

DIA, DEOGHAR IAS ACADEMY

Daily News Feed

D.N.F

07.05.2025

**Sabaijor Complex, Near Jamunajor Pul, Castair Town
Deoghar, Mob:-9162500508**



'Asian crisis in reverse' as currencies soar on the dollar

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters

SINGAPORE/SHANGHAI

A wave of dollar selling in Asia is an ominous sign for the greenback as the world's export powerhouse starts to question a decades-long trend of investing its big trade surpluses in U.S. assets.

Ripples from Friday and Monday's record rally in the Taiwan dollar are now spreading outward, driving surges for currencies in Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia, China and Hong Kong.

The moves sound a warning for the dollar because they suggest money is moving in to Asia at scale and that a key pillar of dol-

lar support is wobbling.

While Tuesday brought a measure of stability, following a stunning 10% two-day leap for Taiwan's currency, Hong Kong's dollar was testing the strong end of its peg and the Singapore dollar has soared close to its highest in more than a decade.

"To me, it has a very sort of Asian-crisis-in-reverse feel to it," said Louis Vincent Gave, founding partner of Gavekal Research, in a podcast, due to the speed of the currency moves.

In 1997 and 1998 capital flight sank currencies from Thailand to Indonesia and South Korea and left the region determined to accumulate dollars in the aftermath.

"Since the Asian crisis,



Trumping dollar: The surge has been triggered by U.S. President Trump's aggressive tariffs. REUTERS

Asian savings have not only been massive, but they've had this tendency to be re-deployed into U.S. Treasuries. And now, all of a sudden, that trade no longer looks like the one-way slam

dunk that it had been for so long," said Gavekal's Gave.

Traders in Taiwan had reported difficulty executing trades, such as the one-sided wave of dollar

selling, and speculated it had been at least tacitly endorsed by the central bank. Dealers said volumes were heavy in other Asian markets.

At its heart, the break

has been triggered by U.S. President Donald Trump's aggressive tariffs, analysts said, rattling investors' confidence in the dollar and upending the flow of trade dollars into U.S. assets in two places.

Fear of U.S. downturn

First, exporters especially in China can expect fewer receipts as tariffs cut access to U.S. customers. Second, fear of a U.S. downturn casts a shadow over U.S. asset returns.

"[Mr.] Trump's policies have weakened the market's confidence in the performance of U.S. dollar assets," said Gary Ng, senior economist at Natixis.

Some are speculating on what markets have termed a "Mac-a-Lago agreement," he said, or a deal - named

after Mr. Trump's gilded Florida resort - to weaken the dollar. Taiwan's Office of Trade Negotiations denied tariff talks in Washington last week had involved the topic of foreign exchange.

Asia's biggest piles of dollars sit in China, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore, which combined number in the trillions.

In China alone, foreign currency deposits at banks - mostly dollars and mostly held by exporters - were \$959.8 billion at the end March, the highest in nearly three years.

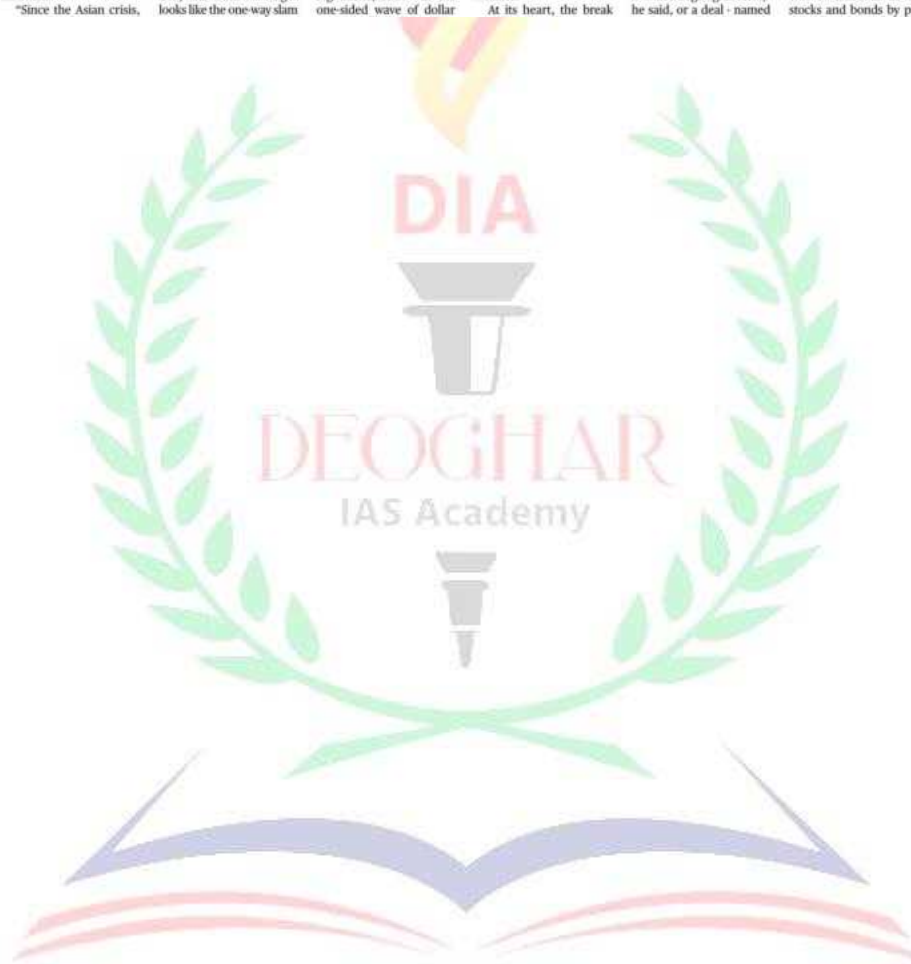
On top of that are layered investments funded in these currencies, which have low borrowing costs by global standards and investments in U.S. stocks and bonds by pen-

sion and insurance funds, which have tended to keep foreign exchange hedges small due to the costs involved.

Shorting U.S. dollar

There are signs the dollar view is shifting from all corners. Goldman Sachs said in a note on Tuesday that investor clients had recently flipped from short yuan positions, to long positions, or in other words, they are shorting the U.S. dollar expecting further weakness.

A popular trade that involved buying cheap U.S. dollars in the Hong Kong dollar forwards market, known in markets as the gift that never stopped giving, also went into reverse since it rested on the Hong Kong dollar staying still.



What are the challenges faced by the civil services?

