

IAF showcases combat prowess at Exercise Vayu Shakti in Pokhran

Event presents glimpses into Operation Sindoor missions

Press Trust of India
Jaisalmer, February 27

THE INDIAN Air Force demonstrated its combat prowess and firepower capabilities, and presented glimpses of missions undertaken during Operation Sindoor through simulated strikes at Rajasthan's Pokhran Field Firing Range under Exercise 'Vayu Shakti' in the presence of President Droupadi Murmu on Friday.

The day-dusk-night demonstration, held in the Thar desert of western Rajasthan near the India-Pakistan border, was also attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Rajasthan Governor Haribhau Bagade and Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, among others. IAF chief, Air Chief Marshal A P Singh, senior officials of the force and others were also present.

A presentation on Operation Sindoor was made at the beginning of the exercise, followed by a detailed display of day target layouts spread across a three-kilometre area.

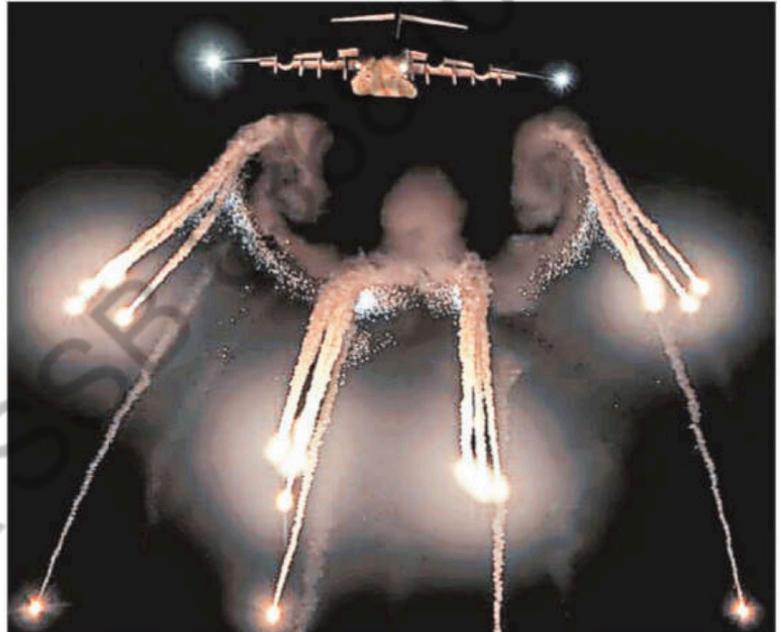


PTI

President Droupadi Murmu stands beside 'Prachand', a Light Combat Helicopter, before undertaking a sortie as co-pilot at Air Force Station in Jaisalmer on Friday. She later attended Exercise Vayu Shakti at Pokhran; (right) an IAF aircraft during the exercise.

The simulated targets included an enemy runway, a petroleum storage facility, bunkers, radar sites, tank and armoured convoys, a communication centre, a terror camp, ammunition storage, a hangar and a command-and-control centre.

Fighter jets and attack helicopters carried out synchronised operations, displaying strategy formulation, target identification and calibrated



ABHINAV SAHA

destruction. The IAF showcased a calibrated response for controlled escalation and precision strikes as part of the simulated mission.

The demonstration also featured decoy operations and loitering missions akin to those undertaken during Operation Sindoor. A radar cluster was neutralised in a simulated strike

to "blind" enemy surveillance systems. An AKASH surface-to-air missile was also fired as part of the demonstration.

The demonstration culminated in a spectacular drone show.

Earlier in the day, President Murmu, clad in an olive green uniform and helmet, undertook a 25-minute sortie as a co-

pilot in the indigenously developed Light Combat Helicopter 'Prachand' from the Jaisalmer Air Force Station.

The 'Vayu Shakti' demonstration was aimed at showcasing the IAF's operational preparedness, precision strike capability and ability to undertake multi-domain operations in a near-realistic combat scenario.

Navy boosts anti-submarine capability with *INS Anjadip*

The Hindu Bureau

CHENNAI

In a move to sharpen its anti-submarine warfare capabilities, the Indian Navy on Friday commissioned its fourth indigenously designed and built anti-submarine warfare shallow water craft *INS Anjadip* at the Chennai Port.

It was commissioned by the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi. Senior naval officials were present.

The vessel, which is 77 metres long, has been designed to detect, track, and neutralise enemy submarines in coastal waters.

It has been named 'Anjadip' to carry forward the valour of the historic island off the coast of Karwar.

The ship is equipped with indigenous anti-submarine warfare weapons and sensor package.

The *INS Anjadip* was



INS Anjadip being commissioned by Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi at the Chennai Port on Friday. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

constructed at Kattupalli by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers, Kolkata, and will mainly address the challenges of the littoral combat environment.

