

Pellet guns part of graded police response, says SC

Top court touches on 'exceptional circumstances' for their use without expanding on it; state must not meet students' protests with brutality, Bench says, but flags the possible 'hijacking' of protests

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said the use of pellet guns by the police in "exceptional circumstances" was part of a graded approach to break civilian protests.

The court, however, did not expand on which "exceptional circumstances" justified the use of pellet guns, nor did it ask the Union government for an explanation during the hearing.

"Police rules allow the use [of pellet guns] in exceptional circumstances. One of the graded responses is the use of pellet guns,"

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, one of the three judges on the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant,



The use of such projectile activated guns for crowd dispersal fails the constitutional tests of necessity, proportionality, and reasonableness

PETITION AGAINST PELLET GUNS



Police rules allow the use [of pellet guns] in exceptional circumstances. One of the graded responses is the use of pellet guns

JUSTICE JOYMALYA BAGCHI
Supreme Court judge



observed orally. Hesitant to consider a blanket ban on pellet guns, the court said it would examine particular incidents during which the police had used pellet guns indiscriminately or arbitrarily in violation of the standard regulations mapping graded responses

for crowd control.

The court was hearing a petition filed by former Indian Police Service (IPS) of officer Yashovardhan Azad, and two pellet injury victims, Prashant Kumar Singh and Shekh Irshad Mansoori, primarily for a direction to ban the use of

kinetic metallic pellets by law enforcement agencies on civilian assemblies.

The petition argued that the use of projectile-activated guns (PAG) or pellet guns loaded with partly or wholly metallic pellets for crowd dispersal fails the constitutional tests of necessity, proportionality, and reasonableness.

Though the court "completely agreed" that the state must meet students' protests with non-violence and not brutality, the Bench flagged the possibility of unscrupulous elements "hijacking" a bona fide students' protest, driving it into a spiral of violence.

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KASHMIR'S PELLET VICTIMS

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'Pellet guns part of graded police response'

The police have to be prepared with a graded response, which includes the use of force, to every possible turn of events while dealing with a restive crowd, the court said.

"We are completely in agreement with pleas of no-violence principle when it comes to agitation of students or persons expressing dissatisfaction with a government policy... But there is also the question of elements hijacking students' protests. A protest must have started with a bona fide purpose, but it may end up as a vehicle for various ulterior purposes... The hijacking may even be intended to sabotage the bona fide protests," Justice Bagchi said.

Protective gear

Justice Bagchi sounded out the government on the need to arm the police with protective gear. This, he said, would give police personnel the confidence of a precious few seconds to pause and think before unleashing violence on protestors. "The best way is to arm your police with defensive gear. That gives them the confidence to ponder... Everyone is a human being. If someone comes with a lathi at you, whether it is a policeman or other, if you wear a helmet, you would take a few more seconds to gauge the situation before deciding the course of action. These aspects must also be included in this debate here," Justice Bagchi said.

The court said the prayer was "vague", and asked advocate Vrinda Grover to amend the petition to challenge the rules which allow the use of pellet guns. Ms. Grover said she could not find any standing orders of the Delhi Police mandating the use of pellet guns. The court turned to Solicitor-General to place on record any protocol followed by the police in controlling unlawful assemblies.

Centre defends CEC panel without CJI

Union govt. says if the decision of the Prime Minister cannot be trusted, then an 'outsider' or a former judge must sit in to advice on the appointment of Cabinet Ministers too; Supreme Court says that it is not about 'lack of faith' in the PM, but about 'justice not only being done, but shown to be done'

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Union government questioned in the Supreme Court on Thursday the insistence on having the Chief Justice of India (CJI) on the Prime Minister's panel which selects the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), saying if the decision of the Prime Minister cannot be trusted then an "outsider" or a former judge must sit in to advise on the appointment of Cabinet Ministers too.

The Centre's submission came while hearing petitions challenging the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act of 2023.

The petitions have contended that the Act "defeated" a Constitution Bench judgment in the Anoop Baranwal case,

which had constituted a CEC selection panel chaired by the Prime Minister and including the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the CJI. The 2023 Act, passed within months of the judgment, had replaced the Chief Justice with a Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.

'Lack of neutral person'
A Bench headed by Justice Dipankar Datta had, in past hearings, questioned the lack of even "one absolutely neutral person" on the Prime Minister's committee. The court had remarked that a Cabinet Minister would hardly defy the Prime Minister. The court had said the "dominant" presence of the Executive in the selection panel would send wrong signals to the public.

