

## We don’t want to see another war

### Eruption of fighting between India-Pakistan worrying

We are extremely concerned by the eruption of fighting between India and Pakistan in a sharp escalation of hostilities between the two nuclear-armed neighbours following the April 22 Pahalgam terrorist attack, in which 26 people were killed. Reportedly, India launched “precision strikes” on what it claimed were nine sites of “terrorist infrastructure” in Pakistan early Wednesday. Declaring the attack to be an “act of war” and vowing retaliation, Pakistan also claimed to have downed five Indian Air Force jets during the attack. At least 38 people were reported killed in these incidents—Islamabad said 26 civilians were killed by India’s missile strikes and firing, while New Delhi said at least 12 died from Pakistani shelling.

We must say this turn of events—while not exactly shocking given the recent escalations marked by harsh rhetoric and retaliatory measures from both sides—is as tragic as it is dangerous. If India continues its campaign and Pakistan acts on its pledge of “corresponding actions,” there is no telling where this will end and at what cost. If left unchecked, it could lead to a wider conflict that could inflict untold suffering across the region. The two countries have fought three wars in the past, and the current fighting already promises to be the deadliest confrontation in decades. Even though India claims its actions under the so-called Operation Sindoor have been “non-escalatory in nature,” and that “no Pakistani military facilities have been targeted,” nationalist sentiments festering within the countries could make it difficult to adopt a reconciliatory gesture or turn away from aggression.

As we know, the momentum for the latest flare-up has been building for some time. In the two weeks since the Pahalgam attack—for which India blamed Pakistan, which the latter denied—both sides took various tit-for-tat measures against each other, including expelling diplomats, suspending visas, and closing border crossings. Many, therefore, expected these developments to escalate to some sort of cross-border confrontation—as seen after the Pulwama attacks which had left 40 Indian paramilitary personnel dead in 2019. While world leaders have urged restraint and de-escalation after Wednesday’s attacks, both countries have yet to show any willingness to take the first step toward compromise or even negotiation.

We don’t need to remind them of the dangers of continuing along this path. The longer they delay meaningful dialogue, the closer they risk edging toward a catastrophic conflict. Moreover, this is not just their problem anymore—it threatens to affect all of us in the surrounding regions. Already there are fears, and early signs, of disruptions in many shared sectors and services. It is, therefore, imperative that both governments urgently pull back from the brink, heed international calls for restraint, and engage in direct talks. The international community, headed by the UNSC, also have a responsibility to mediate and convince them to focus on pursuing the real terrorists, instead of fighting among themselves.

## Will road fatalities go on without end?

### Remove chaos in transport sector, make our roads safe

We are deeply concerned about the lack of meaningful initiatives from the relevant authorities to ensure road safety, as crashes continue to claim lives across the country. According to the Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity (BJKS), 583 people were killed and 1,202 injured in 567 road accidents in April alone. BJKS has identified several major causes of these crashes, with motorcycle accidents contributing to the highest number of casualties last month. Other causes include the operation of battery-powered rickshaws on highways, a lack of signs, markings, and lights on national roads, disobedience of traffic rules, unfit vehicles, unskilled drivers, and reckless driving. Although these reasons are well known, and experts and road safety advocates have long urged action, we have yet to see any effective measures from the authorities.

The current situation reflects the failure of successive governments to treat road safety with the urgency it deserves. Particularly during the 15 years of Awami League rule, corruption, mismanagement, and political influence plagued the transport sector. Powerful figures in transport associations, working hand in glove with police and political leaders, sustained a corrupt system that served their interests. Even though a student-led movement in 2018 led to the enactment of the Road Transport Act (RTA) 2018, it remains largely unimplemented to this day.

We had hoped for improvements under the interim government, but disappointingly, little progress has been made since it took office nine months ago. Extortion and anarchy still dominate the sector, with transport associations now run mostly by BNP leaders and activists instead of their Awami League predecessors. Meanwhile, unlicensed and noncompliant drivers continue to cause accidents. One example of the government’s lack of impact is that although it had announced a decision to remove outdated vehicles from roads by May, there has been little visible interest from owners or government effort to enforce it. Such a lacklustre response to a national crisis is unacceptable.

We urge the authorities to take a holistic approach to restoring order on our roads. Implementing the RTA is essential, but we must also tackle the pervasive extortion and political interference in the sector. Establishing a commission to reform the transport system is also an option that should be considered. The BJKS and other organisations have already identified the main causes of disorder and proposed solutions. The government must take these recommendations seriously and act without delay to ensure road safety.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### World War II in Europe ended

On this day in 1945, following Germany’s unconditional surrender, World War II in Europe officially ended at midnight, although the war in the Pacific continued until the Japanese surrender in September.