"*Anjadip* is equipped with modern shallow-water sonars, lightweight torpedoes, anti-submarine rockets, and combat management system. It is engineered for agility, precision and combat effectiveness," Admiral Tri-

pathi said at the commissioning ceremony. "The ship and her systems distinctly reflect the growing strength of India's indigenous design and industrial ecosystem. Aatmanirbharta, today, is moving beyond Make in India to Trust in India," he added.

It is equipped to undertake coastal surveillance, low-intensity maritime operations, and search and rescue operations.

Kejriwal, 22 others walk free in excise policy case

Court orders inquiry into 'erring investigating officer' for framing accused in absence of material evidence; it says probe was a 'premeditated, choreographed' exercise; CBI to appeal in High Court

Ishita Mishra

NEW DELHI

In a major victory for the Aam Aadmi Party, a special court on Friday discharged party chief and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia, and 21 others in the politically charged liquor policy case. Mr. Kejriwal hailed the order and hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP for orchestrating what he called the "biggest political conspiracy in Independent India".

Closing the Central Bureau of Investigation's lawsuit, Special Judge Jitendra Singh of the Rouse Avenue Court observed that the case relied on hearsay evidence, had major procedural lapses, and violated



Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia address the media after a court discharged them in the Delhi excise policy case on Friday. PTI

constitutional principles. In its order, the court also directed a departmental inquiry against the "erring investigating officer" who framed charges against the accused in the absence of material evidence.

Former Bharat Rashtra Samithi MP K. Kavitha was

also among those discharged by the court.

The court termed the probe a "premeditated and choreographed exercise", wherein roles appear to have been retrospectively assigned to suit a preconceived narrative. "What is particularly disturbing is

the disregard shown by the investigating officer to the fact that public servants, who were discharging their official duties on a day-to-day basis for the effective implementation of a governmental policy, have been subjected to criminal prosecution solely on the basis of inadmissible hearsay attributed to an approver, despite the investigation yielding no material against them," the court said.

The CBI has decided to appeal the judgment in the High Court immediately, saying that several aspects of its investigation have either been ignored or not considered adequately.

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RELATED REPORTS ON

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Modi, Shah fabricated scam to seize power in Delhi: Kejriwal

AAP chief says BJP eliminates political rivals who cannot be defeated in elections; accuses probe agencies of surrendering integrity; challenges Modi to hold fresh polls in Delhi; alleges that Delhi's condition deteriorated after BJP came to power

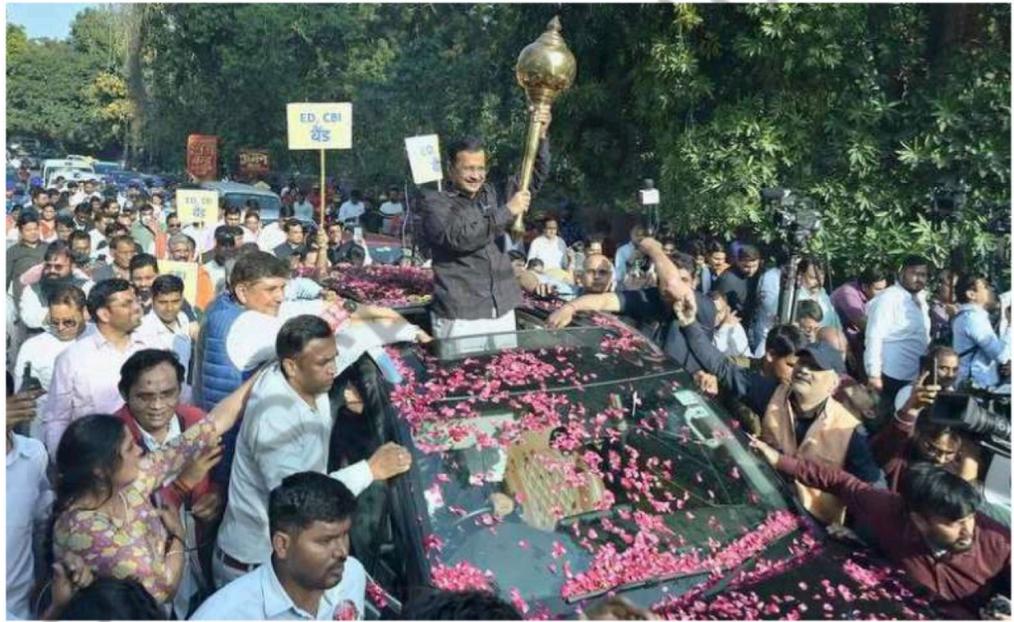
The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah of launching a political conspiracy to destroy the party and seize power in Delhi by “fabricating” the “so-called liquor scam”.

