

DIA, DEOGHAR IAS ACADEMY

Daily News Feed

D.N.F

09.05.2025

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





The affected birds included Cape vultures, lappet-faced vultures and white-backed and hooded vultures. AP

123 vultures die in Kruger after eating poisoned elephant

Associated Press

CAPE TOWN

At least 123 vultures died in South Africa's flagship national park after eating the carcass of an elephant that was poisoned by poachers with agricultural pesticides, park authorities and an animal conservation group said Thursday.

Another 83 vultures that were rescued from the site and transported for treatment by helicopter or a special vulture ambulance were recovering.

The mass poisoning was one of the worst seen in the famous Kruger National Park in northern South Africa, said SANParks, the national parks agency.

Vultures are key to wildlife ecosystems because of the clean-up work they do feeding on the carcasses of dead animals. But that also makes them especially vulnerable to poisoning by poachers, either intentionally or as a result of the killing of other animals. Hundreds of vultures typically feed on a carcass.

The elephant had been poisoned by poachers in a remote part of the huge park to harvest its body parts for the illegal wildlife trade, SANParks and the Endangered Wildlife Trust said.

Many vulture species are endangered in Africa because of poisoning and other threats. The affected birds in Kruger included Cape vultures, endangered lappet-faced vultures and critically-endangered white-backed and hooded vultures.

"This horrific incident is part of a broader crisis unfolding across southern Africa: the escalating use of poisons in wildlife poaching," SANParks and the Endangered Wildlife Trust said in their joint statement. "Poachers increasingly use agricultural toxins to target high-value species."



U.K. government officials defend FTA with India

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

Faced with concerns around migration and tariffs, the U.K. government found itself having to defend a comprehensive “free trade” agreement (FTA) with India, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Tuesday.

The U.K. Department of Business and Trade issued an infographic on X on Thursday, about the trade deal, titled, “Let’s clear some things up”, addressing issues around national insurance (social security) contributions, migration and tariffs.

“This is the biggest trade deal the U.K. has done with a single trading partner since leaving the EU,” the government said in response to the criticism that the impact of the deal was marginal. The U.K. government said it had a first mover advantage in India, “a huge market where opportunity is growing year by year”.

Addressing the criticism that lower tariffs were only beneficial to India, the U.K. government, in its message on Thursday, said India would cut tariffs on £400 million of U.K. goods, highlighting gin, whisky and a quota system for U.K. car exports to India.

‘Never about visas’

On immigration, the statement said, “It will not be cheaper to higher Indian workers rather than British workers,” emphasising that employers would still need to make National Insurance contributions and bear visa costs and the health surcharge (a pay-



The deal is the biggest trade agreement the U.K. has signed with a single country since leaving the EU. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Addressing the criticism that lower tariffs were only beneficial to India, the U.K. govt. said India would cut tariffs on £400 mn of U.K. goods

ment made during the visa application process to access Britain’s National Health Service).

Earlier in the week, Indian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Vikram Doraiswami, had told *LBC Radio* that the FTA was “never about visas”, neither in the period when the Conservative Party was in power and not under the current Labour government.

The Conservative Party, which is battling for space on the right with Reform UK, the nativist party that made gains in last week’s local elections, was among those leading the charge against the Labour government on the trade deal.

Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch, who was the U.K. Business and Trade Secretary in 2023 and 2024, accused the government of agreeing to “two-tier” taxes. Her position, however, was at odds

with members of her own party, some of whom praised the deal.

Trade Minister Jonathan Reynolds made media appearances on Wednesday, defending the clauses of the deal – particularly on the sensitive issues of migration and labour costs.

Reform UK’s leader, Nigel Farage, had said the trade deal had “sold out British workers”.

“We have agreements of this kind with 50...50 other countries...with the U.S., Canada, Japan, South Korea, Chile,” Mr. Reynolds told *Times Radio*, with regard to the clause exempting some Indian and British workers employed in the U.K. and India, respectively, from paying into their host countries’ social security systems for a period of three years.

“This is not something new or novel to the agreement, it means our people pay into our system, and their people pay into their system,” he said.

Prime Minister Starmer termed the criticism “incoherent nonsense” in the House of Commons on Wednesday.

New Delhi had referred to the national insurance exemption as a “huge win” in a government release.



History reflected: The cast of *Andor* *Star Wars* Story during *Star Wars* Story celebration in Tokyo, Japan. FILE PHOTO

From revolutionary Russia to modern-day Gaza, how *Andor* reflects history

Drawing from the blood and betrayal of history, Tony Gilroy hijacks the *Star Wars* mythos to stage a searing political treatise of revolutions, past and present, and it's the clearest this galaxy, far, far away has ever been about ours

Ayaan Paul Chowdhury

There's a scandalously radical something currently streaming on Disney+. It's a granular, more subversive vision that has been grounding the grandiose space operatics of that beloved galaxy far, far away. This is something about rebellion, yes, but also about its gestation. It's about the indignities, the betrayals, and the atrocities that make revolution inevitable and necessary. This brilliant something is Tony Gilroy's *Andor*.

Praxis before hope

Among the many surprises tucked into Gilroy's slow-burning espionage thriller masquerading as 'a *Star Wars* story', is how intimately the show understands the anatomy of rebellion. It's not surprising that he points to *The Battle of Algiers* as his biggest influence. Gillo Pontecorvo's Golden Lion-winner from 1966 is about ordinary people slowly learning how to push back, and the machinery that tries to crush them for it. *Andor* lifts from that idea to anatomise its rebellion. If *Star Wars* was once about hope, *Andor* is about praxis. That *Andor* has always felt the least like *Star Wars* has actually been the best thing about it. What it examines are the more combustible materials of history – bureaucracy, surveillance, police states, prison labour, and the everyday banality of evil that Hannah Arendt once named with terrifying clarity.

Take, for instance, the Russian Revolution. The workers' uprisings in the factories of Petrograd are mirrored in the communal defiance that brews in the

working-class Ferrix, where we see people pushed to the brink by small humiliations. Like Lenin's early Bolsheviks, the citizens of Ferrix operate in coded signals and public silences.

Cassian Andor himself seems to echo a young Joseph Stalin – not yet the dictator, but the furtive conspirator, the romantic outlaw raised in hardship, slipping through borders, organising sabotage, and always ducking the eye of empire. Stalin, like Cassian, started out only with self-preservation in mind. Meanwhile, the seasoned Marxist-Leninist Luthen Rael – the one who delivers that speech about burning your life so someone else can feel the warmth of a distant dawn – embodies the belief that you must first seize power, often through the master's tools, to build anew. Reflections of a wise Lenin radicalising the impressionable Stalin during the Bolshevik Revolution are discernible in Luthen and Cassian's dynamic, and by the time Cassian leads a breakout from the sterile panopticon hell of the Narkina 5 labour camp, he's finally beginning to understand the contours of revolution.

Narkina 5 itself reads like a historical palimpsest. The white-on-white Imperial gulag conjures the sugar plantations of colonial Haiti. In a direct echo of Saint-Domingue under French rule, where enslaved Africans operated sugar mills in rotating teams, the prisoners at Narkina 5 are slaves in all but name. And in Kino Loy, the foreman-turned-martyr, we find shades of Toussaint Louverture – the Haitian general who began as a reformist and ended a revolutionary – caught in the middle as both victim and

enforcer, who finally rises to liberate others even when he cannot liberate himself.