What are the frameworks under which the bureaucracy functions?

Rangarajan, R

The story so far:

In the occasion of Civil Services Day (April 21), Cabinet Secretary T. V. Somanathan IAS, spoke about the importance of civil services in maintaining and strengthening democracy, the need for lateral entrants and greater transparency.

What is merit versus spoils system?

The merit system entails appointments to government posts after a rigorous selection process by an independent authority. In India, this commenced in 1858 when the British introduced the Indian Civil Service to select officers for administering the country. After independence, it is the Union Public Service Commission which conducts such exams. The merit system is aimed at building career bureaucrats who are

expected to function without any political leanings and provide independent advice to the incumbent political executive. The spoils system works on the adage 'to the victor belong the spoils.' It is a system where the incumbent political executive appoints its supporters to various posts in the government. It has its origins in the U.S., and continued until 1883 when it was replaced largely by the merit system.

What is the role of the civil services?

The civil services have contributed significantly in the administration of our democratic system. As mentioned by the Cabinet Secretary, they have been instrumental in the conduct of free and fair elections, and ensuring smooth transfer of power both at the Centre and States. There have been numerous instances when States have been placed under President's rule, with the civil services ensuring uninterrupted administration during such times.

On the development side, they are a repository of institutional knowledge. They provide advice to ruling governments in policy making and also implement the policies made by the political executive. The administrative tasks of public bureaucracy include executing and monitoring programmes, and laying down laws, rules and regulations. Civil servants have been the fulcrum around which governance activities like delivery of essential services, providing relief operations etc., have been carried out.

What ails the civil services?

But the civil services also suffer from significant challenges. First, neutrality as a trait is fast eroding among bureaucrats, resulting in political bias in discharge of critical functions. It is pertinent to note that both the cause and effect of this phenomenon is the increasing political interference in all aspects of bureaucracy

including postings and transfers. Second, career bureaucrats who are generalists, may lack the expertise needed to address technical challenges. Third, there is also significant corruption at all levels of the bureaucracy that often goes unpunished.

What reforms are required?

Some of the measures that need to be taken are summarised here.

In a democracy, the mandate is with the elected government and it needs to be respected. However, the neutral bureaucracy needs to be insulated from undue political interference to uphold the rule of law and constitutional values. To maintain a harmonious balance between the political and permanent executive, the autonomy of career bureaucrats is essential. This includes reasonable independence with respect to postings, tenures and transfers. Also, there needs to be a shift in the focus of bureaucrats from 'procedure' to 'outcomes.' Monitoring at present in the government is primarily through the measurement of outlays and at best through outputs. There is a need to move towards measurement of 'outcomes.' This reform can be hastened by hiring domain experts as lateral entrants, especially at senior levels. These reforms would uphold the essential traits of an effective civil service.

Rangarajan, R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified'. The views expressed are personal.

THE GIST

▼ The merit system entails appointments to government posts after a rigorous selection process by an independent authority.

▼ But the civil services also suffer from significant challenges. First, neutrality as a trait is fast eroding among bureaucrats, resulting in political bias in discharge of critical functions.

▼ In a democracy, the mandate is with the elected government and it needs to be respected. However, the neutral bureaucracy needs to be insulated from undue political interference to uphold the rule of law and constitutional values.



How the judiciary maintains accountability

All judicial powers have been vested in the Constitution, and judges are bound to work within that constitutional ambit. Once any of them go beyond it, they may be removed on the grounds of proved misbehaviour, which would include violation of the Constitution

LETTER & SPIRIT

C.B.P. Srivastava

The recent comments by the Vice-President of India on the role of Judges has caused much anxiety and is a matter of serious concern that needs to be analysed properly. It is a well-known fact that with power comes responsibility. The position of the Vice-President is second in the order of precedence in India and therefore, anybody holding such a post needs to be extremely cautious before speaking, as his views might send wrong signals to the people. The current Vice-President, Jagdeep Dhankhar, in the context of the Supreme Court setting deadlines for Presidents and Governors to clear Bills approved by the Union/State legislatures, has stated that judges are working as a 'super parliament'; that judges cannot give directions to the President; and that judges are not accountable because the law of the land does not apply to them.

Dissecting the claims

The term 'super parliament' does not have any significance as Parliament is the supreme body constituted by the free will of the people reflecting the icon of popular sovereignty. No agency including the judiciary can go beyond it. It is to be noted that in order to prevent any arbitrary exercise of power by an independent judiciary, the framers of the Constitution had placed all judicial powers in the Constitution itself. This has been reiterated by the Supreme Court in *L. Chandra Kumar versus Union of India* (1997) in which the Court held that although all judicial powers are vested in the Constitution, the independence of the judiciary is fully secured because of the principle of separation of powers. If at any time judges try to exercise their powers arbitrarily, crossing the boundaries of the separation of powers, it shall be a gross violation of Article 50 and



GETTY IMAGES

the government which holds majority in Parliament may initiate a process for a removal of the judge concerned.

On the second issue, that the judiciary cannot give directions to the President, a perusal of his position in India needs to be explained. The President is the head of the State (it is clear when Article 52 is read with Article 1). Hence, he or she is elected according to the provisions contained in Articles 54 and 55 establishing India as a Republic. The President is the head of the Executive, the head of the armed forces and also the head of Parliament under Articles 53(1), 53(2) and 79 respectively. Therefore, he is vested with powers

according to his position. Giving assent to the Bills is the power of the President which is well within the limits of popular sovereignty. The President cannot and shall not go beyond this doctrine of popular sovereignty. In more simpler words, if the assent is delayed inordinately, it would undermine the people's power which in itself would be undemocratic. Hence, the judiciary setting a time frame for giving assent to Bills is consistent with the requirements of popular sovereignty. It in no way undermines the dignity of the head of the State. Since the people of India abide by the Constitution and believe in its

supremacy, all authorities including the President and Governor shall abide by the provisions of the Constitution.

On accountability

The statement given by the Vice-President that the law of the land does not apply to judges is not at all rational because he himself, as the second highest constitutional authority, questions the rule of law in India. The rule of law flows from the doctrine of the supremacy of the Constitution; questioning its efficacy and limitations would undermine the Constitutional mandate. As mentioned above, all judicial powers have been vested in the Constitution itself, and judges are bound to work within that constitutional ambit. Once any of them go beyond it, he may be removed on the grounds of proved misbehaviour, which would include violation of the Constitution. Moreover, Parliament is empowered to set aside a decision of the Court, if required, by making a new law. This provision also signifies the people's power and popular sovereignty.