Addressing a press conference after a special court discharged him and other leaders in the case, Mr. Kejriwal challenged Mr. Modi to hold fresh elections in Delhi. Attacking Central investigative agencies, which he said were working on a “political agenda” by compromising their professional integrity, Mr. Kejriwal said: “The special court’s verdict has thoroughly exposed the BJP’s dirty politics of eliminating its political rivals that they could not otherwise have defeated in elections in the people’s court.”

Calling for clean politics, Mr. Kejriwal said that owing to the BJP’s tactics to gain power, the three crore people of Delhi had suffered the most. “PM Modi and Amit Shah’s lust for power has made Delhi suff-



Booster shot: Arvind Kejriwal arriving at the AAP headquarters after getting relief from the court in New Delhi on Friday. R. V. MOORTHY

er. They have tried everything to end Kejriwal. The only thing that is left is to kill me. But I have another alternative. If they want power they should gain it by doing positive work,” Mr. Kejriwal said. The BJP had won 48 seats in the Assembly election in 2025, ending the AAP regime.

He added that since the BJP came to power, the condition of Delhi had deteriorated rapidly. “I chal-

lenge PM Modi, if you have courage, hold fresh elections in Delhi. If you win more than 10 seats, I will quit politics. The people of Delhi are fed up with you,” he said.

Mr. Kejriwal said that he had earned nothing but honesty in his life and that the court’s verdict had vindicated that the AAP was a party of honest people. “In an order of nearly 600 pages, after examining all evi-

dence and witnesses, the court has said there is not even a tiny piece of proof to conduct a trial,” Mr. Kejriwal said.

Staunchly honest

Explaining why he had become silent after coming out of jail, Mr. Kejriwal said that he had decided that until he was proven innocent before the country, he would remain silent. “Today a huge burden has

been lifted from my heart. The court has proved that the AAP is ‘*kattar imaan-dar*’ (staunchly honest),” Mr. Kejriwal said.

In a statement, the AAP said the verdict strengthened the party’s resolve to march forward with its “honest pro-people” politics. The party would not be cowed down by any attempts to browbeat it, no matter how powerful the enemy may be, it said.

NCERT asks public to return Class 8 textbook, delete posts

Advisory comes a day after the Supreme Court banned a Social Science textbook that had a section on 'corruption in judiciary'; it also seeks the removal of any comments on social media

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

A day after the Supreme Court banned a Social Science textbook over a section on "corruption" in the judiciary, the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) on Friday asked people to return the book and take down related social media posts.

The NCERT reiterated that it had withdrawn the Class 8 textbook.

In its advisory issued on Friday, the NCERT called for any "individual or organisation" in possession of the book or any material related to it to return it to the Publication Division of the Department of Education in Social Sciences in New Delhi "at the earliest possible". Anyone who

had posted any material related to the controversial section on social media or online should delete it, it



The NCERT is tasked with developing curriculum frameworks, publishing textbooks and conducting research. FILE PHOTO

said. The statement was issued by the office of Himanshu Gupta, Secretary, NCERT, and cited the Supreme Court order in this regard.

Suo motu case

The Supreme Court registered a *suo motu* case on Wednesday in relation to the section that had appeared in a chapter titled "Role of Judiciary in Our

Society". Chief Justice Surya Kant called the section on "corruption" in the judiciary a "selective reference", while calling for a *suo motu* case to be registered.

On Thursday, while hearing the case, the Supreme Court directed that copies of the book that had already been distributed or sold be seized, further asking officials concerned to

file a compliance report regarding this seizure.

Soon after the Supreme Court heard the issue on Wednesday, the NCERT issued a public statement apologising for the "inappropriate textual material" and "error in judgement" that had "crept into" the said textbook. A day later, as the controversy intensified, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan expressed regret and noted that a direction had been issued to withdraw the book as soon as the material was noticed. Government officials claimed that the direction was issued on Tuesday, a day after the book was released.

Sources added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also taken notice of the section in question and called for accountability to be fixed. Mr. Pradhan told reporters on Thursday that action will be taken against those found responsible.

Canada's Carney begins India visit, uranium to AI on table

Will meet Modi on Monday for bilateral talks

Shubhajit Roy
New Delhi, February 27

UNDERLINING THAT India is showing the fastest growth among the world's major economies, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney began his four-day visit to India as he landed in Mumbai on Friday, and said that he would meet with business leaders and establish partnerships that will offer opportunities to Canadian businesses and workers.

According to officials, Carney will likely sign a 10-year US\$ 2 billion uranium supply deal and smaller agreements on oil and gas, environment, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, education and culture.

Carney was received by Maharashtra's Minister of Protocol and Marketing Jay Kumar Rawal at the airport.

This is a major visit to repair ties between India and Canada, almost two-and-half years after former Canada PM Justin Trudeau wrecked the relationship by alleging the role of Indian government agents in the killing of a pro-Khalistan separatist figure in Canada.

