

# Heavy firing, shelling along LoC

## 5 Indian soldiers hurt

NDTV, Srinagar

Pakistani troops fired mortar shells and small arms across the Line of Control at more than 50 places in Jammu and Kashmir yesterday in a sharp escalation of ceasefire violations that have been underway for the last three consecutive days.

Five Indian soldiers were injured in the Akhnoor sector by Pakistan's shelling; the Indian Army said it was retaliating strongly.

This comes hours after the Indian Air Force bombed a huge Jaish-e-Mohammed camp in Pakistan's Balakot, across the Line of Control, killing a "very large number of terrorists", according to government officials.

The Pakistan Army used heavy weaponry, firing 120 mm mortars targeting some 55 civilian hamlets and forward posts in Jammu, Rajouri and Poonch districts since 5:30 pm, an army officer told news agency PTI. The sectors targeted include Krishna Gati, Balakote, Khari Karmara, Mankote, Tarkundi in Poonch district, Kadal, Baba Khori, Kalsian, Laam and Jhangar areas in Rajouri and Poonch districts and Laleali in Jammu.

Pakistan had shelled forward posts in the state's Poonch, Mendhar and Nowshera sectors earlier in the day too, prompting a response from the Indian forces.

The Pakistan army has resorted to firing and mortar shelling on forward posts and civilian areas along the Line of Control in Rajouri and Poonch districts on seven of the last eight days.

Last year saw the highest number of ceasefire violations - nearly 3,000 - by Pakistani troops in the last 15 years along the Indo-Pak border.

# 'Country is in safe hands'

## PM Modi says he won't let Mother India bow

AGENCIES

Hours after New Delhi confirmed air strikes on terror targets across the Line of Control, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at a rally in Rajasthan's Churu, "I assure you, the country is in safe hands. There is nothing above the nation."

Modi also said, "My soul says, today is the day to reiterate what I had expressed in 2014. I pledge on this soil, I will not let the country die, I will not let the country stop, I will not let the country bend. I will not let your head be bowed. I salute our armed forces, I salute all fellow Indians, your Pradhan Saykows to you."

Before daybreak yesterday, India carried out "non-military, pre-emptive air strikes" across the Line of Control to target the largest terror camp of the Jaish-e-Mohammed, which, the government said, was planning more attacks in the country after the February 14 terror attack in Pulwama in which 40 soldiers were killed.

Twelve Mirage 2000 fighter jets dropped

1,000-kg bombs on a vast camp at Balakot, which was the hub of training for suicide attackers. The camp, nestled in thick forests, was around 80 km from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.

The government said it was a covert operation that was meant to target terrorists and avoid any civilian casualties. The action has received strong support from political parties and former generals.

"Today, I sense a fervour in the crowd," said the Prime Minister, addressing a gathering that included many ex-servicemen, hours after he was briefed about the strikes at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security. "Repeat with me, Bharat Mata ki Jai," he shouted, the crowd cheering heartily in return.

"The reason I am able to work like this is because of your support, your trust... and let me tell you this... that we are a government that thinks a party is bigger than an individual, and the nation is bigger than any party," said PM Modi, wearing a traditional safa or headgear.



# Prepare 'for all eventualities'

## Pakistan PM Imran Khan tells countrymen, military

AGENCIES

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan yesterday asked the country's armed forces and people to "remain prepared for all eventualities" after the Indian Air Force allegedly destroyed a terrorist camp across the Line of Control.

Imran Khan chaired an emergency meeting after India carried out the "non-military, pre-emptive air strikes" to target the terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed, which was planning more attacks in the country after the one in Pulwama earlier this month.

"Forum concluded that India has committed uncalled for aggression to which Pakistan shall respond at the time and place of its choosing," the Pakistan Prime Minister's office said in a statement after the meeting of the National Security Committee that included the chiefs of all three armed forces and other officials.

"PM has directed that elements of

national power including the Armed Forces and the people of Pakistan to remain prepared for all eventualities," it added.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi had earlier said: "This was grave aggression by India against Pakistan. This is a violation of LoC and Pakistan has the right to retaliate and self-defence".