Last but not the least, the Constitution of India has given powers to the judiciary to review the actions of the State and its instrumentalities for the purpose of establishing the rule of law to protect the rights of the people. The exercise of the inherent power of the Supreme Court to do complete justice under Article 142 is worth mentioning. When there is no express constitutional provision or parliamentary law on a particular subject or issue at hand, the Supreme Court has been vested with the power to become the custodian and sole interpreter of the Constitution.

Conclusively, whenever the country faces large-scale turbulence in almost all sectors, constitutional authorities and citizens both need to look at the events with a liberal mindset and should avoid doing or speaking anything which might ultimately prove detrimental to democratic and constitutional sentiments.

C.B.P. Srivastava is President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance, Delhi.

THE GIST

▼ The current Vice-President, Jagdeep Dhankhar, in the context of the Supreme Court setting deadlines for Presidents and Governors to clear Bills approved by the Union/State legislatures, has stated that judges are working as a 'super parliament'.

▼ The term 'super parliament' does not have any significance as Parliament is the supreme body constituted by the free will of the people.

▼ The statement given by the Vice-President that the law of the land does not apply to judges is not at all rational because he himself, as the second highest constitutional authority, questions the rule of law in India.

IAS Academy



Food vs fuel: Surge in ethanol blending and its impacts

Will the increased diversion of sugar for ethanol blending reduce its availability for direct consumption?

DATA POINT

Nitika Francis

India is looking to increase the ethanol-blending ratio in petrol to 30% to further cut down on fossil fuel consumption, as it has met its previous target of 20% in 2025, well ahead of schedule. This would require an increase in the diversion of sugar, produced from sugarcane and other sources, for ethanol production. However, sugarcane production has been on the decline since 2022, so much so that on Thursday, the Centre approved a hike in the Fair Remunerative Price for the crop to protect the interests of farmers. Consequently, the price of sugar has risen too, pinching the pockets of consumers.

Will the increased diversion of sugar for ethanol blending further reduce its availability for direct consumption and push prices even higher?

Chart 1 shows the annual sugarcane production in India over the last 10 years. Following a dip in FY17 due to drought conditions in sugar-producing States, production was almost consistently increasing until it peaked at 490 crore tonnes in FY23. It declined in the following year and is estimated to further dip in FY25 as well to 435 crore tonnes.

A slate of components has influenced lower production of sugarcane over the recent years, such as red-rot disease among crops in major sugar-producing States, deficient rains, and problems with the flowering of crops.

This decline in production has predictably impacted the retail sugar prices across the country. Chart 2, which shows the country-wide modal retail price of one kilogram of sugar, depicts prices rising from ₹40 per kg in May 2023 to ₹45 per kg as of May 5, 2025.

Ethanol blending adds to the price pressure by diverting a portion of the sugar. Government data

show a rapid increase in the amount of sugarcane-based ethanol supplied for blending over the past decade, going from about 40 crore litres in FY14 to nearly 670 crore litres in FY24 (Chart 3). The practice is lauded for its sustainability-related benefits as well as its potential to reduce India's dependence on oil imports.

The Centre has been implementing a long-term Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP) since the start of the 2000s, which allowed for a stagnant, then gradually increasing supply of ethanol. Initially, as a means of ensuring adequate availability of sugar for domestic consumption, the government banned the use of sugarcane juice, sugar syrup, and B-heavy molasses for ethanol production. This ban was lifted later, which explains the surge in supply in recent years.

A commensurate increase can be seen in the rate at which ethanol was blended with petrol over the years. Chart 4 shows the ethanol blending rate over the last 10 years. From just over 1.5% in FY14, the rate of ethanol blending has surged to 20% in FY25. The ethanol blending ratio surged due to a combination of a consistent increase in sugar diverted for ethanol production and a drastic reduction in the goods and services tax imposed on ethanol meant for the EBP.

At the time of its inception, the EBP had set the target of 20% blending to be achieved by 2030. However, upon seeing the progress attained through lifting caps and taxes, standing at 15% blended ethanol in 2024, it was decided to advance the 20% target to 2025. The ratio was reached in March this year, leading to talks of a 30% target for the coming years.

With the availability of sugarcane impacted this year, reports show that the government is looking at grains to make up for the shortfall. Moreover, with sugar prices rising, the choice between food and fuel looms.

Bittersweet blend

The data were sourced from Lok Sabha Questions and Answers, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy



Chart 1: The chart shows the annual sugarcane production in India over the last ten years (in crore tonnes)

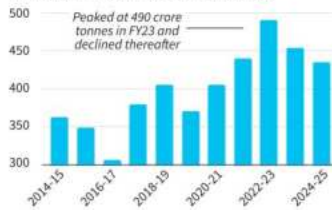


Chart 3: The chart shows the amount of sugarcane-based ethanol supplied for blending (in crore litres)

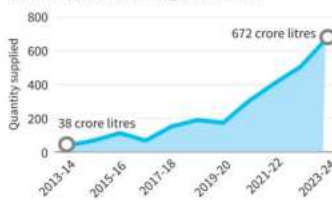
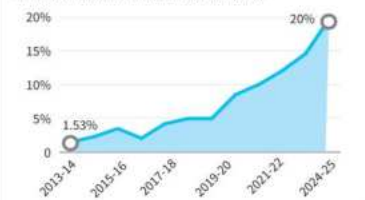


Chart 2: The country-wide modal retail price of 1 kg of sugar between May 2022 and May 2025 (in ₹ per kg)



Chart 4: The chart shows the ethanol blending ratio achieved in India over the last decade (in %)



Power and pitfalls of digital influence

As digital connectivity grows, India faces a complex battle against misinformation and de-influencing. While social media enables vital communication, it also amplifies unchecked content. De-influencing – where influencers discourage purchases – can promote mindful consumption, but often relies on sensationalism and clickbait for engagement.

Despite expert advice being essential, digital platforms often become the go-to place, enabling the rapid spread of misinformation. To counter this, strict regulations are needed.

Experts consulted for the World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Risks Report identify India as one of the nations most vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation. This is largely driven by the rise of AI-generated content and the influence of social media platforms. Despite the Ministry of Consumer Affairs' "Endorsement Know-hows" and ASCI/SEBI guidelines, misleading health advice and weight loss reels blur the line between organic and paid content. Influencers often use shock tactics, clickbait, and half-truths to go viral, rapidly fuelling misinformation.