The Left eats itself

There's also a whisper of South Africa here – of the ANC and its covert networks, and of Mandela's long walk through compromise and confrontation. Mon Mothma embodies the internal fracturing of revolutionary thought. Like many liberal allies in apartheid-era South Africa, she hopes to work within the system and reform it gently, but Gilroy soon demonstrates the failure of soft resistance. Meanwhile, the privileged insurgent Vel recalls Patty Hearst – the heiress turned radical whose alliance with the Symbionese Liberation Army remains one of the more complicated chapters in America's revolutionary folklore. Like Hearst, Vel complicates ideas of ideological purity as both insider and class traitor, and she reminds us that revolutions often enlist allies from the very echelons they seek to dismantle.

Yet, Saw Gerrera is still by far the most fractured reflection in *Andor*'s mirror of revolution. Part Che Guevara, part Buenaventura Durruti, part Prabhakaran, part Malcolm X, he's the rebel forged from the fallout of real-world insurrections. Saw's furious roll call of rival rebel factions in Season 1 also mirrors the internecine rifts that have splintered leftist movements throughout history. The in-fighting among anarchists, communists, Trotskyists, and moderate republicans, who all opposed Francisco Franco's fascists during the Spanish Civil War, is perhaps the clearest parallel that a

wounded and disillusioned George Orwell chronicled in *Homage to Catalonia*.

Though Gilroy has been explicit that *Andor* draws from a sweep of revolutionary history, there's a reason that Palestine rises so clearly from the subtext. It is, as he tactically suggests, the most immediate and ongoing example of settler-colonialism, and the latest arc from its second season expands upon that in startling ways. In arguably the most harrowing hour in *Star Wars* history, *Andor* drops the veil of allegory to stare directly at modern atrocity. The incident in question may have unfolded a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, but the contours are unmistakably of our present – of Gaza, where, as of this writing, tens of thousands have been killed, starved, or buried beneath rubble by an occupying power. Gilroy and his writers sketch, with horrifying clarity, the step-by-step blueprint of that seemingly blasphemous 'g-word', too divisive to be uttered out loud, in the era of post-truth politics. And when Mon Mothma dares to name the crime, she's laughed at and jeered out of the Senate chamber. There's no way around it: this is the most politically audacious storytelling *Star Wars* has ever attempted and it's the clearest this galaxy has ever been about ours.

Every act of rebellion in *Andor* reminds us that revolution is a mosaic of singular efforts. By layering very real struggles into the architecture of *Star Wars* mythology, *Andor* further collapses that distance between fiction and reality.

The revolution is being televised, and the cosmic joke is that it's streaming on Disney+.

Is academic freedom a made-up concept?

In the backdrop of Trump's moves on Ivy League institutions in America, a look at the scope and limitations of freedom on campus, and why it's not always easy with institutions being pulled in different directions

FULL CONTEXT

Atanu Biswas

In Satyajit Ray's 1980 satirical fantasy film *Hirak Rajar Deshe*, literally "in the kingdom of the Diamond King", the Education Minister of the king dictates what should be taught in school. Finally, the Minister closes the school. Is the story a true reflection of the contemporary world, to some extent?

The nature of education and how it shapes society can be examined in a variety of contexts, from the fictional kingdom of the Diamond King to real-life Donald Trump's America. Given that Columbia, an Ivy League university, surrendered its academic freedom, and Harvard, the oldest and richest American university, has chosen to legally defend it, one would wonder what academic freedom is and what its scopes and limitations are.

When then President Pranab Mukherjee spoke at the "International Buddhist Conference" in Nalanda in 2017, he invoked Nalanda and Taxila, the ancient universities, to pitch for an atmosphere free from prejudice, anger, violence, and doctrines. "It must be conducive to free flow intellectual persuasions," he stated.

A difficult path

However, it's not so easy, always. Scholars who disagreed with church theology or behaved in ways the church deemed unacceptable risked persecution in medieval Europe. Then, philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt created a new university in Berlin in the early 19th century. The fundamental principles of academic freedom - freedom of scientific inquiry and the unification of research and teaching - were institutionalised in and diffused to other countries by the Humboldtian model of higher education. Today's seemingly made-up concept of academic freedom can be summed up as follows: students have the right to learn in



Loud voices: Protesters march against the Trump administration's policies and to demand 'liberty, solidarity and accountability' from their universities in New York, U.S. FILE PHOTO

an academic environment free from outside interference, and teachers have the right to instruct. The right of teachers to engage in social and political critique is another definition, though. In a 2022 paper published in the *Houston Law Review*, Yale Law School professor Keith E. Whittington stated that universities committed to truth-seeking and the advancement and dissemination of human knowledge essentially require "robust protections for academic freedom for scholars and instructors."

At the UNESCO-organised International Conference in Nice in 1950, the Universities of the World pledged for "the right to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to follow wherever the search for truth may lead." Academic freedom was then defined as "the freedom to conduct research, teach, speak, and publish, subject to the norms and standards of scholarly inquiry, without interference or penalty, wherever the search for truth and understanding may lead" at the first annual Global Colloquium of University Presidents held

at Columbia University in 2005. But is defining and accomplishing academic freedom really that straightforward?

Tenure, promotions, pay hikes, research funding, and academic honours are all intimately correlated with research publications in the current academic environment. Thus, today's scholars are driven by the peer pressure of publishing. And the interest of funding agencies has a significant impact on academicians' research. Nowadays, universities are also concerned with their international rankings, which are largely based on research papers.

'Publish or perish' culture

How serious is today's "publish or perish" culture? Quite a bit, indeed. One significant exception was 2013 Nobel laureate British physicist Peter Higgs, well known for the Higgs Boson. He stated that he became "an embarrassment to the department when they did research assessment exercises" and that he would have most likely been fired from his job at the University of Edinburgh if he had not

been nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1980. However, he thought that because he would not be deemed "productive" enough in today's academic system, no university would hire him. Thus, today's academic system doesn't even permit a future Nobel winner to peacefully conduct his own research without regularly generating research papers.

Nowadays, there's little scope for leeway in a pre-scheduled framework of university curriculum. Furthermore, as American biologist Jerry Coyne put it, a geology teacher who casually informs his students that the earth is flat is not exercising academic freedom but rather failing in his duties. Compared to general freedom of speech, academic freedom of speech is more limited. For instance, a non-academic can criticise the effectiveness of vaccines, but they can only do it with academic freedom if they have the necessary academic credentials.

And, importantly, academic freedom may be as much as a country's politics and society at the time would have desired to offer academic institutions. For instance, several fields of research, including sociology and genetics, were outlawed as "bourgeois pseudoscience" in the Soviet Union in the 1930s.

