

INDIA, FRANCE INK PACT of Rs 64,000 cr to procure 26 Rafale jets



Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh with other officials of the Indian Government and French Government during the signing of an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) for the procurement of 26 Rafale aircraft, 22 single-seater and four twin-seater, for the Indian Navy, in New Delhi on Monday.

(PTI)

NEW DELHI, Apr 28 (PTI)

INDIA and France on Monday inked an inter-governmental agreement sealing a mega deal to procure 26 Rafale marine jets at a cost of Rs 64,000 crore (Euro 7 billion) for deployment on

board Indian Navy's aircraft carrier INS Vikrant.

The ambitious pact provides for the setting up of a production facility for Rafale fuselage as well as maintenance, repair and overhaul facilities for aircraft engines, sensors and

weapons in India, according to the Defence Ministry.

The agreement will also facilitate the transfer of technology for the integration of indigenous weapons in India.

The delivery of the aircraft will begin in 2028 and will be com-

pleted by 2030, with the crew undergoing training in France and India.

"The induction (of Rafale-Marine) would lead to the addition of a potent force multiplier to the Indian Navy's aircraft carriers, substantially boosting

the nation's air power at sea," the Ministry said in a statement.

Dassault Aviation, the manufacturer of Rafale jets, said, the new acquisition testifies the importance of the strategic relationship between India and

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Houthis claim 68 killed in suspected US air strike on Yemen migrant centre

Aden/Dubai: Corpses covered in dust and debris were scattered in the wreckage of a detention centre for African migrants in Yemen, after what Houthi-controlled television described on Monday as a US airstrike that killed 68 people.

The attack was one of the deadliest so far in six weeks of intensified US airstrikes against the Houthis, an Iran-aligned group that controls northern Yemen and has struck shipping in the Red Sea in what it says is solidarity with Palestinians. US military has said it will not give detailed information about targets of its strikes for reasons of operational security.

Houthi-run AlMasirah television showed images of the aftermath of the strike in Saada, on a route used by African mig-



Rescuers carry an injured African migrant in Saada on Monday

rants to cross conflict-riven Yemen to reach Saudi Arabia.

The footage showed bodies covered in dust amid blood-stained rubble. Rescue workers carried a man who was moving slightly on a stretcher. A survivor could be heard calling "My mother" in Amharic, the main language of Ethiopia. Other survivors interviewed by Yemeni television in hospital described being woken by the

dawn blast. "I was thrown into the air and fell to the ground," one said. The US administration had committed a "brutal crime" by bombing the Saada detention centre which held over 100 undocumented African migrants, Houthi spokesperson Mohammed Abdulsalam said. The group vowed to continue its attacks on Red Sea shipping in a statement from military spokesman Yahya Saree.

The deadliest US strike on Yemen so far came this month with an attack on a fuel terminal on the Red Sea that killed at least 74 people. Rights advocates have raised concerns about civilian killings. Three senators (D) wrote to Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth on Thursday demanding an accounting for loss of civilian lives. REUTERS

China, Philippines spar over a sandbar in SCS

A tiny sandbar in the disputed South China Sea has become the latest flashpoint in tensions between China and the Philippines, with each side displaying its flag to reinforce competing claims on the island.

Earlier this month, members of the Chinese Coast Guard landed on the disputed reef, Sandy Cay, unfurled a flag and "exercised sovereign jurisdiction," Chinese state media reported Thursday. They left the island by Sunday, when the Philippines deployed its own personnel to the sandbar. Hours later, Beijing called the act an "illegal boarding", saying it had "indisputable sovereignty" over Spratly Islands, a chain of dozens of slivers of land, including Sandy Cay, in South China Sea, and its surrounding waters.

The standoff comes days after allies the US and the Philippines began their annual joint military drills in the Philippines, which China has cri-



On Sunday, Philippines deployed its personnel to Sandy Cay in SCS

ticised as undermining regional stability.

On Monday morning, Jonathan Malaya, assistant director general of the Philippines' national security council, pushed back on China's claim that Beijing had seized the reef and urged it to "act with restraint and not increase tensions" in South China Sea. "It is not to the benefit of any nation if these things are happening, nor is it to the benefit of any nation if such irresponsible statements are released." Beijing claims about 90% of South China Sea, parts of which are also claimed by Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines. NYT

J&K Assembly moves resolution denouncing Pahalgam attack

JAMMU, Apr 28 (PTI)

THE Jammu and Kashmir Assembly unanimously passed a resolution on Monday expressing shock and anguish over the Pahalgam terrorist attack and resolved to fight resolutely to defeat the nefarious designs to disturb communal harmony and hinder progress.

The resolution, moved by Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary during a special session of the Assembly, was passed by voice vote. At the beginning of the session, House members observed a two-minute silence to pay homage to the 26 people killed in the attack last week.

"The Legislative Assembly of J&K reaffirms its unwavering commitment to foster an environment of peace, development, and inclusive prosperity for all its citizens, and to resolutely defeat nefarious designs of those who seek to disturb the communal harmony and progress of the nation and of Jammu and Kashmir," the resolution stated.

