



## Terror-hit India pauses Indus pact with Pak.

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India has decided to suspend the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan following a deadly terror attack in Pahalgam that killed 26 people. The announcement was made by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri after a Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The suspension will remain in effect until Pakistan stops supporting cross-border terrorism. As part of additional measures, the Integrated Check Post at Attari will be closed immediately, and Pakistani nationals in India must return by May 1. An all-party meeting has also been called by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

#### Visas deemed

India has announced further measures against Pakistan following the Pahalgam terror attack. Pakistani nationals will no longer be allowed to travel to India under the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES), and previously issued SVES visas are now cancelled. Those currently in India under SVES have 48 hours to leave.

India has also declared Pakistani military advisers in its High Commission as persona non grata and will withdraw its own military advisers from Islamabad. Both countries will reduce their High Commission staff strength from 55 to 30 by May 1, 2025.



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri stated that the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has directed all security forces to remain on high alert and vowed to bring the perpetrators and sponsors of the Pahalgam attack to justice, referencing the recent extradition of Tahawwur Rana as part of this ongoing effort.

#### Meetings convened

In response to the Pahalgam terror attack, the government has called an all-party meeting on Thursday. Union Ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh are reaching out to political leaders to ensure broad participation. The meeting follows a Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) session at the Prime Minister's residence. Political parties across the spectrum have condemned the attack and stressed the importance of national unity. Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi spoke with Mr. Shah to express concern, and the Nationalist Congress Party also urged the government to convene the meeting.

## India will pursue those who planned the attack: Rajnath

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh stated that the Union government will take all necessary and appropriate actions following the terror attack in Pahalgam that killed 26 tourists. He assured the public that both the perpetrators and the conspirators behind the attack will be held accountable. His remarks come amid rising public calls for strong action and speculation about potential military responses, echoing past instances.

#### Zero tolerance

At the Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh Memorial Lecture, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh reaffirmed India's zero-tolerance policy against terrorism, vowing strong action against both perpetrators and conspirators of the Pahalgam attack. He emphasized national unity in the face of terrorism and warned that those responsible would face a "befitting reply".

soon.

Indirectly addressing Pakistan, he cautioned against the consequences of supporting cross-border terrorism, urging reflection on historical lessons. Singh also highlighted the government's focus on transforming the armed forces through self-reliance, particularly strengthening the Indian Air Force as a dominant regional power. He called for commitment, collaboration, and a unified vision to enhance national security.

### Shifting dynamics

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh highlighted the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific amid shifting global power dynamics toward Asia. He stated that the Indian government is actively addressing the complex challenges posed by a rapidly evolving international landscape and technological advancements. Singh pointed out that emerging technologies—such as AI, hypersonic and directed energy weapons, quantum computing, drones, and cyber and space tech—have made modern warfare more unpredictable, lethal, and unconventional.

## India, Saudi agree to enhance stability of global oil markets

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India and Saudi Arabia have agreed to collaborate on enhancing the stability of global oil markets and balancing energy market dynamics, as stated in a joint declaration following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the kingdom. The visit was cut short due to the Pahalgam terror attack. Both countries emphasized the need for secure energy supplies and expanded cooperation in crude oil supply, energy efficiency, and sustainable consumption across sectors like buildings, industry, and transport. They also committed to developing energy-related supply chains and boosting collaboration between companies.

India and Saudi Arabia reaffirmed their commitment to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, emphasizing the need for climate action focused on emissions reduction. They also highlighted the importance of cooperation in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. Additionally, both sides welcomed the signing of an MoU between the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India and Saudi Arabia's Communications, Space and Technology Commission to strengthen collaboration in regulatory and digital sectors.

## Ministry introduces new competency-based curricula for 10 healthcare professions

### POIITY & GOVERNANCE

The Union Health Ministry, in collaboration with the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions (NCAHP), has launched new competency-based curricula for 10 allied healthcare professions. The initiative aims to standardize training across India and produce globally competent professionals to meet the rising demand for allied healthcare services and address the increasing prevalence of diseases.

The curricula will cover a broad spectrum of professions, such as physiotherapy; applied psychology and behavioural health; optometry; nutrition and dietetics; dialysis therapy technology and dialysis therapy; radiotherapy technology; medical radiology and imaging technology; anaesthesia and operation theatre technology; health information management; and physician associates.

Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava highlighted that the revised and standardized curricula mark a major step in ensuring consistency in healthcare education across India. She emphasized that the initiative aims to skill healthcare professionals for both domestic and global needs, enhancing their role in all aspects of healthcare—preventive, promotive, curative, and rehabilitative. The new curricula are expected to improve skill-based training, align education with industry demands, and boost career mobility and recognition for allied health professionals. The Ministry also stressed the need for strong regulatory frameworks and capacity building to support effective implementation.



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# Responding to the terror attack in Pahalgam

## INTERNAL SECURITY

The terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, is seen as a politically calculated move, aimed at both inflicting human casualties and causing strategic disruption. Occurring shortly after the Kashmir Valley began welcoming tourists and during a visit by U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance, the attack is linked to Pakistan's ongoing cross-border terrorism, likely orchestrated by its military-intelligence network. The attack targeted a peaceful tourist spot, emphasizing its deliberate nature. It also exposed intelligence failures and a lack of heightened security, particularly in a tourist hub like Pahalgam. The Resistance Front, a proxy group tied to Lashkar-e-Taiba and Pakistan's ISI, claimed responsibility. The attack reflects Pakistan's persistent efforts to destabilize India without facing significant consequences, a situation that needs to change.

### Crafting a response

India must adopt a long-term, strategic approach to counter Pakistan's terrorism, focusing on institutional memory, political consensus, sustained intelligence efforts, and diplomatic pressure, even in the absence of major attacks. A meaningful response to the Pahalgam massacre requires not just condemnation but a credible deterrence strategy that imposes cumulative costs on Pakistan over time. India's restraint in the past has been interpreted as weakness, so it must develop a credible escalation framework to deter future provocations. This includes diplomatic isolation of Pakistan, reconsidering trade and water-sharing mechanisms, and expanding covert operations to disrupt terrorist networks. These approaches, grounded in statecraft, are necessary and proven tools for altering Pakistan's behaviour.

### Instability in Pakistan

Pakistan's internal instability—marked by economic paralysis, political disarray, and social fragmentation—drives its military to use adventurism in Kashmir as a tool to reassert authority and divert domestic discontent. Under the leadership of General Asim Munir, known for his aggressive stance, Pakistan appears to be reviving the strategy of 'managed escalation,' where violence is carefully calibrated below the nuclear threshold. Munir's rhetoric, blending ideological grievance with strategic opportunism, reflects a continued focus on Kashmir as a battleground. This approach is not new; Pakistan has historically escalated tensions with India during periods of internal unrest, with Kashmir as the primary theatre, as seen in past incidents like the Kargil conflict, the 2001 Parliament attack, and the 2008 Mumbai attacks. These events are part of a sustained strategy of asymmetric warfare, designed to provoke India while maintaining plausible deniability.

### Re-establishing deterrence

India must re-establish deterrence to prevent Pakistan from continuing attacks without consequences. The Pahalgam attack, targeting tourists, seeks to disrupt Kashmir's recovery and isolate the region. It is crucial to recognize that the people of Kashmir are victims, not supporters, of terrorism. The younger generation in the Valley seeks opportunity, not conflict. India's internal response should focus on economic investment, political engagement, and social integration, not repression. The timing of U.S. Vice-President Vance's visit presents a diplomatic opportunity for India to seek stronger support from the U.S. and its allies in pressuring Pakistan. The Pahalgam attack is a stark reminder that ambiguity emboldens aggressors, and India must act with clarity and impose credible consequences to deter future aggression.

## Unity and resolve

## INTERNAL SECURITY

The terrorist massacre of 26 people, mostly tourists, in Pahalgam, Kashmir, has shocked the nation and the world. The attackers' targeting of victims based on religion marks a new low in Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Home Minister Amit Shah reaffirmed that India will not yield to terrorism, and Prime Minister Modi returned early from Saudi Arabia in response. The nation must remain united during this crisis, as internal divisions could undermine social cohesion. A local Muslim man's heroic attempt to shield tourists highlights Kashmir's rejection of violence. The attack has not only taken lives but also disrupted livelihoods in a region reliant on tourism.

New Delhi's response to the Pahalgam attack must address Kashmir's people, the broader Indian public, Pakistan, and the international community. Since 2019, India has focused on integrating Kashmir through infrastructure and connectivity. However, the global environment has become more unstable. India's strategy must be realistic, focused on national interests, and aim to isolate Pakistan, whose terrorism is rooted in the two-nation theory and Hindu-Muslim hostility. The government's resolve should remain firm as it works to bring the perpetrators to justice swiftly.