What's the freedom of a flying kite, indeed? When a kite is flying high, it means that the person holding the spool has just let it soar. Without the monarchs' generous financing and allowing foreign scholars and students, would ancient Nalanda or Taxila have been able to exercise their academic freedom? What happens if that person believes the kite is behaving strangely? Of course, a democracy has checks and balances, such as the judiciary and periodic elections. Therefore, academic freedom and political interference in it are continually being redefined by changing sociopolitical dynamics.

Academic freedom certainly sets up a protective umbrella over scholars' activities; however, this protection is neither absolute nor guaranteed. (Atanu Biswas is Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata)

THE GIST

Today's seemingly made-up concept of academic freedom can be summed up as follows: students have the right to learn in an academic environment free from outside interference, and teachers have the right to instruct

Academic freedom was defined as "the freedom to conduct research, teach, speak, and publish, subject to the norms and standards of scholarly inquiry, without interference or penalty, wherever the search for truth and understanding may lead" at the first annual Global Colloquium of University Presidents in 2005

Tenure, promotions, pay hikes, research funding, and academic honours are all intimately correlated with research publications in the current academic environment



Is social media defining self-worth?



Meghna Singhal

Clinical psychotherapist from NIMHANS and parenting coach



Sannuthi Suresh

Programme co-ordinator, healing and support services, Tulir Centre for Prevention and Healing of Child Sexual Abuse

PARLEY

The recent death of a young entrepreneur, who reportedly took the extreme step after she lost followers on social media, is sufficient reason for us to pause and assess the role of social media in our lives.

There is no doubt that social media is here to stay and has a huge role to play in our lives. By holding up a world that seems perfect, and fickle with its devotion, social media can take a toll on mental health, particularly that of youngsters. On the other hand, the Netflix series *Adolescence* dragged us willy-nilly into a world of teenagers that adults thought they understood but were actually far off the mark from. So, is social media defining self-worth? Meghna Singhal and Sannuthi Suresh discuss the question with Ramya Kannan.

Do you think social media is changing how people form their identity? If so, in what ways?

Meghna Singhal: Yes, absolutely. I think social media is not just a platform anymore. It has become a mirror and, sometimes, like a magnifying glass. I think, which judges young people and the way they are seen and shaped and scrutinised. Identity formation is such an important process that happens at this stage, but the problem is that identity is no longer being formed in the quiet privacy of our bedrooms or classrooms. It is being performed, it is being edited, and it is being posted. The question that many young people are asking is not who I am, but what version of me will get the most approval. That is pretty tricky and scary because the lines between authentic self-expression and a very algorithm-driven self-curation are blurring.

Sannuthi Suresh: I agree. Additionally, we must know that for young people, these are not actually separate. The spheres they are navigating between social media and their own selves and their world, they are all one thing. Unlike for a lot of us who were born and started lives without social media being so inherent in our lives, it is melded into their daily existence. Of course, it is changing how they form an identity. They are basically being dunked into an arena where everything is about presenting yourself in a certain way, but there are no spaces to be able to reflect or think about what any of this means. So yeah, I worry a lot.

Social media influencers are usually accused



of creating this plastic, happy world, where likes and a growing subscriber count are the primary gratification. Is this right?

MS: I think in many cases, yes, this is true. But I wouldn't say it's just the influencers who are guilty. I think the entire ecosystem rewards this performance, this show, and punishes vulnerability. A lot of the so-called influencers do play a very high-stakes game, and the algorithm does favour these glossy aesthetics over gritty truth. Even truth doesn't sell unless it's packaged right, and that is a very big distortion. So, yes and no – influencers are guilty, but I think it's the entire ecosystem, and influencers are just a symptom.

SS: There are also a lot of child influencers online now. There's this show right now on Netflix, *Bad Influence*, which talks of influencers who are children, in some ways, also pushed by their parents to put up different types of content online, including YouTube. Here, primary gratification can become follower count because it's connected to your parent feeling that if you're doing well online, it means that you have more followers. I feel it's even more dangerous when you have an adult who's using a child to become an influencer. I wouldn't say that influencers are the only ones guilty of doing this, but everyone is trying to create aspirational versions of the world.

How exactly do these online trends of perfect images influence body image or self-expression, particularly of children and youngsters?

SS: I remember this whole trend at one point where thigh gaps were a thing; basically, it was about having really shapely thighs, but also a



We as parents and educators need to learn their language, listen to the contexts they use it in, and we have to stop translating it into our own fears. A better question may be: What part of you feels most seen when you like a post, when you share your own post?

MEGHNA SINGHAL

gap between the two thighs, and this led to a lot of young people wanting to get the thigh gap. And then it moved to some other body feature flaunted by celebrities and influencers. It was scary for me to see, even when I was speaking to a young person who is a teen, the minuscule attention to their face and the fact that the left side doesn't match the right side, for instance.

MS: I am reminded of all my adolescent clients, who have a very distorted body image, and they're in therapy because of it. This is also at the core of a whole lot of eating disorders. They tell me, logically, though they know this is an airbrushed kind of reality, it still influences them. There's a lot of internalised shame, and what starts off as inspiration becomes very shameful, you know, when they are not able to achieve it. Another trend that caught on was the 'girl morning routine', which took over Insta reels – promoting rigid schedules and criticised by psychiatrists because it was unrealistic.

Is it possible that children leverage their access to resources to push and achieve this ideal body image?

SS: How far will they go? I don't think anybody can answer that, but the whole point is that the ideal itself keeps shifting. Someday it's the thigh gap, and someday it's that punishing morning routine and someday it's fruit juice. A few years back, the blue whale challenge went viral, and it was all about completing a series of steps, which ultimately had the player taking their own life. A lot of people were succumbing to it. So, how far will we go? I don't think there's an answer to that.

MS: Blue Whale was one of those trends where it kept pushing you to prove that you could be daring, with no one discussing the underlying aspects of insecurity or pain or suffering. None of those were being discussed and are not being discussed. So children are encouraged to present themselves as alpha male or sigma male, and ultra sassy if you are a girl. There is no

dialogue, no facilitation, no conversation around what it means to be that, and the implications of this trend.

Can parents keep tabs on the social media use of teens? More importantly, how do they make the right sense of what they're doing online?

SS: The truth is you can't really keep tabs on the social media use of a teenager. We need to accept that as parents or adults. You don't have control right now. In *Adolescence*, you can see the vacuum that these young people are in, with almost no adult conversation in their lives. How has that vacuum been built? I think that's an important question to ask. Young people are spending a lot of time online today, and I feel there has to be some way to close that vacuum of communication. We are also guilty of dumping young people into this sea of information without giving them any idea about what authoritative information is. It is about us taking the initiative to talk more, spend more time, and hang out with them in general.