"If the Prime Minister's decision is not to be trusted, why not have someone



The appointment procedure should be shown to be fair... The issue is that the composition of this committee tilts in favour of one side. There is a two versus one here, two of the Executive and one of the Opposition. Should there not be a show of fairness in the appointment to one of the most important offices of this country?

JUSTICE DIPANKAR DATTA
Supreme Court judge



from outside or a former judge to select the Ministers also," Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the government, asked on Thursday.

Mr. Mehta, quoting from a 2014 apex court judgment in the Manoj Narula case, said the Prime Minister's office held constitutional trust and high sanctity.

The law officer asked if a constitutional court, while deciding the composition of a committee in a statute,

could presume abuse of power, bad faith and *mala fide* intention on part of the constitutional functionaries.

Justice Datta said the question was not about "lack of faith" in the Prime Minister, but about the principle of "justice not only being done, but shown to be done".

"The appointment procedure should be shown to be fair... The issue is that the composition of this committee tilts in favour of

one side. There is a two versus one here, two of the Executive and one of the Opposition. Should there not be a show of fairness in the appointment to one of the most important offices of this country?" Justice Datta asked the Union government.

Baranwal judgment

Mr. Mehta queried whether the Anoop Baranwal judgment could really restrict the wisdom of Parliament to replace the CJI with a Cabinet Minister on the CEC selection panel. Like independence of the judiciary, the Constitution has also envisaged independence for the Legislative and Executive, the Solicitor-General said.

Justice Datta referred to the government's oft-repeated complaint about the Collegium system of "judges selecting judges".

"We wonder whether judges are really selecting

judges nowadays," Justice Datta said in a veiled comment about Executive interference in judicial appointments to the highest courts.

The court reserved judgment on the point whether the case should be referred to a five-judge Constitution Bench. Advocate Kaleswaram Raj, on the petitioners' side, said a reference was uncalled for as no novel question relating to constitutional interpretation has been identified or framed, other than the ones already dealt with in the Anoop Baranwal judgment.

The judgment by a Constitution Bench in March 2023 had declared that the CEC should be a person of "herce independence, neutrality and honesty". It had called for an end to government monopoly and "exclusive control" over appointments to the highest poll body.

Parliament passes paper leak Bill as Opposition walks out of Rajya Sabha

Jitendra Singh says the govt. has made efforts to free medical education from management quota malice; during debate in Upper House, Kharge demands SC-monitored high-powered panel to probe NEET leaks, police action against protesters

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Thursday passed the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026. The Lok Sabha had passed the Bill on Wednesday.

The Opposition members belonging to the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) walked out of the

House before the reply by Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension Jitendra Singh to the seven-hour debate. The Upper House considered the Bill after the government listed it as supplementary agenda.

Replying to the debate, Mr. Singh questioned the Opposition's contention that there had been 152 examination paper leaks under the Narendra Modi government. "They could not



Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Monsoon Session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

authenticate it," he said, adding that the government has made efforts to free medical education from management quota malice.

He said the government increased the number of All India Institutes of Medical Sciences and both undergraduate and post-graduate seats in medical education.

He said the government's approach laid em-

phasis on democratisation of education.

Earlier, moving the Bill, Mr. Singh said the Bill reflected the Centre's commitment to safeguarding the interests of students and youth while ensuring merit, consistency, transparency and credibility in the public examination system.

Initiating the debate, Opposition leader Mallikarjun Kharge demanded a

PM says passage of Bill will make system more robust

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday took to Instagram again and said the passage of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026

would make the examination system more robust. Addressing young students as "sathiyon" (compatriots), Mr. Modi said the passage of the Bill was part of many steps taken by his government to address the issue of leak of examination papers.

Supreme Court-monitored high-powered committee probe into the NEET paper leaks and the police action on protesters. He demanded the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and warned that people's power would drag him "out of his forts" and make him answerable.

"You are the Home Minister, and despite so much unrest, you are not opening your mouth. Has

someone stitched it? He should have spoken openly. In the interest of the nation, he should have borne that insult," he said. Criticising the Centre's intention, he said the Bill was much-delayed and failed to address how to prevent paper leaks.

The DMK did not walk out with the INDIA bloc members, but moved amendments to the Bill, which were defeated.

Amid uproar, Parliament passes Bill making insult to National Song punishable

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Thursday passed amid din the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, making intentional insult to *Vande Mataram* a punishable offence. With the Rajya Sabha having cleared the legislation earlier, both Houses have now passed the Bill amid continuing Opposition protests that have repeatedly disrupted the Monsoon Session.

