the cancellation of flights 6E 6552 (Lucknow to Chandigarh) and 6E 146 (Chandigarh to Lucknow), citing operational constraints due to suspended activity at Chandigarh Airport.

Additionally, international flights to Dammam and Sharjah have faced delays due to airspace restrictions and increased pre-flight security checks.

The cumulative effect is being felt by tour operators and pilgrimage planners. Manoj Jaiswal, who runs a travel agency near Lucknow Junction, said, "We usually send at least 30-40 groups to Vaishno Devi during May-June. This time, half our bookings have been canceled. Clients are postponing trips indefinitely."



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and World Bank President Ajay Banga during a meeting in Lucknow

CM Yogi slams Pakistan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

On Friday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath participated in a commemorative event marking Maharana Pratap Jayanti, where he paid heartfelt tribute to valiant warriors such as Maharana Pratap, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, and Guru Gobind Singh.

Taking a strong stance against terrorism, he targeted Pakistan, stating that the country has crossed all limits of audacity and now faces an existential crisis. He asserted that Pakistan's terrorist face has been fully exposed to the world.

Referring to the brutal terrorist attack on Indian tourists in Pahalgam on 22 April, Yogi Adityanath said the incident had stirred the conscience of every Indian and strengthened the resolve for decisive retaliation. He stated that under the firm leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Indian armed forces had delivered a robust and appropriate response to such provocations. As a

result, he noted, Pakistan now finds itself globally isolated and severely weakened.

Condemning Pakistan's continued patronage of terrorism, CM Yogi pointed out the shocking participation of senior Pakistani military officials and politicians at the funerals of terrorists who were neutralised in Indian counterterrorism operations. "This not only proves Pakistan's patronage of terrorists but also shows its deep-rooted complicity," he said, adding that Pakistan is now visibly struggling for survival.

In his address, the Chief Minister called on citizens to remain united and firmly stand by the Indian armed forces. He cautioned against the spread of misinformation and rumours on social media, urging people to stay alert and expose anti-national elements. "Every Indian must support our forces and expose anti-national elements. We must move forward with unity under the guidance of our central leadership," he emphasised.

Muslims across UP condemn Pakistan, back Indian Army

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

The first Friday namaz after the launch of Operation Sindoor witnessed an outpouring of patriotism from the Muslim community across Uttar Pradesh. From Lucknow to Varanasi and Sambhal, worshippers condemned Pakistan's aggression and raised slogans in

support of the Indian Army and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In a significant development reflecting national solidarity, large gatherings at mosques turned into scenes of protest against Pakistan.

In Lucknow, noted Islamic scholar Maulana Khalid Rashid Farangi Mahali stated, "Muslims of India stand united with

the nation. We strongly oppose this cowardly attack by Pakistan and demand a fitting reply."

In Sambhal's Jama Masjid, a rare display of nationalist unity unfolded as hundreds of worshippers raised slogans of "Hindustan Zindabad," "Indian Army Zindabad," and "Pakistan Murdabad" after the Friday prayers. The congregation

sent a clear message of loyalty to the nation.

Community representatives expressed full support for the government and the armed forces. "Forty crore Muslims of India are with PM Modi," said Shad Adil, who also mentioned that prayers were offered for India's prosperity and global peace. "Pakistan cannot stand before India," he added.



CM Mamata warns traders against hoarding

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has warned a section of business community against blackmarketing of essential commodities saying such attempts would be strongly dealt with. The order came following reports that a section of traders particularly in the wholesale markets were hoarding items, in turn, jacking up price of essential commodities like potato, egg, edible oil etc sources said.

"Love for the motherland is not to be shown on the streets but in spirit too," Banerjee said reminding how the country should remain united in every respect from family affairs to the battle front. "A situation has arisen after the Pahalgam attack by terrorists when many innocent people were killed, in that respect it is a necessity that we should be prepared for certain situations, our stocks should be kept ready, in that context it is necessary that people do not indulge in blackmarketing of essential commodities taking advantage of the situation. We are keeping a strong watch on the hoarders, traders are asked not to supply produce through the borders to make money," Banerjee said adding this was the time for everyone to remain united not only in words but also in their acts.

The Chief Minister has also asked the respective departments to ensure that Sufal Bangla stores (Government run outlets) should remain open with increased supplies. "We have around 700 outlets and we will have 100 more. These stores are doing good job," but at the same time their efficiency should be increased during the hour of need, she said.

Banerjee's instruction to the top officials including the State Director General of Police came at a time when there were reports of some unscrupulous traders hoarding essential commodities allowing price of food products to shoot up.

"There is plenty of supplies and there is no need to panic, only we will have to ensure that such things are not hoarded and artificial scarcity is not created. The DGP has to keep track of this and hold virtual meetings on a regular basis," Banerjee said asking the departmental ministers and people's representatives to keep a strong vigil on the situation too.

Banerjee's statement came within hours of the Government cancelling leaves of all the Government employees.

The Chief Minister had earlier requested the private schools to announce summer vacations earlier than schedule "though this is not an order." A number of schools had followed her instructions and had announced summer vacation sources said.

Elsewhere the authorities at the Netaji Subhas International Airport too issued circulars cancelling leaves of its staff particularly those associated with the security system, sources said. "The repair work at the second landing strip too has been suspended for now and a state of alert has been sounded," a senior official said. Meanwhile, in a parallel development the Special Task Force of the State police arrested two terror operatives reportedly linked to Bangladesh's banned terrorist group Jamat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). The arrests were made following raids at some locations at Nalhati and Murarai in Birbhum district bordering Murshidabad. The terror moles have been identified as Ajmol Hossain (28) and Saheb Ali Khan (28). Murarai is not very far from Khagraghar village where two JMB terrorists were killed while making bombs in October 2014.

Hossain and Khan who were arrested following reports that they were propagating jihadi ideology against India in their area. These JMB modules were entrusted with recruiting members and disseminating seditious materials that went against the unity and integrity of Indian State officials said. The police were trying to find out whether they had Pakistan links or not, sources said.

SUMMER SPECIAL TRAINS-2025									
For the convenience of Rail Passengers, Railways have decided to run the following Summer Special Express Trains as per schedule given below:-									
Train No.	Station From	Dept. Time	Station to	Arr. Time	Freq. quency	Day	Period		
04088	New Delhi	15:50	Patna Jn	08:40	Daily		upto 10.07.2025		
04087	Patna Jn	12:00	New Delhi	04:40	Daily		upto 11.07.2025		
04064	New Delhi	09:30	Sheikhpura	05:00	Bi-weekly	Mon, Thu	upto 10.07.2025		
04063	Sheikhpura	07:00	New Delhi	23:35	Bi-weekly	Tue, Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04066	New Delhi	21:35	Saharsa Jn	22:00	Bi-weekly	Mon, Thu	upto 10.07.2025		
04065	Saharsa Jn	23:55	New Delhi	23:30	Bi-weekly	Tue, Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04022	New Delhi	14:00	Gorakhpur	05:00	Weekly	Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04021	Gorakhpur	07:00	New Delhi	23:10	Weekly	Sat	10.05.25 to 12.07.25		
04081	New Delhi	23:45	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	11:40	Tri-weekly	Mon, Wed, Sat	upto 12.07.2025		
04082	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	21:20	New Delhi	09:30	Tri-weekly	Tue, Thu, Sun	upto 13.07.2025		
04012	Delhi Jn	19:30	Darbhanga Jn	20:30	Bi-weekly	Tue, Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04011	Darbhanga Jn	22:00	Delhi Jn	22:40	Bi-weekly	Wed, Sat	upto 12.07.2025		
04024	Delhi Jn	19:30	Varanasi Jn	09:45	Tri-weekly	Mon, Thu, Sat	upto 10.07.2025		
04023	Varanasi Jn	18:35	Delhi Jn	08:50	Tri-weekly	Tue, Fri, Sun	upto 11.07.2025		
04026	Delhi Jn	23:05	Raxaul Jn	19:00	Weekly	Thu	upto 10.07.2025		
04025	Raxaul Jn	22:00	Delhi Jn	17:45	Weekly	Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04018	Anand Vihar (T)	09:00	Muzaffarpur Jn	06:00	Weekly	Thu	upto 29.05.2025		
04017	Muzaffarpur Jn	07:30	Anand Vihar (T)	06:00	Weekly	Fri	upto 30.05.2025		
04020	Anand Vihar (T)	19:30	Barauni Jn	18:00	Weekly	Sun	upto 06.07.2025		
04019	Barauni Jn	20:00	Anand Vihar (T)	19:00	Weekly	Mon	upto 07.07.2025		
04070	Anand Vihar (T)	00:20	Rajgir	19:50	Bi-weekly	Tue, Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04069	Rajgir	23:30	New Delhi	19:00	Bi-weekly	Tue, Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04096	Anand Vihar (T)	05:00	Jaynagar	12:00	Bi-weekly	Mon, Thu	upto 10.07.2025		
04095	Jaynagar	17:00	Anand Vihar (T)	19:55	Bi-weekly	Tue, Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04098	Anand Vihar (T)	05:00	Sitamari	02:30	Bi-weekly	Tue, Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04097	Sitamari	03:45	Anand Vihar (T)	01:30	Bi-weekly	Wed, Sat	upto 12.07.2025		
04030	Anand Vihar (T)	09:00	Muzaffarpur Jn	04:30	Bi-weekly	Tue, Sat	upto 17.05.2025		
04029	Muzaffarpur Jn	06:15	Anand Vihar (T)	03:10	Bi-weekly	Wed, Sun	upto 18.05.2025		
04094	Anand Vihar (T)	23:55	Jogbani	07:30	Weekly	Thu	upto 10.07.2025		
04093	Jogbani	09:30	Anand Vihar (T)	16:00	Weekly	Sat	upto 12.07.2025		
04207	Lucknow Jn	08:05	New Delhi	17:50	Weekly	Mon	upto 07.07.2025		
04208	New Delhi	20:20	Lucknow Jn	06:00	Weekly	Mon	upto 07.07.2025		
04213	Ayodhya Cantt	18:20	Anand Vihar (T)	06:00	Tri-weekly	Sun, Tue, Thu	upto 10.07.2025		
04214	Anand Vihar (T)	09:00	Ayodhya Cantt	22:00	Tri-weekly	Mon, Wed, Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04687	Banihal	18:40	Budgam	20:20	06 Days a week	Except Friday	upto 03.06.2025		
04688	Budgam	08:35	Banihal	10:40	06 Days a week	Except Friday	upto 03.06.2025		
04217	Varanasi Jn	06:25	Lucknow Jn	11:45	Daily		upto 30.06.2025		
04218	Lucknow Jn	16:30	Varanasi Jn	21:50	Daily		upto 30.06.2025		
04219	Shahganj Jn	22:35	Ayodhya Dham Jn	01:40	Daily		upto 10.07.2025		
04220	Ayodhya Dham Jn	02:10	Shahganj Jn	04:40	Daily		upto 10.07.2025		
02270	Lucknow Jn	14:15	Chhapra	21:30	Six day a week	Except Tuesday	upto 11.07.2025		
02269	Chhapra	23:00	Lucknow Jn	06:30	Six day a week	Tuesday	upto 11.07.2025		
04604	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	18:15	Varanasi Jn	19:00	Weekly	Sun	upto 06.07.2025		
04603	Varanasi Jn	05:30	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	11:25	Weekly	Tue	upto 08.07.2025		
04206	Varanasi Jn	14:50	Chandigarh	07:45	Weekly	Sat	upto 05.07.2025		
04205	Chandigarh	09:30	Varanasi Jn	01:20	Weekly	Sun	upto 06.07.2025		
04518	Bhatinda Jn	20:50	Varanasi Jn	17:30	Bi-weekly	Mon, Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04517	Varanasi Jn	20:40	Bhatinda Jn	17:00	Bi-weekly	Tue, Sat	upto 12.07.2025		
04209	Lucknow Jn	20:45	Chandigarh	07:55	Tri-weekly	Mon, Wed, Fri	upto 09.07.2025		
04210	Chandigarh	10:20	Lucknow Jn	21:30	Tri-weekly	Tue, Thu, Sat	upto 10.07.2025		
04504	Chandigarh	23:35	Patna Jn	22:10	Weekly	Thu	upto 29.05.2025		
04503	Patna Jn	22:45	Chandigarh	23:10	Weekly	Fri	upto 30.05.2025		
04302	Yog N Rishikesh	15:20	Muzaffarpur Jn	13:00	Weekly	Tue	upto 15.07.2025		
04301	Muzaffarpur Jn	15:00	Yog N Rishikesh	14:20	Weekly	Wed	upto 16.07.2025		
04606	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	21:30	Guwahati	19:10	Weekly	Fri	upto 30.05.2025		
04605	Guwahati	23:20	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra	20:45	Weekly	Mon	upto 02.06.2025		
04610	Jammu Tawi	06:20	Varanasi Jn	05:10	Weekly	Thu	upto 09.07.2025		
04609	Varanasi Jn	09:00	Jammu Tawi	07:45	Weekly	Fri	upto 10.07.2025		
04304	Yog N Rishikesh	15:20	Gorakhpur	06:20	Weekly	Sat	10.05.25 to 12.07.25		
04303	Gorakhpur	09:00	Yog N Rishikesh	00:55	Weekly	Sun	11.05.25 to 13.07.25		
04602	Firozpur Cantt Jn	15:10	Patna Jn	18:00	Bi-weekly	Wed, Sat	upto 12.07.2025		
04601	Patna Jn	20:50	Firozpur Cantt Jn	23:55	Bi-weekly	Thu, Sun	upto 13.07.2025		
04608	Amritsar Jn	20:10	Darbhanga Jn	02:30	Weekly	Fri	upto 11.07.2025		
04607	Darbhanga Jn	04:00	Amritsar Jn	10:30	Weekly	Sun	11.05.25 to 13.07.25		
04212	Sultanpur Jn	04:00	Lokmanya Tilak	14:00	Weekly	Mon	upto 23.06.2025		
04211	Lokmanya Tilak	16:35	Sultanpur Jn	23:00	Weekly	Tue	upto 24.06.2025		
03255	Patna Jn	22:20	Anand Vihar (T)	18:35	Bi-weekly	Sun, Thu	02.01.2025 till further advise		
03256	Anand Vihar (T)	23:30	Patna Jn	18:35	Bi-weekly	Mon, Fri	03.01.2025 till further advise		
05049	Chhapra	10:15	Amritsar Jn	13:50	Weekly	Fri	07.02.2025 till further advice		
05050	Amritsar Jn	17:45	Chhapra	23:55	Weekly	Sat	08.02.2025 till further advice		
05305	Chhapra	22:00	Anand Vihar (T)	00:20	Bi-weekly	Mon, Thu	17.02.2025 till further advice		
05306	Anand Vihar (T)	22:10	Chhapra	22:50	Bi-weekly	Wed, Sat	19.02.2025 till further advice		
05057	Gorakhpur Jn	22:45	Delhi Jn	12:50	Weekly	Thu	06.02.2025 till further advice		
05058	Delhi Jn	14:00	Gorakhpur Jn	06:25	Weekly	Fri	07.02.2025 till further advice		
01701	Jabalpur	19:40	Ayodhya Cantt	11:00	Weekly	Wed	upto 25.06.2025		
01702	Ayodhya Cantt	13:30	Jabalpur	04:15	Weekly	Thu	upto 26.06.2025		

Editor's TAKE

A humble shepherd with a global vision

Revered for his humility, Pope Leo XIV is poised to shape a new chapter for the Church

In a historic and unexpected turn, Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost has been elected as the 267th pope of the Roman Catholic Church, taking the name Pope Leo XIV. His election on May 8, 2025, marks the first time an American has ascended to the papacy, signaling a significant shift in the Church's global orientation.