MS: I don't think keeping tabs on the social media use of teens is such a good idea at all; it is a very surveillance kind of perspective. Whereas I think what we need to do is shift from surveillance to establishing a connection. Monitoring social media, when we do that as parents, it comes from a place of fear, and it actually backfires. What we need is parents coming at their children from a place of curiosity and trust because young people speak a very different language, as shown in *Adolescence*. Also, did you know children have Finsta accounts – fake Instagram accounts – that they keep hidden, we have no idea they use. So, we as parents and educators need to learn their language, listen to the contexts they use it in, and we have to stop translating it into our own fears. A better question to ask may be: What part of you feels most seen when you like a post, or when you share your own post? Having different conversations instead of seeing everything as rebellion is a definite starting point. I think we need to start seeing these young people from their own lens as well, only then will we be able to bridge the gap. (Here is a list of helplines that can help people in emotional or mental distress: newsth.liv/suicidehelplines)



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com



Caution and optimism

The FTA with the United Kingdom
should not elbow out India's farmers

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the United Kingdom marks a strong step towards securing India's bilateral ties in an increasingly fragmented global trade environment. The key highlight for India is that 99% of its exports will attract no duties. Apart from being hailed by business leaders, industry associations representing sectors such as engineering goods, apparel, and gems and jewellery – each among the top Indian exports to the U.K. – have expressed strong optimism for future trade growth. Engineering exports, for example, are expected to nearly double to \$7.55 billion by 2029-30, according to the Engineering Exports Promotion Council of India. Overall bilateral trade is expected to double to \$120 billion by 2030. The other major win is that Indian workers temporarily working in the U.K. and their employers will be exempt from making social security contributions for three years. This is likely to ease the hiring of Indian workers in the U.K. The FTA also eases the movement of professionals and investors, which should go some way in reviving India's flagging foreign direct investment levels. On the flip side, India has agreed to cut its tariffs on 90% of the tariff lines imported from the U.K., with 85% of these to be reduced to zero tariff within a decade. While the reduction in automotive tariffs is unlikely to meaningfully change the price-conscious behaviour of Indians, the slashing of import duties on whiskey and gin will increase competition in India and perhaps slow the ongoing premiumisation trend.

Although the Modi government has been quick to criticise the FTAs signed by the UPA for putting India at a disadvantage, some of its own FTAs have faced the same issue. The India-UAE CEPA (2022), for example, has seen India's trade balance worsen over the years. The FTA with Australia, too, has not resulted in gains for Indian exports. Indian farmer organisations – opposed to the U.K. FTA since talks began – are up in arms over the reduced tariffs on lamb and salmon and other edible products. Here, too, the government must act to ensure that India's farmers, already in a low-income, low-margin situation, are not elbowed out. Then, there is the fact that trade experts agree that the India-U.K. FTA will be the template for future agreements with the EU and the U.S. India must be careful here. While the U.K. is a relatively small trading partner, the EU and the U.S. deals – when they happen – will have a more significant impact. India has already cut import duties on several food and auto products in line with U.S. demands. With a less than 2% contribution to global exports, Indian manufacturing needs to be helped, not undermined.



Eighty years on, 'never again' is sounding hollow

As conflict once again darkens horizons in the subcontinent, West Asia, North Africa and eastern Europe, Europeans are commemorating 80 years since the guns fell silent over Europe and the world's most destructive war began to wind down. On May 8, 1945, as news of Germany's surrender spread, crowds surged onto the streets of European cities in spontaneous gestures of thanksgiving and relief. In the decades that followed, that outpouring of relief has been commemorated as Victory in Europe (or VE) Day. Yet, Europe, though free, was shattered and bankrupt. After the war, the task of rebuilding Europe went hand in hand with efforts to prevent another war starting on the continent. 'Never again' was the watchword.

From dates to memory

Eighty years on, 'never again' is beginning to sound somewhat hollow. The contrast in the way that this major anniversary of Nazi Germany's surrender is being commemorated in Russia and western Europe is telling. Indeed, the fact that the same event is celebrated on both sides of the former Iron Curtain on two different days suggests that the peace of May 1945 was tenuous. Tensions between the wartime allies of Britain, France and the United States on one side, and the Soviet Union on the other, meant that Stalin refused to accept the ceasefire signed by Germany in Reims on May 7 at the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force (led by General Eisenhower). This was to come into force at 11.01 p.m. the following day. Stalin instead insisted on a second, grander, surrender in Berlin (then under Soviet control) the following evening, by which time President Harry Truman, General Charles de Gaulle and Prime Minister Winston Churchill had already formally announced Germany's surrender. When this document was signed in Berlin, it was already May 9 in Moscow. Hence the discrepancy in dates over essentially the same surrender.

As with the difference with dates, so too with memory. It is an article of faith in Russia that the USSR's contribution to defeating fascism is discounted by its former allies. Estimates vary, but Soviet casualties are thought to be 26 million, including 11 million military deaths in what Moscow calls the Great Patriotic War. This was



Priyanjali Malik

writes on politics and international relations

The 80th anniversary of VE Day has passed, but, with it, the ghosts of war are returning to Europe

10% of the entire Soviet population. Stalin was also bitter about the delay in opening a second front in the fighting against Germany to draw away some German troops after Hitler's invasion in 1941. Less often acknowledged in these accounts is that Moscow changed sides halfway through the war, when Hitler double-crossed Stalin. Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact on August 23, 1939, which contained a secret protocol dividing Poland and the rest of eastern Europe between them. A week later, Hitler invaded Poland from the west and the Soviet army moved in on eastern Poland 16 days after that. The German and Soviet occupation of Poland was brutal, with mass transfers of population. It is estimated that Poland lost 20% of its pre-war population. Thereafter, the Red Army moved into the Baltics and Finland. In these circumstances, perhaps it is unsurprising that trust was thin on the ground.

The commemorations

As with the history, so with the commemorations. Moscow's Victory Day (a national holiday) has grown into a massive military parade that celebrates Russia's latest weaponry – a great patriotic spectacle rather than an occasion of remembrance. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the parade has acquired additional significance, and this year will include troops from other countries. It will be attended by guests, including China's President Xi Jinping.

Russia's erstwhile allies of that war observed VE Day rather more sombrely, with the focus on thanksgiving and honouring the few remaining veterans who served in the war. And of course there is the spectre of conflict against Russia hanging over the continent – a continent that started two world wars and has enjoyed an unprecedented era of peace for 80 years.

After the Second World War ended, America underwrote Western Europe's renewal (eastern Europe being under Soviet influence) through the dual approach of the Marshall Plan for reconstruction and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for external defence. President Truman described the security and prosperity provided by both as 'two halves of the same walnut'. There was an expressly political

element to the American financial support to industrialise in a way that pushed the 17 States of southern and western Europe into ever closer economic and political union. It is testament to the success of this political project that when Germany's Bundestag voted in March to remove limits on defence spending, the rest of Europe breathed a collective sigh of relief.

U.S. President Donald Trump's contradictory messaging on Ukraine and his refusal to reiterate full-throated support for NATO, including support for Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, has thrown Europe into a panic.

European leaders are in full agreement that Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine has moved from being a threat to the world order to being a direct threat to Europe. In French President Emmanuel Macron's words, Mr. Putin is 'an imperialist who seeks to rewrite history'.

An air of insecurity

And so Europe is rearming. Key European NATO members including Britain, France and Germany, are preparing for an orderly American exit from NATO. The European Union has proposed a defence fund, relaxed curbs on defence spending and published its first ever defence strategy. Several member states have advised their citizens to stockpile emergency survival rations for 72 hours. Poland and the Baltic States (all bordering Russia) have withdrawn from the landmine treaty. Almost all states are raising defence spending.