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# Talking mode

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance's visit to India was overshadowed by the Pahalgam terror attacks, but his continued solidarity with India, even while on a family vacation, was appreciated. This was the first visit by an American Vice-President to India in 12 years. The trip was mostly private, with the Vance family visiting Delhi, Jaipur, and Agra. The visit included a brief review of decisions made during Prime Minister Modi's February trip to the U.S., but no major outcomes, apart from finalizing terms for the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). Talks also touched on U.S. President Donald Trump's upcoming visit and Indo-Pacific strategy. It's unclear whether Modi raised concerns over U.S. tariffs, immigration policies, and visa revocations affecting Indian students.

During a public address in Jaipur, U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance defended President Trump's trade policies, explaining that Trump aims to "rebalance global trade" rather than start a trade war. He emphasized the importance of India removing non-tariff barriers, particularly in agricultural and dairy exports. On defense, Vance highlighted India as a trusted partner in co-producing U.S. defense hardware and reiterated Trump's offer of F-35 jets. He also advocated for increased U.S. oil and natural gas exports to India and urged India to amend its nuclear liability law to encourage U.S. companies to invest in nuclear power plants. Vance's visit reinforced Trump's agenda, and India must carefully consider its own objectives, as New Delhi has been largely in a "listening mode" during engagements with the U.S.

## Air pollution in India — where does it come from?

### ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

Sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) is the main pollutant that causes acid rain. **Chart 1** shows where Indian SO<sub>2</sub> emissions came from in 2022. Energy production was the biggest contributor by far. This is predominantly due to power from coal, which has



sulphur impurities that are released when it is burned.

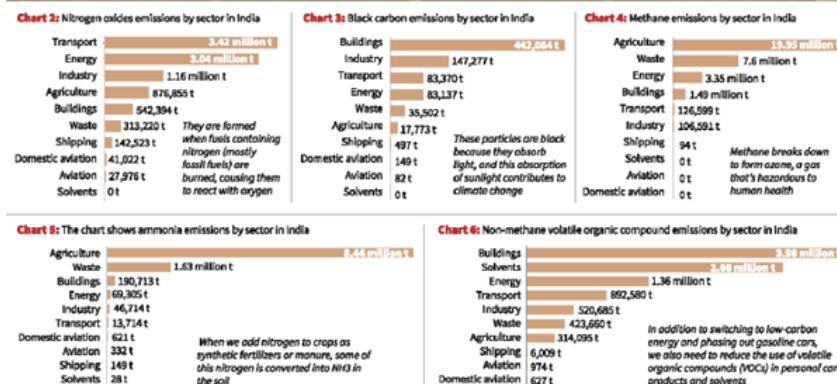
Nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) can be acutely toxic, inflaming the lungs. The biggest source is transport: NO<sub>x</sub> is emitted from the exhaust of cars and trucks. This is almost matched by the burning of coal and gas for electricity production, shown as 'energy' in **Chart 2**.

Black carbon is the soot that fills our skies and lungs. It is a big problem in lower-income countries where people rely on burning biomass and charcoal for cooking and openly burning waste (**Chart 3**).

Methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) is a greenhouse gas, so it is mostly discussed regarding contributions to climate change. Agriculture is the biggest source of methane (**Chart 4**). The other sector that contributes a lot is waste. Methane is produced when organic material, such as food waste, rots in conditions without much oxygen (a landfill).

Studies show ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>) could drive up to 3,85,000 premature deaths from particulate matter. Nearly all human emissions of NH<sub>3</sub> come from agriculture (**Chart 5**).

Non-methane volatile organic compounds can be directly toxic and mix with other gases to form ozone and small particulates. Unlike most other pollutants, solvents such as paints, cleaning products, and chemical plants are also major sources (**Chart 6**).



*"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."*

—Benjamin Franklin

# Is India witnessing judicial despotism?

## POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The passage explores the concept of judicial review in India, noting that while the term isn't explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, it is implied through Article 13, which invalidates laws contrary to constitutional provisions. Judicial review is integral to the rule of law and part of the Constitution's basic structure, with the High Courts and Supreme Court empowered to protect rights under Articles 226 and 32, respectively. While judicial activism differs from judicial review, both aim to uphold justice. The Supreme Court expanded access to justice through Public Interest Litigation post-Emergency to regain legitimacy. Questions are raised about potential judicial overreach and the use of Article 142 for "complete justice," yet the Court's interventions have often defended human rights, such as aiding torture victims and protecting workers.