Born in Chicago in 1955, Pope Leo XIV brings a rich tapestry of experiences to the papacy. His extensive missionary work in Peru, where he served as a bishop, and his leadership roles within the Augustinian order and the Vatican's Dicastery for Bishops, reflect a deep commitment to pastoral care and global outreach. Known for his reserved demeanor and thoughtful deliberation, he is often described as a "bridge builder" who seeks unity within the diverse tapestry of the Catholic Church.

His choice of the name Leo XIV pays homage to Pope Leo XIII, renowned for his advocacy of workers' rights and social justice. This selection underscores Pope Leo XIV's dedication to continuing a legacy of compassion and inclusivity.

Pope Leo XIV's election carries significant implications for the intersection of faith and politics, particularly in the United States. He has been an outspoken critic of nationalist policies, including those associated with former President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance, especially concerning immigration and social justice issues. While maintaining traditional Church teachings on matters like same-sex marriage and abortion, he emphasises the importance of pastoral sensitivity and the dignity of every individual.

His nuanced positions reflect a commitment to upholding doctrinal integrity while engaging with contemporary societal challenges. This approach aims to foster dialogue and understanding within a polarised global landscape.

The process leading to Pope Leo XIV's election was marked by thoughtful deliberation among the College of Cardinals. Following the death of Pope Francis in April 2025, 133 cardinal electors convened in the Sistine Chapel, engaging in a conclave guided by centuries-old traditions and the apostolic constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis*. After four ballots over two days, Cardinal Prevost emerged as a consensus candidate, reflecting a desire for continuity with Pope Francis's reformist agenda and a commitment to global inclusivity.

In his inaugural address, Pope Leo XIV emphasised themes of unity, peace, and pastoral care. He called for the Church to be a beacon of hope and a bridge in a fractured world. His leadership is expected to continue the synodal approach championed by his predecessor, promoting greater lay participation, environmental stewardship, and a compassionate outreach to marginalised communities.

As the Catholic Church embarks on this new chapter under Pope Leo XIV, his blend of humility, global experience, and commitment to social justice positions him to navigate the complexities of the modern world while staying rooted in the timeless teachings of the faith.

The Catholic Church, one of the oldest institutions in human history, has undergone profound transformations over the centuries — spiritually, politically, and culturally. Rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostolic tradition, the Church has had to continuously adapt to changing times while maintaining its theological foundations. In its early centuries, the Church faced persecution before eventually becoming intertwined with state power in the Roman Empire. The medieval period saw it wield immense political influence, often blurring the lines between spiritual authority and temporal control. However, this power was challenged by events such as the Great Schism and the Protestant Reformation, which forced the Church to re-evaluate its structures and doctrines.

The 20th century marked a particularly significant era of change. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was a watershed moment, modernising Church practices — introducing the use of vernacular languages in liturgy, promoting ecumenical dialogue, and encouraging greater engagement with the modern world. This opened the Church to a more pastoral and inclusive approach, focusing not only on doctrinal purity but also on social justice, human rights, and global outreach.

In recent decades, under popes like John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and especially Francis, the Church has further grappled with issues like secularism, clerical abuse, gender roles, and the role of laity. Pope Francis's emphasis on mercy, care for the poor, and environmental stewardship has redefined the Church's mission for many in the 21st century.

Now, with the election of Pope Leo XIV, the first American pontiff, the Church stands at another pivotal juncture. His leadership signals a continued embrace of reform, cultural diversity, and moral courage in facing the world's pressing social and political challenges. Through centuries of change, the Catholic Church has shown a remarkable ability to evolve — slowly, at times painfully, but always with a deep concern for its spiritual mission and global relevance.

India's power and resolve

The Prime Minister's decision to rely on the armed forces reflects a deeper commitment to professionalism, affirming that India's future depends on capable, values-driven experts and globally aligned views

After almost two weeks of the Pahalgam massacre, India retaliated by carrying out cross-border strikes with precision and depth. According to a press release under Operation Sindoor, altogether nine terror camps and headquarters of Jaish and Lashkar were targeted in Pakistan and Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir. While India showed its strong will to strike back by carrying out cross-border strikes, the strategic message was beyond punishment this time.

Until now, India's strike-back pattern suggested punitive deterrence with a limited hitting range. Uri strikes in 2016 and Balakot Strikes in 2019 demonstrated India's capability to enforce punitive deterrence against Pakistan by sending the strategic message that any undesirable behaviour will be met with a swift and severe response. In fact, after the Parliament attacks, India launched Operation Parakram, which was also an attempt to demonstrate an act of punitive deterrence, but punitive deterrence became an ineffective strike-back option as Pakistan built a perception that India's deterrence behaviour could be sustained with the ability to counter-strike as they were credible and had a limited hitting range. Pakistan's perception was demonstrated in Operation Swift Retort when Pakistan swiftly acted the next day after the Balakot strikes by breaching India's airspace with JF-17s and attempting to carry out air strikes on non-military targets in J&K. While the escalation ladder was in a pretty controlled state from both sides. Still, India's larger objectives of enforcing deterrence against Pakistan remain quite faint as both states resorted to punitive deterrence, almost seroing down the effectiveness of deterrence on Pakistan. Consequently, Pakistan didn't learn its lessons. It continued its terror operations in J&K and even shaped its sub-conventional tactics to such an extent that it could launch deep terror strikes with an element of plausible deniability. Creating offshoots and front organisations like The Resistance Front.

The echo to configure strong offensive deterrence was found in former Chief of Army Staff General Krishnaswamy Sundarji's vision paper — India's Army Perspective Plan 2000. He argued that for Pakistan, we have to adopt a maximised offensive deterrence ranging from seizure of territory to destruction of Pakistan's military and economic capabilities. Similarly, another former Chief of Army Staff, General Sundarajan Padmanabhan, who oversaw India's Operation Parakram, said, "Perpetrator would be punished so severely that its continuation thereafter in any form would be in doubt." Both the Generals echoed, maximum and credible deterrence against Pakistan, not aiming to punish



Pakistan but to escalate deterrence and offensive measures to such extent that Pakistan's sub-conventional warfare capability gets eroded but this erosion requires continuity in delivery of credible deterrence such as done in Operation Sindoor.

Operation Sindoor demonstrated three key swift shifts from earlier striking patterns. First, India expanded its striking horizon by going beyond Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir and striking deep inside Pakistan by targeting key cities — Bhawalpur and Muridke. Second, multiple targets increase operational selectivity, which was limited to only one or two camps until now — third — Attempt to push Multi Domain

Deterrence against Pakistan. India's five-point diplomatic strike after a few days of attack which notably included keeping the Indus Water Treaty in abeyance to isolating Pakistan's diplomatic and economic potential was an attempt to bring double squeeze strategy into play by exploiting and exacerbating Pakistan's internal weakness at one end and strategically isolating at the global stage — miserable failure of Pakistan at UNSC closed-door meeting despite launching renewed decades-old narrative of "false flag" is one testament of strategic isolation.

Earlier, India's isolatory approach towards Pakistan had demonstrated ordinary diplomatic measures, but this time India attempt-

to demonstrate some extraordinary diplomatic measures, adding the actual element of multi-domain deterrence. Overall, this time, India's strategic response demonstrated its capability to impose a sustained, credible and multi-dimensional deterrence against Pakistan.

Operation Sindoor echoes the beginning of a shift from immediate deterrence to long-term credible deterrence against Pakistan. The idea of long-term credible deterrence can push Pakistan to the margins if India continues to develop its long-term deterrence by adding more credibility by precisely striking the Octopus — the head of terror outfits in future. This shift in deterrence against Pakistan will force Pakistan to realise the new strategic reality that any misadventure would be met with an overwhelming response, not limited to plain responses. India's Operation Sindoor also gives a glimpse that India is also chalking a path of integrated deterrence and gradually departing from the traditional notion of deterrence, a similar move that the United States did in its National Defence Strategy after realising increasing threats and risks to its strategic security especially after 9/11 and began to sharpen its integrated deterrence in modern time after realising increased threat from rising threat from Russia and China in a heightened strategic completion environment.

The threat of the escalation ladder spiralling is one major issue in the retaliation cycle between India and Pakistan. This gets further aggravated if the Pakistan leadership is strongly tilted towards Islamic generals — from Zia, Musharraf, Parvez Kayani, to Asim Munir. Though India has already made it clear that its actions are calculative, precise, and non-

escalatory, targeting only terrorists, Pakistan has tried to play with fire when it comes to controlling escalations from unprovoked offensives at the border to launching nuclear rhetoric. After India's thunderbolt response, Pakistan's top echelons may be in a dilemma in delivering a reaction while considering the escalation factor, as the onus of escalation is now on Pakistan. Last year, Pakistan carried out limited air strikes in response to Iran's retaliatory response against anti-Iran terror groups in the bordering region of Pakistan. Similarly, Pakistan might opt for limited air-to-cross-border strikes but may also exercise in-depth strikes. At present, Pakistan is attempting to flare up by indiscriminate shelling against civilians in J&K's bordering regions. Poonch is one of the worst-hit areas by Pakistan's shelling.

Whatever Pakistan's response, Asim Munir must realise that he is already suffering with high costs, with his nation getting humiliated and bleeding. If Munir attempts to deliver a miscalculated response, then the escalation ladder might spiral, and he might get consumed by his fire. Pakistan must also realise that it does not have many options; it cannot afford to put its strategic security at more risk, especially when Pakistan's western frontier is almost smoked by TTP and Baloch fighters. It's high time that Pakistan realises that now, higher costs and risks are involved in coercing India after it has demonstrated a swift shift in its deterrence against Pakistan by showing both power and resolve.

(The writer is an advocate and a columnist. Views are personal)

The Power of choice and faith

SECOND Opinion

BY BARBARA O'NEILL

My journey into the world of mental health began early, shaped by personal experience and a natural call to care. I was just 18 or 19 when I found myself taking care of my mother, who was wheelchair-bound. At the same time, I was studying psychology at night, and it quickly became clear that nursing — especially psychiatric nursing — was where my heart belonged. Even while enjoying the life of a young adult, I was deeply curious: What causes mental illness? What pushes a person to the edge?

One case I'll never forget involved a man admitted in utter crisis. His wife had left him, his business collapsed, his home was destroyed in a fire, and his son became a paraplegic — all in a short span of time. He had reached breaking point. But with coordinated care from social workers, financial advisors, and mental health professionals, his life began to mend. Just a week later, he walked out of the facility with a bag in his hand and hope in his heart. That experience taught me a vital truth: with the right support, people can recover even from the depths of despair.

At 25, my path took a spiritual turn when I became a Christian. Around the same time, I developed a deep interest in natural remedies and a holistic approach to raising my children. A pivotal moment came when I was given a book

called *Psycho-Dietetics*, published in 1976. It explored how American doctors were using minerals, vitamins, and lifestyle changes to support mental health. That book lit a fire in me. It launched a lifelong pursuit of natural, empowering, and faith-aligned ways to support the mind.

I've always believed in raising independent thinkers — emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. I didn't spoon-feed my children; I wanted them to think, question, and grow strong from within. That same principle guides my approach to care: give people tools they can use on their own, not just within the walls of a clinic. In recent years, especially amid global upheaval and restrictions, many people have started to look inward and upward for answers. The need for holistic self-care — mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual — has never been clearer. People are realising that healing is not just something that happens in a doctor's office; it starts with taking responsibility for one's own well-being.

Mental health is complex, but one truth remains: our mindset matters. Depression is often a state of mind — though this may be difficult to hear, it carries weight. Therapies like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) help us see that while we can't always change our circumstances, we can choose our responses. Gratitude, even in suffering, is one of the most powerful tools. In a world gripped by fear and uncertainty, we must remember the profound power of choice. It is central to mental freedom, parenting, and spiritual growth. When we choose to trust God in adversity, we're not simply holding onto hope — we're resisting fear itself. But this choice also reveals a deeper spiritual truth: God is not a tyrant. He gives us freedom,

even when it means people sometimes choose wrongly and others suffer. Still, in reclaiming our minds from destructive patterns, this freedom becomes our greatest strength. We are not victims of our thoughts. We can choose what we focus on. As Dr Neil Nedley says, "The mind stayed on Him is a choice." Sometimes, that choice starts with "fake it till you make it." It may sound hollow, but it's a powerful truth-repetition creates reality. Just like going to the gym builds identity over time, practicing hope reshapes our inner dialogue.