This backdrop provides little room for celebration. The insecurity might also excuse to some extent the utter insularity of the commemorations in Western Europe – outsiders watching these might be forgiven for believing that the war was a purely European affair. Of course it was not. This was a war between empires: the fields of Europe and north Africa are soaked with the blood of people from Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, the Caribbean as well as America and Europe. And so, we all have a stake in how Europe settles its differences.

As the shadows of conflicts darken different parts of the world, there is no room for complacency.



Public health in India strained by flawed policy, weak training

Master of Public Health curricula across the country are as fragmented as public health governance structure; despite training, graduates face systemic invisibility; without a technically equipped public health workforce, India's response to emerging challenges will remain reactive and weak

C. Aravinda

World Health Day 2025, which fell on April 7, carried the theme 'Healthy Beginnings, Hopeful Future' a message of promise. Yet for India, this future is tethered to a present riddled with structural lapses in public health preparedness. At the heart of this fragmentation lies a lesser-examined but critical fault line: the state of public health and its education in India, including the design and delivery of the Master of Public Health (MPH) programmes.

A common misconception about public health is that it is a sub-domain of medicine, primarily involving doctors and hospitals. But that is a narrow and incomplete view. Public health is both an art and a science. It combines the best of medical sciences, engineering solutions, and social science understanding. As a science, it is grounded in medical knowledge (like the germ theory of disease), engineering principles (such as water purification and sewage systems), and social sciences (which explain how poverty shapes health outcomes). It is the art of persuasion, communication, and creative problem-solving – the ability to design campaigns, shift behaviours, and build trust within communities. This blend of disciplines makes public health a field unto itself.

How public health works in India

In India, public health is often reduced to a 'State subject' in policy circles, as mentioned in the 7th schedule of the Indian Constitution. This misses the field's complexity, scope, and inter-sectoral nature. A deeper reading of the Constitution shows that public health responsibilities are scattered across the State, Union, and Concurrent Lists. For example, drug safety, pollution control, family planning and food safety fall under the Concurrent List, where both State and Union governments can legislate. Meanwhile, critical areas like quarantine, international health regulations, and Census and vital statistics belong to the Union List. Even in States, public health is often restricted to primary care and health education.

This results in fragmented public health governance between different layers of government, without a coherent chain of command or common vision. This scattering is not accidental but a Colonial inheritance. India maladapted much of its health structure from the British system – a unitary state – while forming a federal nation.

Even within States, public health responsibilities remain split. Public health was never housed within a clear executive arm. Within the executive branch, it was further divided between the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Water Resources, Food Safety Departments, and local bodies. Immunisation and disease control are managed by the departments of public health and preventive medicine, while food safety falls under a separate Commissionerate, and water and sanitation are handled by public works departments or municipal boards. There is little synergy, and limited accountability.

Public health in India was never positioned as a cohesive national agenda. This disjointedness has consequences. When public health is handled in silos, it becomes reactive. For example, we fight tobacco-related cancers while subsidising

tobacco cultivation. The Indian Council of Medical Research combats disease against tobacco, yet the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's Central Tobacco Research Institute enhances tobacco yield. This contradiction in vision, where one hand heals and the other harms, reveals the urgent need for unified, coherent public health governance – and education.

Public health education

Master of Public Health (MPH) curricula across India are as fragmented as the public health governance structure. Just as public health responsibilities are scattered across multiple Ministries and Constitutional lists, its educational mandate is dispersed across institutions without national coherence or standardisation. The MPH is the foundational training ground for future epidemiologists, public health engineers, food safety officers, behavioural scientists, and health economists. Yet it operates in silos, mirroring the very dysfunctions that plague our health system. The training required to serve such a vision must be robustly interdisciplinary. Unfortunately, India's MPH courses fall short of this ideal.

One of the first hurdles is the inconsistent eligibility criteria for MPH programmes.

Some universities restrict entry to those from medical, dental, or allied health backgrounds, while others accept graduates from any discipline. The intention of inclusivity in the latter is welcome, but this diversity becomes a challenge without a standard baseline curriculum or foundational modules. The courses vary widely – some are overly theoretical, others heavily managerial, but few provide hands-on experience or technical depth. This lack of standardisation leads to significant disparities in student capabilities, even among those holding the same degree.

Crucial domains of public health are

Public health is both an art and a science. It combines the best of medical sciences, engineering solutions, and social science understanding. This blend of disciplines makes public health a field unto itself

often completely omitted or superficially addressed. Public health engineering, which includes designing and maintaining systems for water purification, waste disposal, and drainage – the backbone of disease prevention – receives minimal attention. Similarly, nutrition is often taught as a static concept, with little integration of food processing, food handling practices, or food technology, all of which are essential to ensure food safety and preventing contamination-related diseases. India's regulatory framework for food safety may be housed under the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), but the skills to interpret and implement its policies are not systematically included in MPH curricula.

The absence of training in behavioural sciences is equally troubling. Understanding human behaviour is key to changing health practices, whether it is encouraging vaccine uptake, reducing tobacco consumption, or improving sanitation habits. While some institutions may offer modules on health communication, few delve into the depths of behavioural change theories, psychology, or social marketing that are necessary for large-scale public health impact. Health technology assessment, an emerging field that evaluates the cost-effectiveness and impact of health interventions, is taught in only a handful of institutions, limiting our capacity to make evidence-informed policy decisions at scale.

The two-year MPH programme, in its current form, is also under strain from

the breadth of what it tries to accomplish. Expecting mastery across epidemiology, health policy, behavioural science, health economics, and operational research within this time frame is unrealistic, especially with thesis requirements and field postings. This compressed format often reduces complex subjects to superficial overviews, doing injustice to the students and to the field. A relook at the programme duration, perhaps introducing modular training with exit and entry flexibility, may be essential.

Systemic invisibility

Despite completing training, MPH graduates in India face systemic invisibility. There is no structured public health cadre across most States that values the technical skillset of MPH professionals as envisioned in National Health Policy 2017. As a result, most find employment in short-term projects, NGOs, or data-entry roles in health departments – positions that fail to utilise their full potential.

Without a technically equipped public health workforce, our response to emerging challenges – be it antimicrobial resistance, climate-induced diseases, or future pandemics – will remain reactive and weak.

Public health, like national security, cannot be an afterthought. It must be proactively nurtured. India must begin by fixing its public health education ecosystem. We need a nationally coordinated curriculum that sets minimum standards while allowing for regional adaptation. Our MPH programmes must produce graduate professionals who can engage with epidemiological data, assess health technologies, lead disease surveillance units, and advise policymakers on environmental and occupational risks. (Dr. C. Aravinda is an academic and public health physician. The views expressed are personal. aravindaaiimsjr10@hotmail.com)



In focus: In India, public health is often reduced to a 'State subject' in policy circles, as mentioned in the 7th schedule of the Indian Constitution. This misses the field's complexity, scope, and inter-sectoral nature. G.N. RAO

Centre unveils draft 'climate taxonomy' document to aid clean energy investment

Jacob Koshy

NEW DELHI

To direct investment towards clean-energy projects and infrastructure better adapted to weather threats from climate change, the Finance Ministry has made public a draft document, "Framework of India's climate finance taxonomy".