Carney is expected to meet business leaders in Mumbai on Saturday, and will also pay homage to 26/11 victims at the memorial at Taj Mahal Palace hotel. He will arrive in Delhi on Sunday evening and will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi



Canada Prime Minister Mark Carney and wife Diana Fox Carney arrive in Mumbai on Friday. AP

on Monday for bilateral talks in Hyderabad House.

After landing in Mumbai, Carney said, "India is showing the fastest growth among the world's major economies. We have just arrived in Mumbai to meet with business leaders there and establish partnerships that will offer opportunities to Canadian businesses and workers."

The Ministry of External Affairs' official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal posted on X, "A warm welcome to Prime Minister @MarkJCarney of Canada as he arrives in Mumbai on his first Official Visit to India. The visit marks a significant step in further strengthening India-Canada ties."

"The India-Canada partnership is anchored in shared democratic values, strong people-to-people ties, and expanding cooperation across diverse sectors," he said.

According to the MEA, Carney is on an official visit to India

from February 27 to March 2.

This is his first official visit to India after assuming office in May last year. PM Modi had visited Canada for the G7 leaders' summit in June last year.

Over the next two days, Carney will participate in separate business engagements, interact with Indian and Canadian CEOs, industry and financial experts, innovators, educators as well as Canadian Pension Funds based in India, according to the MEA.

On March 2, the two Prime Ministers will hold delegation-level talks at Hyderabad House.

"Both leaders will review the progress achieved till date across diverse areas of the India-Canada Strategic Partnership, building on their earlier meetings in Kananaskis (June 2025) and Johannesburg (November 2025). They will also take stock of ongoing cooperation in key pillars including trade and investment; energy;

critical minerals; agriculture; education, research, and innovation; and people-to-people ties. The two leaders will also exchange views on regional and global developments", the MEA said.

Modi and Carney will also attend the India-Canada CEOs Forum scheduled later in the day. The MEA said that the visit comes at an "important juncture in normalization of India-Canada bilateral relations".

"The two Prime Ministers have earlier agreed to pursue a constructive and balanced partnership grounded in mutual respect for each other's concerns and sensitivities, strong people-to-people ties, and growing economic complementarities," it said. "The forthcoming meeting between the leaders will provide an opportunity to reaffirm the positive momentum and shared vision of India and Canada in building a forward-looking partnership."

India-Canada reset is vital in the time of Trump



AMEN
NAITHANI
AND
ELIZABETH
ROCHE

A quiet, constructive meeting between PMs Narendra Modi and Mark Carney at the G7 summit in Kananaskis in June 2025, followed by deeper and longer bilateral meetings at the G20 in November 2025, set the stage for a calibrated reset

CANADIAN PM Mark Carney's visit to India this week is expected to place the bilateral relationship — which touched a nadir in 2023 with Ottawa accusing New Delhi of being involved in the murder of a Canadian national — on a more stable footing. The logic for the reset in India-Canada ties was outlined by Carney himself in a speech at the WEF in Davos in January: "The middle powers must act together, because if you're not at the table, you're on the menu." Amid cracks in the global order, Ottawa has pivoted from a "laid-back" observer to a vocal protagonist, aggressively courting new alliances in the Indo-Pacific to absorb the shocks delivered by President Donald Trump to the once unified West.

Canada's transformation also comes at a critical time for India, which is looking to diversify its partnerships. What will prove helpful is Carney's economic expertise. With Canada looking for new markets to replace the business opportunities lost in the US, Carney should look at India, with a middle class comparable in numbers to the entire US population, as an economic opportunity, replacing surface-level engagements with deep-rooted linkages. In September 2023, ties hit a historic low when then PM Justin Trudeau accused the Indian government of involvement in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, an Indian-origin Canadian Sikh. The result was a total diplomatic freeze that lasted nearly two years. But ahead of the visit, Ottawa concluded that India was not involved in violent criminal activity on Canadian soil.

A quiet, constructive meeting between PM Narendra Modi and Carney at the G7 summit in Kananaskis in June 2025, followed by deeper and longer bilateral meetings at the G20 in Johannesburg in November 2025, set the stage for a reset. Incidentally, bilateral goods trade grew to roughly \$13.3 billion in 2024, despite the chill in relations. During Carney's visit, both are expected to conclude a \$2.8-billion deal for uranium supplies to India for a decade. For an India aiming to massively expand its civilian nuclear energy capacity, Canadian uranium is a necessity.

The official reboot of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations is also on the cards. CEPA has the ambitious goal of doubling bilateral trade to \$60 billion by 2030.

