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The mock drills are a sure forecast of war clouds

Will India go to war with Pakistan? The answer to that may be blowing in the wind, as of now, but the nation quickened the drumbeat a bit more on Monday, when the government instructed several states to conduct security mock drills on May 7. The aim of these drills, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), is to enhance the preparedness of civilians in the event of a hostile attack, with an emphasis on air-raid sirens, blackout measures, camouflaging of vital installations, and evacuation plans. And with this, these drills, following the deadly Pahalgam terror attack on April 22, point to war clouds gathering and tension escalating between the two nuclear-armed neighbours.

Once it became clear that terrorists fuelled and funded by Pakistan were behind the tragic events of Pahalgam, which left 26 civilians dead and heightened anxieties along the border, calls for retaliation have grown louder in India. The diplomatic response has been swift, with actions such as the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty and a significant downgrading of Pakistan's diplomatic presence in India. Yet, these mock drills - scheduled amidst rising tensions - signal a deeper, more concerning shift. They represent a stark reminder of the likelihood of conflict, marking a further downturn in the already strained ties between the two countries.

The government's decision to revive a practice that was last observed in 1971, during the India-Pakistan war, is not without its implications. At a time when the world is already concerned about regional instability, India's move to conduct such drills indicates that it is bracing for a potential escalation in the ongoing stand-off with Pakistan. While mock drills are routinely conducted to prepare for natural disasters like earthquakes or building collapses, the inclusion of measures aimed at defending against "external threats" is telling. The drills aim to prepare civilians for a worst-case scenario. This is no longer about hypothetical threats; it's a preparation for the very real possibility of war.

As India prepares for these mock drills, the larger question remains: What steps will both nations take to avoid an all-out conflict? While the mock drills may serve as a precautionary measure to protect civilians in the event of war, they also raise the spectre of war itself. In the face of this growing crisis, it is vital that both India and Pakistan take a step back. The rhetoric of retaliation and vengeance must give way to dialogue and diplomacy

Pahalgam attack has set off a chain reaction of events that could spiral out of control. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statements in the aftermath of the attack, including promises of severe retaliation, have only added to the rhetoric of vengeance. With the government of India vowing to punish those responsible for the attack and with public opinion strongly demanding action, the pressure on the government to respond militarily is intensifying. The mock drills, which involve a large-scale mobilisation of civil defence volunteers and the implementation of air-raid warning systems, could be a prelude to something more ominous.

This renewed focus on civil defence, combined with the military's preparation for possible escalation, speaks volumes about the state of India-Pakistan relations. The last time such a level of preparedness was undertaken was in 1971, the year India and Pakistan fought a war. The war not only led to the creation of Bangladesh but also entrenched deep divisions and mistrust between the two nations. In many ways, the present situation is eerily reminiscent of that period, with both countries positioned on the brink of a conflict that could have catastrophic consequences.

The situation is further complicated by Pakistan's own actions. The repeated violations of the 2003 Cease-fire Agreement, the constant military provocations, and the unyielding support for groups responsible for cross-border terrorism only add fuel to the fire. With both countries poised for military action, the international community must take heed of the situation. The possibility of war looms larger with every passing day, and the time for diplomacy and de-escalation is rapidly running out.

As India prepares for these mock drills, the larger question remains: What steps will both nations take to avoid an all-out conflict? While the mock drills may serve as a precautionary measure to protect civilians in the event of war, they also raise the spectre of war itself. In the face of this growing crisis, it is vital that both India and Pakistan take a step back. The rhetoric of retaliation and vengeance must give way to dialogue and diplomacy. Both countries must remember the lessons of history, where wars have led only to destruction and suffering. The mock drills may be necessary for preparedness, but they must also serve as a wake-up call for the need to work toward de-escalation and peace. Only then can we hope to avert the kind of tragedy that the world witnessed in 1971, and prevent history from repeating itself in the most tragic way possible.