Climate finance taxonomy, the report said, is a "tool to identify activities consistent with India's climate action goals and transition pathway." The objective of this taxonomy is to encourage investment in climate-friendly technologies and activities, thus enabling India to be Net Zero by 2070 but simultaneously encouraging long-term access to reliable and affordable energy.

The taxonomy should prevent "green-washing" and be consistent with the developmental goal of 'Viksit Bharat'. The draft note follows an announcement



At the COP29, lack of consensus on the definition of 'climate finance' led to disagreements.

by Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech in February.

Developing countries demand billions of dollars from developed countries in the form of subsidised technology transfer and grants to finance renewable energy development as well as strengthen their defences against climate change.

At the 29th session of Conference of the Parties (COP) in Baku, Azerbaijan, developed countries committed to only \$300 billion annually by 2035 as the

"New Collective Quantified Goal" when the actual requirement was \$1.35 trillion and a large part of the disagreement was due to a lack of consensus on the definition of "climate finance".

The climate taxonomy document aims to classify a range of activities and sectors as "climate supportive" or "climate transition". The former include activities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce emissions intensity (emissions per unit of GDP), adaptation solutions that reduce the risks of adverse impacts of climate change and, research and development needed to meet these aims. Climate supportive activities would include those that improve emissions intensity reduction in sectors where cutting absolute emissions are challenging with the available technology – this could mean in the so-called "hard to abate" iron, steel and cement sector.

MMR shows a declining trend, reveal latest data

The highest MMR is seen in the 20-29 age group and second highest in the 30-34 age group; the maternal mortality ratio in a region is a measure of the reproductive health of women

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in India declined to 93 per lakh live births in 2019-21 from 97 in 2018-20, and 103 in 2017-19, show the latest data released by the Office of the Registrar-General and Census Commissioner of India.

The data show the highest MMR occurs in the 20-29 age group, and the second highest in the 30-34 age group.

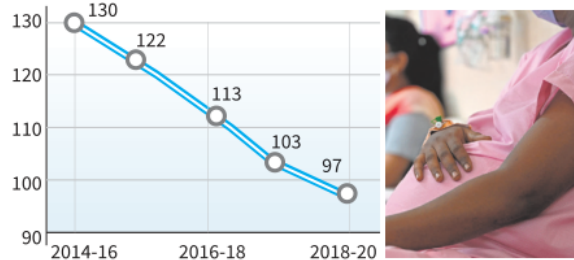
Several States, including Madhya Pradesh (175), Assam (167), Uttar Pradesh (151), Odisha (135), Chhattisgarh (132), West Bengal (109), and Haryana (106), have high MMRs.

The Registrar-General arrives at estimates on fertility and mortality using the Sample Registration System, one of the largest demographic sample surveys in the country.

The MMR is a measure of the reproductive health of women in a region.

Drop in maternal death rate

The chart shows the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR), which is the number of maternal deaths during a given period per 100,000 live births



Source: Office of the Registrar General, India

Every day in 2023, over 700 women died of preventable causes related to pregnancy, says WHO

One of the key indicators of maternal mortality is the MMR, defined as the number of maternal deaths during a given time period per 100,000 live births during the same time period as reported.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim at reducing global MMR to less than 70 per 100,000 live births.

Many women in the reproductive age span die from complications during and following pregnancy and childbirth, or abortion.

"Maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the dura-

tion and site of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management but not from accidental or incidental causes," according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The data state that maternal deaths, being a rare event, require prohibitively large sample sizes to provide robust estimates.

The WHO notes that every day in 2023, over 700 women died from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.

"A maternal death occurred almost every 2 minutes in 2023. Between 2000 and 2023, the MMR...dropped by about 40% worldwide. Just over 90% of all maternal deaths occurred in low- and lower-middle-income countries in 2023. Care by skilled health professionals before, during and after childbirth can save the lives of women and newborns," the WHO said.

Pakistan's military actions will be met with a 'very, very firm response': Jaishankar

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday said Pakistan's military actions will be met with a "very, very firm response".

Mr. Jaishankar conveyed this to his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi during the 20th India-Iran Joint Commission Meeting held here. He also hosted Saudi Arabia's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al Jubeir before meeting the Iranian delegation.

"Our response was targeted and measured. It is not our intention to escalate this situation. However, if there are military attacks on us, there should be no doubt that it will be met with a very, very firm response," said Mr Jaishankar. Mr. Araghchi had earlier called for de-escalation of tension between India and Pakistan. Mr. Jaishan-



S. Jaishankar

kar described the April 22 Pahalgam attack as a "particularly barbaric terrorist attack".

Earlier, in a sign of quick-footed diplomacy, Mr. Al Jubeir arrived here on Wednesday night. His arrival coincided with the arrival of the Iranian Foreign Minister who was here for a day-long visit against the backdrop of India hitting terror targets inside Pakistan on Wednesday.

"A good meeting with

Adel Al Jubeir, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia this morning. Shared India's perspective on firmly countering terrorism," Mr. Jaishankar said. Official sources said India did not seek mediation from either Saudi Arabia or Iran.

Call with Rubio

Mr. Jaishankar on Thursday night spoke to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and conveyed to him that India will firmly counter any attempts by Pakistan to escalate the situation.

Following the phone conversation, he underlined India's targeted and measured response to cross-border terrorism.

U.S. State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce said Mr. Rubio emphasised the need for immediate de-escalation.

(With PTI inputs)

PM stresses need for continued alertness, institutional synergy

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday chaired a high-level meeting with Union Secretaries to review the country's preparedness and inter-Ministerial coordination in light of recent developments pertaining to national security.

An official release said the Prime Minister stressed the need for continued alertness, institutional synergy, and clear communication mechanisms as the nation navigated a sensitive period. He reiterated the Centre's unwavering commitment to ensuring national security, operational preparedness, and the safety of citizens.

The review meeting comes in the wake of the April 22 terror attack in Pahalagam, which claimed the lives of 26 civilians, and subsequent retaliatory strikes by Indian armed forces on Wednesday targeting terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Security agencies have



Narendra Modi

since intensified surveillance and preparedness under Operation Sindoor, which remains ongoing.

Actionable points

"All Ministries are fully prepared to respond to emerging situations," the release said, noting that actionable points have been identified by the Ministries in relation to the conflict, with institutional processes being reinforced accordingly.

The meeting discussed a range of issues, including the strengthening of civil defence mechanisms, strategies to counter misinformation and fake news, and the safeguarding of critical infrastructure.

'Caste census not a political issue to BJP, but part of a philosophy of social justice'

Party has stayed true to its ideological roots by prioritising harmony and empowerment, says Union Minister of Education; the biggest beneficiaries of the Modi government's welfare policies have been the poor, which includes Muslims as well, and there has been no discrimination, he adds

INTERVIEW

Dharmendra Pradhan

Nistula Hebbbar

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan says that the BJP has always had a consistent approach towards social justice. Elaborating on the party's historical and ideological approach to empowerment, particularly concerning Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Mr. Pradhan says the Modi government has never discriminated on the issue of welfare and the decision to undertake a caste census is part of this commitment. Excerpts:

It is being said that the decision to enumerate caste within the decadal Census was taken under compulsion.