The legislation was cleared after a symbolic debate lasting barely 15 minutes. The Bill was passed by voice vote after the Opposition's amendments were rejected, with only two members participating in the brief debate.

DMK member A. Raja, who had moved an amendment to the Bill, protested against the legislation and later tore a document and threw it towards the Well



Kanimozhi

of the House as Opposition members continued to raise slogans after the Bill was passed.

"Today is a very dangerous day for the Parliament of this country," he said.

DMK member Kanimozhi opposed the Bill, calling it a "Hindutva agenda" being brought in under the guise of nationalism. She said the legislation was "against federalism".

"You cannot impose nationalism by bringing a law, the song goes against the secularism of the country. The founding fathers

had the wisdom to stop only with two stanzas, but today you are trying to polarise the country by making it compulsory and making it a criminal offence if we do not sing all the six stanzas," Ms. Kanimozhi said.

Replying to the debate, Minister of State for Home Nityananda Rai said the legislation would accord *Vande Mataram* a status on a par with the national anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*.

The existing Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act prohibits intentionally preventing the singing of the national anthem or causing disturbance to an assembly engaged in such singing. Such offences are punishable with imprisonment of up to three years, a fine, or both.

A second and subsequent conviction attracts a minimum one-year jail term. The amendment extends these provisions to *Vande Mataram*.

Women face doxxing, online threats after Delhi protests

Suruchi Kumari

NEW DELHI

Following the protests at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi demanding the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as Union Education Minister, several women who took part in the movement have reported being subjected to online harassment.

The Hindu has verified multiple such instances, including women facing doxxing (the circulation of personal information) and rape and death threats online.

Videos and photographs of women who attended the protest last week or gave social media bytes have been shared across social media platforms, with several X and Instagram handles urging their



Several social media handles have been found to be sharing details of women who took part in the July 20 march. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

followers to “teach them a lesson”.

One woman was declared “most wanted” in a post that said a “search is on” and sought information about her whereabouts. By Thursday afternoon, posts claiming she had been identified were

circulating online, carrying her name, city, and a copy of a zero FIR registered in Noida. In the purported video, the woman is alleged to have “abused” Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

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Women face doxxing, threats after protests

The Hindu found that several accounts involved in sharing such content have, in recent days, amplified videos alleging that protesters abused public authorities or assaulted police personnel.

Soon after the Jantar Mantar protest ended, a 23-year-old student posted a seven-second reel on her Instagram account, which has 3.78 lakh followers. Within an hour, the video had crossed a million views before she deleted it. Five days and two apologies later, she says she is still receiving rape and death threats.

Harassed in a market

Another protester, a 22-year-old woman who requested anonymity, said her photographs were included in a collage circulated online seeking the arrest of 12 women accused of “abusing” Mr. Modi and taking an “anti-India” stance.

“My posts are filled with abusive comments and rape threats. I have a right to express myself,” she said. “I was in a market with my mother when two men approached and started harassing me. Relatives are calling my parents after seeing these videos. But I will neither deactivate my account nor delete my posts,” said the content creator, who has over 3 lakh followers.

Posts targeting women participants were amplified by accounts including The Jaipur Dialogues, Hindutva Vigilant, and others, across social media platforms. In one post, Instagram user Rohit Sharma said a list of individuals had been prepared and called on followers to share their locations. Another account, Indic Matrix, claimed to know a participant’s address and phone number.

In response to queries from *The Hindu*, Hindutva Vigilant said, “I only shared videos posted by the person who filed the complaint and tagged Delhi Police requesting appropriate legal action. I do not possess anyone’s personal information.”

‘SC clean chit for Singh must trigger reform of criminal justice system’

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court’s “decisive and merited vindication” of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in an “utterly untenable” criminal prosecution should prompt a wider reckoning with the country’s criminal justice system, senior advocate and former Union Law Minister Ashwani Kumar said on Thursday.

The court on Wednesday provided Manmohan Singh posthumous relief by agreeing with two back-to-back closure reports filed by the CBI in 2014 giving him a clean chit, while highlighting there was no “sufficient material or good reason” to register a corruption case against him in connection with the coal block allocation scam.

Calling the order a “vindication of truth”, Mr. Kumar said the case underscored the dangers of a system in which the process of prosecution itself could become punishment, particularly when allegations were amplified through a media trial.