### The case for complete justice

There is an ongoing debate around judicial review in India, noting that political leaders often shift their stance based on whether they are in power or opposition. It criticizes the Vice-President's remark comparing Article 142 to a "nuclear missile," emphasizing that the Supreme Court has used this provision judiciously in landmark cases like the Babri judgment, mob lynching, and divorce rulings. The Court is portrayed as a guardian of public trust, generally exercising restraint and prioritizing peace, as seen in its decisions on the Babri Masjid and Article 370. While Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna's rulings have faced criticism, the Court's actions are largely seen as balancing justice with social stability.

### The democracy debate

The tension between judicial review and parliamentary supremacy in India, referencing historical views, including those of Jawaharlal Nehru, who argued that the judiciary should not override Parliament's will. It notes that even Indira Gandhi acted on this belief by superseding judges, a practice now also seen in the collegium system under the guise of diversity and merit. Critics argue that unelected judges should not nullify laws passed by elected governments, but scholars generally reject this view in matters involving federal structure, legislative procedure, or fundamental rights. Unlike the UK, India upholds constitutional supremacy, not parliamentary supremacy. Therefore, the Vice-President should also avoid asserting the dominance of Parliament over the Constitution.

### Judiciary vs the government

The Supreme Court of India generally supports the government and rarely overturns laws or decisions. While the Court has a constitutional responsibility to check misgovernance and protect citizens' rights, critics argue it has become more aligned with the executive, especially under the Modi government. It upheld key policies like demonetisation, the Rafale deal, and NRC, and refrained from acting on issues like Pegasus and EVMs. The Court has made bail harder under UAPA and ignored some contentious matters. Major rulings against the government were limited to electoral bonds, NJAC, and President's rule in Arunachal Pradesh. The only recent hint of judicial activism was advising the President to seek the Court's opinion on unconstitutional state laws—intended more as a safeguard than overreach.

### Need for fair criticism

Fairness in critiquing judges, emphasizing that while criticism is valid, attributing motives or accusing judges of overstepping constitutional bounds is inappropriate. It defends the judiciary's integrity, noting their heavy workload and the current CJI's cautious approach amid religious sensitivities. The judiciary, executive, and legislature must stay within their constitutional limits. The passage criticizes Governors who withhold assent to Bills, violating their oath. It reaffirms that Article 142 powers are curative and not meant to override substantive law. The Supreme Court's verdict in the Tamil Nadu Governor case is praised for upholding democracy and federalism, and Justice Pardiwala is credited with safeguarding constitutional principles.

The constitutional powers must be exercised with restraint and accountability, as highlighted by Justice Krishna Iyer in *Maru Ram v. Union of India* (1981). It defends judicial intervention in exceptional cases, like the Tamil Nadu Governor's mala fide actions, arguing that the court's suggested timelines do not amend the Constitution but serve to assess arbitrariness. It cites *Qaiser e Hind* (2001) to assert that Presidential assent under Article 254(2) is a serious constitutional act subject to judicial review. The passage concludes by stating that no authority—including the President or Supreme Court—is above the Constitution.



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## World Bank lowers India's FY26 growth forecast to 6.3%

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

The World Bank has reduced India's growth forecast for FY25/26 to 6.3%, down from its earlier estimate of 6.7%, citing global economic weakness and domestic policy uncertainty. Growth in FY24/25 also fell short due to slower private investment and underperformance in public capital expenditure. The report notes that while monetary easing and regulatory reforms could aid investment, their impact is likely to be neutralized by external and internal economic challenges. Similarly, the IMF revised its forecast to 6.2% from 6.5%.

## 'Domestic demand will cushion impact of external headwinds'

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Despite a 20 basis point cut in growth projections to 6.5% for 2025–26 due to the global trade war, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra asserted that India will remain the world's fastest-growing major economy. He emphasized that strong domestic demand will help buffer external shocks. The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) unanimously voted to cut the repo rate by 25 bps to 6% and shifted to an accommodative stance. The MPC showed varied views on the impact of tariffs, with some members cautious about global spillovers despite India's domestic resilience.