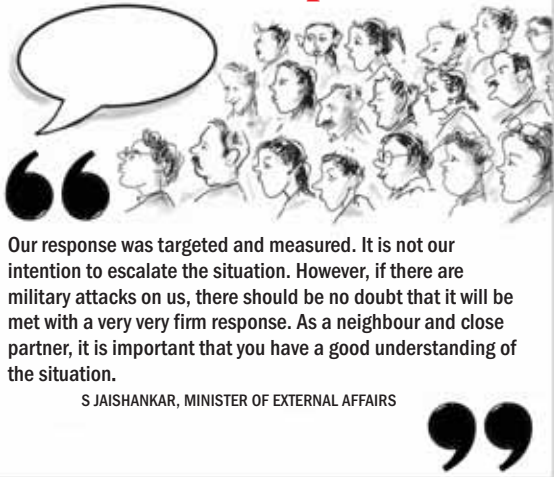
Living in the present is also vital. We're often bogged down by regrets or fears of tomorrow. But as one speaker said, "Love today. Love where you are. Love what's happening — because you'll never have that moment again." Gratitude brings healing. Even when self-critical, pause and reframe. Maybe your feet look odd — but they carry you. You are free.

Lastly, mental wellness is deeply rooted in the physical laws of health, where simple, consistent habits yield profound results. Breathing through the nose, rather than the mouth, enhances oxygenation and naturally filters the air we take in, supporting clearer thinking and calmness.

Regular movement, exposure to sunlight, and quality sleep are equally vital — research shows that just ten nights of six-hour sleep can reduce brain function by up to 50 per cent. Hydration and proper nutrition, particularly with omega-3 fatty acids, form the building blocks of cognitive and emotional balance. Faith doesn't remove fear, but it gives us the courage to keep walking, step by step.

(The author is a world renowned holistic healer and advocate of transformative wellness. Views are personal)

Leaderspeak



Our response was targeted and measured. It is not our intention to escalate the situation. However, if there are military attacks on us, there should be no doubt that it will be met with a very very firm response. As a neighbour and close partner, it is important that you have a good understanding of the situation.

S JAISHANKAR, MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Letters to the Editor

Caste census must bridge gaps

Madam — The move to conduct a caste-based census must be viewed with thoughtful consideration. Data can be a tool for progress if it promotes fairness and opportunity, not division. Global principles emphasise equal dignity, social cohesion, and the recognition of merit beyond inherited identity. While marginalised communities deserve focused support, categorising citizens primarily by caste may risk reinforcing societal barriers.

Instead, emphasis should be placed on gathering data related to education, employment, and healthcare disparities. Nation-building thrives when every citizen feels valued as part of one collective future. Let us ensure that any data collection fosters inclusion, not fragmentation. Policy must balance historical realities with a shared vision for equity and unity. Progress lies not in highlighting our differences but in bridging them meaningfully.

In conclusion, the call for a caste-based census must be grounded in a vision that uplifts rather than divides. While acknowledging historical injustices, we must prioritise data that addresses real developmental gaps — education, employment, healthcare — without deepening social fault lines. The aim should be to craft policies that empower the marginalised while reinforcing our shared national identity. India's progress depends on fostering unity through inclusion, not fragmentation through labels.

HASNAIN RABBANI | MUMBAI

Rohit Sharma calls it a day gracefully

Madam — Unfortunately, an underachiever in Whites called it a day for reasons known only to him. India captain Rohit Sharma has retired from Test cricket. It comes after reports in the Indian media that he would be removed as captain for the Test series in England this summer. Rohit gave nonchalant joy whenever in form and in mood. Retires when still good enough to play for couple of years.

In his test Career, Sharma played 67 Test matches, scoring 4,301 runs at an average of 40.57, including 12 centuries and 18 half-centuries. As a captain he succeeded Virat Kohli as Test captain in 2022 and led India in 24 matches, winning 12. In his ODI Career Rohit Sharma will continue to play ODIs and has recently led the team to the 2025 Champions Trophy title.

His T20 Career ended as he retired from T20 internationals after India's victory in the 2024 — T20 World Cup. A graceful exit, Rohit Sharma bows out of Test cricket with 4,301 runs in 67 matches, 12 centuries, and a captaincy that saw India win half of his 24 Tests in charge. Though his departure follows whispers of a captaincy change, Rohit exits with dignity intact, still capable, still cherished. Having led India to triumphs in the 2024 T20 World Cup and 2025 Champions Trophy, his legacy lives on. Sometimes, it is best to leave them wanting more.

JAYANTHY SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

Operation Sindoor: Precision Strike

Madam — On May 7, India launched Operation Sindoor, a precision military strike targeting nine terrorist hubs in Pakistan and Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK). This decisive action followed the April 22 Pahalgam attack that killed 26 civilians, mostly tourists. Between 1:05 AM and 1:30 AM, Rafale Jets armed with SCALP missiles hit camps run by Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Notably, Indian forces avoided Pakistani military targets, signaling a calculated and focused counterterrorism mission. The operation highlights India's evolving military doctrine — marked by swift retaliation, strategic restraint, and intelligence-based targeting.

It reinforces India's stance of measured but firm responses to cross-border terrorism while bolstering its defense credibility. Geopolitically, the strike comes amid Pakistan's internal instability and raises the risk of regional escalation. Islamabad is likely to seek diplomatic support, especially from China and Turkey.

China's stance will be closely watched, given its Indo-Pacific ambitions. Western nations, particularly the US, may support India's right to self-defense while calling for calm. Beyond immediate security implications, Operation Sindoor could influence economic and diplomatic ties, including trade dynamics and water-sharing talks. As India aligns military action with broader national strategy, its assertive posture may mark a significant shift in South Asia's geopolitical landscape.

AMARJEET KUMAR | HAZARIBAGH

PAKISTAN LEANS ON CHINA FOR ARMS SUPPLIES

Since the US having cut off arms supplies to Pakistan in the wake of the changed geopolitical situation in Afghanistan, cash-strapped Islamabad has been increasingly leaning on China in recent years to fill the gap.

According to data compiled by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), China was the largest supplier of military hardware to Pakistan, accounting for as much as 81 per cent of the country's total imports, followed by the Netherlands at 5.5 per cent and Turkey at 3.8 per cent. Turkish President Erdogan expressed solidarity with Pakistan amid rising tensions with India following Operation Sindoor.

The total arms imports from China between 2019 and 2023 alone were valued at \$5.28 billion, which accounted for 63 per cent of Pakistan's total arms imports, according to SIPRI data.

Pakistan has been getting defence hardware from China that ranges from fighter jets for the air force to sub-

marines and frigates for the country's navy and artillery guns for the Pakistan Army. The JF-17 Thunder fighter jet is a flagship project of China-Pakistan military cooperation. The JF-17 is currently a mainstay of the Pakistan Air Force after the US stopped supplying its F-16s. Production of the jets started in 2007, and deliveries are ongoing, with each delivery introducing upgraded modern variants.

In 2015, Pakistan ordered eight Type-041 Yuan-class conventional submarines from China, four of which were to be built in China, and four to be made under license in Pakistan at Karachi Shipyard. Delivery schedule for these submarines runs from 2022 to 2028, with the deal valued at \$5 billion. Pakistan has also got Chinese SH-15 155mm self-propelled artillery guns for deployment to the Indian border. With this the Pakistan having full support of mighty China currently which is worrisome for India.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Please send your letter to theletterstopioneer@gmail.com. In not more than 400 words. We appreciate your feedback.

Victory's veil: The allied legacy of moral evasion

Eighty years on, the Allied victory is still hailed as a triumph over tyranny — but behind the celebration lies a legacy of deceit, injustice, and moral compromise. The victors fashioned a postwar world less defined by liberation than by selective memory and calculated impunity

FIRST Column

When President Harry Truman read the plea from Manhattan Project scientists urging a reconsideration of the atomic bomb's use on Japan, his response likely showed no moral hesitation or remorse. Instead, his actions reinforced a postwar global order based not on liberty, but on selective memory and perverse exoneration.

Eighty years after Victory in Europe Day, the dominant Western narrative continues to present the war's outcome as a triumph of virtue, ignoring the uncomfortable ethical compromises and strategic duplicities that underpinned it. The mythology of liberation has become sacrosanct, while the darker aspects — such as rendition, racial internment, scientific justification of war crimes, and indifference to colonial sacrifice — remain marginalised or erased. The obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki — while dressed in the procedural lexicon of wartime necessity — was, in fact, the Western world's inaugural postbellum moral abdication. The bombings were less a denouement of global conflict and more a vulgar display of technological supremacy calculated to dissuade Soviet assertiveness. The horror, therefore, was not simply that a nuclear Rubicon had been crossed, but that it was done with an exultatory grin, and later justified with the antiseptic language of 'strategic imperatives'. It is no longer speculative fiction but a matter of record, buried in declassified memoranda, that alternatives existed — namely, Japan's increasing willingness to consider surrender if the Emperor were retained. Truman's decision was not an exigency of war, but a deliberate theatricality of dominance. The supposed Allied moral high ground crumbled further when Operation Paperclip was set into motion.

Over 1,600 Nazi scientists, including unrepentant perpetrators of ghastly human experimentation, were clandestinely ferried into the United States under the auspices of national security and scientific utility. Wernher von Braun, a man whose rockets were lubricated by the blood of enslaved labourers at Mittelwerk, became a lauded patriarch of American aerospace triumph. The apologia was monstrously bureaucratic — his past affiliations were 'scrubbed' to sanitise his assimilation into American exceptionalism. In a 1947 CIA memo, the chilling intent is laid bare: "It is not desirable that the public or press become aware..." — a line that resounds like a macabre hymn to state-sanctioned impunity. This institutional duplicity was not uniquely American.

The British intelligence establishment had its own euphemistically elegant form of deceit. Through the "Double Cross System," MI5 successfully manipulated German intelligence via double agents, such as the legendary Juan Pujol García, to misdirect Axis expectations about D-Day. Though tactically ingenious, this also reveals an alarming precedent: deception, once wielded in wartime, quickly transmogrifies into peacetime governance. The ability to deceive a foreign enemy soon turned inward —



domestic populations were no longer sacrosanct from psychological warfare, propaganda, and informational obfuscation. Simultaneously, the West turned a wilfully blind eye to Soviet atrocities for the sake of fragile alliances. The Katyn Forest massacre, wherein Stalin's NKVD executed over 22,000 Polish officers, was known to the Roosevelt and Churchill administrations.

Declassified communications confirm that both leaders opted for calculated silence, fearing the rupture of wartime unity. One CIA memo chillingly advised that "public disclosure not advised due to diplomatic concerns." In those words lies the DNA of postwar moral relativism: truth subjugated to expediency.

Even within the triumphant United States, the internment of over 110,000 Japanese Americans — a move unreplicated in scale or racial homogeneity for any other ethnic group — was executed under the pretence of national security, yet dripped with racial animus. The true indictment emerges not just

from the camps themselves, but from what came after. Thousands of Japanese American men volunteered to fight for a nation that caged their families. The 442nd Regimental Combat Team, largely composed of these internees' sons, became the most decorated unit of its size in US military history. Their leader, Senator Daniel Inouye, once said, "We fought not just the enemy, but the prejudice of our own country. Still, we fought."

That their legacy was received with patronising nods rather than substantive restitution only amplifies the grotesquerie of their sacrifice. Meanwhile, British colonial troops — 2.5 million strong from India, Africa, and the Caribbean — were deployed across the world's war fronts, shedding blood for a Crown that had no intention of emancipating them.

In Burma, Indian troops bore the brunt of the jungle war, their bodies discarded in the colonial ledger as expendable assets. Their gallantry was neither commemorated with equitable pensions nor with places in British collective memory. A veteran of the Burma Campaign once lamented: "We fought for the British, yet after the war, they forgot us. My medals mean little without respect." Postwar Britain, engrossed in rebuilding its own wounded self-image, had no space for the sepia-toned loyalty of its colonial wards. Simultaneously,

the Soviet Union — while lionised for its monumental military sacrifice — was also the architect of unspeakable internal savageries. The Holodomor, the Great Purge, and mass deportations — these were not aberrations but policies. The Red Army's entry into Berlin was marked not only by military triumph but by a tidal wave of civilian rapes and looting, acts that were obfuscated or trivialised in postwar historiography.

Allied complicity in whitewashing these crimes was another ethical forfeiture. The myths of the 'liberator' prevailed, even as countless women were left psychologically eviscerated by the supposed liberators themselves. There were no clean hands in this war — not among the Allies, not among the Axis, and certainly not among the institutions that shaped the postwar order. The psychological experiments of Unit 731 in Japan, which included live vivisections and plague dissemination, should have led to Nuremberg-style prosecutions in the Pacific. Instead, many of its physicians were rewarded with amnesty by the United States in exchange for their data on biological warfare. "Data on human experimentation is valuable..." read a US Army report in 1947.

It is difficult to concoct a phrase more morally desiccated. Nor was the West's complicity confined to acts of commission; its sins of omission reverberate just as loudly. The Jewish partisans in Eastern Europe, those who rose from the ashes of ghettos to sabotage Nazi convoys and derail genocide, were rarely included in the triumphalist Allied narrative. Their resistance did not conform to the clean binaries of statehood or military discipline — it was desperate, feral, and incandescently courageous. Faye Schulman, one such partisan, wrote: "I vowed never to be taken alive again. The forest became my freedom, my gun my answer."