That being said, challenges remain. The deep-seated disagreements that triggered the 2023 crisis have not vanished; they have simply been moved to a different track. But the diplomatic channels are back at work along with the reinstatement of the high commissioners. NSA Ajit Doval's visit to Ottawa earlier this month ensured the delicate balance: Security dialogues run parallel to economic progress, rather than impeding it. Doval and his counterpart, Nathalie G Drouin, agreed to a "shared work plan" to guide cooperation. The real anchor of this relationship remains the people. With nearly 4,30,000 Indian students in Canada and a diaspora that is deeply integrated into the Canadian political and economic fabric, the people-to-people ties were always too strong to snap. They are the reason why, even at the height of the freeze, the two nations never stopped talking entirely.

India-U.S. deal: apple farmers from J&K, H.P., Uttarakhand to protest outside Parliament

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Apple farmers from Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, led by the Apple Farmers' Federation of India (AFFI), have decided to protest outside Parliament during the second lap of the Budget Session in March to demand that the India-U.S. bilateral trade agreement be scrapped.

AFFI convener and Jammu and Kashmir MLA M.Y. Tarigami and co-convener Rakesh Singha condemned the "total annihilation of import tariffs" on Washington apples from 50% to nil under the India-U.S. interim bilateral trade agreement.

'Unequal treaty'

"This trade agreement, which is clearly an unequal treaty, is a major surrendering of India's economic interests by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and will prove a death knell for apples domestically produced in the country. To protest this move, the AFFI will mobilise apple farmers from Jammu & Kashmir,



The AFFI said allowing American apples with minimal import tariffs does not bring another competitor to the local market. FILE PHOTO

Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and hold a demonstration outside Parliament in March 2026," they said in a statement.

The AFFI said allowing American apples with minimal import tariffs does not just bring another competitor to the domestic fruit market. "The U.S. federal government heavily subsidises the American farmer, including the orchardist. In 2026, it is forecasted that payouts to the agriculturists there would amount to ₹4 lakh crore, implying a per capita subsidy of more than ₹21 lakh per U.S. farmer," they said, adding that Indian apple farmers were living in precarious conditions with fast-depleting state sup-

port and being pushed into an unequal battle with the heavily-supported rich U.S. farmers and agribusinesses. "Our imports have climbed from 0.2 lakh metric tonnes (MT) to 6 lakh MT, from 1.7% of domestic production to 22.5% since 2000. At the same time, our exports – at just 21,700 MT – are behind even the 2004-05 figures when India exported 23,100 MT of apples. We agree that there is a gap of a few lakh MT between domestic production and consumption, but instead of supporting our growers to invest in their farms and improve their productivity, the government is trusting foreign farmers to cover the gap," they added.

Pak. bombs Kabul, declares 'open war'



Taliban soldiers sit beside an anti-aircraft gun while keeping watch for Pakistan's fighter jets in Khost province, Afghanistan. REUTERS

Agence France-Presse

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan bombed major cities in Afghanistan, including the capital Kabul, on Friday, with Islamabad's Defence Minister declaring the neighbours at "open war" following months of tit-for-tat clashes.

Pakistan's latest operation came after Afghan forces attacked Pakistani border troops on Thursday night in retaliation for earlier air strikes by Islamabad.

Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mu-

jahid said Afghan forces killed 55 Pakistani soldiers and captured several others, while putting the death toll among Afghan troops at 13. The head of the Pakistan military's publicity wing, Lieutenant-General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, told reporters "274 Taliban regime members and terrorists" had been killed, for the loss of 12 Pakistani troops.

Casualty claims from both sides are difficult to verify independently.

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Pak. bombs Kabul, declares 'open war'

The overnight operation was Pakistan's most widespread bombardment of the Afghan capital and its first air strikes on the southern base of the Taliban authorities since they returned to power in 2021. Relations between the neighbours have plunged in recent months, with land border crossings largely shut since deadly fighting in October that killed more than 70 people on both sides.

Islamabad accuses Afghanistan of failing to act against militant groups that carry out attacks in Pakistan, which the Taliban government denies.

Most of the attacks have been claimed by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a militant group that has stepped up assaults in Pakistan since the Afghan Taliban returned to power. Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif declared an "all-out confrontation" with the Taliban government. "Now it is open war between us and you." Taliban government spokesman Mujahid said Afghanistan wanted "dialogue" to resolve the conflict.

Several rounds of negotiations between Islamabad and Kabul followed a ceasefire brokered by Qatar and Turkey, but the efforts have failed to produce a lasting agreement. After repeated breaches of this truce, Saudi Arabia intervened this month, mediating the release of three Pakistani soldiers captured by Afghanistan in October.

Iran, which shares an eastern border with Afghanistan and Pakistan, offered on Friday to help "facilitate dialogue", while the Saudi Foreign Minister spoke with his Pakistani counterpart and China said it was "working with" both countries while calling for calm.

PAK PM SHEHBAZ SHARIF TO VISIT MOSCOW NEXT WEEK

Russia, China urge Pakistan, Afghanistan to end conflict

Press Trust of India

Moscow, Beijing, February 27

AMID AN escalation of armed clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Russia on Friday urged both countries to end the conflict and resolve their differences through diplomatic means.