In his statement after the Pulwama terror attack, Imran Khan had said the country would act if India gave "actionable intelligence" against terrorists based in the country. He had warned India that Pakistan would retaliate if India indulged in any "misadventure".

India said Khan's offer to investigate the attack if provided proof is a "lame excuse".

"It is a well-known fact that Jaish-e-Mohammed and its leader Masood Azhar are based in Pakistan. These should be sufficient proof for Pakistan to take action," the Ministry of External Affairs said.



# Strike boosts Modi's polls chances

## India celebrates action against Pakistan; opposition leaders hail brave IAF pilots

AGENCIES

Indians took to the streets in celebration across the country yesterday after the government said it carried out air strikes inside Pakistan killing hundreds of militants in a training camp.

The reaction may be a sign that support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi is surging months before a general election, pollsters said. Patriotism may be having a greater influence than concerns about low farm incomes and weak jobs growth.

India said air force jets hit a training camp of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), the militant group that claimed credit for a Feb 14 suicide bombing attack that killed Indian paramilitary police in Kashmir, a mountainous region also claimed by neighbouring Pakistan.

"A very large number of Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorists" were killed, Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale said. Pakistan said there had been no casualties at all.

While the results of the strikes in the early hours of Tuesday were disputed, that didn't stop many in India from believing their government's version of events.

"Modi ji has finally done it", said Sandeep Sharma, a driver in the Jammu region of India's border state of Jammu and Kashmir, using an honorific for Modi. "There's a lot of anger against Pakistan here."

India's opposition leaders, many of



President of the National Akali Dal party Paramjeet Singh Pamma holds a placard while shouting anti-Pakistan slogans with party activists during a demonstration in New Delhi yesterday, as they celebrate the Indian Air Force (IAF) strike launched on a Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) camp at Balakot.

trated by Pakistan's intelligence agency, and tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours have escalated in recent days.

Yesterday's strike will not only boost Modi's campaign in the election due by May, political analysts said, but also take the spotlight off economic issues for which the BJP has felt the heat.

The BJP lost a string of state elections late last year, after which opposition parties have attempted to form a coalition to take on Modi.

And although his ratings have dropped to their lowest-ever level, Modi remains the most popular leader in the country, an India Today poll showed last month.

"A large proportion of voters who had started drifting away from the BJP would come back to the fold," Sanjay Kumar, director of the CSDS think-tank and a leading pollster, said. "This all goes to the advantage of the BJP."

As news of the strike emerged, India's television channels flashed patriotic slogans and headlines including TIMES NOW's "Proud moment for undefeatable Bharat", using a Hindi word for India.

Some recalled the so-called "surgical strike" on suspected militant camps in Pakistan in 2016 after an attack by militants on an Indian army camp.

On Twitter, #SurgicalStrike2, #IndianAirForce and #IndiaStrikesBack were the top trending hash tags in India.



# May promises to let House vote on Brexit delay

AFP, London

Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday promised to allow parliament to vote on Brexit by up to three months so that Britain would not crash out of the European Union without a deal on the scheduled departure date of March 29.

The dramatic reversal in May's steadfast Brexit strategy came after threats of mass resignations from her own ministers and calls for a second referendum on Britain's EU membership from the main opposition Labour Party.

It saw the pound rally to its highest level since May 2017 against the euro -- and since October 12 against the dollar -- as investor fears of imminent trade gridlock and financial market mayhem eased.

The beleaguered British leader told parliament she would offer MPs the chance to vote on March 14 on a "short, limited" extension of the March 29 deadline if her own divorce proposals fail to win lawmakers' support by March 12.

But she also cautioned that the extra time would not help negotiations and that she herself opposed any delay.

"Let me be clear, I do not want to see Article 50 extended," she said in reference to an EU procedure that set Brexit in motion two years ago.

"Our absolute focus should be on working to get a deal and leaving on 29 March," she said.

May laid out a three-step procedure with a vote in parliament on her latest Brexit proposals by March 12.