## Flash India PMI expands on record high export orders

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

India's HSBC Flash Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose to 60 in April, up from 59.5 in March, driven by a sharp increase in export orders, aided by a temporary 90-day tariff pause. Services PMI rose to 59.1, while manufacturing output increased slightly to 61.9. Growth in both sectors led to higher output and employment. Although cost inflation remained steady, prices charged rose, boosting margins. HSBC economist Pranjul Bhandari noted that some firms gained from a weaker rupee. However, HSBC warned that tariffs could reduce GDP growth by 0.5 percentage points due to global trade disruptions and reduced foreign investment.

## 'Facilitating the growth of global capability centres a priority for govt.'

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

The Indian government is prioritizing the growth of Global Capability Centres (GCCs) as they create jobs, boost the economy, and foster innovation, according to S. Krishnan, Secretary of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. He emphasized plans to expand these centres to tier II and III cities, which would reduce costs and improve talent retention. The Union Budget for 2025-26 proposed a national framework to guide states in promoting GCCs outside major cities. States like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are already implementing their own programmes. Regarding the India AI Mission, Krishnan noted a positive response, with over 180 proposals received for developing indigenous AI models, including Large Language Models.

## Gold prices cool from record high, but is the rally just getting started?

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Gold prices saw a significant decline on April 23, 2025, after reaching record highs the previous day. Prices dropped by ₹1,358 (1.40%) to ₹95,982 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange of India (MCX), following a peak of ₹99,358 per 10 grams. The correction came after easing trade war tensions prompted profit booking. In the international market, gold prices also fell, with spot gold dropping 0.7% to \$3,357.11 per ounce. Despite this, analysts predict that gold will remain strong in 2025 due to sustained demand from central banks and global uncertainty. Gold has surged over 28% in 2025 and 45% over the past year, driven by geopolitical tensions and economic instability.



## Impact of tariffs

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

On April 2, 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump announced a new policy to impose reciprocal tariffs on countries with high tariffs or barriers, aiming to reduce the U.S. trade deficit and boost domestic manufacturing. Although a 90-day pause on the tariffs was announced, fears of a trade war persist, causing market volatility. This uncertainty has driven investors toward safer assets like gold. The trade disputes, especially between the U.S. and China, have disrupted supply chains and raised concerns about global growth. Additionally, fears of a U.S. economic slowdown and higher inflation expectations have further contributed to the surge in gold prices.

#### Buying spree

Geopolitical tensions, including the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict, along with the rise of the U.S. dollar and high interest rates, have prompted central banks worldwide to increase their gold reserves. Central banks purchased over 3,000 tonnes of gold between 2022 and 2024, with 44 tonnes added in early 2025. This demand is driven by geopolitical instability and economic fears, such as inflation, currency devaluation, and financial crises. Central bank purchases signal confidence in gold as a safe-haven asset, which in turn drives up its price. The rally in gold prices, fuelled by uncertainties like trade wars and the COVID-19 pandemic, is expected to continue, with the ongoing U.S.-China trade tensions contributing to the upward trajectory.

## Swiss franc's surge on tariff turmoil pressures SNB to act

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Swiss franc has appreciated sharply, rising 9% against the dollar in April, the largest monthly gain since the 2008 financial crisis. This surge, driven by U.S. trade policy uncertainties, has raised concerns for the Swiss National Bank (SNB), as it risks depressing import costs and harming Swiss exporters facing potential U.S. tariffs. The SNB may need to intervene to prevent further damage to the economy, as its current interest rates are already low. However, interventions to weaken the franc could carry risks, such as being branded a currency manipulator by the U.S. The strong franc is exacerbating challenges for Swiss industry, already affected by weak demand and the looming tariff threat.

#### Pain threshold?

The Swiss National Bank (SNB) stated that it does not engage in currency manipulation but intervenes to maintain price stability. It has also hinted at the possibility of returning to negative interest rates, though these were unpopular when implemented between 2014 and 2022. UBS economist Maxime Botteron suggested that the SNB might already be making limited sales of francs but is unlikely to engage in systematic interventions. The SNB is primarily concerned with the franc's appreciation against the euro, as most Swiss trade is with the eurozone, which impacts inflation. While the SNB does not focus on specific currency pairs, it uses a broader currency basket when shaping its policy to meet its inflation target.



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