Legal landscape

While Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, it is subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2), including defamation, public order, and morality. The Supreme Court has upheld that free speech does not protect spreading misinformation or harmful content.

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, bans misleading advertisements, holds influencers accountable for deceptive promotions. Digital regulations under the IT Act (Sections 66 & 67), the Intermediary Guidelines, 2021, and defamation and e-commerce laws penalise harmful content and ensure accurate endorsements.

Though not legally binding,



Gopal Jain

Senior Advocate,
Supreme Court of
India

Brands must invest in consumer education, while regulators and platforms should enforce strict guidelines against misinformation

ASCI guidelines set ethical standards, with non-compliance leading to blacklisting and public reprimands.

With stricter enforcement, influencers must prioritise transparency and credibility, making ethical content creation essential in the evolving digital landscape.

An influencer's intent is key when critiquing brands. Honest reviews aid consumers, but exaggerated negativity for clicks or sponsorships is a commercial tactic. Indian defamation laws protect against misleading content, highlighting the need for authenticity. While influencers operate across many fields, health-related content is held to a higher pedestal. There are norms in place, but something more critical is required in the health sector to ensure that advice is reliable and responsible.

Influencer content blurs the line between fact and manipulation with selective data, ambiguous language, and cherry-picked events. Misinterpreted studies and emotional appeals create misleading narratives that prioritise engagement over accuracy.

We have all fallen for clickbait, especially when it promises to teach us "how to avoid cancer" or "how to make liver detox water." These trends highlight influencers' role in shaping narratives and public discourse. Viral content often outpaces fact-checked information, making critical thinking, source verification, and expert consultation crucial.

Evolving regulation

Regulations for social media influencers are tightening, with a focus on accountability and responsible content. SEBI recently imposed strict rules on "finfluencers," restricting real-time stock data in educational content to prevent influencers from influencing financial decisions without proper expertise or authorisation.

Legal scrutiny now extends to

misleading advertisements. In *Indian Medical Association vs Union of India*, the Court held influencers accountable for false endorsements, and the Delhi High Court stressed claim verification, especially in health content. With non-experts gaining visibility on unregulated platforms, health advice must come from qualified professionals. Strong ethical norms and legal oversight are crucial to curb misinformation.

In a landmark ruling, the Delhi High Court restrained an influencer from disparaging a brand, emphasising that freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a) is not absolute. It upheld restrictions to prevent defamation and ruled that health content must be backed by qualified professionals with disclosed credentials.

While influencers gain trust, exploiting it for personal gain damages credibility. As trust erodes, influencers and brands risk losing their authenticity.

Moreover, establishing a registration system or database for influencers disseminating public health information is essential. Such a system would function as a continuous monitoring tool, ensuring transparent accountability for the content produced. This approach would help curb the unchecked spread of misinformation and empower consumers to make well-informed, objective assessments, especially given the significant safety and perception challenges associated with health-related content. Recognising the ethical dimensions inherent in public health communication, robust ethical practices must complement legal measures to safeguard public interests.

Brands must invest in consumer education, while regulators and platforms should enforce strict guidelines against misinformation. It is critical to enforce stringent guidelines to hold influencers accountable for their content and unchecked promotional activities, thereby safeguarding consumer interests.

Hell on earth

The world should restrain Israel from occupying Gaza

Gaza, as the Red Cross has put it, has already become “hell on earth”. In 19 months, Israeli forces have killed more than 52,000 Palestinians in the enclave, most of them women and children. Nearly all of Gaza’s 2.3 million residents have been displaced, many, multiple times. Tens of thousands have been wounded in a territory that lacks even basic medical facilities. Israel has imposed a renewed siege on the 365-sq.-km strip, deepening an already dire hunger crisis, and threatening, as the UN Human Rights Office warned, the viability of the Palestinians continuing to live in Gaza. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government has decided to call up tens of thousands of reservists and launch an intensified ground offensive in the enclave, aimed at capturing and holding territory, and taking direct control of aid delivery. Israel has already reduced to rubble much of northern Gaza, and forcefully moved the over one million people who used to live there before the war began in October 2023. Now, Mr. Netanyahu says that as part of the new offensive, Palestinians would be moved again from their makeshift shelters and refugee camps. The Israeli government claims that “military pressure” is the only way to force Hamas to release the remaining hostages. But in the name of combating Hamas, Mr. Netanyahu has unleashed a relentless assault on the entire population of the Gaza Strip, even as the rest of the world watches passively.

Despite the use of callous, inhumane military tactics, which led the International Criminal Court to issue an arrest warrant against Mr. Netanyahu, Israel has faced little resistance from the most powerful nations. West Asia’s only nuclear power continues to receive weapons from its western allies. The Biden administration provided consistent military and diplomatic support throughout the war. And President Donald Trump, who once threatened to empty out the Palestinians from Gaza, appears to have given a carte blanche to Mr. Netanyahu. With no meaningful restraints, Mr. Netanyahu is now poised to make another grave mistake by expanding the offensive. Over the past 19 months of war, the best opportunity for peace was the implementation of the January 2025 ceasefire agreement. It required, in the second phase, Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza and Hamas releasing the remaining hostages. But Israel’s refusal and also Hamas’s refusal to hand over the hostages without Israeli pull-back led to the resumption of fighting. If Mr. Netanyahu proceeds with his plans, it will not just deepen the moral and humanitarian crisis but also deal a devastating blow to any attempt to end the conflict through talks. The world should show greater moral and institutional courage in confronting mass violence and forced displacements perpetrated by nation-states.



The fragmentation in the global fight against terror

The Pahalgalam terror attack of April 22 has exposed, yet again, the fragmentation in the global fight against terror and Pakistan's resort to terrorism when it fears normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir. While a number of countries have condemned the Pahalgalam attack, they have, at the same time, called upon India and Pakistan to exercise restraint. The United States Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, went to the extent of calling on both parties to "work towards... a responsible resolution that maintains long term peace and regional stability in South Asia". U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance "hoped" that India's response would not lead to a wider regional conflict. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that "settling disagreements" between New Delhi and Islamabad on a bilateral basis should be by political and diplomatic means. The European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas could not even get around to calling it a "terror attack".

The end of a collective fight

Gone are the days of "zero tolerance" to terror. Gone are the days when the perpetrators of terror were called out and accountability demanded. Some have even asked India for "proof" of Pakistan's complicity, conveniently forgetting *inter alia* the Pulwama (2019) and 26/11 Mumbai (2008) terror attacks. In effect, they are calling on India, the victim, to be restrained and to not go after Pakistan, the perpetrator and backer.