Ex-Union Law Minister Ashwani Kumar

Former Information and Broadcasting Minister Manish Tewari recalled Singh’s press conference in January 2014 in which he had said history would be kinder to him than the media and his contemporaries.

“The Supreme Court’s decision to close a completely spurious case against him vindicates the honour of a gentleman who steered the ship of the Indian state through some of its most turbulent times,” he said, adding, “It came a little too late, as Dr. Manmohan Singh had already left us.”

Mr. Kumar said the verdict should trigger reforms to effectively curb media trials, which threaten the fundamental rights to reputation, privacy and dignity.

The Bay of Bengal as India's SHANTI anchor

The Bay of Bengal region, one of the world's most disaster-prone regions, lacks coordinated mechanisms to respond to natural disasters. Non-traditional threats such as climate-induced disasters, illegal fishing, cyber vulnerabilities, and supply chain disruptions require regional cooperation beyond bilateral aid or maritime power. This gap – growing capacity without shared norms – highlights the need for stronger maritime security.

On July 13, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar introduced Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity (SHANTI) while launching India's candidature for the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the 2028-29 term. Building on Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR), SHANTI provides a normative framework for shared maritime spaces, with the Bay of Bengal serving as the ideal region to operationalise it before expanding it across the wider Indo-Pacific.

The Bay's centrality

In recent years, the Bay of Bengal has moved from the margins to the centre of India's strategic thinking. Historically, it connected South and Southeast Asia through trade, culture, religion, and the exchange of ideas long before the Indo-Pacific entered diplomatic vocabulary.

Today, it links India's Act East policy with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), provides access to the strategically vital Malacca Strait, and connects the eastern Indian Ocean to major global trade and energy routes. China's heavy reliance on the strait – often described as the “Malacca dilemma” – has driven its expanding regional presence through ports and infrastructure projects, intensifying geopolitical competition. As economic connectivity, maritime



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The Bay of Bengal is an ideal testing ground for SHANTI's security vision

governance, and strategic rivalry converge in the Bay, SHANTI offers a framework that places norms, trust, and integrity – not tonnage – as the currency of durable advantage.

A maritime security evolution

As such, SHANTI can be best understood as a logical evolution of its maritime outreach: SAGAR, articulated in 2015, supplied the vision of ‘equity in development’ and MAHASAGAR, announced in 2025, expanded that vision's scope recognising the interconnectedness of security (both vertically among nations and horizontally in threat perception) in the wider Indo-Pacific and the Global South. SHANTI offers the grammar of maritime security framework, the norms, trust and integrity in cooperation through which vision can be translated into tangible action that is well received and reciprocated. It shifts the emphasis from competition to demand driven cooperation, from influence to non-prescriptive institution-building, and from episodic crisis management to long-term resilience. This shift – from protecting maritime spaces to governing shared maritime commons – reflects India's new security mantra. If SAGAR was a statement of intent and MAHASAGAR a statement of reach, SHANTI is a statement of method to situate India as the “preferred security partner” and “first responder”.

Because the Bay of Bengal is a single interconnected system, its cyclones, fish stocks, shipping lanes and pollution cross national boundaries almost by default, and its littoral states face remarkably similar challenges and concerns – disaster risk reduction and response, coastal erosion, fisheries management, port resilience, undersea cable protection and climate adaptation.

Unlike the western Indian Ocean, which is marked by active conflict, fragile economy and

contested spaces, the Bay of Bengal's strategic geography encourages cooperation. Yet, the region suffers less from a lack of institutions than from institutional fragmentation. What is missing is a common framework to align existing mechanisms. SHANTI fills this gap by providing principles to strengthen cooperation in maritime security, disaster response, the blue economy, and environmental resilience. India's geography gives it a natural convening role, but its centrality should rest on regional stewardship – not dominance – through trust-based, rules-based cooperation among states with shared challenges and opportunities.

Principles to practice

Taken together, these conditions make the Bay of Bengal India's most governable maritime sub-region – a natural laboratory where SHANTI can move from principle to practice before shaping wider cooperation across the Indian Ocean. This was reflected at the July 2026 BIMSTEC National Security Advisers' meeting in New Delhi, where member-states adopted common principles for maritime law enforcement and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. BIMSTEC also agreed to hold its first joint maritime security exercise in the Bay, in November 2026, while a white shipping information-sharing agreement remains under discussion. These initiatives reflect the norm-building and trust-based cooperation that SHANTI seeks to promote. Its lasting contribution, therefore, will not be another acronym in India's maritime lexicon, but a redefinition of security – from deterrence to resilience, from rivalry to shared responsibility, and from crisis management to governance of the shared maritime commons.