# Iran's policy poisoned by deadly infighting

## Says Zarif after resigning as FM; Israel PM welcomes move

REUTERS, Geneva

Fighting between parties and factions in Iran is a "deadly poison" in formulating foreign policy, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in an interview published by the Jomhuri Eslami newspaper yesterday, a day after announcing his resignation.

Zarif's comments suggest he may have resigned over pressure from hardline elements opposed to his role in negotiating a landmark 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

"We first have to remove our foreign policy from the issue of party and factional fighting," Zarif said in the interview.

"The deadly poison for foreign policy is for foreign policy to become an issue of party and factional fighting," he added.

President Hassan Rouhani has not formally accepted the resignation which Zarif announced on Monday on Instagram.

Zarif offered an apology for his "shortcomings"

in the unexpected message, with prominent members of parliament immediately calling for Rouhani not to accept the resignation.

Zarif, 59, has served as Rouhani's foreign minister since August 2013 and has been under constant pressure from hardliners who opposed his policy of detente with the West.

"I apologise for my inability to continue serving and for all the shortcomings during my term in office," Zarif said in the message posted on his verified Instagram account.

He urged Iranian diplomats not to follow his lead as rumours spread of mass resignations.

The prospect of Zarif's departure was swiftly welcomed by Iran's foes.

The 59-year-old's ready smile and mastery of both the English language and social media has made him a formidable player on the diplomatic stage.

"Zarif is gone. Good riddance," said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.



# Earth's heat reaches 'five-sigma' level

## MAN-MADE GLOBAL WARMING

REUTERS, Oslo

Evidence for man-made global warming has reached a "gold standard" level of certainty, adding pressure for cuts in greenhouse gases to limit rising temperatures, scientists said yesterday.

"Humanity cannot afford to ignore such clear signals," the US-led team wrote in the journal Nature Climate Change of satellite measurements of rising temperatures over the past 40 years.

They said confidence that human activities were raising the heat at the Earth's surface had reached a "five-sigma" level, a statistical gauge meaning there is only a one-in-a-million chance that the signal would appear if there was no warming.

Such a "gold standard" was applied in 2012, for instance, to confirm the discovery of the Higgs boson subatomic particle, a basic building block of the universe.

Benjamin Santer, lead author of yesterday's study at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, said he hoped the findings would win over sceptics and spur action.

"The narrative out there that scientists don't know the cause of climate change is wrong," he told Reuters. "We do."

Mainstream scientists say the burning of fossil fuels is causing more floods, droughts, heat waves and rising sea levels.

Sixty-two percent of Americans polled in 2018 believed that climate change has a human cause, up from 47 percent in 2013, according to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

# US trying to bring war to S America

## Says Maduro as Guaido, Pence agree to tighten noose around regime

AFP, Washington

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro accused the American government of manufacturing a crisis in an attempt to start a war in South America, in an interview broadcast on Monday.

"Everything that the United States government has done has been doomed to failure," Maduro told American broadcaster ABC News from the presidential palace in Caracas in remarks translated by the network from Spanish.

"They are trying to fabricate a crisis to justify political escalation and a military intervention in Venezuela to bring a war to South America."



being "politics to attempt to establish a parallel government in Venezuela."

Washington, he said, "wants Venezuela's oil" and is "willing to go to war for that oil."

"The extremist Ku Klux Klan government that Donald Trump directly wants a war over oil, and more than just oil," Maduro said, describing Venezuela as a "pacifist, humble nation."

But he also said he was ready to participate in a "direct dialogue" with the Trump administration.

Asked if he would allow Guaido back into the country, Maduro said: "He has to respect the laws."

Guaido "can leave and come back and will have to see the face of justice because justice had prohibited him from him leaving the country."

A team of six journalists from the US-based TV network Univision said it was detained for nearly three hours in Caracas Monday after Maduro was offended by questions about poverty and the legitimacy of his rule which they had asked him during an interview.

Venezuelan authorities seized the team's equipment, too, said anchorman Jorge Ramos of the big Spanish-language network.