India should not be surprised. To begin with, the appetite for a flare-up in Asia is low after the raging wars in Ukraine, Gaza and West Asia. Moreover, successful elections in Jammu and Kashmir and tourists flocking to Kashmir are red flags for Pakistan. To top it all, the global fight against terror is no more a collective fight. It is now left for each state to fend for itself. The consensus reached after the 9/11 terror attacks in the U.S. in 2001, to fight terror comprehensively, seems to have run its course. The world has gone back to the era of "my terrorist" and "your terrorist."

Europe is focused on "its" terrorists – right-wing extremism and terror. The U.S., under former President Joe Biden, focused on REMVE, or racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is keen only to use Islamophobia as an excuse to condone terror. Canada has told India that "your" terrorists are not "my" terrorists and that any terrorist threat against India from its soil is covered under its freedom of expression – in effect asking India to wait till a terror act is committed before approaching them. China has blocked proposals submitted by India in 2022 to "black-list", under the UN Security Council 1267 sanctions regime,



T.S. Tirumurti

was Ambassador/
Permanent
Representative of
India to the United
Nations, New York
(2020-22)

Gone are the days of a united fight against, and 'zero tolerance' to terror; a different yardstick applies when it comes to India, which is a victim of state-sponsored terror

terrorists operating against India from Pakistani soil. Now that Pakistan is in the UN Security Council (UNSC) for 2025-26 (as a non-permanent member), these will remain blocked for at least two more years.

The world is blindsided by the spread of terror in Asia and Africa. Terrorism in Africa has spread exponentially, from the Sahel to Mozambique. The Global Terrorism Index 2025 points out that the Sahel is now the epicentre of terrorism, accounting for over half of all terrorism deaths in the world. But the international community says they are "your" terrorists not "my" terrorists and is short-changing Africa.

A different yardstick for India

However, a different yardstick applies when it comes to India, which is the biggest victim of state-sponsored terror from Pakistan. First, it is about "regional stability" and not about fighting terror as Pakistan has successfully sold the "nuclear war" bogey to the world. Even as they egg Ukraine on in its war with "nuclear" Russia, the thought of two developing countries using nuclear arms scares the West enough to call on India to stop fighting cross-border terror. It is quickly forgotten that it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who called on Russian President Vladimir Putin not to use nuclear arms in the Ukraine war for which he was thanked by the U.S. among other countries.

Further, it is now common knowledge that in Pahalgalam, the terrorists singled out the tourists based on religion and shot them. A Muslim pony ride operator was shot while trying to save the tourists. The terror attack, which The Resistance Front (a proxy of the Pakistan-based terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba) claimed that it had carried out – it retracted this statement later – was clearly done to raise tensions and create a communal divide in India.

While the whole world cries hoarse in condemning Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and Christianophobia, why does it become silent when calling out the recent attack for what it is, i.e., Hinduphobia? When even protests in American university campuses are being dubbed anti-Semitic or Islamophobic and portrayed in religious terms, rather than contextualising them in terms of the 52,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza or Israeli hostages still with Hamas, to maintain radio silence on Hinduphobic attacks is glaring, if not unexpected. Even U.S. presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, was confronted with accusations of belonging to a "pagan, wicked" faith while on the campaign trail.

But there has been a refreshing departure – the statement by the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, who characterised the Pahalgalam attack in religious terms, as a "horrific Islamist terrorist attack" and recognised that the targets were Hindus. A silver lining is the

extradition of Tahawwur Rana from the U.S. to India for the Mumbai attacks, even if big fish, David Headley, is still in the U.S.

Further, predictably, Pakistan used its presence in the UNSC to move for an emergency closed session on a "deteriorating regional environment and rising tension" posing "a serious risk of escalation". In 2019, a similar closed meeting took place, at China's behest, just after Article 370 was abrogated, but fizzled out. The meeting now was no different and no document was issued. It underlined once again that the P-5 (the five permanent UNSC member states), with the exception of China, is in no mood to play the "Kashmir" game, which it considers to be a bilateral matter between India and Pakistan (even if parts of it have been ceded by Pakistan to China).

India's move to keep the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance has also been targeted by Pakistan at the UNSC. India will no doubt keep the pressure on the UNSC to stop any outcome document, unlike how a similar issue was dealt with in 2021 between Ethiopia and Egypt on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Any one country in the UNSC can stop a statement.

The path ahead

Consequently, if the world is so concerned about India not using kinetic options to fight terror from where it originates, should not India's "strategic" partners demand accountability from Pakistan rather than substituting harsh words for real action or calling on "both sides" to "defuse" tensions? To deter Pakistan, India's close Gulf partners, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which are themselves undertaking internal socio-religious reforms, need to step up. The international community must act to deter and sanction Pakistan, and not merely react episodically. If it refuses to act, India will act alone. Apart from the current slew of options, India will also have to think ahead.

Having built a strong international framework to combat terror, including terror financing and misuse of emerging technology, the international community cannot step back on combating terror, especially state-sponsored terrorism. Three years after raising it for the first time in the UN General Assembly in 2022, India has yet another opportunity to take the lead in combating religio-phobia against non-Abrahamic religions. This time its campaign should go beyond the UN, where select Indian Missions should take up the issue bilaterally with their host countries.

All this points to one thing. India should not only create geopolitical space for itself through its strategic autonomy and multi-alignment policy, but must also be prepared to use it when it matters. There is no doubt that such parleys are on.



Birds that thrive in urban spaces sport colours different from less successful ones

The urban colour homogenisation hypothesis says that cities render bird colours more uniform; this idea doesn't hold up at a global scale; once one accounts for species richness, cities actually have more colour-diverse bird communities; the requirements for survival and propagation in a forest and an urban environment are different

Monika Mondal

In 2016, when Juan Diego Ibáñez-Álamo at the University of Granada in Spain met Kaspar Delhey, an expert in bird colouration at the Max Planck Institute for Biological Intelligence, a new collaboration was born.

"He suggested we study whether urbanisation is associated with differences in bird colouration," Mr. Delhey said.

Many studies have investigated how urban noise has been changing the way city birds talk to each other. But scientists know little about what urbanisation is doing to the way birds look.

The collaboration soon blossomed into the world's first large-scale, global study of how urban environments can control which birds – and which colours – can thrive in cities.

