

Will pursue terrorists to the ends of the earth: PM

▶ IB, HOME MINISTRY OFFICIALS BRIEF ALL-PARTY MEETING

▶ PAKISTAN SAYS ANY ATTEMPT TO DIVERT INDUS WATER 'AN ACT OF WAR'

ARCHIS MOHAN
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Tensions between India and Pakistan escalated sharply on Thursday with Islamabad cautioning New Delhi that any attempt to divert the water meant for Pakistan under the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) would be considered an Act of War.

Islamabad's statement came a day after India had announced a five-pronged response to the Pahalgam terror attack, including suspending the 1960 water-sharing treaty.

The day was marked by the last rites of several of the 26 gunned down by terrorists in Baisaran in Pahalgam were held, with heart-wrenching visuals from funerals across several parts of India headlining social media and news channels.

At a public meeting in Bihar's Madhubani, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi issued an unequivocal warning that India will track the terrorists who killed 26 people in Pahalgam, pursue them



"Today from the soil of Bihar, I want to say to the whole world in clear words that India will identify, trace and punish every terrorist and their supporters, conspirators. They will be punished beyond their imagination"

NARENDRA MODI, Prime Minister

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P9

and their backers "to the ends of the earth" and punish them "beyond their imagination".

This was his first speech since the terror attack in which PM switched to English to make his point, underlining the geographical spread of victims to call for unity beyond linguistic differences.

During the day, India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri briefed envoys of the G20 nations on the cross-border linkages of the Pahalgam terror attack and the government admitting to security and intelligence lapses at an all-party meeting in the evening.

Turn to Page 6 ▶

PAGE 7

Islamabad shuts airspace for Indian carriers

Pakistan on Thursday closed its airspace to Indian carriers. Executives from India's leading airlines went into a huddle to devise alternative routes for international flights that pass through Pakistani airspace.

▶ INDUS WATERS TREATY PAUSE MAY HURT PAK'S FOOD SECURITY

▶ PAK STOCK MKT TUMBLES AMID RISING TENSIONS P16

PAGE 22

Amarnath yatra under cloud as terror grips Valley

The terror attack in the Pahalgam region of Jammu & Kashmir has sparked concern among pilgrims who make the annual journey to the Amarnath temple, with some already cancelling plans for the July-August yatra this year.

Pak shuts down Wagah border

World leaders, such as French President Emmanuel Macron, Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called up Modi. The French President told the PM that the barbarism displayed in the Pahalgam terror attack is unacceptable.

In Islamabad, after a meeting of the National Security Committee chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan said it was putting the Simla Agreement, which the two neighbours signed in 1972, and other bilateral accords with India on hold. Islamabad also closed the Wagah border post, closed its airspace for Indian airlines, and in a tit-for-tat response to India's, suspended all trade, cancelled visas given to Indians under the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES) and asked military advisers at the Indian High Commission to leave.

In the evening, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah, officials of the Intelligence Bureau and Home Ministry briefed an all-party meeting, which was also attended by prominent Opposition leaders, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi.

Opposition leaders assured Singh, Shah and other ministers present that they are with the government in dealing with the issue of terrorism.

According to sources, the government admitted to intelligence and security lapses, the Opposition leaders demanded why the PM did not chair the meeting and also flagged "inflammatory" social media posts against the minority community by members of the ruling party. Gandhi asked if accountability was fixed for the lapses that

led to the terror attack.

In the morning, Home Minister Shah and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar called on President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. India also announced revoking all visas issued to Pakistani nationals from April 27 and advised Indian nationals residing in Pakistan to return home at the earliest.

New Delhi also announced suspending visa services to Pakistani nationals with immediate effect. It said medical visas issued to Pakistani nationals will be valid only till April 29. The MEA said all Pakistani nationals currently in India must leave the country before the expiry of visas. It also "strongly advised" Indian nationals to avoid travelling to Pakistan.

In Islamabad, a statement issued after the meeting, which included key minister and the three services chiefs, said Pakistan's armed forces "remain fully capable and prepared to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity against any misadventure".

Pakistan Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said there were reports that India was planning to target different cities through terrorist acts.

"If our citizens are targeted, then Indian people will also suffer," he told reporters after the meeting. The 1972 Simla Agreement entails upon the two neighbours to resolve differences through negotiations, and recognised the Line of Control between the two countries.

Pakistan declared the Indian military advisers at New Delhi's mission in Islamabad persona non grata, asking them to leave by April 30, replicating the Indian move. Their support staff would also leave. Pakistan's NSC "rejected" the Indian decision to suspend the

Indus Waters Treaty, and called it a lifeline for 240 million Pakistanis.

"Any attempt to stop or divert the flow of water belonging to Pakistan as per the IWT and the usurpation of the rights of lower riparian will be considered as an Act of war," it said.

In a related development, the Border Security Force (BSF) said it has "scaled down" the retreat ceremony held at Attari, Hussainiwala and Sadki along the India-Pakistan border in Punjab in the wake of the Pahalgam terrorist attack. India and Pakistan have been traditionally hosting the evening flag-lowering ceremonies at the Attari-Wagah border since 1959.

In the morning, the Congress Working Committee met in the national capital, and termed the Pahalgam attack masterminded by Pakistan as a direct assault on the values of our republic. It accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of exploiting the tragedy to promote discord and polarisation at a time when unity is most needed. It demanded a comprehensive analysis be conducted into the intelligence failures and security lapses. Indian Navy's guided missile destroyer INS Surat successfully test-fired a medium-range surface-to-air missile. The missile has a range of around 70 km, it is learnt. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday said his government was in touch with governments of states where Kashmiris were allegedly being harassed in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack. Government sources said "Abir Gulal", a Hindi film featuring Pakistani star Fawad Khan in the lead, will not be allowed to be released in India in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack.

(With PTI inputs from New Delhi and Islamabad)