comment



SIDDHARTH DESAI

India's strategic response to US tariffs

A new round of tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump on dozens of countries took effect on April 5. Approximately 60 trading partners have been subjected to customised tariff rates, which the Trump administration refers to as reciprocal tariffs. These tariffs are based on the existing rates that other countries charge the US, along with non-tariff barriers such as regulatory measures. Chinese imports now face a staggering 104% tariff after China refused to retract its retaliatory tariffs of 34% on US goods, heightening fears of a trade war. Additional tariffs include 26% on imports from India, 46% on Vietnam, 32% on Taiwan, 25% on South Korea, 24% on Japan, and 20% on the European Union.

Trump's actions have disrupted the multilateral trade system, placing the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in jeopardy. The principle of Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status, which promotes uniform tariff rates among countries, is now undermined, allowing one nation to unilaterally impose tariffs on others. Trump has also initiated emergency economic measures within the US to enforce these tariffs. His administration argues that the trade imbalances the US faces are not due to a decline in its economic competitiveness but rather due to unfair advantages exploited by other countries. Consequently, the US seeks to reassess trade values, limiting this to goods and merchandise, while maintaining a significant advantage in the services sector.

The current strategy of issuing ultimatums and undermining established international trade norms, as seen with Trump's tariffs, is unsustainable. Protests against these measures are already emerging in the US, and criticisms from prominent supporters indicate growing dissent



Trump has introduced two tariff structures: a baseline tariff of 10% applicable to all countries, alongside a reciprocal tariff that reflects the average tariff imposed by the trading partner, which also accounts for non-tariff barriers. The impact of these tariffs has already begun to manifest, following their

announcement on April 2 and implementation on April 5. As a response, China has imposed an additional 50% tariff, while the European Union is formulating its strategy. India has engaged in trade negotiations with the US and has indicated it will not retaliate with tariffs, while other nations are considering reducing their tariff levels in a zero-for-zero approach.

The stock market's reaction is a clear indicator of the ramifications of these tariff hikes. There is a growing concern about global inflation and the potential for a worldwide recession, affecting about 86 partner nations in various ways. At the heart of this issue lies a significant conflict between the two largest economies, the US and China, which together account for over 40% of global GDP. The US has seen its manufacturing sector lose ground to China, which now represents 30-35% of global manufacturing. This has resulted in a trade deficit exceeding a trillion dollars for the US, while China enjoys a similar surplus.

India has found itself in a somewhat advantageous position. Although Trump claims that India imposes tariffs of around 52% on US exports, the tariffs imposed on India are only 26%. The European Union is responding by categorising US exports based on the states that supported Trump, imposing staggered tariffs beginning mid-month and culminating on December 1. Thus, different countries are adapting to the situation, with the overarching question being how to reduce dependency on the US.

India's approach has been proactive rather than cautious. Prime Minister Modi's visit to the US coincided with the announcement of reciprocal tariffs, emphasising the need to expand trade beyond current levels. The ambitious target of \$500 billion in trade by 2030 reflects a desire for mutual benefits rather than a zero-sum scenario. India's strategy includes accelerating trade to achieve early gains, recognising that a trade war would have limited benefits for India, given its small share of US trade.

India has also begun consultations to bolster its global supply chains, as tariffs impact trade flows. Key sectors such as gems and jewelry, chemicals, apparel, and hydrocarbons are likely to be severely affected. Recently, the US

Deputy Trade Representative led a team in New Delhi to negotiate a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), demonstrating India's early recognition of the need for course correction in its trade relationship with the US.

Furthermore, India's increasing trade deficit with the US, growing from roughly \$17 billion in 2021 to \$35 billion last year, highlights the need for strategic partnerships. Opportunities in defence equipment imports and sectors like nuclear energy could offer pathways for collaboration. India's position as neither a close ally nor an adversary of the US creates a unique space for manoeuvring and damage limitation.