In a new study, Mr. Delhey, Mr. Ibáñez-Álamo, and their colleagues reported what they found when they analysed colour data from nearly all bird species around the world alongside a reference database.

The results were unexpected.

"Contrary to expectations, bird species that do well in cities tend to be quite colourful," Mr. Delhey said. "Some of the least successful species were largely brown, colours that we humans often consider dull or cryptic."

Published on April 4 in *Ecology Letters*, the study paper revealed that urban birds that are able to lead fuller lives are also more likely to sport blue, grey, and black plumage. The findings challenge some long-held assumptions in urban ecology.

Breaking through

"If you look at a city park, you may find fewer species than in a nearby forest. But those species tend to be more colourful," Mr. Ibáñez-Álamo said.

However, the urban colour homogenisation hypothesis holds that cities render bird colours more uniform. "We tested this idea at a global scale and found it doesn't hold up: once you account for species richness, cities actually have more colour-diverse bird communities," he added.

Colour differences between male and female birds are often due to sexual selection: males evolve brighter plumage to attract mates or assert dominance. Females may be more cryptically coloured because they often incubate the eggs and take care of the offspring. "It has been suggested that in urban environments, sexual selection may be weakened, and therefore the difference between male and female colours should



Blue-faced honeyeaters, with their bright blue plumage, have become more common in Australia's cities. J.J. HARRISON (CC BY-SA)

be reduced. We, however, do not find any evidence," Mr. Delhey said.

"Bird colours vary dramatically around the globe alongside variations in climate, habitat, diet, migration, type of mating system, whether they live in groups or not, etc.," Delhey said.

Some colours, like yellow or red, are derived from carotenoids in food, while the blacks and greys are the result of melanin.

Darker-coloured birds may have an edge in polluted environments, where melanin could bind to toxins. But the strongest and most consistent pattern, the researchers found, was the decline of browns.

Being seen is dangerous

In their study, the researchers found that successful city birds are more likely to be colourful while avoiding brown.

Brown colors are often found in species that live in the understory of forests, which is similarly coloured. The green spaces are different in cities. "Even if you have a park, you also have a lot of asphalt or concrete, which changes the brown background that you will have in a natural forest with dying leaves and sticks and even the soil," Mr. Ibáñez-Álamo said.

Brown is considered to be a cryptic colour yet it appears to lose its ecological value in human-built environments, which are often much more complex than forests. The researchers don't yet know why city birds prefer to be more



If you look at a city park, you may find fewer species than in a nearby forest. But those species tend to be more colourful

colourful. One possibility is that in urban environments, predation risk is often lower, potentially allowing birds to be more expressive with their plumage rather than lay low.

According to Mr. Ibáñez-Álamo, the "why" remains an open question for now. Factors such as predator density, availability of food, light conditions, and nesting space all interact with plumage colour. In some regions, researchers have found that fewer predators has meant local birds could afford to be more conspicuous. In others, food scarcity has favoured birds that are less showy.

Urbanisation filters species

Mr. Delhey said urban ecology is becoming a kind of evolutionary laboratory. As more species travel to parts of the world they haven't been to before, the ways in which they're adapting – from song pitch to feather hue – are offering researchers insights into their survival as much as life's astonishing plasticity.

Even so, or maybe for this reason, more research is required. "Any

differences in colouration we detect are rather subtle. We'll always find exceptions," Mr. Delhey said.

Even as researchers delve into the "why," it appears that cities – by selecting for certain traits, environments, and now colours – are nudging evolution in slow, quiet increments in possibly new directions. The new study itself has far-reaching implications. "You might think that cities are just grey and lifeless, but in fact they host a different kind of avian beauty," Mr. Ibáñez-Álamo said.

As biodiversity declines in many parts of the world, both the ecological and the cultural values attached to urban wildlife become more significant. Understanding the patterns therein can help make cities more hospitable for a wider range of species.

"We cannot really tear apart cause and effect because it's a relative study. There could be other factors that we have not considered," Mr. Ibáñez-Álamo said. "I think that the next step will be to try to see whether other organisms, let's say insects or mammals, follow the same patterns."

Arthropods, he said by way of example, are tremendously diverse. "And they also suffer from a reduction in the city, in urban areas. It will be super-interesting to identify whether they follow the same patterns."

(Monika Mondal is a freelance science and environment journalist. a.monikamondal@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Colour differences between males and females are often due to sexual selection. Males evolve brighter plumage to attract mates or assert dominance. Females may be more cryptically coloured because they take care of the offspring.

The most consistent pattern was the decline of brown, which is found in species living in the similarly coloured understory of forests. Green spaces are different in cities. Brown appears to lose its ecological value in human-built environments.

Urban ecology is becoming a kind of evolutionary laboratory. It appears that cities, by selecting for certain traits, environments, and colours, are nudging evolution in slow, quiet increments in possibly new directions.

PM speaks to Emir of Qatar as India steps up outreach

Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani expresses full support to India's fight against terrorism and all actions to bring the perpetrators of Pahalgam attack to justice; New Delhi rejects OIC statement as absurd

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The Union government on Tuesday stepped up its outreach to West Asia amid tensions with Pakistan.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will meet Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi in Delhi on Wednesday.

The moves came even as the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation Mission at the United Nations in New York issued a statement expressing concern about the "deteriorating security environment" in South Asia, and criticising India for "hostile rhetoric", while condemning the terror attack in Pahalgam.

In a sharp response to the OIC statement, which had also expressed support for Pakistan and called for Kashmiri "self-determination", the External Affairs Ministry said the statement had been issued at the behest of Pakistan, and called it "absurd".

The Ministry rejected any interference by the 57-nation grouping in India's



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani in New Delhi in February. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

"internal affairs"

In a statement, the Ministry said the Emir of Qatar had conveyed condolences for the victims of the attack and "expressed full support in India's fight against terrorism and all its actions to bring the perpetrators to justice".

The statement of support to India came even as Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani met with visiting Pakistani Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi in Doha. A statement released by the Qatari PMO said that they had discussed "bilateral cooperation relations and ways to support and develop them,

along with several issues of joint interest".

Iran FM's visit

The External Affairs Ministry announced that the Iranian Foreign Minister would arrive in Delhi on Wednesday afternoon. He will hold talks with Mr. Jaishankar on Thursday, and co-chair the Joint Commission Meeting on economic issues. He will also call on President Droupadi Murmu during his visit, indicating the importance South Block is giving to the visit.