Activists raise transparency concerns as PM CARES Fund withholds audit statements since FY 2022-23

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund has not made public any audited financial statements for the past three fiscal years even as activists raise concerns about its transparency.

The fund, a public charitable Trust established in March 2020 amid the COVID-19 crisis to support relief efforts during public health emergencies and other disasters, is chaired by the Prime Minister and funded entirely through voluntary contributions, according to information released by the Centre.



Chaired by the PM, the fund was set up in 2020 to aid relief efforts during public health emergencies and other disasters. FILE PHOTO

The last publicly available audited financial statements, for the financial year 2022-23, show an opening balance of ₹5,415.65 crore, voluntary contributions of ₹909.64 crore, total receipts of ₹6,723.07 crore, total payments of ₹439.38 crore,

and a closing balance of ₹6,283.68 crore as on March 31, 2023. Audited financial statements for 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23 are available on the PM CARES website.

The absence of publicly available audit statements after 2022-23 is "extremely

concerning", Anjali Bhardwaj, co-convenor of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information, told *The Hindu*.

"The fund was presented as having been set up by the Union government, making it appear to be a public authority. Government employees also contributed from their salaries," Ms. Bhardwaj said.

"However, when information regarding the funds collected and spent was sought, the government maintained that the Trust is not a public authority under the RTI Act... At present, PM CARES remains outside the ambit of the RTI Act, parliamentary scrutiny, and audit by the

Comptroller and Auditor-General," she said.

Information relating to the PM CARES Fund should be made available to the public, former Central Information Commissioner and RTI activist Shailesh Gandhi said.

'Falls in ambit of RTI'

"Legally speaking, the PM CARES Fund falls within the ambit of the RTI Act... In fact, anything associated with the Prime Minister, except matters affecting national security, should be open to public scrutiny. The trustees of the PM CARES Fund are Union Ministers. They are public servants and should be accountable," he said.

Militants attack security checkpoint in northwest Pakistan, killing 9 policemen

Press Trust of India

PESHAWAR

At least nine policemen, including a senior officer, were killed and over two dozen others injured when militants attacked a checkpoint in northwest Pakistan, police said on Thursday.

The attack late Wednesday on the Khazina Banda checkpoint in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Hangu district, bordering Afghanistan, also left 15 militants dead, police said.

No group or individual immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.



A security force member stands guard after a militant attack on a checkpoint at Hangu district in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. AFP

Inspector General of Police Zulfiqar Hameed said that the checkpoint was attacked by Fitna al Khawarij, a term the government

uses for the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants. Following the attack on the police checkpoint, reinforcements

were dispatched to assist, he said. However, the vehicle carrying additional personnel also came under fire, he added.

During the intense exchange of fire, nine policemen, including Deputy Superintendent of Police Diyar Khan, were killed while 28 others were injured, Mr. Hameed said.

He added that 15 militants were killed while multiple others were injured.

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif have condemned the attack.

Tension grips PoK as clashes continue amid elections

Press Trust of India

Islamabad, July 30

TENSIONS PREVAILED in Rawalkot region in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) on Thursday as clashes continued between security forces and the banned Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC).

The tensions, which have claimed several lives this week, coincide with ongoing regional elections in PoK, with demonstrators affiliated with JAAC determined to march towards Muzaffarabad to press Islamabad to accept their demands.

The JAAC is a collective of ac-

tivist groups which have been staging demonstrations for nearly two months over 12 contentious seats of the so-called legislative assembly in PoK.

It alleges that the establishment manoeuvres these seats to install a prime minister of its choosing.

In PoK, clashes between security forces and protesters have intensified since Monday, especially in Rawalkot and Mirpur, which reportedly resulted in maximum casualties.

According to the JAAC, at least 37 men lost their lives in the clashes.

"The number of those in-



People rally in support of PoK protestors during a demonstration in Islamabad on Wednesday. REUTERS

jured remains unknown. Amid heavy gunfire, our people have continued to stand peacefully

and unarmed. God willing, our peaceful struggle against oppression and injustice will con-

tinue," it said in a statement.

However, the Pakistan government denied any death of civilians saying militants of the banned Tehrik-e Taliban are present among the protesters and crackdown against them will continue.