Despite being the fastest-growing major economy, India's low GDP per capita necessitates accelerated growth to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047. This requires a focus on regulatory frameworks, reducing non-tariff barriers and enhancing the manufacturing sector, which has suffered due to China's competitive pricing. American assistance could facilitate improvements in manufacturing and higher productivity.

India's strategic growth must also align with a geostrategic approach, necessitating a strong partnership with the US. The current strategy of issuing ultimatums and undermining established international trade norms, as seen with Trump's tariffs, is unsustainable. Protests against these measures are already emerging in the US, and criticisms from prominent supporters indicate growing dissent.

India's leadership has maintained strong personal relationships with US officials, which could prove beneficial as the QUAD summit approaches. Hosting Trump in India would provide an opportunity for dialogue and damage control in bilateral relations. While the short-term impact of these tariffs may lead to a slight GDP growth adjustment, India's proactive stance positions it favourably to minimise disruption.

As developments unfold, the focus remains on the US and China. However, India's proactive approach may make it a silent yet significant winner in this evolving landscape, creating opportunities that it must leverage effectively moving forward.

(The author is an advocate by profession)

people's edit

A LEGACY OF COMPASSION AND JUSTICE

MOLLY FERNANDES

Fifteen days have passed since Pope Francis entered the heavenly realm, yet his legacy continues to occupy our thoughts. As the conclave begins in a couple of days to choose his successor, the world reflects on the transformative impact of his papacy and the path forward for the Church.

Pope Francis has been a transformative leader, advocating for social justice, environmental responsibility and a more inclusive Church. His teachings resonate across generations, calling for a renewed commitment to compassion and global solidarity. Through his encyclicals, apostolic exhortations and direct engagement with the marginalised, he has reshaped the Catholic Church's role in addressing key global challenges.

Environmental stewardship had been central to Pope Francis' teachings. His 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* underscored the urgency of climate change, criticizing consumerism and environmental exploitation. He emphasised that the poor suffer the most from ecological destruction and insisted that caring for the environment is a moral and social responsibility.

This commitment was reinforced in his 2023 apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum*, in which he urged world leaders to take decisive action to curb emissions and adopt sustainable energy practices. Under his leadership, the Vatican implemented eco-friendly initiatives, demonstrating a commitment to responsible environmental policies.

In *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), Pope Francis called for fraternity and unity in an increasingly divided world. He advocated for policies that prioritize human dignity over economic gain and challenged nations to work toward ethical governance and fair economic structures. His teachings consistently emphasise compassion over division, urging societies to build solidarity rather than walls.

His approach to governance also aimed at dismantling rigid hierarchical structures in favour of collaboration and transparency. By encouraging laypeople and women to take on leadership roles, he promoted a more participatory model of Church leadership.

Pope Francis has also addressed the moral implications of artificial intelligence and digital communication. In *Antiqua et Nova*, a doctrinal note issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education, he warned against misinformation, manipulation, and unethical AI practices. He called on developers and policymakers to ensure that technology serves humanity rather than controls it, reinforcing truth, justice, and dignity in digital advancements.

Pope Francis' apostolic exhortations have shaped the Catholic Church's approach to pastoral care and inclusion. *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) encouraged evangelisation rooted in joy and social outreach, particularly toward refugees, the poor, and those alienated from traditional religious structures.

In *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), he addressed the complexities of family life, promoting pastoral sensitivity and inclusivity, especially in cases of divorce and remarriage. His exhortation *Christus Vivit* (2019) reaffirmed his belief that young people are not just the Church's future but its present, inspiring them to take leadership roles within the Church.

Pope Francis has fostered a relatable and accessible papacy through his engagement with young people and marginalised communities. His participation in World Youth Day events and informal conversations with youth have encouraged young Catholics to challenge injustice and advocate for peace.

His outreach extends to migrants, prisoners, and the poor. His first trip as Pope was to Lampedusa, where he highlighted the humanitarian crisis of refugees. He has consistently championed the cause of migrants and demonstrated that the Church must stand in solidarity with the suffering.