# India-Pakistan tensions and the risks of war



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Two weeks after the terror attacks in Pahalgam, India-administered Kashmir, India launched missiles into Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Pakistan under “Operation Sindoor,” described as a precision strike. At the time of writing, India and Pakistan have polar opposite claims regarding the strikes. From Pakistan’s perspective, Indian strikes have killed 26 people, including a child, as reported by *The Guardian* and Reuters. On the other hand, the Indian government said in a statement that attacks were directed at nine non-military targets, and “terrorist infrastructure.”

It is too early, and rather preliminary, to conclude that India-Pakistan tensions have escalated to a “war.” But it is also impossible to rule out further escalations, and that uncertainty is what makes the current situation all the more concerning.

The scale of the attacks has surpassed historical precedence where the tit-for-tat exchanges did not result in a wider war. Prior to Indian strikes on Wednesday, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced on Tuesday, without specifically mentioning Pakistan, that India’s water will flow and “be conserved for India’s benefit.” Withdrawing from the 65-year-old Indus Water Treaty has been India’s fiercest diplomatic offensive in response to the Pahalgam attacks, and Pakistan has vowed that any attempt by India to stop water flow would constitute “an act of war.”

Pakistani military spokesperson Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, in an early morning news conference, said Indian missiles targeted four locations in Punjab, and two in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it summoned the Indian chargé d’affaires in Islamabad, and stated that India’s “blatant act of aggression constitutes a clear violation of Pakistan’s sovereignty. Such actions are in contravention of the UN Charter, international law and established norms governing inter-state relations,” as reported by CNN.

India has not yet publicly provided evidence of the claims that Pakistan was directly linked to the terror attacks in Pahalgam, to justify Wednesday’s attacks on the premise of self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

Retaliating to the Indian strikes, Pakistan has already launched heavy artillery shelling along the de facto border between the two nations, reports BBC. India has claimed the



Metal debris lies on the ground in Wuyan in India-administered Kashmir’s Pulwama district, May 7, 2025.

PHOTO: REUTERS

artillery shelling along the de facto border is unprovoked.

At least 12 people were killed and dozens wounded on the Indian side in Poonch, local government official Azhar Majid told AFP. Pakistan has also claimed it has shot down five Indian Air Force jets—including a Rafale jet—and a drone. A weapons researcher, Trevor Ball, of Armament Research Services, analysed witness photos from a wreckage site in the village of Wuyan in India-administered Kashmir, and said the tank was likely from a Rafale or Mirage fighter jet, as reported by *The New York Times*. Though facts and verifications are yet to emerge, both nations’ responses have surpassed previous “non-escalatory” boundaries.

but according to analysts, the previous military responses in 2019 and 2016 (Uri) were more measured. Asfandiyar Mir, a senior fellow in the South Asia Program at the Stimson Center in Washington, told *The New York Times* that the Indian strikes under Operation Sindoor so far “have crossed two significant thresholds in its military action,” by hitting a large number of sites in Pakistan and by striking Punjab. Pakistan’s military claims that Indian strikes have hit the densely populated province of Punjab, and are the deepest India has struck inside Pakistan since 1971, according to CNN.

The role of powerful nations who would act as mediators, and with

whom both nations share relations—namely the US—is key. JD Vance had suggested they would support an Indian “response” that would not lead to a larger conflict in the region. One could infer that Vance’s statement suggests supporting a kinetic response that would not be overly escalatory. After the overnight strikes, the Indian army posted a video on X, saying “Justice is served.” According to *The New York Times*, India has said its military actions have been “measured, responsible and designed to be non-escalatory in nature.” At the White House, US President Trump has so far called the escalation between India and Pakistan a “shame,” and said he hoped “it ends very quickly.” Trump had said earlier that both are “friends” of the US. The UN, Western nations, and China stepped up the calls for restraint for both nations.

Beyond statements, the current escalation requires active engagement and mediation. The rapid escalation has gone far, and renegotiating the Indus Water Treaty, rather than calibrated “responses,” must be encouraged by geopolitical actors already navigating two wars and a Cold War between China and the US, with heightening tensions.

Ultimately, a protracted conflict harms both countries. On May 5, Moody’s stated that a persistent increase in tensions with India could impair Pakistan’s access to external financing and pressure its foreign exchange reserves, which remain well below what is required to meet its external debt payment for the next few years. For India, a full scale war with Pakistan threatens its geopolitical position in the Indo-Pacific policy, as a net security provider in the region. “An outright war with Pakistan... would only indirectly put us [India] against China, one of the world’s largest economies... which has strategic investments in the Belt and Road Corridor that runs through Pakistan,” writes Saba Naqvi, a Delhi-based journalist, in an article in *Frontline* magazine.