Concluding a discussion on



Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah with MLAs observes silence to pay tributes to the victims of Pahalgam terror attack during the one-day special session of the J&K Assembly, in Jammu on Monday. (PTI)

the resolution, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who also holds the tourism portfolio, condemned the Pahalgam terror attack and admitted that he failed

in his responsibility of ensuring a safe return for tourists.

"As the Chief Minister and Tourism Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, I had invited these peo-

ple here. It was my responsibility to ensure they were sent back safely to their homes. I could not send them back," he said.

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India's 'incursion' imminent, claims Pak defence minister

Cross-LoC fire spreads from Valley to Jammu

Islamabad: Pakistan's defence minister said Monday that a military incursion by neighbouring India was imminent in the aftermath of a deadly militant attack on tourists in Kashmir last week, as tensions rise between the two nuclear-armed nations.

The attack killed 26 people and triggered outrage in India, along with calls for action against Pakistan. "We have reinforced our forces because it is something which is imminent now. So in that situation some strategic decisions have to be taken, so those decisions have been taken," defence minister **Khawaja Muhammad Asif** said.

Asif said India's rhetoric was ramping up and that Pakistan's military had briefed the govt on the possibility of an Indian attack. He did not go into further details on his reasons for thinking an incursion was imminent. After last Tuesday's J&K attack, India identified two suspected militants as Pakistani. Islamabad, however, denied any role and called for a neutral investigation. Asif said Pakistan was on high alert and that it would only use its arsenal of nuclear weapons if "there is a direct threat to our existence". REUTERS



Rajat.Pandit@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Ceasefire along the Line of Control with Pakistan continues to fray, with the exchange of fire between the rival armies for the first time spreading from Kashmir to the Jammu region as well in the aftermath of the Pahalgam massacre.

The operational situation, however, has not yet escalated to the deadly artillery duels that were regular before the fresh "understanding" reached between the Indian and Pakistani director-generals of military operations in Feb 2021 to maintain peace and tranquility along the 778-km LoC.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh met PM Modi Monday morning to discuss the overall situation, as govt contemplates military action in the shape of limited punitive strikes against Pakistan.

As the gun duels, with assault rifles and light machine guns continued along the LoC for the fourth consecutive night, Indian Army said that Pakistan Army had initiated



Gun duels with assault rifles & light machine guns continued along the LoC for the 4th consecutive night

"unprovoked" small arms fire across LoC at its posts in Kupwara and Poonch districts, among other places.

"Firing till now was taking place in Kashmir region like Tutmari Gali, Rampur, Uri, Gurez & Sunderbani sectors. But now, it has taken place in Poonch in Jammu region as well," a senior officer said.

The Army has recorded at least a dozen "clear-cut" ceasefire violations (CFVs) by the Pakistan Army in the last four days, all of which have been

responded to "in double measure". A CFV is generally said to occur when over 25 rounds of small arms fire are witnessed in one particular place.

Any use of heavy-caliber weapons like 155mm artillery guns or 120mm mortars, of course, constitutes a violation. "There was just one CFV in 2022, zero in 2023 and two in 2024," another officer said.

Before Feb 2021, India often used targeted artillery and heavy-mortar fire on Pakistan Army posts and bunkers to impose costs for actively aiding and abetting infiltration of terrorists from launch pads into J&K, often by giving "covering fire".

"The Army has the capability to conduct strikes against terror launch pads, camps and staging areas along the LoC. The military pressure on Pakistan Army can certainly be enhanced with concentrated artillery barrages as well as sniping operations to disrupt their patrols. Then, there are shallow cross-border raids that can be conducted," another officer said.

India briefs Taliban; Af govt condemns Pahalgam attack

Both Sides Seek Better Ties; Kabul Woos Investment

Sachin.Parashar
@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: As it looks to mobilise international opinion against Pakistan's support to cross-border terrorism, the govt briefed the Taliban regime in Afghanistan about the common neighbour's links with the April 22 Pahalgam attack. Sources said Taliban's acting foreign minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi strongly condemned the attack and underscored the need to punish the perpetrators.

Muttaqi met an Indian delegation headed by MEA joint secretary Anand Prakash. The visit came amid soaring India-Pakistan tensions over the attack. India's ties with

Bombing on western Pak border kills 7

A powerful bomb blast in South Waziristan in Pakistan's west, bordering Afghanistan, ripped through a pro-govt peace committee office Monday, killing seven people and wounding 16. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan is suspected to be behind the bombing of the anti-TTP office. **P 22**

the Taliban dispensation in Kabul have improved dramatically in the recent past, contrary to the fear in Aug 2021 — after the Taliban took over Kabul — that the armed militia would act as a proxy govt run by the ISI.

Pakistan's ties have seen a steady deterioration, mainly because of the activities of Pakistan Taliban (TTP).

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US urges India, Pak to work towards solution

New Delhi: Amid heightened tensions between India and Pakistan over the Pahalgam terrorist attack, the United States said it remains in touch with both countries at multiple levels and urged them to work towards a "responsible solution". The state department also said the US stands with India and strongly condemns the terrorist attack in J&K's Pahalgam.

Both US President Donald Trump and Vice President J D Vance had spoken to PM Modi last week to condemn the April 22 attack and to express support for India's efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice. **TNN**

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