One of Pope Francis' most significant contributions has been his push for greater inclusion in Church governance. He appointed more women to leadership positions in the Vatican than any predecessor, granting them voting rights in synodal meetings. While he did not change the Church's stance on female ordination, he worked to ensure that women had a voice in decision-making.

Pope Francis' legacy is one of compassion, inclusion, and responsibility. His writings have shaped a vision of a Church actively engaged with the world's most pressing issues. His support for environmental protection, outreach to marginalised communities, and push for inclusive governance have transformed the Catholic Church into a more open and responsive institution. As the world reflects on his teachings, his call for justice, fraternity, and care for creation remains as relevant as ever.

This is no time for war

The PM has told the Russian President Putin and the world that India stands for peace and this is no time for war! After the dastardly Pahalgam massacre, India can no more tolerate the 1000 cuts and two nation theory openly being pursued by Pakistan and now we have rightly vowed to punish the terrorists, their handlers and sponsors wherever they may be! However, China is strongly supporting Pakistan and so are some other nations covertly for various reasons. Pakistan is a failed state and a war at this stage will hurt us more than Pakistan. So far India has been taking rapid steps diplomatically, economically, psychologically, methodically for isolating Pakistan on the world stage.

What is wrong is the subservient boastful media, people demanding quick retribution and foolish military escalation on our irresponsible nuclear capable neighbour! The government too has to bid its time and show India has more brains than brawn at this stage,

to not permit its politicians to make arrogant and provocative statements when being provoked. When all parties are standing together as one officially, the ruling party must realise that we are a democracy and if someone makes a wrong statement, no need for FIRs and court cases but either ignore or give a counter rebuttal statement? The Courts and Police have better things to do! This is no time for hate speeches and fanatics to be tolerated. The party in power has an enormous responsibility to prove to the world that we practice what we preach!

John Eric Gomes, Porvorim

Need to reinstate free water supply scheme

It is shocking to note that the government has reportedly discontinued the state's free water supply scheme. The free-water scheme previously

provided 16,000 litres of free water per household per month. It was a lifeline for thousands of low-income families across Goa who are already reeling under the hike in power tariff. Around 40-50% or nearly 3.5 lakh consumers in the state will reportedly be affected with the discontinuation of the scheme, which was introduced in September 2021.

An exemption from payment of water charges, and meter rent, a benefit that came with the scheme, has also reportedly been dropped for individual domestic consumers. The move comes at a time when the scorching summer heat has left most parts of the state without potable water. Unlike the rich, those belonging to lower income do not use water supplied by PWD either to wash their cars or to water the plants in their gardens and the sprawling lawns. At the most the government could have reduced the quantity of

water that is supplied free of cost from 16,000 liters, to say 10,000 liters instead of discontinuing the scheme altogether. The government of the day needs to introduce schemes to help those belonging to the low-income group instead of scrapping those schemes which are already in existence. People in the low-income group are finding it difficult to make both ends meet because of the rising price of essential commodities. They were happy with the free water supply scheme. It seems prudent for the government to have a rethink on the issue and reinstate the free water supply scheme.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Suicide prevention programmes needed

Recent death of a student in BITS Pilani, highlights the need for suicide prevention programmes in educational institutions. In

some States in India, has found that suicidal ideation and suicide attempts are alarmingly high among college students across the country. The fear of failure also makes the mind lose self-confidence and leads to psychological imbalances and suicides amongst the susceptible youth.

Student suicides can be averted, but merely setting up training and sensitisation sessions for teachers, increasing the role of counselling services and setting up expert committees to review suicide cases in schools won't do the trick. Mental health issues such as anxiety and depression need to be addressed without stigma in schools and colleges, and parents should be encouraged to inculcate and foster feelings of sensitivity toward their children.

Educational institutions should start creating activities that act as counselling sessions - morning assembly, teaching classes etc. Systemic counselling is required to lower this student suicide rate. A mass movement is the correct approach to see radical change.

K G Vilop, Chorao