### VENEZUELA CRISIS

US announces more sanctions against Venezuela, \$56m in aid for its neighbours

Lima Group urges ICC to declare aid blockade 'crime against humanity'

Earlier in the day, US Vice President Mike Pence and Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido agreed on a strategy to tighten the noose around President Nicolas Maduro following a meeting with regional allies in Colombia.

Pence announced more sanctions against Venezuela and \$56 million in aid for neighbouring countries grappling with a flood of people fleeing the economically stricken country.

US Vice President Mike Pence announced \$56 million in aid to Venezuelans as well as

tougher US sanctions as he joined a Lima Group meeting of Latin American countries plus Canada that was also attended by opposition leader Juan Guaido.

The group also urged the International Criminal Court to declare Maduro's refusal to allow in humanitarian aid a "crime against humanity."

The United States is among some 50 countries that recognize Guaido as Venezuela's interim president.

Maduro blasted the talks in Bogota as

### FACT-CHECK

# Do viral videos show Pakistan, India warplanes in action?

Videos which have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times on Facebook and YouTube, and published by mainstream media in both India and Pakistan, show military jets flying at night and dropping what appear to be bombs. They went viral as India yesterday claimed it had launched an air strike which killed a large number of militants in Pakistan, a claim which Islamabad has denied.

The first video shows what appears to be an F-16 jet flying through the night sky and firing what could be bombs or flares into the darkness.

Pakistan's mainstream Urdu-language newspaper, Nawa-i-Waqt, posted the video on its Facebook page, where it had been viewed more than 17,000 times in the six hours since it was published. The post's caption says: "Immediate and timely flights by Pakistan air force planes. Indian planes ran away: DG ISPR." "DG ISPR" stands for Director General Inter Services Public Relations, or Pakistan's military spokesman. The same video was posted on an Indian Facebook account alongside claims it showed the Indian Air Force bombing "terror camps".

The video has been posted repeatedly on Facebook in both countries.

A second video which was posted on Pakistani Facebook page SiasTV, where it has been viewed more than 20,000 times, contains similar footage of a warplane flying at night. The caption on the post claims it shows the Pakistani air force responding to the Indian incursion. The exact same footage was also posted by an Indian Facebook account, where it has been viewed 36,000 times in the five hours since it was published. The caption says: "Indian Airforce Attacks Pakistan".

A YouTube search found both videos shared in all the misleading posts actually show a 2014 air show to mark Pakistan's independence day.

An August 12, 2014 statement by Pakistan Air Force announces the night flying demonstration for the next night, August 13, 2014.

The first video used in the misleading posts was originally published on YouTube on August 14, 2014, and is headlined "Pakistan Air Force F-16 Block 52+ dispensing Flares".

The second video used in the misleading posts shows the same 2014 night flight demonstration from a different angle. This footage was posted on YouTube on September 23, 2016 with a headline: "Pakistan Airforce Islamabad night flying".

SOURCE: AFP

### NEWSIN brief

#### Russian TV lists nuke targets in US

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian state television has listed US military facilities that Moscow would target in the event of a nuclear strike, and said that a hypersonic missile Russia is developing would be able to hit them in less than five minutes. The targets included the Pentagon and the presidential retreat in Camp David, Maryland.

#### US, Israel back British plans to ban Hezbollah

AFP, London

Britain said yesterday it will seek to ban the political wing of Hezbollah, making membership of the movement or inviting support for it a crime, in a move that earned swift praise from the United States and Israel. The decision follows outrage last year over the display of the Hezbollah flag at pro-Palestinian demonstrations in London.

#### Cubans back new constitution

AFP, Havana

Cubans voted overwhelmingly in favor of constitutional reforms that cement the role of socialism in the island nation, the electoral commission said Monday. Some 6.8 million people, or more than 86 percent of voters, supported the changes in Sunday's referendum, while only 766,400, or nine percent, voted against.

#### BITS OF HISTORY (FEBRUARY 26)

1993: A bomb at New York's World Trade Center killed six people and injured more than 1,000. Militant Muslims were later convicted on charges related to the bombing.

2001: Bosnian Croat leader Dario Kordic was sentenced to 25 years in jail for crimes against humanity, the first senior politician to be convicted by the UN court in The Hague.