Time and time again, history has shown that wars exact a price. Further military actions from either nation can no longer be rationalised by their governments’ need to “save face” and flex muscle power to their rival in order to tend to their domestic audience. Both nations stand to lose more than they would gain with outright war, and realising that sooner rather than later would serve their people.

## VOTER EDUCATION

# The missing link in govt’s democratic reform



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Political education is not a luxury. It is essential for the very survival of democracy. Plato cautioned that democracy turns perilous when citizens are uninformed. In Bangladesh, many voters sell their votes for a few thousand takas. If they truly grasped the profound socio-economic significance of their vote, would they still make such a choice?

A vote is not merely a token. It is a social contract between the citizen and the state, an agreement that, in exchange for the vote, the voter should receive security and good governance.

By selling their vote upfront, individuals essentially forfeit access to critical public services such as free, publicly funded healthcare, state-guaranteed fair wages, employment opportunities, quality education for their children, fair prices for their produce, and access to justice. Over the course of a five-year term, the cumulative loss from being deprived of these entitlements could amount to several lakhs of taka.

Though free and fair election should guarantee democracy, this is only a half-truth. When voters are swayed by short-term gains, such as monetary incentives, democracy becomes a commodity rather than a process of genuine representation. Moreover, Bangladesh faces another problem rooted in the patron-client leadership model. Leadership positions often stem from family ties or patronage rather than merit or competence,

perpetuating a cycle of incapable governance time and again.

In any society, the struggle for democracy must begin with the political education of the masses. Yet neither the Election Commission (EC), political parties, intelligentsia, nor social activist groups have seriously prioritised or worked towards this most fundamental requirement. The interim government has pledged to reform state institutions and conduct a free and fair election, but it has shown no visible initiatives in promoting civic education or political awareness among voters, thereby risking the reversal of whatever changes they implement.

Although transforming an entire population into politically engaged, fully empowered “active citizens” is a long-term endeavour, the interim government can take a vital first step by launching a comprehensive voter education programme. Even instilling a basic awareness that selling one’s vote for immediate gain is, in effect, sacrificing far greater entitlements for a fleeting benefit, can begin to shift public consciousness.

The EC and the interim government are uniquely positioned to lead an impartial, nationwide voter education campaign. They can leverage the existing administrative infrastructure, including local government bodies, publicly funded schools and colleges, upazila level land administration, agricultural extension services, and

cooperative departments, where such programmes can be seamlessly integrated.

It is also possible to implement a meaningful voter education programme within the limited time available to the current interim government.

Between 1996 and 1997, Bangladesh successfully implemented a grassroots initiative known as the Local Democracy Education Programme (LDEP), funded by USAID and supported by the Asia Foundation and BRAC. The programme, carried out by dozens of NGOs across 12 different districts, aimed to promote voter education through both innovative and practical means. These included distributing educational materials such as posters and leaflets and organising public gatherings, workshops, and courtyard meetings to raise awareness among voters.

Maintaining political neutrality, LDEP urged voters to reject candidates linked to religious extremism, candidates with criminal records, and corruption. The programme’s impact was remarkable: in the December 1997 Union Parishad elections, in LDEP’s area of operation, voter turnout exceeded 90 percent, women participated in unprecedented numbers, and both vote rigging and the influence of money declined significantly. Notably, NGO assessments found that 43 percent of elected candidates were honest and capable, making it one of the most credible and memorable elections in the public memory of those areas.

Similar success stories have emerged from countries like Kenya, Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa, where election commissions and various NGOs implemented voter education programmes with notable success.

These examples reveal several key factors for the successful

implementation of such programmes: maintaining a non-partisan attitude is essential for building public trust; using simple and accessible language is more effective than relying on academic jargon; combining mass media platforms such as radio, television, and SMS with community-level workshops maximises outreach; and emphasising both “how to vote” and “why voting matters” significantly strengthens voter engagement.

In the current political landscape, major political parties are unlikely to support a non-partisan voter education programme. This situation presents an opportunity for smaller political parties, which often struggle to compete within the existing framework. By promoting voter awareness through their own networks and communication channels, these smaller parties can not only strengthen democratic participation but also help create conditions that may eventually allow them to compete on a more level playing field.

Large NGOs with strong rural networks can also play a critical role. The interim government can actively engage with these organisations, encouraging them to integrate voter education into their ongoing programmes. Many international development partners provide funding for democracy-related initiatives, which NGOs can explore to support these efforts. Civil society organisations and concerned citizens must also be part of this process.

By mobilising NGOs, civil society organisations, and ordinary citizens around a shared agenda of voter education, the government can lay the groundwork for lasting democratic reform. If pursued with sincerity and collaboration, this collective endeavour could yield meaningful results, not only in the upcoming election but in all future ones as well.