This is not correct as the BJP has always believed in social justice, and we have our own, very consistent approach with regard to these aspirations of socie-

ty. This is not a political issue for us. In the initial days, in 1967 when the Jan Sangh was part of the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (SVD) government, Shri Karpoori Thakur had, in Bihar, initiated steps for social justice and reservation. In 1979, the Janata Party government constituted the Mandal Commission, and we were part of the Janata Party then. In the 1990s, we supported the then Janata Dal government in their decision to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations. As far as political leadership is concerned, from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to Kalyan Singh, Uma Bharti, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Mohan Yadav, Keshav Prasad Maurya, myself, Bhupender Yadav, Hansraj Ahir, Annpurna Devi, are the biggest cohort in terms of OBC empowerment in leadership post-Independence. It was under Atalji [former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee] that a Ministry for Tribal Affairs was created, in 1999. Compared to this, the Congress and Nehru [former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru], during



the Constituent Assembly debates opposed reservation and affirmative action. The biggest proof is his letter to Chief Ministers. Putting in abeyance the Kaka Kalelkar report, the subsequent Congress government [under former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi] attempted to derail the Mandal Commission report too.

Subsequently, during the implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations, [former Prime Minister] Rajiv Gandhi was the most vocal critic. Rajiv Gandhi was also the one who used objectionable language against a sitting Chief Minister, Anjaiah [of Andhra Pradesh]. So those who have a limited understanding, espe-

cially Rahul Gandhi, should not attempt to explain why our government took this decision.

There is a view that a caste census will lead to fragmentation of society...

Not at all. For us development and welfare is a matter of priority, and the RSS from the beginning has been an advocate of social justice. Since the 1980s, then RSS chief Balasaheb Deoras spoke of *roti-beti ka vyavhar* [sharing meals and inter-caste marriage], and to this day, in our organisations we have people from *sarva samaj* [society at large]. Modiji himself brought in reservation for the economically

weaker sections in the General Category, so therefore when I say that we have an approach to social justice, this too is part of that.

What do you see as the political implication, looking at what happened in Bihar, Karnataka and Telangana after their caste surveys?

Here I will make a difference between what happened in Bihar and, later, in Karnataka and Telangana. Both in Karnataka and Telangana, welfare was not the priority for the survey, rather it was politically driven which is why there is a difference of opinion within the Congress itself, especially in Karnataka. In Bihar, for the caste survey, we too were a party to it. It was done for welfare, not political aims. We know that Muslim communities are also there among Backward and Extremely Backward Classes. If you see in the last 11 years, the biggest beneficiaries of the Modi government's welfare policies have been the poor, which includes Muslims as

well, and we have never discriminated on the issue of welfare.

Who brought in the Sachar Committee report, and which were the State governments found wanting in terms of welfare measures? The government of West Bengal, then headed by the Left Front, who speak incessantly on social justice, they received the most negative remarks, followed by Congress-led States.

When we say we have a distinct philosophy we speak of *samarasta* [harmony], not confrontation. Some parties have the conception of social justice as being that of confrontation. Other parties limit it to the families of their leaders.

The BJP made a person from the OBCs Prime Minister, and the galaxy of leadership from Backward Classes that BJP has created is unmatched, certainly the Congress cannot match it. This is a result of a consistent stand. For those who say that there will be tension between castes after the census, this is not the first time that caste is being counted.



Robert Prevost, first American Pope, will take the name Leo XIV

Associated Press
VATICAN CITY

Robert Prevost, a missionary who spent his career ministering in Peru and took over the Vatican's powerful office of bishops, was elected the first pope from the United States in the 2,000-year history of the Catholic Church.

Pope Prevost, a 69-year-old member of the Augustinian religious order, took the name Leo XIV.

In his first words as Pope Francis's successor, uttered from the loggia of St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Leo said, "Peace be with you," and emphasised a message of peace, dialogue and missionary evangelisation. He wore the traditional red cape of the papacy – a cape that Francis had eschewed on his election in 2013.

Pope Prevost had been a leading candidate for the papacy, but there had long been a taboo against a U.S. Pope, given the country's geopolitical power already wielded in the secular sphere. But Pope Prevost, a Chicago native, was seemingly eligible because he is also a Peruvian citizen and lived for years in Peru, first as a missionary and then as an archbishop.

Heir apparent

Pope Francis clearly had his eye on Cardinal Prevost and in many ways saw him as his heir apparent. He brought Cardinal Prevost to the Vatican in 2023 to serve as the powerful head of the office that vets bishop nominations from around the world, one of the most important jobs in the Catholic Church. And in January, he elevated him



Marking history: Pope Leo XIV appears on the central loggia of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Thursday. AP

into the senior ranks of cardinals. As a result, Cardinal Prevost had a prominence going into the conclave that few other cardinals had. The crowd in St. Peter's Square erupted in cheers when white smoke poured out of the Sistine Chapel on the second day of the conclave. Priests

made the sign of the cross and nuns wept as the crowd shouted "Viva il papa!"

Waving flags from around the world, tens of thousands of people waited to learn who had won and were shocked when an hour later, the senior cardinal deacon appeared on

the loggia and said "Habeamus Papam!" and announced the winner was Pope Prevost.

He spoke to the crowd in Italian and Spanish, but not English.

The previous Leo

The last pope to take the name Leo was Leo XIII, an Italian who led the church from 1878 to 1903. That Leo softened the church's confrontational stance toward modernity, especially science and politics and laid the foundation for modern Catholic social thought, most famously with his 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which addressed workers' rights and capitalism.

Earlier Thursday, large school groups joined the mix of humanity awaiting the outcome in St. Peter's Square. They blended in

with people participating in preplanned Holy Year pilgrimages and journalists from around the world who have descended on Rome to document the election.

"The wait is marvelous!" said Priscilla Parlante, a Roman.

Pedro Deget, 22, a finance student from Argentina, said he and his family visited Rome during the Argentine pope's pontificate and were hoping for a new pope in Francis' image.

"Francis did well in opening the church to the outside world, but on other fronts maybe he didn't do enough. We'll see if the next one will be able to do more," Deget said from the piazza.

The Rev. Jan Dominik Bogataj, a Slovene Franciscan friar, was more critical

of Francis. He said if he were in the Sistine Chapel, he'd be voting for Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem who is on many papal contender lists.

"He has clear ideas, not much ideology. He's a direct, intelligent and respectful man," Bogataj said from the square. "Most of all, he's agile."

Short conclave

Some of the cardinals had said they expected a short conclave.

For much of the past century, the conclave has needed between three and 14 ballots to find a pope. John Paul I – the pope who reigned for 33 days in 1978 – was elected on the fourth ballot. His successor, John Paul II, needed eight. Francis was elected on the fifth in 2013.



India hits back after intercepting Pak. strikes

India shoots down a 'substantial' number of munitions fired at civilian, military locations

Military stations in Jammu, Pathankot, Udhampur targeted late in the evening, but no losses suffered

India's response in 'same domain', air defence system in Lahore neutralised: Defence Ministry

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

Escalating tensions, Pakistan launched drone and missile attacks at various locations along the western borders with India late on Thursday evening, but the Indian armed forces swiftly intercepted them, official sources said.

