

Pakistan decries 'act of war' after strikes from India

India

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India has launched a string of overnight strikes on Pakistan in what Islamabad described as an "act of war" between the nuclear-armed rivals.

Three civilians, including a child, were killed, officials said. The strikes followed the killing of 26 people by militants in Indian-controlled Kashmir on April 22.

The Indian government said it had targeted "terrorist infrastructure" at nine sites in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, from where it claims last month's terrorist attack originated.

"A little while ago, the Indian Armed Forces launched 'Operation Sindoor', hitting terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir from where terrorist attacks against India have been planned and directed," the military said in a statement.

The Delhi government claimed it had "demonstrated considerable restraint in selection of targets and method of execution". A statement read: "We are living up to the commitment that those responsible for this attack will be held accountable."

Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan's prime minister, said the country "has every right to give a befitting reply to this act of war imposed by India and a befitting reply is being given".

After last month's attack, Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, promised to hunt the attackers "to the ends of the earth", adding: "The perpetrators and conspirators will face the harshest response."

Two Indian combat aircraft were shot down by Pakistan, according to the



state broadcaster PTV. India's strikes followed days of sustained small-arms exchanges between Indian and Pakistani troops along the line of control (LoC), the de facto border dividing Kashmir between the two countries, putting the 2021 ceasefire at risk.

Eyewitnesses in Indian-administered Kashmir said Indian and Pakistani troops were exchanging fire on the LoC overnight.

Indian jets could be heard flying over Srinagar, the capital of Indian Kashmir, in the early hours of Wednesday, according to local media.

There were also reports of shelling and explosions in the Pakistani-controlled area of Kashmir, which has been contested by the two nations since the partition of India in 1947.

The Pakistani army spokesman, Lieutenant General Ahmad Sharif, said missiles had been launched from within Indian territory and no Indian aircraft had entered Pakistani airspace.

Pakistan has closed its airspace for 48 hours and scrambled all its air force

pilots, officials said. Tensions have escalated since April 22, when armed assailants stormed Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir, killing 26 people, predominantly Indian tourists. Delhi blamed Pakistan for backing the massacre, a charge it dismissed.

The attack was one of the deadliest in recent years. All but two of the victims were male Indian tourists; the others included a Nepalese traveller and a local guide. Eyewitnesses said only male Hindu tourists were singled out by the terrorists. Dozens more were wounded.

Two days after the attack, two of the militants were identified by Indian officials as Pakistani. But India has so far provided little evidence publicly to support its claims. Pakistan denied any involvement and has accused India in turn of sponsoring a terrorist network inside Pakistan. India has dismissed such allegations.

Since 1947 Kashmir has been a flashpoint in the bitter rivalry between India and Pakistan, both claiming the Muslim-majority region in its entirety. After three wars it remains divided between them, and both control portions of the territory.

In the 1990s an insurgency loyal to Pakistan erupted in Indian-administered Kashmir, fuelling unrest in the region, which is among the world's most militarised zones, with over half a million Indian armed forces deployed.

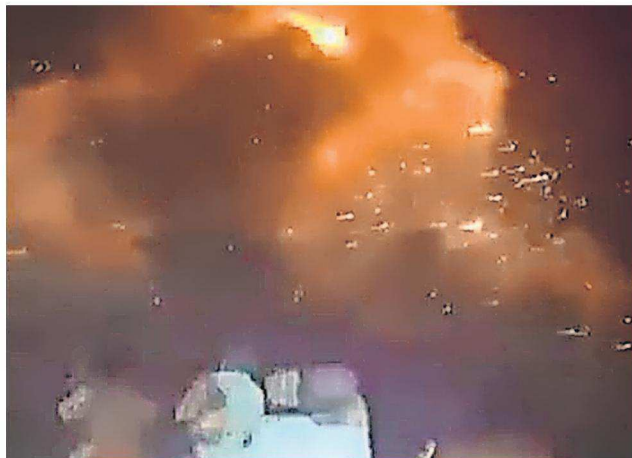
The two countries had their last big confrontation in 2019 after a suicide bomber killed 40 Indian paramilitary police officers in Kashmir. The attacker was Kashmiri, but he claimed in a video released afterward to be a member of Jaish-e-Mohammed, a Pakistani militant group.

India later launched airstrikes on Pakistan, claiming to have targeted "terrorist camps". Pakistan attacked Indian-controlled territory and, in the ensuing dogfight, shot down an Indian jet and captured its pilot.

Months later Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government unilaterally revoked the Indian-administered Kashmir's limited autonomy, intensifying crackdowns on dissent and bringing in a slew of laws which stripped the local people of their exclusive rights over land and jobs.

President Trump said last night he hoped the clashes between India and Pakistan end very quickly. "They've been fighting for many, many decades and centuries, actually, if you really think about it."

A spokesperson for the UN secretary-general, Antonio Guterres, said he was "very concerned" about Indian military strikes on Pakistan, adding: "He calls for maximum military restraint from both countries. The world cannot afford a military confrontation between India and Pakistan."



Video footage on social media showed the aftermath of a missile strike. India said that it had demonstrated "considerable restraint in selection of targets"