The war also eviscerated any illusions of gender equality. Thousands of women risked and gave — their lives in resistance movements, logistics, and espionage. Noor Inayat Khan, a British Muslim spy of Indian heritage, refused to betray her comrades under Gestapo torture and was eventually executed at Dachau. Her last known words were: "I have nothing more to say." Yet after the war, women were largely herded back into domestic anonymity, their wartime roles ossified as aberrations rather than recognised contributions to victory. The truth is that, while the West defeated fascism with the indispensable support of the Global South and poorer nations, it merely adopted fascist mechanisms, cloaked them in democratic rhetoric, and integrated them into the Cold War order. What followed was not peace, but a cover-up, where impunity was dressed as security and complicity as strategy. The moral divide between Axis villainy and Allied virtue crumbles, revealing a postwar world shaped not by justice, but by duplicity, omission, and a profound fear of moral reckoning.

(The writer is a columnist and political analyst based in Colombo. Views are personal)



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

EVEN WITHIN THE TRIUMPHANT UNITED STATES, THE INTERNMENT OF OVER 110,000 JAPANESE AMERICANS — A MOVE UNREPLICATED IN SCALE OR RACIAL HOMOGENEITY FOR ANY OTHER ETHNIC GROUP — WAS EXECUTED UNDER THE PRETENCE OF NATIONAL SECURITY, YET DRIPPED WITH RACIAL ANIMUS

Time for the People of J&K to Rise and Shine!

Once plagued by instability, Jammu and Kashmir is now witnessing a transformative resurgence in tourism, infrastructure, and investment, ushering in a new era of growth, opportunity, and national integration

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful places on earth. It, however, has also been one of the most volatile regions due to the delusional and dogmatic mindset of our western neighbour. The result: ever since 1947, it has been subjected to periods of turmoil, instability and tremendous external pressures.

The casualties in this entire process have been the people of the State along with our brave security forces, who have defended the people from both external as well as indoctrinated internal elements. Post-Independence, the economy of the State was doing quite well, and it was driven to a large extent by the tourism industry. For decades, this sector formed a critical part of the State's economy and was the favourite destination of India's most loved entertainment source — the Bollywood movies!

As a result, the State remained in the limelight, with the most famous actors, in a way, becoming its brand ambassadors. As many as 50 per cent of the movies were shot in the State, showcasing its beauty and creating avenues of growth for various extensions of the entertainment industry.

This had a huge bearing and created fertile conditions for the coming up of tourist destinations, hotels, markets for local handicrafts, the Kashmiri 'apple' and 'dry fruits', shikara (houseboats) — all of which generated tremendous employment for the people of the State.

In 1955, over 50 thousand domestic and foreign tourists visited J&K; this number crossed 74 thousand by 1960, to over 1.5 lakh by 1968, and stood at around 5.85 lakhs in 1980. Srinagar, in the 1960s and 70s, had approximately 5-9 daily flights from many Indian cities and was relatively well connected back in the days.

According to a Government survey, J&K welcomed 7 lakh tourists in 1987, and this went down to a mere 6,000 three years later. This proves the sheer economic damage that the State suffered due to instability and mischievous propaganda of vested interests. Things improved a little post-1989, and unfortunately the region was embattled in the Kargil War in 1999. Things did take a turn for the better, and by 2010 — 30 years after 1980 — the number of tourist arrivals touched the 5-lakh mark, going on to show that despite some recovery, the State made no real progress in this area in 30 years due to the prevailing uncertainties and an environment of terror.

In 2019, when the Government took the bold step of abolishing Article 370, and firmly conveyed its position — that enough is enough — J&K once again began an era of unprecedented economic and all-round progress. The improved overall environ-



ANIL RAJPUT

ment and sentiment was first and foremost reflected through the tourist arrivals that broke all records. In 2021, 1.13 crore tourists visited the UT; 1.89 crore in 2022; this increased to 2.12 crores in 2023 and 2.36 crores in 2024. This has also resulted in many multinational and domestic hotel chains opening new properties in the UT, and the region currently offers 62,488 registered tourist beds across hotels, guest houses and houseboats.

In addition, J&K is developing 75 new tourist destinations, 75 heritage/cultural sites, 75 Sufism/religious sites and 75 adventure treks/sites — potentially attracting tourists for all the four seasons.

ACCORDING TO A GOVERNMENT SURVEY, J&K WELCOMED 7 LAKH TOURISTS IN 1987, AND THIS WENT DOWN TO A MERE 6,000 THREE YEARS LATER. THIS PROVES THE SHEER ECONOMIC DAMAGE THAT THE STATE SUFFERED DUE TO INSTABILITY AND MISCHIEVOUS PROPAGANDA OF VESTED INTERESTS.

There has also been a massive increase in the daily flights to Srinagar, which is today witnessing around 45-50 daily flights in summer and 35-37 flights in the winters. To complete a full circle, as many as 300 movies and web series were shot in J&K in two years (2022 and 2023) — a clear signal that the atmosphere was back to the pre-1989 days. In fact, here it is critical to mention the laudable and impactful steps that the Central and the UT Government have taken since 2019: the Prime Minister's Development Package — 2015 was accelerated and 53 projects pertaining to 15 ministries are being implemented at a cost of ₹58,477 crores in various sectors such as roads, power, health, education, tourism, agriculture, skill development and much more — out of these, 29 projects have been completed with many others in advanced stages of production.

A new Central Sector Scheme was notified in 2021 for the industrial development of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir, with an outlay of ₹28,400

crores. In addition, J&K has received investment applications of more than ₹54,000 crores, out of which projects worth more than ₹36,000 crores have been allotted industrial land. The construction work of 17,601 km of roads under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana was completed up to March 2022, and this has connected over 2,074 places. Two AIIMS, seven new medical colleges, two cancer institutes and 15 nursing colleges have been taken up and operationalised, along with reviving power projects for about 3,000 MW capacity.

Three major irrigation projects that include Ravi Canal (₹62 crore), third stage of Tral Lift Irrigation Scheme (₹45 crore) and the comprehensive flood management plan of river Jhelum and its tributaries — Phase I, costing ₹400 crores — have been completed. In addition, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir has carried out recruitment in the public sector from 2019 onwards, totalling nearly 30 thousand employments. Another 5.2 lakh persons are estimated to be employed through self-employment schemes from August 2019 up to June 2022. A hundred per cent saturation has also been achieved in 17 individual beneficiary-centric schemes, including Saubhagya, Ujala, Ujjwala and Indradhanush schemes. Therefore, things really began to look up, and the period from 2019 onwards is actually the golden period for the Valley and the UT of J&K.

That is, till the recent and most unfortunate and orchestrated attack that happened at one of the UT's most famous tourist destinations — Pahalgam. It was clear that the recent development of the region, and the overall environment of prosperity, did not go well with a neighbouring state which has an evil eye on J&K — and their frustration led to this desperate attempt to damage the economy and derail the progress being made by the local population. It has always been the people of the UT who have, today and in the past, remained the biggest sufferers and have paid a steep price for such senseless acts. It is my firm belief that the best is yet to come for the Valley and its people. Ultimately, the answer for J&K's growth and a bright future lies in the local Kashmiri's resolve and ability to recognise and call out the sinister agenda of external forces. They need to awaken and defeat these evil designs for their own good, and for this to happen — cooperating and trusting the local administration, which has always tried to ensure their safety and security, along with that of their future generations — is the need of the hour!

The writer is President — Corporate Affairs, ITC. Views are personal

Indian envoy to UK calls on Pakistan to take 'off-ramp'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

India's response to Pakistan's original conflict escalation with the terrorist attacks in Pahalgam last month was "precise, targeted" and focussed solely on terror infrastructure but Pakistan has chosen to continue to escalate the matter instead of taking an "off-ramp" to end the crisis, the Indian High Commissioner to the UK has said. Vikram Doraiswami was interviewed by a series of UK media outlets on Thursday to present India's stance on the rising tensions between India and Pakistan. He told 'Sky News' that the international community can intervene by pointing out the opportunity for an off-ramp to Pakistan.

He also displayed an image live on air of US-designated terrorist Abdur Rauf leading prayers for the terrorists killed in Operation Sindoor, also presented during a briefing by Foreign Secretary Vikram Mistry in New Delhi.

"Everybody knows that for the last 30 years, Pakistan has used this (terrorism) as a means of sub-critical warfare against India," said Doraiswami. "If the international community really wants to be able



The Indian High Commissioner Vikram Doraiswami

PTI

to look at this and worry about it, the simple solution is to tell Pakistan it has an opportunity for an off-ramp. These are things that the world should have com-

pelled Pakistan to do 30 years ago, and to compel them to implement their promises about taking down this infrastructure. It has not done so," he said. Asked if India

fears a further escalation of conflict in the region, the envoy asserted that the "original escalation" is Pakistan-sponsored terror groups attacking and shooting civilians in Pahalgam on April 22. "Our response thereafter was precise, targeted, reasonable and moderate. It was focused principally and solely on terrorist infrastructure. We did not strike the Pakistani military establishment. We did not strike national infrastructure, and we made it abundantly clear... that the object of this exercise was clearly to avoid military escalation - a fact actually acknowledged in a left handed way, of course, by the Pakistani side in terms of their own official statements which said that the airspace hadn't been violated," said Doraiswami.

"The logical solution would be, as we've said repeatedly, for Pakistan to take the opportunity of an off ramp, which we have made abundantly clear, including this morning, that if Pakistan stops attacking our military facilities, the matter ends there, but it is for them to decide," he said.

The High Commissioner was also pressed on media reports around Indian jets being allegedly shot down, claims that remain unsubstantiated.

Imran Khan's party files petition seeking his jail release

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad

Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party on Friday filed a petition in the High Court here seeking his release from jail, claiming a threat to his life due to the impact of the prolonged detention on his health and in view of the current situation with India.

Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf party, in a WhatsApp message, said that the party's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur approached the Islamabad High Court for the release of the party founder.

Khan, 72, has been incarcerated in Adiala Jail of Rawalpindi, the garrison city, since mid-2023 in connection with multiple cases.

"The Islamabad High Court has been approached for the release of Imran Khan. An application has been filed by Chief Minister KP Ali Amin," the party said.

"It has been requested that in view of the current war situation with India, for national harmony and solidarity, and due to the fear of a drone attack in Adiala Jail, he be immediately released on parole/probation."

The court has not set any date for the hearing of the plea.

Speaking to the media at the Islamabad High Court premises, Gandapur described the PTI founder as a leader of the Muslim Ummah (community) and expressed hope for justice.

Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf party, in a WhatsApp message, said that the party's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur approached the Islamabad High Court for the release of the party founder

He expressed concern about the lack of law and order in the country, stating that they have knocked on all doors seeking justice.

Gandapur argued in the petition that Khan's prolonged detention due to politically motivated cases is violating the basic rights of the PTI founder.

He stated that the Constitution provides a remedy for release on parole to avoid such detention. The petitioner further mentioned that there is a risk of health deterioration due to prolonged imprisonment.

We are at war with the terrorists, India states to US

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

India is at war with the terrorists and will bring justice to victims of the Pahalgam attack by holding the "lowlifes, subhuman monsters" accountable, Indian Ambassador to the US Vinay Kwatra has said, underscoring that in no world would these terrorists be allowed a free pass.

"The frame and the template in which we look at is the terror template. April 22 was the most heinous terrorist act," Kwatra said in an interview to CNN on Thursday.

The interview comes as India ramps up its diplomatic offensive against Pakistan following the military confrontation triggered by the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack that had cross border linkages.

"It is nobody's case to say that these terrorists should be given a free pass, and that's precisely what we did the day before yesterday, held them accountable," Kwatra said and described India's action as "a very precise, calibrated, measured response to these terrorists."

"We are at war with the terrorists, and we will, as I said, bring justice to the victims and hold them accountable," he said answering a question if India is at war with Pakistan. "Our foremost objective in this was (to) hold these lowlifes, subhuman monsters accountable and bring justice to the victims."

India launched 'Operation Sindoor' on May 7, striking terror factories at nine locations in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in retaliation for the Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 civilians and for which the Resistance Front (TRF), a front for the UN-proscribed Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, had claimed responsibility.

Underscoring the fact that four terrorists backed by Pakistan killed 26 civilians, Kwatra said "in no world would you allow such terrorists to be given a free pass. And that is precisely what we did the day before yesterday."

"We carried out a very precise, calibrated, measured response to these terrorists, to their factories, to their integrated facilities, which they run out of Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. (We) took them out where they train them, they equip them, organise them, those are the facilities we took out."

"It is nobody's case to say that such terrorists should be given a free pass, wherever they are located."

He added that from a large number of Congressmen, Senators to the whole world, they all appreciate that India should respond and bring accountability for these terrorists and justice for the victims.

Kwatra asserted that the original escalation and the original breakout of ten-

sion happened on April 22, when four terrorists backed by Pakistan carried out "brutal, subhuman, monstrous kind of killings" of 26 civilians, including a Nepali national.

He said the terrorists killed the civilians on the basis of religion, identifying and killing "all non-Muslims".

"So what we did the day before yesterday was essentially our response to terror," Kwatra said, adding that India's response has been very measured, calibrated and proportionate.

Responding to a question on explosions being heard in Kashmir, Kwatra said Pakistan has again decided to stand with the terrorists. "Rather than take action against them, they are essentially lending them support," he said.

"We wouldn't be surprised if they are themselves involved in this, but that's what is the message," which Pakistan is telling the world that it is with terrorists, it is not with the rest of the civilised world, the rest of humanity.

"Pakistan's belief lies in perpetrating these proxies of terror killings, brutal killings of innocent civilians," he said.

To a comment that Pakistan has denied involvement in the attacks, Kwatra said that "denial and obfuscation" has always been the first part of Pakistan's strategy.

"They have this unique characteristic where they assume responsibility of their past actions in future, not in the present moment," he said as he asked where was Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, who plotted the September 11 attacks in the US, found. The killer of American journalist Daniel Pearl or perpetrators of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks found?