Pakistan launched a retaliatory operation late Thursday night in response to the alleged border attacks by the Afghan Taliban. Islamabad claimed that 133 Taliban fighters were killed in Operation Ghazab lil Haq.

The 2,611-km-long border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is known as the Durand Line, which Kabul has not formally recognised.

The Russian Foreign Ministry expressed concern over the "sharp escalation" of armed clashes between Afghanistan and Pakistan, "involving regular army units, air force, and heavy weapons".

"There are casualties on both sides, including civilians. We call on our friendly countries, Afghanistan and Pakis-



Afghan Taliban soldiers at the Torkham border on Friday. PTI

tan, to abandon this dangerous confrontation and return to the negotiating table to resolve all differences through political and diplomatic means," foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said in a statement.

Kremlin's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, also urged Islamabad and Kabul to halt the hostilities.

China also called on Pakistan and Afghanistan to work

out a ceasefire while expressing concern over the escalation of the conflict between the two countries. China is closely following the developments of the situation in the conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said.

The strikes by Pakistan were the first time it had directly targeted its former allies over allegations they are harbouring militants; it described

E. EXPLAINED

Open escalation

PAKISTAN AND Afghanistan are in open conflict after cross-border clashes escalated. Pakistan launched airstrikes on Kabul and other Afghan cities, accusing the Taliban of harboring militants. Both sides report heavy losses, with tensions rooted in border disputes, militancy, and accusations of supporting insurgents.

the situation as "open war".

Sharif to visit Moscow

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is set to visit Moscow next week, according to a report. "The Pakistani Prime Minister will visit the Russian Federation next week," Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed was quoted by news agency TASS. However, so far the Kremlin has not officially confirmed the report.

• GEOPOLITICS

Taliban, terror: Behind Pakistan's call for 'open war' on Afghanistan

Rishika Singh

New Delhi, February 27

PAKISTAN LAUNCHED airstrikes on Afghanistan overnight, in what Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Mohammad Asif described as an "open war" after months of cross-border attacks from both sides. *Reuters* reported that 274 people had been killed in Afghanistan since Thursday night.

Taliban factor

Pakistan's Operation "Ghazab lil-Haq" (meaning, righteous fury) comes amid its criticism of the Taliban-led Afghan government on security-related issues. Specifically, it has accused Afghanistan of failing to rein in the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has operated in Pakistan since 2007, while the Afghan Taliban have denied supporting the group.

It has alleged that the Afghan Taliban is acting on behalf of India as New Delhi-Kabul ties have warmed. New Delhi, on its part, has condemned Pakistan's strikes and described them as another attempt by Pakistan to "externalise its internal failures".

Initially comprising separate groups,

TTP seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate by overthrowing the Pakistani government. It has launched several terror attacks over the years, including one in a Peshawar school in 2014 that killed 132 students.

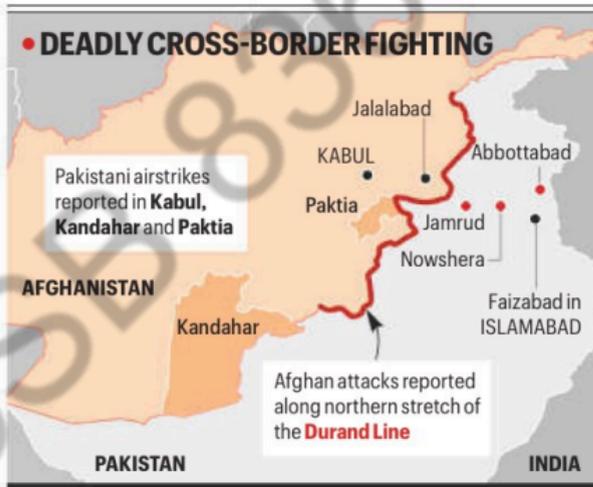
Pakistan had welcomed the Afghan Taliban's return to power in 2021 — to gain strategic depth in the region (and to counter India). But TTP-led terror attacks in Pakistan have only increased since then, especially in the northwestern Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa region that borders Afghanistan, resulting in a souring of relations.

In October 2025, too, a ceasefire mediated by Qatar and Turkey in Doha halted a round of hostilities. That did not last.

The Pakistan information ministry, citing a series of suicide bombing attacks this month, including an attack on February 6 that killed over 30 people at a mosque in Islamabad, said it had "conclusive evidence" to show that the acts were perpetrated by militants at the "behest of their Afghanistan-based leadership and handlers".

Worsening ties

The security issues have spurred other actions, adding to the friction. The think-



tank International Crisis Group noted that Islamabad's "pressure tactics", like forced deportation of over 1.7 million Afghan refugees from Pakistan and launching airstrikes on supposed TTP bases and even ensuring "hits" as far as in the capital Kabul, did not sit well with the Afghan Taliban.

