

## INDIAN STANDS AS ONE

On the first anniversary of the Pahalgam terrorist attack, India stood as one by not allowing Pakistan to succeed in breaking its unity at the human level. A memorial erected in Pahalgam in memory of 25 tourists and a local pony-wallah, who lost their lives to terrorists' guns, at Baisaran on April 22, is a slap on the face of Pakistan which is behind the attack. Its then army chief Asim Munir in his infamous speech to non-resident Pakistanis explained that Hindus and Muslims are different and so are their ambitions and aspirations. He was speaking the language of the Muslim League, a fundamentalist party behind India's partition. A few days later terrorists trained, armed by sent by Pakistan, descended on Baisaran and killed Hindu tourists after ascertaining their religion and local service provider – a Muslim – who challenged the terrorist as he was shooting. Syed Adil Hussain's courage to speak up is exemplary and a tight slap on the face of Pakistan that though it could divide Indians on religion because of the brazen killing for religion. Not only that governments and individuals from all over India paid tributes to the local heroes who saved lives. The government of Maharashtra built a house for the family of Adil Shah. Interestingly, it was the deputy chief minister from Shiv Sena – a supposedly pro-Hindu party – which built the house for the family. Nazakat Ali is another local hero who saved the lives of tourists from Chhattisgarh. The people of that state have honoured him and there was a civic reception for him when reached there later. Pakistan has no idea of the resilience and unity of Indians at human level. We have seen an occasion tension here and there, more so because of the social media, but in the times of crises we are one.

## Trump vs Pope Leo XIV: A clash of power and faith

Kalyani Shankar

The conflict between President Donald Trump and Pope Leo XIV is unprecedented. While popes have commented on politics before, Trump's personal insults towards the Pope are unusual. Although reports suggest his tone has softened, his discomfort is still clear.

In 250 years of US history, no president has personally attacked a pope. Such public disagreements create only confusion.

Trump publicly condemned Pope Leo XIV after the Pope criticised the actions of the US and Israel regarding Iran. This marked a significant confrontation.

The conflict between President Trump and Pope Leo XIV is unprecedented in modern history, highlighting a rare clash that blends political power with religious symbolism, which can deeply influence public opinion and faith communities.

Trump said, "I have a right to disagree with the Pope." He claimed, "The Pope made a statement saying 'Iran can have a nuclear weapon.' I say 'Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon,'" although a reporter noted that Pope Leo has not made such remarks publicly.

Pope Leo expressed that he had "no fear of the Trump administration" and would continue to speak out about God's message.

Catholics, as the largest swing voting group, are affected by this dispute, which could influence their voting decisions and shape future election outcomes. Tensions peaked during Holy Week, further shaping public opinion and underscoring their stake in the conflict.

Trump also criticised the conclave, arguing that Leo was "selected" by the Church to "match Trump's presence." Shortly after, Trump shared an AI-generated image of himself as Christ healing the sick, but later deleted it, saying it was to show him "as a doctor."



Trump publicly opposed the ongoing US-led war against Iran. It is unclear why Trump claims that Leo supports nuclear weapons in Iran.

Pope John Paul II called for solutions to conflicts in the Middle East and Lebanon in 1979 while addressing the United Nations on human rights. In 2013, Pope Francis led a peace vigil for Syria and wrote to President Putin to oppose military actions. After a chemical attack in 2017 that killed about 70 people, he expressed his outrage and urged leaders to stop the violence, stating that he does not hear the prayers of those who wage war.

Pope Leo criticised leaders who waste billions on war, stating that the world is "being ravaged by a handful of tyrants." These strong remarks were made during his visit to Cameroon, where he condemned those who misuse "the very name of God" for their own gain.

Pope Leo has been a strong critic of warfare in general, particularly condemning the combat operations

publicly opposed the ongoing US-led war against Iran. It is unclear why Trump claims that Leo supports nuclear weapons in Iran.

Pope John Paul II called for solutions to conflicts in the Middle East and Lebanon in 1979 while addressing the United Nations on human rights. In 2013, Pope Francis led a peace vigil for Syria and wrote to President Putin to oppose military actions. After a chemical attack in 2017 that killed about 70 people, he expressed his outrage and urged leaders to stop the violence, stating that he does not hear the prayers of those who wage war.

Pope Leo criticised leaders who waste billions on war, stating that the world is "being ravaged by a handful of tyrants." These strong remarks were made during his visit to Cameroon, where he condemned those who misuse "the very name of God" for their own gain.