"We will not talk to the protesters and law will take its course," Pakistan State Minister for Interior Affairs Talal Chaudhary said.

Amnesty International and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan have expressed concerns over reports of violence in the region, calling on the authorities to probe the incidents.

U.S., Iran trade strikes as Pakistan says talks ongoing

Agence France-Presse

TEHRAN

Mediator Pakistan insisted on Thursday that negotiations between Iran and the United States were ongoing, even as Washington carried out a “heavy wave of strikes” on its foe in retaliation for fresh attacks targeting Jordan.

The military's Central Command said in a social media post that the U.S. struck dozens of targets belonging to Iran's Revolutionary Guard, including military command centres, missile and drone facilities, and coastal surveillance and defence sites.

IRGC in the northwestern province of Zanzan said three of its members were killed in a U.S. attack there.

The last two days have seen Saudi Arabia join the U.S. in striking militant



Smoke rises in the city after reports of multiple U.S. strikes on Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province, Iran, on Thursday. REUTERS

groups in Iraq, and Egypt come under fire for the first time with a drone attack at a Mediterranean port.

On Thursday morning, Jordan reported intercepting incoming Iranian missiles for a second day running, while Kuwait said an Iranian strike that hit a building belonging to a Chinese company killed

one person.

The return to direct hostilities followed a brief pause in fighting meant to give talks a boost.

“Negotiations between parties are ongoing, particularly on [the] Strait of Hormuz and to de-escalate,” Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi told presspersons in Islamabad.

Wildfires rage across Europe even as France and Spain see some respite

Reuters

Bordeaux, Madrid, Athens,
July 23

FRANCE, SPAIN and Greece battled major wildfires on Thursday, with Spain bringing one blaze under control but facing new threats as intense heat, dry vegetation and powerful winds kept much of southern Europe on alert.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez downgraded the emergency level for a major fire on the border between Madrid and Castilla y Leon, but warned the danger had not passed as at least 10 other blazes caused concern across the country.

In France, two people were arrested on suspicion of arson as crews contained a vast fire near Bordeaux, while fires in Greece killed three firefighters and forced tourists and residents to flee parts of Crete, some by boat.

"We barely made it... we were running and the fire was behind us, chasing us," said Lia Galata, a Greek seasonal tourism worker who found shelter in an indoor gym and had to be evacuated by boat as a blaze tore through the hills above a resort on Crete late Wednesday.

"We have difficult days ahead of us," Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said.

Emergency crews have faced barely a pause between heatwaves and fire fronts this summer across an increasingly tinder-dry Europe, the world's fastest-warming continent.

In eastern England, firefighters were tackling a significant wildfire at Dunwich Heath, prompting the evacuation of about 200 caravans from the area, a significant biodiversity site. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service called the blaze one of the most challenging incidents.

Clooney family forced to flee 'beautiful home'

Paris: George Clooney has said his family has been forced to evacuate their home in southeastern France as a wildfire burned nearby, his agent said Thursday. The Hollywood star behind the *Ocean's Eleven* franchise and other films made the statement in a letter to Didier Bremond, mayor of Brignoles, publicist Guido Gotz said.

"At this point we have no idea whether our beautiful home makes it through this terrible moment"... Amal and I are committed to making sure that whatever happens to our village" Clooney wrote, referring to his wife Amal.

REUTERS

Toll now three as clashes spread in Nepal's Tarai; Balen vows stern action

Yubraj Ghimire

Kathmandu, July 30

NEPAL PRIME Minister Balendra Shah promised stringent and effective measures against those responsible for rioting and clashes in parts of eastern Nepal.

In a six-minute televised address to the nation, he said investigation has already begun into the violence that erupted in Sundari district and spread to other areas, and no one found guilty would be spared.

The PM said Nepal's constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens to pursue and practise all religions and the government is determined to protect those rights. "No religion preaches hatred and intolerance," he added.

Shah came under fierce criti-

cism for his continued absence in Parliament even as death toll rose to three in continuing communal clashes since Monday.

Shah and Home Minister Sudhan Gurung were both absent in the House as Opposition members demanded that they come and explain the situation in curfew-hit Sunsari and Siraha districts in eastern Nepal where the army is deployed to restore law and order.

The situation in the two districts flared up on Thursday as a 15-year-old boy, Ganesh Yadav, died in Golbazar area of Siraha district as protestors indulged in arson, burned down a few houses and attacked a shopping mall. They were demanding stern action against the culprits who attacked "pilgrims" in adjoining Sunsari Monday night.