The 2,640-km Durand Line adds

another layer of complexity, with attacks along this border in recent days. Established in 1893 by the British, Afghanistan later rejected it for cutting through the Pashtun and Baloch areas.

Former Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan, Vivek Katju, earlier wrote for *The Indian Express* that before 1947, Afghanistan urged Britain to relinquish the agreement, which it refused to do. "That would have meant that all the Pashtun lands ceded to British India would revert to Afghanistan, effectively making the Indus as the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan."

On Friday, the Turkish Foreign Minister spoke with his Pakistani, Afghan, Qatari and Saudi counterparts to discuss the conflict, AP reported.

What might happen over the next few days will also stem from the differences in military capabilities. The Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* reported: "The Taliban's strengths are rooted in unconventional and guerrilla-style warfare, whereas Pakistan's advantages lie in its conventional force structure, air power and deterrent capability... It implies that a head-on military contest would therefore never favour Kabul."

I saw nothing, did nothing wrong: Clinton on Epstein



Former US President Bill Clinton

Associated Press
Washington, February 27

FORMER PRESIDENT Bill Clinton told members of Congress on Friday that he “did nothing wrong” in his relationship with Jeffrey Epstein and saw no signs of Epstein’s sexual abuse as he faced hours of grilling from lawmakers over his connections to the disgraced financier from more than two decades ago.

“I saw nothing, and I did nothing wrong,” the former Democratic president said in an opening statement he shared on social media at the outset of the deposition. The deposition in New York marks the first time a former President has been compelled to testify to Congress.

It came a day after Hillary Clinton sat with lawmakers for her own deposition.

CHINA URGES CITIZENS IN IRAN TO EVACUATE

US advises embassy staff in Israel to leave immediately

Agencies

Tel Aviv, Beijing, February 27

THE US Embassy in Israel on Friday told its staff that it could leave the country and urged anyone considering departure to do so immediately, as the threat of an American strike on Iran looms.

US Ambassador Mike Huckabee told embassy employees in an email that discussions with officials in Washington had led to a decision authorizing departures for those who wished to leave.

The email was recounted to The AP by someone involved with the US mission who wasn’t authorized to share details. Sent before 10:30 a.m., it urged staff considering departure to do so quickly, advising them to focus initially on getting any flight out of Israel and to then make their way to Washington.

“Those wishing to take AD should do so TODAY,” Huck-



At the Imam Khomeini Grand Mosque in Tehran on Friday. AP

abee wrote, using an acronym for “authorized departure.”

“While there may be outbound flights over the coming days, there may not be,” he added. Huckabee said there was no need for panic, but for those desiring to leave, it was important to make plans soon.

Australia on Wednesday “directed the departure of all dependents of Australian offi-

cial posted to Israel in response to the deteriorating security situation in the Middle East.” India and several European countries with missions in Iran advised citizens to avoid travel to the country as well.

Meanwhile, China also advised its citizens to avoid traveling to Iran and urged those in the country to evacuate as soon as possible.

COUNTRY WILL HOLD FIRST ELECTION SINCE GEN-Z PROTESTS ON MARCH 5

Three rivals in race to become Nepal PM

Binaj Gurubacharya
Kathmandu, February 27

A FORMER rapper who ran Kathmandu as a mayor. The young leader of Nepal’s oldest party. And a communist veteran politician hoping to return to power after being ousted in youth-led protests in which dozens were killed last year.

Whoever prevails will become Nepal’s 16th PM in less than two decades, underscoring the recurring political instability that has marked the Himalayan nation since the monarchy was abolished in 2008.



(From left) K P Oli, Gagan Thapa and Balendra Shah

Balendra Shah, widely known as Balen, is seen as front-runner after emerging as a popular figure during the campaign. He was elected mayor of

the capital, Kathmandu, in 2022 and later left the post to become the National Independent Party’s candidate for PM.

Gagan Thapa is the newly

installed leader of the Nepali Congress, the country’s oldest major political party, a liberal democratic party with close ties to neighboring India.

The other contender for the post is K P Oli, the controversial but strong communist leader who led the coalition government that was forced out of power last year. He is blamed by many for the deaths in the violent protests that ousted him.

Oli has consistently argued that steady policies and politics are essential for Nepal, warning that the economy needs stability to develop. AP

China legislature sacks 19 members, nine of them are military officers

Associated Press

Beijing, February 27

CHINA'S LEGISLATURE has dismissed 19 members, including nine who are military officers, one week ahead of the start of its annual meeting. The late Thursday announcement did not say why the deputies had been removed, but such removals are generally tied to corruption investigations.

An anti-corruption campaign launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping shows no sign of letting up after more than a decade. The military has been targeted in recent years, including the removal of its top general last month, as Xi seeks to reform and modernize the armed forces.