However, the government is unlikely to take up Mr. Araghchi's offer to mediate between Iran's two "brotherly neighbours" In-

dia and Pakistan. During a visit to Islamabad on Monday, the Iranian Foreign Minister, who met with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, President Asif Ali Zardari, and Army chief General Asim Munir, told reporters that his mission in the region was to "get a clear understanding of the current situation".

The engagement with Iran and Qatar follows Mr. Modi's conversations with leaders of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the UAE in the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack.

However, as India began preparations and drills for a possible military strike on Pakistan, in response to the attack, many countries, including Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, along with the U.K., the U.S., and the European Union, had also issued statement calling for de-escalation and resolving issues through dialogue and diplomacy, which New Delhi has not responded to. New Delhi did not respond to a statement by Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on Tuesday calling for an "independent and transparent investigation" into the attacks.

Centre plans revision of 'safe harbour' clause

I&B Ministry says it plans to revisit guidelines for intermediaries in a bid to curb 'fake news'; the IT Act provision protects the platforms by not holding them liable for the user-generated content

Sobhana K. Nair
Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

In a bid to disincentivise "fake news" content, the government plans to revise the guidelines for intermediary platforms and revisit the "safe harbour" provisions that protect these platforms, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has, according to sources, said in reply to questions from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communication and Information Technology, headed by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey.

In the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack, the government has blocked dozens of YouTube channels citing their spread of fake news. While most of the impacted accounts are Pakistani, at least two Indian channels, one belonging to influencer Dr. Medusa and a YouTube news channel 4PM News, were taken down.

The parliamentary panel is scheduled to meet on Wednesday morning. In the written submission made ahead of the meeting, the I&B Ministry, as per sources, said: "In order to check the menace of



In order to check the menace of fake news, the due diligence for the intermediary platforms could be revisited requiring them to take appropriate steps to remove fake news from their platforms on their own

I&B MINISTRY IN REPLY TO JPC



There is a need to revisit the 'safe harbour' provision

ASHWINI VAISHNAW

Union I&B Minister in November 2024

fake news, the due diligence for the intermediary platforms could be revisited requiring them to take appropriate steps to remove fake news from their platforms on their own."

The intermediary platforms enjoy immunity from liability for content posted on their platforms by users under Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

The provision provides a safe harbour for the intermediaries by not holding them liable for the user-generated content as long as they comply with guidelines issued by the Union government.

The government has repeatedly maintained that it plans to make the interme-

diary platforms more accountable, but has not taken any concrete step. While speaking on the occasion of National Press Day in November 2024, Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnaw said that there was a need to revisit the "safe harbour" provision.

The I&B Ministry, meanwhile, said "self regulation" was the best way to address fake news. For now, it has ruled out bringing a new law to address "fake news" saying that it would require "broader consultation and consensus building" especially in view of provisions relating to the freedom of speech and expression in the

Constitution.

The government feels that giving a statutory basis to the Fact Check Unit under the Press Information Bureau (PIB), as proposed in the amendments to IT Rules 2021 as above is necessary for checking fake news relating to its plans, programmes and initiatives.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology is in the process of filing a special leave petition (SLP) against the judgment of Bombay High Court that struck down the Fact Check Unit's authority to eliminate safe harbour for content on social media platforms that the government has deemed to be misinformation.

India climbs 3 spots to 130 among 193 nations in HDI, but inequality continues to be a burden

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

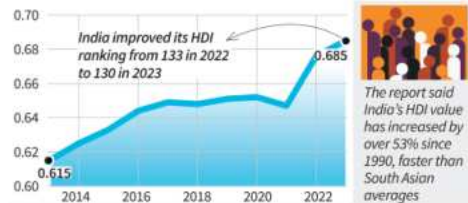
India moved up three spots in the Human Development Index, ranking 130 out of 193 countries in 2023, as per the Human Development Report 2025 released on Tuesday by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

With the HDI value improving to 0.685 in 2023 from 0.676 in 2022, India remained in the medium human development category, moving closer to the high human development threshold of 0.700.

The Gross National Income per capita rose over four times to \$9,046.76 in 2023 from \$2,167.22 in 1990, while 135 million In-

Steady progress

According to the latest UNDP report, India's Human Development Index(HDI) score improved from 0.676 in 2022 to 0.685 in 2023



dians escaped multidimensional poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21.

However, challenges persist, with inequality reducing India's HDI by 30.7%, one of the highest losses in the region, the report said.

"While health and edu-

cation inequality have improved, income and gender disparities remain significant. Female labour force participation and political representation lag, though recent steps – such as the constitutional amendment reserving one-third of legislative seats for

women – offer promise for transformative change," it added.

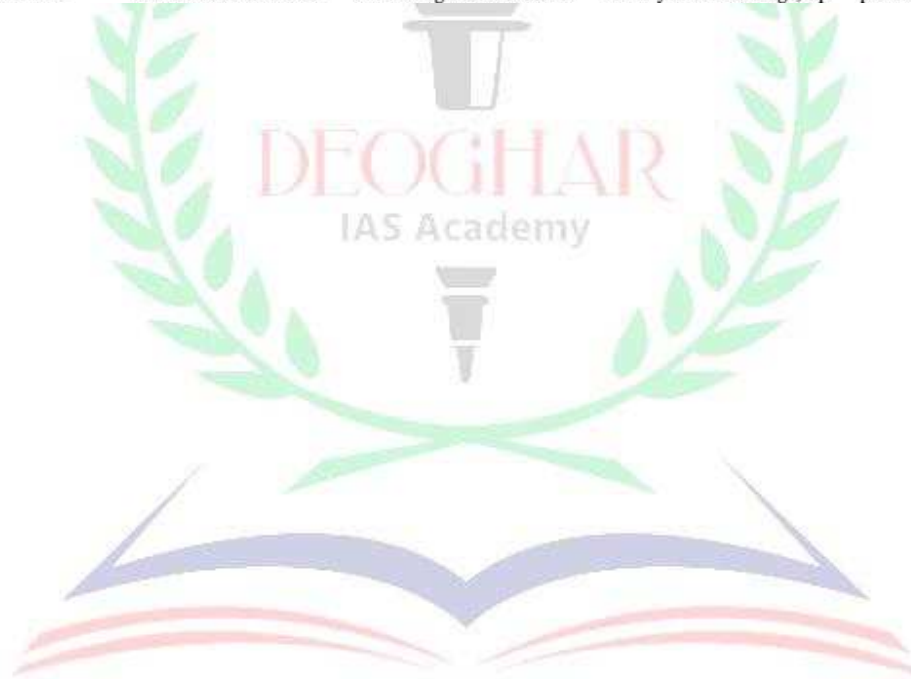
Better life expectancy

Life expectancy in India rose to 72 years in 2023 from 58.6 years in 1990, the highest since the inception of the index, indicating a strong recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on life expectancy. The report attributed this to the national health programmes followed by successive governments, including the National Rural Health Mission, Ayushman Bharat, Janani Suraksha Yojana, and the Poshan Abhiyaan.