Responding to a question, Kwatra said that with Operation Sindoor, "we, from our perspective, had brought a certain finality to it, but it was, of course, subject to whether Pakistan has brought finality to it. Pakistan chose to escalate it further. Now it's duty-bound for us to respond to that."

When asked how concerned should the world be that the tensions between India and Pakistan could escalate into a nuclear war, the Indian envoy said, "I think the world should be concerned about the fact that Pakistan's support to terrorism and terrorist activities continues."

"I think that's what the world should be concerned about. And I think that's what the world should tell Pakistan - to stop supporting terrorism. I think that's the crux of the question," he asserted.

When asked if he thinks it could get to the point of nuclear weapons, he said: "That's for you to ask Pakistan for that." He also drew attention to what he called was "Pakistan's old habit of misinformation campaign."

US to stay out of war: Vance on India-Pakistan tensions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

Amid escalating tensions between India and Pakistan, the US has said it is not going to get involved in a war that's "fundamentally none of our business."

While the US cannot control India and Pakistan, it can encourage the two nuclear-armed neighbours to de-escalate, Vice President J D Vance said in an interview with Fox News on Thursday.

"Look, we're concerned about any time nuclear powers collide and have a major conflict," Vance said when asked how concerned the Trump administration is about a potential nuclear war between India and Pakistan.

Vance quoted US President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio who have said that Washington wants the tensions to "de-escalate" as quickly as possible.

"We can't control these countries though. Fundamentally, India has its gripes with Pakistan. Pakistan has responded to India. What we can do is try to encourage these folks to de-escalate a little bit. But we're not going to get involved in the middle of war that's fundamentally none of our business and has nothing to do with America's ability to control it," the vice president said.

"America can't tell the Indians to lay down their arms. We can't tell the Pakistanis to lay down their arms. And so we're going to continue to pursue this thing through diplomatic channels. Our hope and our expectation is that this is not going to spiral into a broader regional war or, God forbid, a nuclear conflict, but sure, we're worried about these things."

"But I think the job of diplomacy, but also the job of cooler heads in India and Pakistan is to make sure this doesn't become a nuclear war. If it happened of course it would be disastrous. Right now



US Vice President J D Vance

PTI

we don't think that's going to happen," he said.

Vance, Second Lady Usha Vance and their three children were on their first official visit to India when terrorists killed 26 people, mostly tourists, in Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir on April 22.

Two weeks after the attack, India launched Operation Sindoor on Wednesday, targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. On Thursday night, India neutralised Pakistan military's attempt to hit military stations in Jammu, Pathankot, Udhampur and some other locations with missiles and drones as tensions soared between the two countries amid fears of a wider military conflict.

After the Indian military foiled the Pakistani attempts, the defence ministry said India remains "fully prepared to defend its sovereignty and ensure the safe-

ty of its people".

Earlier on Thursday, Secretary of State Rubio spoke separately with India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, emphasising the need for immediate de-escalation.

In his call with Jaishankar, Rubio expressed US support for direct dialogue between India and Pakistan and encouraged continued efforts to improve communications. He reiterated his condolences for the horrific terrorist attack in Pahalgam and reaffirmed the US' commitment to work with India in the fight against terrorism.

In his conversation with Sharif, Rubio reiterated his calls for Pakistan to take concrete steps to end any support for terrorist groups.

In a press briefing on Thursday, State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce

said Rubio underlined the need for de-escalation in his conversations with Jaishankar and Sharif.

"...At this moment in time, there is like one thing that has to stop, which is a back-and-forth and a continuation of this, and that is what we're focused on right now," she said.

The message from the Secretary of State and from the United States "is that the violence should stop, that military action, war, as we've seen in that region, certainly in the Middle East, has clearly for generations proven that it is not a solution because it never ends."

"There has to be a change in that regard. So obviously, when it comes to solving a problem, this administration has made itself clear, that war, the military, more violence is not a solution. Diplomacy is a solution, new ideas to stop generational violence and problems."

Asked if Rubio offered to mediate between the two countries, Bruce said, "We are not going to be speaking about the details. That is certainly our policy."

The US continues to urge India and Pakistan to work towards a responsible solution. Washington remains engaged with both governments at multiple levels, she said.

The US wants the perpetrators to be held accountable and are supportive of any efforts to that end, she added.

Bruce told reporters that Rubio underlined that the conflict should not escalate.

"Clearly this has been an issue for decades and... With what we saw over the last few weeks after the terrorist attack, it was not surprising but very, very disappointing. But... It should not escalate."

"And communication was fundamentally key, that there should be talks, that there should not be silence and that America obviously was in the centre of this in speaking with a variety of leaders of both countries over the last two days," Bruce said.

Pakistan says economic affairs ministry's X account hacked after post seeking loans

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad/New Delhi

Pakistan on Friday said that the X account of its ministry of economic affairs was hacked and an appeal was posted on it for more international loans to meet the "heavy losses" caused by the current tensions with India.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issued a 'FAKE TWEET ALERT', saying the account was "hacked".

An official also confirmed that the X account has been hacked, and "work was going to switch off the account."

The hacking led to a fake appeal by the Economic Affairs Division of the ministry,

calling for more loans and urging the international community to help defuse the tensions with India following the Pahalgam terror attack. The tensions caused the stock market in Pakistan to tumble.

"Government of Pakistan appeals to International Partners for more loans after heavy losses 'inflicted' by enemy. Amid escalating war and stocks crash, we urge international partners to help de-escalate. Nation urged to remain steadfast," the post on the account said.

Interestingly, "inflicted" was misspelled in the post, leading to suspicion as official handling accounts seldom make such glaring mistakes.

The post came after the Pakistan Stock

Exchange fell by more than 6,000 points on Thursday. However, the market recovered on Friday and gained more than 1,000 points in the morning trading session.

The timing of the post was also intriguing as it coincided with a meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) executive board to decide on the next installment of a \$7 billion loan agreed last year.

Pakistan is expected to get more than \$2 billion as part of the second tranche of the loans and a new loan which the fund approved to combat the impact of environmental changes. Earlier, India's Press Information Bureau had taken a swipe at the fashion the economic affairs division of Pakistan was seeking alms.

Kim supervised missile tests simulating nuclear strikes: North Korea

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised tests of short-range ballistic missile systems that simulated nuclear counterstrikes against US and South Korean forces, state media said Friday, as the North continued to blame its rivals for escalating tensions through their joint military exercises.

The report came a day after South Korea's military detected multiple launches from North Korea's eastern coast and assessed that the tests could also be related to the country's weapons exports to Russia during its war in Ukraine.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said Thursday's tests involved a mobile ballistic missile system apparently modelled after Russia's Iskander, as well as 600-millimetre multiple rocket launchers that South Korean officials classify as ballistic due to their self-

propulsion and guided flight. Both are part of a growing lineup of weapons systems that the North says could be armed with "tactical" nuclear weapons for battlefield use. KCNA said the tests were intended to train military units operating missile and rocket systems to more effectively execute attacks under the North's nuclear weapons control system and ensure a swift response to a nuclear crisis.

The agency criticised the United States and its "vassal states" for expanding joint military exercises on and around the Korean Peninsula, which the North claims are preparations for nuclear war, and said Thursday's launches demonstrated the "rapid counteraction posture" of its forces.

Kim stressed the need to strengthen the role of his nuclear forces in both deterring and fighting war, and called for continued efforts to improve combat readiness and precision strike capabilities, KCNA said. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said



multiple missiles of various types were launched from the area around the eastern port city of Wonsan on Thursday from about 8:10 to 9:20 am, with the farthest travelling about 800 kilometres. Lee Sung Joon, spokesperson for the Joint Chiefs, said in a briefing the North Korean launches were possibly intended to test the performance of weapons it plans to export, as the country continues to send military equipment and troops to fuel Russia's warring against Ukraine.

Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani told reporters that none of the North Korean missiles reached Japan's exclusive economic zone and there was no damage to vessels or aircraft in the area.

It was the North's first known ballistic activity since March 10, when it fired several ballistic missiles hours after US and South Korean troops began an annual combined military exercise, and the country's sixth launch event of the year.

Nepal's human rights group protests outside Indian, Pakistan embassies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kathmandu

Nepalese human rights group staged demonstrations outside the Indian and Pakistani embassies here on Friday, urging both nations to end ongoing tensions and promote peace in South Asia.

The Human Rights and Peace Society organised the protests, led by activist Krishna Pahadi and HURPES president Renuka Paudel.

The group condemned terrorism and extremism, emphasising that peace is the only path forward for the region.

Demonstrators carried placards with slogans such as, "No one will win in war, only humanity gets defeated," "Terrorism is deplorable in all times," "In peace all will win," and "Let's make South Asia a war-free zone."

The activists also raised concerns over specific issues, with slogans questioning the suspension of the Indus Water Treaty and Pakistan's protection of those involved in the Pahalgam terror attack.

"How lawful to suspend the Indus Water Agreement?" "Why did Pakistan protect those who attacked tourists in Pahalgam?" and "Why Pakistan, who itself is victim of terrorism and extremism is harboring terrorism?" were the other slogans the placards were displaying. A memorandum addressed to the Indian government was handed over to Indian Embassy officials in Kathmandu, while a similar letter for Pakistan was sent via email after embassy officials declined to accept it, the HURPES said in a press release.

TRAI recommends spectrum fee for satcom operators

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Telecom regulator TRAI on Friday released its recommendations on pricing of spectrum to be given for satellite-based internet services, suggesting a levy of 4 per cent of annual revenues as fee on operators like Elon Musk's Starlink. Operators offering services in urban areas would have to shell out an additional ₹500 per subscribers annually, TRAI said in its recommendations to the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). No additional levy would be applicable for services in rural areas.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recommended that satellite broadband spectrum be allotted for five years, which can be extended by another two years. The 4 per cent of adjusted gross revenue (AGR) spectrum charge would be for both geostationary orbit (GSO) and NGSO (non-Geostationary orbit) opera-

tors. These would be subject to a minimum annual spectrum charge of ₹3,500 per MHz. Releasing the recommendations, TRAI chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti said satcom services once available can play a vital role in taking connectivity to under-served areas where telecom networks are not available. They also play a critical role in disasters, in rescue and relief operations.

Starlink earlier this week got a Letter of Intent (LoI) for the start of its services. It now has to procure a license before starting services in India.

SpaceX, the aerospace company led by Elon Musk, has already tied up with rivals Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel to bring Starlink's broadband internet services to India. Both Indian firms will offer Starlink equipment through their network and also support customer installation and activation on devices.

Over the past few months, rivals Jio and Airtel had come together to demand an



auction for awarding spectrum for satellite services in India. Musk on the other hand lobbied for administrative allocation as per international norm. In October last year, the government sided with Musk on the issue of allocating airwaves, to be used for offering low latency internet services using satellite, at a pre-decided price through administrative route.

Both Jio, India's largest wireless carrier, and Airtel, the No 2 player in the world's most-populous nation, where data usage is rapidly rising, feared lower entry cost will chip away some of their subscriber base.

Based on the recommendations of TRAI, the DoT would now go to the Cabinet for pricing of satellite spectrum and once approved any satcom wanting to offer services in India can apply.

Starlink is the world's largest Low-Earth-Orbit (LEO) constellation operated by SpaceX. Bharti already partners with Eutelsat OneWeb, the second largest LEO

constellation. Similarly, Jio Platforms has a joint venture with SES, a leading global satellite-based content connectivity solutions provider.

Jio Space Technology Ltd, where Jio holds 51 per cent and SES 49 per cent, is to use multi-orbit space networks that is a combination of geostationary (GEO) and medium earth orbit (MEO) satellite constellations capable of delivering multi-gigabit links and capacity to enterprises, mobile backhaul and retail customers across the length and breadth of India and neighbouring regions.

Eutelsat OneWeb, in which Airtel is the single-largest shareholder with a 21.2 per cent share, and Jio's joint venture with SES have already secured GMPCS licenses and IN-SPACE approvals.

Starlink currently operates over 6,000 LEO satellites, while Amazon's Kuiper project plans to deploy 3,236 satellites starting in early 2025.

India, New Zealand FTA talks conclude

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The five-day talks between India and New Zealand for a proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA), aimed at boosting bilateral trade and investment, will conclude on Friday, an official said.

After a gap of about ten years, the two countries on March 16, 2025 announced resumption of negotiations for the FTA. "The first round of negotiations started on May 5 here," the official said.

India and New Zealand began negotiating the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) in April 2010 to boost trade in goods, services, and investment. However, after ten rounds of discussions, the talks stalled in February 2015. With bilateral trade continuing to grow steadily, surpassing \$1 billion during April-January 2025, the FTA would help unlock new avenues for businesses and consumers.

According to the think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), a major challenge in the renewed talks will be the disparity in tariff structures.

New Zealand's average import tariff is only 2.3 per cent, with over half of its tariff lines already duty-free, meaning Indian goods already have substantial access to its market. In contrast, India's average tariff stands at 17.8 per cent, meaning it

would have to make significant reductions, making a traditional FTA less attractive for India. "As talks resume, both countries will need to find common ground on these issues to move forward successfully," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

Earlier New Zealand has demanded greater access to India's dairy market, which India has resisted to protect its domestic industry that supports millions of farmers.

Currently, India's dairy imports from New Zealand are minimal (around \$0.57 million). The country has not given duty concessions in the sector in any of its trade pacts. New Zealand may look for duty concessions on products like meat and wine. The bilateral trade between the two countries stood at \$ 873.4 million (exports \$ 538.33 million and imports \$ 335 million) in 2023-24 as against \$ 1.02 billion in 2022-23. India's key goods exports to New Zealand include clothing, fabrics, and home textiles; medicines and medical supplies; refined petrol; agricultural equipment and machinery such as tractors and irrigation tools; auto; iron and steel; paper products; electronics; shrimps; diamonds; and basmati rice.