This came after the Indian air defence systems thwarted Pakistan's attempts to strike civilian and military locations in northern and western India with a "substantial" number of missiles and loitering munitions in the early hours of Thursday.

India had hit multiple terror infrastructure facilities in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir under Operation Sindoor early on Wednesday.

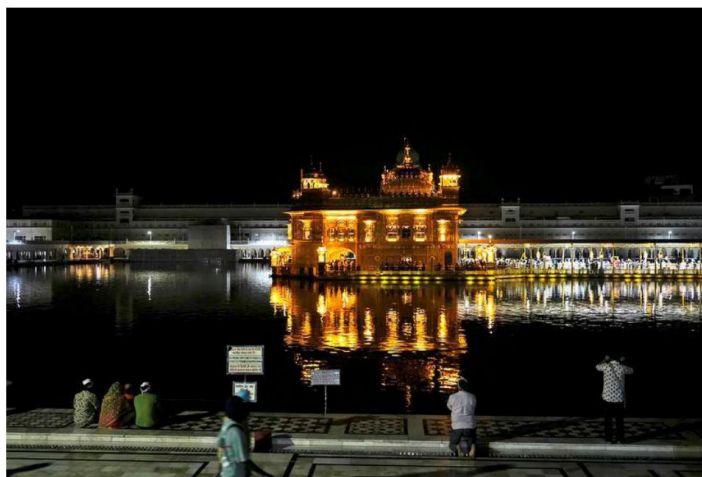
India is said to have launched retaliatory strikes late in the evening, but official confirmation and details are awaited. Blackouts were enforced in several districts in Punjab, Gujarat, and Rajasthan as a preventive measure.

"Military stations of Jammu, Pathankot, and Udhampur in proximity to the International Boundary, in Jammu & Kashmir targeted by Pakistan using missiles and drones," the headquarters of the Integrated Defence Staff of the military said in a post on X. "No losses. Threat neutralised by Indian armed forces as per Standard Operating Procedures (SoP) with kinetic and non-kinetic means."

Indian response

In the evening, the Indian air defence systems also intercepted and destroyed eight missiles fired by Pakistan towards Satwari, Samba, R.S. Pura, and Arnia in Jammu. Drones were also being engaged over Jammu and Pathankot, sources said.

As a response to Pakis-



Uncertain times: People at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab, during a blackout on Thursday. PTI

tan's strikes in the early hours of Thursday, the Indian armed forces hit back a few hours later with loitering munitions targeting Pakistani air defence locations.

The Defence Ministry said the "Indian response has been in the same domain with same intensity as Pakistan".

"It has been reliably learnt that an air defence system at Lahore has been neutralised," the Ministry said in a statement. "Indian armed forces reiterate their commitment to non-escalation, provided it is respected by the Pakistani military," it added.

Speaking at an event, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said India had always played the role of a responsible nation, but cautioned that if anyone tried to take advantage of its restraint, they would face "quality action". "No limit will become an obstacle in protecting India's sovereignty, fully prepared for responsible responses in the fu-

ture," he said. The systems from the Indian air defence network that came into action on Thursday morning included the S-400 Triumf very long-range air defence systems from Russia and the indigenous Akash surface-to-air missile (SAM) system, among others, it has been learnt. Sources in the know said military targets in Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi were among those hit.

The Defence Ministry reiterated that India's response under Operation Sindoor was "focused, measured and non-escalatory" and also that Pakistani military establishments had not been targeted.

"It was also reiterated that any attack on military targets in India will invite a suitable response," the Ministry said.

'Debris recovered'

Giving details of the developments of Thursday morning, the Ministry said Pakistan tried to engage a number of military targets

in northern and western India – Awantipura, Srinagar, Jammu, Pathankot, Amritsar, Kapurthala, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Adampur, Bhatinda, Chandigarh, Nal, Phalodi, Uttarlai, and Bhuj – using drones and missiles. "These were neutralised by the Integrated Counter Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Grid and Air Defence systems. The debris of these attacks is now being recovered from a number of locations that prove the Pakistani attacks."

On the Indian response, the Ministry said the Indian armed forces targeted air defence radars and systems at a number of locations in Pakistan.

The Pakistan military spokesperson also said at a press conference that India had fired several Herops on their military targets in various locations.

On the situation along the Line of Control (LoC), the Ministry said Pakistan had increased the intensity of unprovoked firing

across the LoC using mortars and heavy calibre artillery in areas in Kupwara, Baramulla, Uri, Poonch, Mendhar and Rajouri sectors in Jammu and Kashmir.

Sixteen people, including three women and five children, were killed in the Pakistani firing, the Ministry said.

CRPF companies

A government official said over 100 companies of the Central Reserve Police Force – over 10,000 personnel – were being sent to the Jammu region in the wake of Operation Sindoor. The personnel have been drawn from training and reserve battalions and will be posted in Jammu region primarily, the official said. "While some companies are on their way, others will reach in a day or two," the official added.

MORE REPORTS ON

» PAGES 2 & 5

EDITORIAL

» PAGE 8

At least 100 killed in operation, Rajnath tells all-party meet

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

At least 100 people, including several hardcore terrorists, were killed in the nine cross-border strikes made by Indian armed forces on Wednesday morning, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh told an all-party meeting that he chaired on Thursday. All political parties unanimously lauded Operation Sindoor and reiterated their support for the government amid the heightened tension between India and Pakistan.

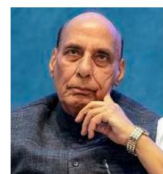
According to multiple leaders who attended the meeting, Mr. Singh told them that the "intent and objectives" of the government have been achieved. He also said that the government has "no interest in escalating the situation", but if Pakistan takes any hasty step, then India will strongly respond.

Mr. Singh also informed the leaders that government-run defence manufacturing firms have been told to speed up production.

Congress president and Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge expressed his disappointment at the absence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the meeting.

"He (Mr. Modi) was not present in the last meeting. Maybe he believes he is above the Parliament. We will ask this question at the right time, right now we don't want to criticise anyone," Mr. Kharge said.

Addressing presspersons after the meeting, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju said that Mr. Singh had told the gather-



Rajnath Singh

ing that the government could not share the technical details of Operation Sindoor as it was an ongoing operation. "The discussions were conducted in a constructive and serious manner given the gravity of the issue at hand," Mr. Rijju said. According to him, Mr. Singh had said, "We do not do politics just for forming governments but for building the nation."

Planes downed?

Several Opposition leaders – including Mr. Kharge, AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi, RJD's Prem Chand Gupta, CPI(M)'s John Brittas, Shiv Sena (UBT) Sanjay Raut, NCP (Sharad Pawar)'s Supriya Sule, and the AAP's Sanjay Singh – urged the government to respond to the news reports published in many international publications about Indian aircraft being shot during the operation.

Congress MP Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, echoed Mr. Kharge's view on the absence of the Prime Minister at the meeting. It is learnt that he told the meeting that the PM's absence sent a "negative message". Mr. Gandhi added that the government should have briefed the leaders.