Also, children today are expected to stay in school for 13 years on average, up

from 8.2 years in 1990. "Initiatives like the Right to Education Act, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, the National Education Policy 2020 have enhanced outcomes. However, quality and learning outcomes remain areas for continued focus," the report said.

The report, titled *A Matter of Choice: People and Possibilities in the Age of AI*, highlighted the critical role of artificial intelligence in shaping the next chapter of human development – particularly in fast-growing economies, including India. The report placed India in a unique position globally as a rising AI powerhouse with the highest self-reported AI skills penetration.



Trade pact gives India 'zero duty' access to the U.K.

Breaking barriers

The deal is expected to double bilateral trade by 2030



Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and U.K. Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds.

- 99% Indian exports to benefit from **zero duty** in U.K. market
- Britain to benefit from reduction in tariffs on whisky, gin and automotive imports
- Reduced import duties for cosmetics, aerospace and medical devices, lamb, salmon, electrical machinery, chocolates and biscuits to favour Indian consumers



T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

India and the United Kingdom have concluded a historic Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that will see 99% of Indian exports to the U.K. benefiting from zero duties, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced on Tuesday.

"In a historic milestone, India and the U.K. have successfully concluded an ambitious and mutually beneficial Free Trade Agreement, along with a Double Contribution Convention," Mr. Modi posted on X, following a telephone conversation with Mr. Starmer.

According to a release by the Commerce and Industry Ministry, the FTA ensures comprehensive market access in the U.K. for Indian goods, covering all of India's export interests.

"India will gain from tariff elimination on about 99% of the tariff lines covering almost 100% of the trade value offering huge opportunities for increase in the bilateral trade," the release said. India has agreed to cut rates on 90% of tariff lines from the U.K., its government said, with

85% of these set to become zero tariff within a decade.

Further, whisky and gin tariffs are to be halved from the current 150% to 75% before reducing to 40% by year ten of the deal. Automotive tariffs will go from over 100% to 10% under a quota.

Landmark deal

"Today Britain has agreed a landmark trade deal with India," Mr. Starmer announced on X.

"Fantastic news for British business, British workers, and British shoppers...", he said.

The U.K.'s Business and Trade Secretary, Jonathan Reynolds, called the new agreement "the largest ever trade deal secured by the U.K."

In a relief for Indian workers temporarily in the U.K., the Double Contribution Convention signed between the two countries includes a provision wherein such Indian workers and their employers will be exempt from paying social security contributions in the U.K. for a period of three years.

(With inputs from Sriram Lakshman from London)

RELATED REPORTS

» PAGES 6, 12



States to conduct civil defence drills today

244 districts in Categories 1, 2, and 3 identified for conduct of exercise in the wake of 'hostile situation'

States asked to add areas with vital installation to 'vulnerable list' based on their assessment

After the drills, security gaps identified will be plugged accordingly, says senior govt. official

Vijalita Singh
NEW DELHI

Various States prepared on Tuesday for drills to test civil defence preparedness that begin on Wednesday. The Union Home Ministry has ordered the drill in the aftermath of the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 civilians were killed.

Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan on Tuesday reviewed the preparations done by the States in the wake of a "hostile" situation.

While the Directorate-General, Civil Defence, has identified 244 districts in Categories 1, 2, and 3 for the conduct of drills up to the village level based on an assessment done in 2005 and 2010, the States have been asked to add to the "vulnerable areas" list based on their own assess-

ment. An area is designated a civil defence district if there are vital installations such as a refinery, nuclear plant or cantonment in its geographical limits. The States have been asked to submit a report to the Home Ministry after the drills are completed and the identified security gaps will be plugged accordingly, a senior government official said.

"We are not micro-managing the drill. States have been given a format to conduct the drill based on the availability of resources and mapping of vulnerable areas. The District Magistrates may decide the venue and time," the official said.

Pak. violates truce
Meanwhile, the Pakistan Army continued to violate the ceasefire along the Line of Control for the 12th consecutive night.



Taking caution: SDRF personnel train at Dal Lake in Srinagar ahead of Wednesday's drill. IMRAN NEISSAR

The Indian Army responded in a proportionate manner to unprovoked small arms in Kupwara, Baramulla, Poonch, Rajouri, Mendhar, Naushera, Sunderbani, and Akhnoor districts of Jammu and Kashmir, a statement said.

The drill will test the efficacy of the operationali-

sation of air-raid warning signs, crash blackout measures, camouflaging vital installations, evacuation plans, establishing hotline with the Indian Air Force, activating control rooms, firefighting and warden services and undertake cleaning of bunkers and trenches among others.

The Anantnag police in South Kashmir issued a public advisory that a mock drill will be conducted at 4 p.m. on Wednesday by the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF).

"As part of the drill, sirens will be activated at various locations in Kashmir. This is a practice exercise

UNSC members question Pak. on Pahalgam attack

NEW YORK

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) member nations posed tough questions to Pakistan in a discussion on the Pahalgam terror attack. The council refused to issue a statement following the meeting, effectively dismissing Pakistan's attempt to secure a favourable position from the top UN body. **PAGE 5**

es. The Delhi Police beefed up security in the national Capital ahead of the scheduled mock drills with increased number of officials being deployed at tourist spots such as Connaught Place, India Gate, Janpath, Gole Market, Jama Masjid, Red Fort.

The South Central Railway said volunteers, instructors and associated personnel would "simulate a hostile attack scenario to evaluate emergency preparedness and inter-agency coordination" at Kacheguda (Hyderabad division), Raichur (Guntakal Division) and Aurangabad (Nanded Division) on May 7. In Maharashtra, the drill will be conducted at more than a dozen locations, including Mumbai at 4 p.m.

Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police Prashant Kumar said mock exercise will be done in all the 75 districts.

to test our emergency response systems," the police said.

Mocks drills in Delhi

In Delhi, the mock exercise will be conducted at 55 locations from 4-6 p.m. The locations include residential buildings, government offices, markets and colleg-