The main imports are agricultural goods, minerals, apples, kiwifruit, meat products such as lamb, mutton, milk albu-

min, lactose syrup, coking coal, logs and sawn timber, wool, and scrap metals.

In FY24, India's services exports to New Zealand stood at \$ 214.1 million, while New Zealand's services exports to India totalled \$ 456.5 million.

India's key services exports include IT and software services, provided by companies such as Infosys and HCL, along with telecommunications services to support New Zealand's digital infrastructure.

India also exports healthcare services, including medical tourism, pharmaceutical research, and telemedicine. Financial services are another important area, with Indian banks and fintech companies offering digital payment solutions.

New Zealand's services exports to India are led by education services, with thousands of Indian students pursuing higher education in New Zealand. Tourism services are also significant, as Indian tourists are drawn to New Zealand's natural landscapes and adventure activities.

New Zealand provides fintech services, offering digital solutions to India's financial sector, and specialised aviation training programmes for pilots and cabin crew.

Additionally, New Zealand firms offer niche IT services such as data analytics and automation solutions.

India imposes anti-dumping duty imported solar glass

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India has imposed an anti-dumping duty of up to \$ 664 per tonne on imports of a certain type of solar glass from China and Vietnam for five years in a bid to protect domestic manufacturers from cheap imports from these two countries, according to a government notification. The duty was imposed after the commerce ministry's investigation arm Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) recommended for the same after conducting a detailed probe on the dumping of 'Textured Toughened (Tempered) Coated and Uncoated Glass' from China and Vietnam.

Commonly used in solar panels, these glasses are also referred to as Solar Glass, Low Iron Solar Glass, Solar PV Glass, High Transmission Photovoltaic Glass, and Tempered Low Iron Patterned Solar Glass. It has concluded in its findings that there is a substantial increase in the volume of dumped imports of the glass from these countries in absolute and relative terms. "The anti-dumping duty imposed under this notification shall be effective for a period of five years from the date of imposition of the provisional anti-dumping duty, that is, December 4, 2024, unless

revoked, amended or superseded earlier," the finance ministry said in a notification.

The imposed duty will be in the range of \$ 570 per tonne and \$ 664 per tonne. The DGTR conducted the probe following applications regarding the same from Borosil Renewables Ltd on behalf of the domestic industry.

In a BSE filing, Borosil has hailed the decision and said that it will encourage rapid and significant growth in domestic manufacturing of solar glass.

Anti-dumping probes are conducted by countries to determine whether domestic industries have been hurt because of a surge in cheap imports.

As a countermeasure, they impose these duties under the multilateral regime of the Geneva-based World Trade Organization (WTO). Both India and China are members of the multilateral organisations, which deals with global trade norms.

The duty is aimed at ensuring fair trading practices and creating a level-playing field for domestic producers vis-a-vis foreign producers and exporters.

India has already imposed anti-dumping duty on several products to tackle cheap imports from various countries, including China.

Britannia Q4 profit rises 4.2 pc sales up 9 pc at Rs 4,375.6 cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Bakery food company Britannia Industries Ltd has reported a 4.2 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to ₹559.13 crore for the March quarter of FY25, despite subdued demand and a challenging operating environment. The company had posted a net profit of ₹536.61 crore in the same quarter a year ago, according to a late-night regulatory filing on Thursday by Britannia Industries. Britannia Industries' revenue from the product sales rose 9 per cent to ₹4,375.57 crore in the March quarter. Its revenue from the operation increased 8.9 per cent to ₹4,432.19 crore in the March quarter from ₹4,069.36 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Commenting on the results, Vice Chairman & Managing Director Varun Berry said, "With a high single-digit value growth of 9 per cent during the last quarter of the year amidst a tight consumption scenario, the performance underscores our resilience in a challenging operating environment."

No need for panic buying: Oil firms assure of fuel stocks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the nation's largest oil firm, on Friday said ample stocks of petrol, diesel and cooking gas LPG are available in the country and there is no need for panic buying of fuel.

The statement comes after social media was flooded with posts and videos showing people queuing at petrol pumps to stock fuel as tensions between India and Pakistan escalated. "Indian Oil has ample fuel stocks across the country and our supply lines are operating smoothly," IOC said in a post on X. "There is no need for panic buying, fuel and LPG are readily available at all our outlets."

Panic buying was mostly witnessed in states bordering Pakistan. Several towns in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab enforced blackouts after Pakistan's armed forces launched multiple attacks using drones and other munitions along the entire western border on the intervening night of May 8-9. The Indian Army said the attacks were "effectively repulsed".

These had led to a fear of escalation in

tension and panic buying. "Help us serve you better by staying calm and avoiding unnecessary rush. This will keep our supply lines running seamlessly and ensure uninterrupted fuel access for all," IOC said.

India on Wednesday struck at nine sites in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Pakistan, its deepest strikes inside Pakistan in decades, in retaliation for a deadly terrorist attack two weeks before. Thereafter, Pakistan attempted to unleash drones and missiles at Indian military targets in more than a dozen cities and towns, many of them home to air force bases. IOC advised the citizens to stay calm and avoid unnecessary rush, which will help the company in keeping their supply lines running seamlessly and ensure uninterrupted fuel access for all. Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) in a statement assured that sufficient petrol, diesel, CNG, and LPG are available across its vast nationwide network. "All BPCL fuel stations and LPG distributors across its nationwide network are operating smoothly and are fully equipped to meet the energy needs of consumers," it said.

Booking platforms halt offerings to Turkey, Azerbaijan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Amid escalating tensions with Pakistan, various online booking platforms on Friday announced suspension of new travel offerings to countries, including Turkey and Azerbaijan for their "support" to Pakistan and advised customers to avoid "non-essential" travel to these destinations, while urging Indians to exercise "utmost caution" before planning trips to sensitive regions.

Cox & Kings said it has decided to temporarily pause all new travel offerings to Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkey.

"In light of recent developments, we have decided to pause all new travel offerings to Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Turkey. This decision is driven by our commitment to uphold principles that matter deeply to us and the people of our country. We also advise Indian travellers to exercise discretion and avoid any non-essential travel to these destinations until there is greater clarity and alignment in the broader geopolitical environment," said Karan Agarwal, Director, Cox & Kings.

"Travel Advisory — Following the Pahalgam attack and escalating tensions between India & Pakistan, travellers are



urged to stay aware. As Turkey & Azerbaijan have shown support for Pakistan, we strongly recommend visiting only if absolutely necessary," EaseMyTrip said in a post on X, formerly Twitter, on Thursday evening. EaseMyTrip Founder and Chairman Nishant Pitti also took to X, saying he was "deeply concerned" by the recent developments and advising all its customers to exercise utmost caution and stay updated on official travel advisories

before planning trips to sensitive regions. Travomint said the company has suspended the sale of all travel packages to Turkey and Azerbaijan to support Indians' call for boycotting these two countries.

"Due to the escalating tensions with Pakistan and countries like Turkey and Azerbaijan supporting it, we at Travomint have taken a firm and responsible stand. We have decided to support the Indians' call for boycotting Turkey and Azerbaijan.

With immediate effect, Travomint has suspended the sale of all travel packages to these countries," Travomint Chairman and CEO Alok K Singh said in a statement.

In addition to this, he said, no cancellation fees will be charged on existing bookings to Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Emergency flight bookings will be available in case of any emergency or urgent need, Singh said.

Meanwhile, Vice President of Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Association of India (FHRAI) and Hotel And Restaurant Association (Western India) - HRAWI spokesperson Pradeep Shetty shared that there have been cancellations for hotels in states including Rajasthan, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, among others.

"There are cancellations... We are observing the situation closely," he told PTI. India on Wednesday carried out strikes on nine sites in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Pakistan, marking its deepest strikes inside Pakistan in decades, in retaliation for a deadly terrorist attack two weeks before. Thereafter, Pakistan attempted to unleash drones and missiles at Indian military targets in more than a dozen cities and towns, many of them home to air force bases.

Trade unions ready for May 20 strike but will review situation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Central trade unions on Friday said they are ready for the workers' nation-wide strike scheduled on May 20, but will review the evolving situation in the country due to escalating tensions between India and Pakistan.

A joint platform of central trade unions and independent sectoral federations said in a statement that preparations on general strike on May 20 is determinedly progressing and situation will be reviewed again on May 15 amid tension at Indo-Pak border.

"We call upon all workers to be in the fore front to maintain the unity and harmony among the masses," the statement said. It further said that the members of the platform met on Thursday and reviewed the preparations for the scheduled nation-wide general strike. The members also condemned unequivocally the Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 civilians were killed. It was resolved that the central trade unions will meet again on 15th May to review the situation as it evolves further, it said. The platform has ten central trade unions on board, including INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, TUCC, SEWA, AICTU, LPE, and UTUC.

Rupee closes at 85.41 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The rupee pared its initial losses and settled for the day higher by 17 paise at 85.41 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, as likely intervention by the Reserve Bank of India helped contain excess depreciation of the rupee.

Forex traders said the rupee opened on a weak note on the escalation of hostility between India and Pakistan, however, RBI intervened to prevent major weakness.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.88 and moved between the intra-day high of 85.32 and the low of 85.88 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.41 (provisional), registering a gain of 17 paise over its previous closing level.

On Thursday, the rupee saw its steepest single-day fall in more than two-and-a-half years and settled 81 paise lower at 85.58 against the US dollar on Thursday, weighed down by heightened geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan. "Indian rupee opened weak on Friday amid flaring up of geopolitical tensions across the border. Weak domestic markets and a rise in crude oil prices also weighed on the rupee."

However, the domestic currency recovered in the latter half of the day on reports of selling of dollars by the Reserve Bank of India as well as a correction in the US dollar index," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. On the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday, India neutralised the Pakistan military's attempt to hit military



stations in Jammu, Pathankot, Udhampur and some other locations with missiles and drones.

Pakistan's armed forces launched multiple attacks using drones and other munitions along the entire western border on the intervening night of May 8-9, which were "effectively repulsed", the Indian Army said on Friday. Pakistani troops also resorted to "numerous ceasefire violations" along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian Army said in an early morning post on X.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.26 per cent at 100.38.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 1.80 per cent to USD 63.97 per barrel in futures trade.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias as the geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan may continue to weigh on the domestic unit. Rising crude oil prices and risk aversion in the domestic markets may further pressurise the rupee."

"However, FII inflows may support the rupee at lower levels. Any de-escalation of tensions over the weekend may also support the rupee at lower levels, Choudhary added. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 880.34 points, or 1.10 per cent, to close at 79,454.47, while the Nifty fell 265.80 points or 1.10 per cent to settle at 24,008.00. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 2,007.96 crore on a net basis on Thursday, according to exchange data.

SBI sells stake in Yes Bank to Sumitomo corporation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hong Kong

State Bank of India (SBI) and seven other lenders on Friday announced selling 20 per cent of their combined stakes in Yes Bank to Japan's Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC) for a consideration of Rs 13,483 crore, making it the largest cross-border investment in the Indian banking sector.

Following completion of the transaction, SMBC will become the single largest shareholder of Mumbai-based Yes Bank.

Of the 20 per cent stake, SBI would dilute 13.19 per cent stake in Yes Bank in favour of SMBC for a consideration of Rs 8,889 crore, while 6.81 per cent shareholding will be offloaded by seven other lenders -- Axis Bank, Bandhan Bank, Federal Bank, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, IDFC First Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank -- for about Rs 4,594 crore. SBI and the seven investor lenders had invested in the bank as part of the YES Bank Reconstruction Scheme in March 2020. The share sale is proposed to take place at a price of Rs 21.50 per equity share, it said.

The executive committee of the central board (ECCB) of the bank in the meeting has accorded approval to divest 413.44 crore shares or equivalent to 13.19 per cent stake in Yes Bank for a consideration of Rs 8,888.97 crore, SBI said in a regulatory filing.

SBI, which currently holds 24 per cent stake in Yes Bank, will be left with a little over 10 per cent stake after the dilution.

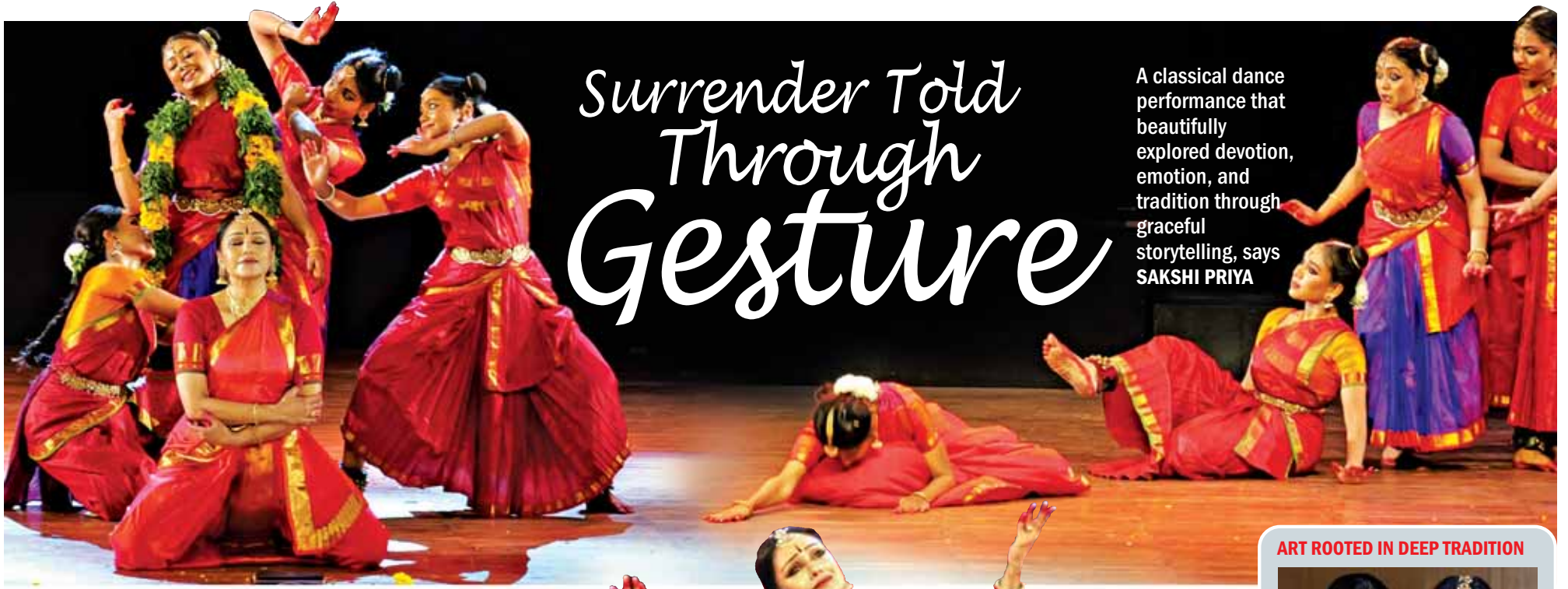
Among other lenders, HDFC Bank had 2.75 per cent, ICICI Bank 2.39 per cent, Kotak Mahindra Bank 1.21 per cent, Axis Bank 1.01 per cent, IDFC First Bank 0.92 per cent, Federal Bank 0.76 per cent and Bandhan Bank 0.70 per cent as on March 31, 2025.