Analysts say the campaign is also a way for Xi, who is in his 14th year in power, to remove potential rivals and ensure loyalty among his subordinates. The dismissals aren't likely to have a major impact on the meeting of the National People's Congress, which opens next Thursday and is expected to run for a week. The largely ceremo-

The removed officers include two under the Central Military Commission, the military's highest body, as well as others from the army, the navy, the air force and the rocket force

nial legislature rubber stamps decisions that have been made by the ruling Communist Party.

The removed officers include two under the Central Military Commission, the military's highest body, as well as others from the army, the navy, the air force and the rocket force. Three are generals. The rocket force, which oversees China's nuclear arsenal, was an early target of the military purges. The other dismissed deputies were regional representatives from several provinces. The removals leave the National People's Congress with 2,878 members.

GROWTH EXCEEDS FIRST ADVANCE ESTIMATE OF 7.4% RELEASED UNDER OLD GDP SERIES

In new GDP series, economy estimated to grow 7.6% in FY26

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, February 27

THE ECONOMY grew 7.6% in 2025-26 under the new GDP series with 2022-23 as the base year, according to the second advance estimates of the Ministry of Programme Implementation and Statistics (MoSPI). This is higher than the first advance estimate of 7.4% released in January under the old GDP series which had a base year of 2011-12.

In the third quarter this year, under the new GDP series with 2022-23 as the base year, the economy grew 7.8%.

The revisions to other growth figures are as follows:

- April-June 2025 GDP growth is now 6.7% versus 7.8% under the old series
- July-September 2025 GDP growth is now 8.4% versus 8.2% under the old series
- 2023-24 GDP growth is now 7.2% versus 9.2% under the old series
- 2024-25 GDP growth is now 7.1% versus 6.5% under the old series

It is expected the MoSPI would be able to complete the 'backseries' showing GDP data

for years before 2022-23 as per the new GDP series by December 2026. The release of the new GDP series with 2022-23 as the base year comes more than a decade after the exercise was last performed by MoSPI.

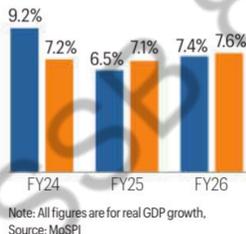
Back in January 2015, when the erstwhile GDP series with 2004-05 as the base year was revised, growth was raised for some years and lowered for others after MoSPI incorporated several methodological changes to measure the size of the Indian economy more accurately and comprehensively.

The magnitude of some revisions undertaken a decade back had left economists puzzled, with Raghuram Rajan, then the governor of the RBI, saying the central bank found it "hard to see the economy as rollicking" in 2013-14 after growth for that year was raised to 6.9% (later revised to 6.4%) from 4.7% as per the 2004-05 GDP series.

The 2022-23 GDP series has also undergone major changes, the most crucial of which has been how nominal GDP is adjusted for price changes to arrive at real GDP. The single-deflator method used until now

• How new GDP series has changed India's growth picture

● 2011-12 series ● 2022-23 series



by MoSPI to calculate the Gross Value Added of all sectors other than agriculture and mining and quarrying, could lead to growth being overstated at times when commodity prices were falling or not rising as fast as consumer prices.

The new GDP series does not use the single-deflator method and instead uses double-deflation — adjusting input and output by their respective inflation rates — with deflators also being used at a more granular level. This allows for more

CEA raises FY27 growth forecast to 7-7.4% after revised GDP series

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, February 27

THE NEW GDP series' numbers show investments have held up well amid global uncertainty, CEA V Ananth Nageswaran said Friday, raising the growth forecast for FY27 to 7-7.4%. Speaking to the media, he said risks to the improved growth projections were to the "upside".

"The Economic Survey had projected a real GDP growth

range of 6.8-7.2%. We were waiting for the benchmark revisions to come through and subsequently to the Economic Survey and the Budget presentation, we also have had the framework agreement with the US arrived at, etc. Therefore, we are increasing our GDP growth outlook for FY27 from 6.8-7.2% previously to between 7% and 7.4% under the new series," the CEA said.

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accurate measurement of real GDP growth.

Some other changes in the new series include the use of new sources of data and surveys (GST, e-Vahan, Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprise, Periodic Labour Force Survey, among others).

These changes, along with the new base year, have led to significant shifts in various sectors of the economy. The primary sector — which includes agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishing and mining and

quarrying — is now estimated to be 6.1% larger in absolute numbers in 2022-23, 4.5% larger in 2023-24, and 4% larger in 2024-25.

On the other hand, the new series estimates the secondary sector — comprising manufacturing, construction, and electricity and other utilities — to be 2.1%, 3.1%, and 2.2% smaller in size in the previous three years. The gross value added of the tertiary sector, or services, is also smaller. FULL REPORT ON

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