"This transaction is the largest cross-border investment in the Indian banking sector...The transaction is a significant milestone to drive YES Bank's next phase of growth, profitability and value creation and we expect to leverage SMBC's global expertise in this phase," Yes Bank said in a separate filing.

The transaction is subject to the necessary regulatory and statutory approvals including from the Reserve Bank of India and Competition Commission of India and will be subject to customary closing conditions, it said.

SMBC is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group, Inc (SMFG). SMFG is the second largest banking group in Japan with total assets of USD 2 trillion as of December 2024 with strong global presence.

SMBC is among the leading foreign banks in India and SMFG's wholly-owned subsidiary SMFG India Credit Company Limited is among the largest diversified NBFCs in India.



Surrender Told Through Gesture

A classical dance performance that beautifully explored devotion, emotion, and tradition through graceful storytelling, says SAKSHI PRIYA

To witness true devotion is to see the soul dance and in this performance, the dancer became the voice of Andala's longing. HCL Concerts' recent presentation of *Maalyada — Andala's Sacred Garland* was an experience that left the audience quietly moved.

Choreographed by Rama Vaidyanathan and based on *Maalyada*, *The Sacred Garland*, the book by Jeysundhar D, the work drew from Andala's *Thiruppavai* and was accompanied by live music composed by Sudha Raghuraman. From the first movement, an emotional thread work through the performance. It avoided flourish and showmanship, focusing instead on a sincere portrayal of devotion. The approach resonated deeply, creating a mood that stayed well beyond the final curtain.

Nine Pathways to Bhakti

The choreography followed Nava Vidya Bhakti — the nine traditional forms of devotion, with coherence and emotional precision. Rama Vaidyanathan shared the stage with four of her disciples: Sayani Chakraborty, Reshika Sivakumar, Vaishnavi Dhore, and Shubhamani Chandrashekar. Together, they built a rhythm of gesture and meaning that gave shape to Andala's spiritual longing.

The journey began with *Shravanam*, the act of listening. Each gesture was attentive, almost reverential. In *Smaranam*, expressions carried a quiet ache, recalling Krishna with intimacy. *Sankeerthanam* brought a sense of lyrical energy, measured and full of clarity. *Pada Sevanam* offered one of the most touching moments of the evening. The portrayal of Andala at Krishna's feet carried a

stillness that seemed to hold time. In *Sakhyam*, devotion as friendship was expressed with gentle warmth, while *Dasyaminvoked* episodes from Krishna's life as the protector, each sequence distinct in mood and intention. The final section, *Atma Nivedanam*, a complete surrender, felt stripped of all ornament, pure, steady and heartfelt. The silence that followed in the auditorium was its own applause.



Music and Light in Dialogue with Dance

The live music — led by Sudha Raghuraman (vocal), Sumod Sreedharan (percussion), Raghuraman Govindarajan and Himanshu Srivastava (flute), and Sannidhi Vaidyanathan (mridangam) — provided an elegant and responsive framework. Rather than seeking prominence, the musicians supported the dancers with sensitivity. Their presence added emotional texture, allowing the audience to absorb each moment more fully.

Lighting by Gaurav Sharma played a restrained yet vital role. Gentle shifts in tone allowed the stage to adapt to each form of devotion. The production design was thoughtful, avoiding spectacle in favour of intimacy.

Celebrating Golden Year

This performance also coincided with a special milestone: this is the 50th year of Ganesha Natyalaya which is run by Rama Vaidyanathan, the Bharatanatyam institution founded by the late Guru Saroja Vaidyanathan. Celebrated through the Swarna Saroja Festival, the institution has grown from a small classroom to a cultural landmark.

The Institution has also been active in outreach, offering Bharatanatyam training to underprivileged students through collaborations with organisations such as the Guild of Service, Aravindam Foundation, and SARVAM. Over the past year alone, more than 35 events have been held across national and international platforms.

ART ROOTED IN DEEP TRADITION



Sudha Raghuraman and Rama Vaidyanathan brought together music and movement in a deeply reflective performance. Sudha's rich, emotive vocals blend effortlessly with Rama's expressive Bharatanatyam with grace and clarity rooted in artistic grace.

This context gave the performance an added layer of depth. It stood not only as an artistic interpretation of Andala's devotion, but also as a reflection of a long-standing commitment to preserving and evolving the Bharatanatyam tradition.

A Performance Rooted in Feeling

Throughout the evening, the performance avoided grand gestures in favour of quiet strength. Every movement was anchored in intention. The Performer led with clarity, allowing each dancer to bring her own energy to the stage. Rather than overpowering the space, the ensemble shaped it together, with balance, care and deep respect for the material. There was no distance between emotion and execution. Every section felt like a step in a spiritual journey, one shared between dancer and audience, saint and seeker.

A moving tribute to Andala's devotion, told with restraint and rare emotional clarity. For those present, it felt less like watching a performance and more like being invited into a sacred conversation. Few evenings in recent memory have offered such stillness, such grace, and such honesty on stage.

CAN ART STILL MOVE US TO SILENCE IN A WORLD FULL OF NOISE?

Maalyada — Andala's Sacred Garland, answers with a resounding yes — not through spectacle, but through sincerity. What stayed beyond the performance wasn't just choreography or technique, it was the emotional honesty work into each moment. This was an evening where Bharatanatyam spoke not to the intellect alone,

but to something quieter and deeper. In a time where tradition is often repackaged to suit trends, *Maalyada* held its ground — anchored in faith, simplicity and artistic integrity. The live music, careful lighting and absence of excess allowed the focus to remain on the essence of devotion. It was a moment of living it.

An Artist's Map of the Soul

BY TEAM VIVA

Some exhibitions speak; others whisper. Shinee Sharma's *The Journey of Soul* does neither — it listens. The works in this collection do not impose meaning but create space for it, drawing viewers into a dialogue with the unseen.

The exhibition is structured as a spiritual pilgrimage, beginning with *Hiranya Garbha*. Here, Sharma explores cosmic origins through a careful balance of form and emptiness. The golden tones suggest creation's first moments, while the deliberate negative space around them carries equal weight. This series establishes the exhibition's visual language — one where absence is as articulate as presence.

The Five That Form the World translates elemental energies into visual terms. Earth appears not as literal soil but through dense, textured layers of pigment. Water emerges in fluid brushstrokes that seem to ripple across the canvas.

Each element maintains its distinct character while contributing to a cohesive whole, much like the philosophical concepts they represent. In the *Maya* series, Sharma's technique becomes particularly compelling. Semi-transparent layers of paint create figures that appear



THE EXHIBITION SUCCEEDS BY CREATING CONDITIONS FOR THEIR DISCOVERY. IN AN ART WORLD OFTEN DOMINATED BY SPECTACLE, SHARMA'S QUIET CONFIDENCE IN HER MATERIALS AND IDEAS FEELS PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT.

solid from one angle yet dissolve when viewed differently. This literal visual trickery mirrors the exhibition's thematic concern with perception and reality. The artist's control of medium here is precise — each brushstroke serves both the immediate image and the larger philosophical inquiry. The final section, *The Gate of Liberation*, employs a restrained palette of deep blues and blacks punctuated by subtle metallic accents. The compositions are simpler but no less powerful, with geometric elements suggesting architectural thresholds. These works feel like inviting viewers to stand before them as one might at an actual gate — contemplating whether to cross, and what might lie beyond. Sharma's background in Sanskrit and philosophy informs every artistic decision, from colour choices to compositional structures.

The works reward close viewing — the texture of a particular brushstroke or the careful placement of a symbolic element often reveals deeper layers of meaning. The Tokyo showing attracted particular attention for how these deeply Indian philosophical concepts resonated with Japanese audiences.



How Paper Became Art's Living

A centuries-spanning exhibition reveals how artists have transformed humble sheets into vessels of memory and rebellion, says SAKSHI PRIYA

In an art world increasingly dominated by large-scale installations and digital spectacles, there's something quietly subversive about an exhibition that insists we pay attention to the humble sheet of paper. *Paper Alchemy: Tracing Memories* through Time does exactly this, revealing how this fragile medium has borne witness to centuries of artistic evolution in India. The exhibition opens with delicate Company School works that immediately challenge our expectations. The precision of botanical studies and architectural renderings demonstrates how paper became a meeting ground for cross-cultural exchange long before globalisation became a buzzword.

This exhibition of works on paper transforms what many consider a preliminary medium into the main event, proving that artistic significance isn't measured in square footage. These aren't dry documentation but vibrant encounters between European techniques and Indian subjects. The precision of botanical illustrations and architectural studies shows paper serving as both witness and participant in cultural exchange. The Bengal School section demonstrates paper's emotional range. Abanindranath Tagore's wash paintings use the medium's absorbency to create dreamlike images where forms emerge and dissolve like memories.

The way pigment interacts with fibers becomes a metaphor for history itself — certain details remain sharp while others fade into suggestion. Modernist works bring a different energy. The Progressive Artists' sketches and prints capture creative urgency, their spontaneous marks preserved

GREAT BANYAN ART REVEALS ITS EXQUISITE PRIVATE PAPER COLLECTION FOR THE FIRST TIME IN "PAPER ALCHEMY," PRESENTING 100+ MASTERWORKS THAT TRACE THREE CENTURIES OF ARTISTIC INNOVATION ON PAPER.

in ink and graphite. Souza's aggressive lines and Husain's fluid figures show artists testing ideas, using paper's immediacy to their advantage. These works remind us that some of the most vital art happens in notebooks, not just on canvases.

Contemporary artists push paper's possibilities further. Atul Dodiya and others treat the medium as raw material to be cut, layered and reconstructed. These pieces acknowledge paper's history while reinventing its potential, mirroring India's own balancing of tradition and innovation. The journey begins with pioneering British artists who shaped



early visual narratives of India. William Hodges' aquatints from *Select Views in India* (1780-1783), including *A View of a Mosque at Rajmahal*, *A View of the Jungle Terry*, demonstrate his groundbreaking approach to Indian landscapes. The Daniells' meticulous architectural studies like *Gate of the Tomb of Emperor Akbar* and *Govinda Ram Mittee's Pagoda*, Calcutta, from their *Oriental Scenery* series showcase their unparalleled documentary precision blended with artistic vision.

In an age of digital reproduction, *Paper Alchemy* feels particularly relevant. It celebrates the physical artifact while demonstrating how limitations can spark creativity. The exhibition doesn't overwhelm with spectacle, but invites a deeper engagement. Here, paper is an active collaborator in the artistic process, recording every decision and accident with equal fidelity.



Chopra, Rohit, Kohli back Indian armed forces amid conflict with Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India's sporting icons, including Neeraj Chopra, PV Sindhu, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, have come out in strong support of the country's armed forces for their strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan, hailing them as "the soul of our nation."

India on Thursday night swiftly thwarted Pakistan's attempts to strike its military bases with drones and missiles including in Jammu and Pathankot after foiling similar bids at 15 places in northern and western regions of the country, as tension soared between the two neighbours amid fears of a larger conflict.

"With every passing moment, with every decision taken I feel extremely proud of our Indian Army, Indian Airforce & Indian Navy. Our warriors are standing tall for our nation's pride. It's important for every Indian to be responsible and refrain from spreading or believing any fake news. Stay safe, everyone! #OperationSindoor #JaiHind," Rohit wrote on his X account on Friday.



Modern-day great Kohli posted his tribute on his Instagram page.

"We stand in solidarity with, and salute our armed forces for fiercely protecting our country in these difficult times. We are forever indebted to our heroes for their unwavering bravery and heartfelt gratitude for

the sacrifices they and their families make for our great nation," Kohli wrote.

"We are proud of our Brave Indian Armed Forces who are fighting for our nation against Terrorism. Let's do our part and make sure to follow guidelines to ensure everyone's safety during this time,"

double Olympic-medallist Chopra posted. Two-time Olympic medallist shuttler Sindhu also paid tribute to the courage of Indian armed forces.

"To the brave men and women of the Indian Armed Forces — your courage, discipline, and sacrifice are the soul of our nation. In moments like OperationSindoor, we're reminded of the silent strength and selfless service that keep our tricolour flying high. India stands with you. Jai Hind" Sindhu posted.

Thursday's IPL match between Punjab Kings and Delhi Capitals in Dharamsala was called off due to security reasons following air raid alerts in nearby areas, prompting the BCCI to suspend the league indefinitely.

Former opener Swagat blamed Pakistan for the current situation.

"War has been chosen by Pakistan when they had an opportunity to keep quiet. They have escalated to save their terrorist assets, speaks so much about them. Our forces will reply in the most appropriate manner, a manner Pakistan will never forget," Swagat posted on 'X'.

Monitoring situation in India, Pakistan: Cricket Australia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Sydney

Cricket Australia (CA) on Friday said it is "closely monitoring" the escalating tensions between India and Pakistan given that over 20 Australian players and coaches are currently involved in the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL) and the Pakistan Super League.

The IPL was thrown into uncertainty on Thursday after air raid alerts in nearby cities forced the match between Delhi Capitals (DC) and Punjab Kings (PBKS) to be abandoned midway in Dharamsala.

The disruption has prompted the BCCI and IPL organisers to review the unfolding situation and consider their next steps.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has decided to shift the remaining matches of the Pakistan Super League to the UAE due to growing security concerns.

"We continue to closely monitor the situation in Pakistan and India, including obtaining regular advice and updates from the Australian Government, the PCB, BCCI and local government

authorities" "...And maintaining communication with our players and support staff currently in the region," CA said in a statement.

Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head and coaches Ricky Ponting and Brad Haddin are involved in the IPL while the likes of former batter David Warner, pacers Ben Dwarshuis, Riley Meredith and Sean Abbott are competing in the PSL.

According to local media reports, several Australian players have expressed concerns about their safety and are keen to leave India as soon as possible.

IPL chairman Arun Dhumal on Thursday said government directives are being awaited before deciding on whether to continue with the league.

"We are reviewing the situation right now. It is an evolving situation. We haven't received any directive from the government. Obviously the decision will be taken keeping all the logistics in mind," Dhumal said on Thursday night.

However, he confirmed that Friday's match between Lucknow Super Giants and Royal Challengers Bengaluru would go ahead "as of now."

Yashasvi Jaiswal wants to continue playing for Mumbai

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal has requested the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) to allow him to remain with the domestic giants, a month after asking for a No Objection Certificate (NOC) to switch to Goa.

In April, Jaiswal surprised everyone by writing to the MCA to seek its approval for a shock move to Goa. On its part, the MCA too had swiftly approved Jaiswal's request.

PTI is in possession of Jaiswal's email to the MCA in which he said he is available to represent Mumbai in the next domestic season.

"I the undersigned would request your goodness to consider my request in withdrawing my NOC given to me as I had some family plans in shifting to Goa which for now has been curtailed!" Jaiswal wrote.

"So I sincerely request MCA to allow

me to play for Mumbai this season! I have not submitted the NOC to BCCI nor to Goa Cricket Association!" he added.

Jaiswal, who moved from Uttar Pradesh's Bhadohi to Mumbai as a young player and rose through the ranks to make his debut across formats for India over the last couple of years, was also believed to have shifted to Goa from Mumbai owing to the prospect of becoming their captain.

A packed international calendar perhaps would not have allowed the 23-year-old Jaiswal a lot of time to spend with Goa, but becoming their skipper would have given him some experience in major leadership roles.

The secretary of the Goa Cricket Association, Shamba Desai had earlier confirmed to PTI that Jaiswal would be their captain with the Goa team being promoted from Plate division to Elite ahead of the 2025-26 season.

Why scrapping of Asia Cup is best option for BCCI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The currently suspended Indian Premier League's (IPL) 16 remaining games can be completed during a 10 to 12 days window in September as the Asia Cup is now uncertain due to the rising armed hostilities between India and Pakistan.

It would be a miracle if Asia Cup, which is supposed to be hosted by India (at a supposedly neutral venue), goes ahead given the raging conflict which was triggered by the killing of 26 people in a terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam.

The nearly non-existent sporting ties are unlikely to resume at any level till tensions ease. The Asia Cup was given a 19-day window in September where at least two Indo-Pak matches were to take place apart from the possibility of a final clash between the bitter rivals which would have assured the broadcasters of high advertising revenue.

"It is extremely bad optics if cricket continues when there is a possibility of war

with a rogue nation (Pakistan). Sports can continue when everything is normal. Plus it is very natural for foreign players and coaches to be wary and wanting to return home," a senior BCCI official told PTI on condition of anonymity after the league was suspended indefinitely on Friday.

Incidentally, the Asian Cricket Council is now headed by Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi and the onus will be on him to deal with financial losses that the Asia Cup cancellation would cause.

It is understood that the BCCI top brass' decision to suspend the league was well thought out call as only a handful of matches are left which can be completed in a 10-day window with possible double-headers.

The options for BCCI?

The IPL has a dedicated window from March end to May ending which no international cricket is scheduled allowing the best of world cricket to ply their trade in the league. Now that the schedule has gone haywire, the BCCI will have to

explore the available options.

The Indian team will be touring England from first week of June to first week of August and that schedule cannot be changed. The only period that looks good right now is between the second and fourth week of September where the BCCI can also negotiate with the various cricket boards to allow their players (except for freelancers who don't need permission) to come back and complete the assignment.

Why not August?

In August, India have a six-match white ball away series against Bangladesh which could have been stalled for IPL. However, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB)'s 'The Hundred' will be played between August 5 to 31 where most of the top T20 players, who also play in IPL, will be taking part.

Most IPL franchise owners like Reliance and RPSG group have bought stakes in 'The Hundred'.

Also Australia will be hosting South Africa for a six-match white ball series

through the month of August so players from both countries won't be available.

Why September is best option

From August 15 till September 22, the Caribbean Premier League will also be held where some of the top West Indies players are going to take part. But during the second week of September, a fair number of West Indies players can be made available for their respective IPL teams.

England and South Africa have a six-match white-ball series from September 2 to 14. Given the cordial relationship that BCCI shares with both the ECB and Cricket South Africa, it can request them to allow the players important to their IPL teams to be released during the window.

All SA20 is also a league that runs on investment from IPL franchises.

By end of September, India's WTC (World Test Championship) commitments against the West Indies and South Africa will commence followed by a white-ball tour of Australia in October-November.

Chelsea advances to Conference League final against Real Betis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

Chelsea rested its regular starters and still comfortably advanced to the Conference League final by beating Djurgården 1-0 in their semi-final second leg. The Premier League club advanced 5-1 on aggregate to set up a May 28 title match against Real Betis, which prevailed in extra time for a 4-3 aggregate win over Fiorentina to reach its first European final.

At Stamford Bridge, midfielder Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall collected a through pass from Tyrrique George before scoring the winner with a low left-footed shot in the 38th minute.

"Amazing to be in the final," Dewsbury-Hall told TNT Sports.

"We set our sights at the start of the season to get as far as we can in this tournament and it has been a long couple of months but one more game to go and hopefully we can lift that trophy." Chelsea remains on course to become the first club to win all major European competitions. The Blues have claimed the Champions League (2012, '21), the Europa League (2013, '19), Cup Winners' Cup (1971, '98) and Super Cup (1998, '21). The final takes place in Wroclaw, Poland.

Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca used only Marc Cucurella from the team that beat the new Premier League champion Liverpool 3-1 on Sunday.

Sixteen-year-old midfielder Reggie Walsh was given his first career start and drew frequent fouls from the opposition defense. When he was used as substitute in the first leg, he became the third youngest player for Chelsea, the club said. The Conference League champion is rewarded with a place in the second-tier Europa League next season, hardly a desirable bonus for Chelsea given that it is fighting in the Premier League for a Champions League spot.

Chelsea, in fifth place in the Premier League, should have fresh legs Sunday when it plays at Newcastle.

In Florence, Antony crossed for substitute Abdessamad Ezzalzouli in the 97th minute to score past goalkeeper David De Gea for a 2-2 draw that sent Betis to the final. Ezzalzouli also scored in the first-leg 2-1 victory in Sevilla last week. Betis increased its aggregate lead from the first leg to 3-1 with a goal from Antony in the 30th.

UAE set to decline PCB request to host PSL games

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

The Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) plans to conduct the remaining Pakistan Super League (PSL) matches in the UAE may not succeed as the Emirates Cricket Board is "unlikely to approve" its request due to the border tensions between India and Pakistan.

A source close to the developments in the Emirates Cricket Board (ECB) has indicated that the Board is set to reject the request from the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), which has already announced that the PSL would be held in the UAE.

The source has cited "security concerns potentially emanating from the rising tension between India and Pakistan."

It is learnt that the recent developments have made the Emirates Cricket Board "vary of being perceived as an ally of PCB," which it believes the act of hosting the PSL may suggest.

The Emirates Cricket Board has enjoyed a strong relationship with BCCI in recent years having hosted the 'India' edition of the ICC T20 World Cup 2021, editions of the IPL as well as India matches during ICC Champions Trophy

2025," the source further stated.

Dubai is also the headquarter of the International Cricket Council, which is currently headed by former BCCI secretary Jay Shah.

"The UAE has a diverse South Asian population which enjoys cricket. Hosting a tournament like the PSL in the midst of such tense circumstances could vitiate harmony, pose security risks and stir unnecessary friction between communities," the source said.

The PCB said early this morning that the last eight PSL fixtures, which were previously scheduled in Rawalpindi, Multan and Lahore, will now be staged in the UAE.

Schedule of matches, outlining the dates and venues, will be shared in due course, a statement said.

On Thursday, the PCB called off a scheduled match between Peshawar Zalmi and Karachi Kings at the Rawalpindi stadium.

India launched missile attacks on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir a fortnight after the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 people were killed.

FIFA's President Infantino plans to visit Saudi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Geneva

FIFA President Gianni Infantino will go to Saudi Arabia next week during US President Donald Trump's state visit while the soccer body's 211 member federations gather at their annual Congress being held in Paraguay.

It is unprecedented in modern times for a FIFA president to skip any part of the days-long congress program, where FIFA voters in soccer's six continental bodies caucus ahead of the main meeting often called the sport's parliament.

"The FIFA president has accepted invitations to attend a series of important events with world leaders, where FIFA World Cups will also be discussed," soccer's governing body said in a statement.

Infantino also is expected to visit Qatar, the 2022 World Cup host which also is on the US President's Middle East tour schedule. Infantino's close ties to Trump during the president's first term have grown stronger in about 10 meetings together since December, including Tuesday at the White House with a task force to oversee federal plans for the 2026 World Cup being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The FIFA leader also meets regularly with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, whose kingdom will host the



men's World Cup in 2034. Infantino helped steer those hosting rights to Saudi Arabia in an uncontested vote last December.

Infantino is expected to return from the Middle East in time for the FIFA Congress on Thursday, the last meeting of all FIFA members before they come to the 2026 World Cup.

It also is their first meeting together since before the online votes six months ago that confirmed the Saudi bid for 2034 and sent the 2030 edition to Spain, Portugal and Morocco plus single games in Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay.

He had been due Tuesday in the Paraguayan capital Asuncion to chair an in-person meeting of FIFA's ruling council. It is now moved up four days for an online session Friday that clears Infantino's schedule for the kind of geopolitical trip he has seemed to relish detailing on his Instagram account.

Infantino and FIFA have consistently said he needs to maintain good relations with the Trump administration to ensure the 48-team, six-week tournament is safe and successful. FIFA voters chose the North American bid in 2018 when it was backed by then-President Trump.

Manchester United, Tottenham reach Europa League final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Manchester

For Manchester United or Tottenham, a miserable campaign will end in Europa League glory. Despite both teams languishing in the bottom half of the Premier League, the Champions League is now just one game away.

That's the reward on offer after the two troubled English clubs advanced to the final of Europe's second-tier competition on Thursday. United beat Athletic Bilbao 4-1 in the semi-final second leg at Old Trafford and won 7-1 on aggregate. Tottenham won 2-0 away at Bodo/Glimt to seal a 5-1 aggregate victory. It sets up an all-English Europa League final for the second time in six years after Chelsea beat Arsenal to lift the trophy in 2019.

"If we don't win the final, it means nothing for us," United coach Ruben Amorim said. "It's hard to describe what it's like to be manager of this club. You want to give them (the fans) something, because we've been so disappointing in the Premier League." United came back from 1-0

down at halftime against Bilbao, with Mason Mount coming off the bench to score twice after the break. Casemiro and Rasmus Hojlund were also on target.

Dominic Solanke and Pedro Porro struck for Tottenham against Bodo/Glimt in Norway.

The final is in Bilbao on May 21. "It's an unbelievable feeling," Spurs defender Micky van de Ven said. "We've had a tough season, but we're one game away from winning silverware." A major title, alone, would be enough to salvage what has otherwise been a season to forget for both United and Spurs. But the added prize of a place in the lucrative Champions League would put the winner back among Europe's elite next term.

That hasn't looked likely for either team for most of the campaign as they have languished closer to the relegation zone than the top five. United is 15th in the standings having lost a club record 16 games in the Premier League. It is also certain to record its worst-ever points total in the modern era, as well as its lowest fin-



ish. For Tottenham, it's even worse — sitting one place below United after a club record-equaling 19 losses in the Premier League. Now, one of those teams has the

chance to effectively erase their woeful domestic form by winning the final, which will be the fourth time they have faced each other this season.

Spurs won all three of the previous encounters — twice in the league and also in the English League Cup.

"We are struggling, both of us, so I don't know what is going to happen," Amorim said. "That is a good thing and a bad thing with this team. I never know." United's two-legged victory over Bilbao defied its performances for most of the season, which saw former coach Erik ten Hag fired in October and his replacement, Amorim, oversee 12 losses in 24 league games. Bilbao, fourth in the Spanish league, trailed 3-0 from the first leg but mounted a fightback through Mikel Jauregizar's curling long-range shot in the 31st minute at Old Trafford.

There were signs of nerves in United's play as the visitors applied more pressure, but the introduction of Mount in the 62nd turned the game. He spun and curled a low shot past Bilbao goalkeeper Julen Agirrezabala 10 minutes after coming on. Casemiro headed United in front in the 79th and Hojlund scored from close range in the 85th.