Pope Leo has been a strong critic of warfare in general, particularly condemning the combat operations

launched by the US and Israel during their surprise attack against Iran on February 28. He also labelled Trump's threat to destroy Iran's "whole civilisation" as "truly unacceptable."

This time, the discomfort is stronger. For devoted voters and religious community members, the matter is not just political; it also involves religious symbolism, which holds great importance. "I do not fear Trump," said Pope Leo after the President called him "weak," emphasising the resilience of faith amid political disputes.

On April 12, the President criticised Leo, saying he is "weak on crime" and "weak on nuclear weapons." He also suggested that the Pope thinks it is acceptable for Iran to have a nuclear weapon.

On April 16, Trump spoke with the press about his disagreement with the Pope. He stated that he needs to do what is right. What does he have against the Pope? "It's very simple. I have nothing against the Pope," Trump claimed. "The Pope made a statement. He says, 'Iran can have a nuclear weapon.' I say, 'Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon.'"

Leo told reporters on April 13, at the start of his Africa trip, "I will speak out against war and promote peace, dialogue, and multilateral solutions to conflicts."

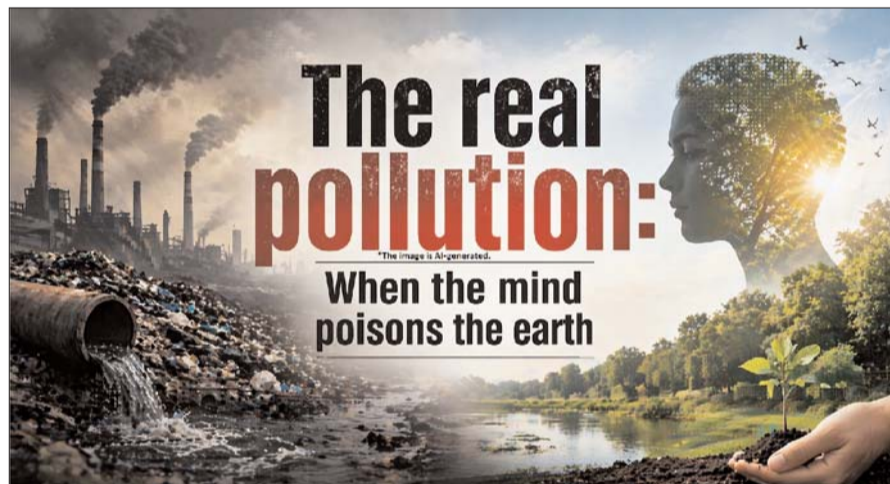
The Washington Post reports that the war in Iran is unpopular among Americans. This week, Democrats attempted to limit the President's engagement, passing war powers resolutions in the House and Senate along mostly partisan lines, while Republicans opposed these efforts. Pope Leo XIV seeks to ease tensions with President Trump, stating on X that a "disciple of Christ is never on the side of those who once wielded the sword and today drop bombs."

The writer is popular columnist; Views presented are personal.

## THE REAL POLLUTION: WHEN THE MIND POISONS THE EARTH

Rayogi Brahma Kumar Nikunj Ji

Today, globally, every country is facing the consequences of pollution, contamination, or abuse of air, water, food, and even space on a very large scale, yet they are unable to find a foolproof solution to this dangerous threat to humanity. Environmental pollution, having been the focus of public attention during the last couple of years, is now increasingly being recognised as the result of humanity's wanton and often cruel treatment of planet Earth, leading to the ravaging and ruin of the atmosphere. The denudation of forests, the poisoning of lakes and rivers with pesticides and industrial waste, the pollution of the atmosphere with smoke from automobiles and factory chimneys, and the overuse of chlorofluorocarbons—resulting in ozone depletion—have brought the world to the brink of environmental disaster. Environmental scientists now warn that the accumulation of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere will not only lead to the greenhouse effect but also increase the planet's average temperature by 3°F to 9°F. This, in turn, could cause sea levels to rise by several feet, flooding coastal areas, destroying vast tracts of farmland, and triggering further calamities. It is therefore be-



ing suggested that industries must re-examine their production processes so that industrial waste and emissions are reduced, waste products are recycled, and mass transport systems are encouraged in place of private automobiles.

If we look up the dictionary meaning of the word "pollution", we may find something like "to destroy the purity of; to contaminate". However, we as humans are largely aware only of material pollution—the branches of the polluted tree—while disregarding the root cause: thought pollution. Without addressing this root, the source can

never truly be purified. It would not be an exaggeration to say that environmental pollution is, in essence, a reflection of the pollution of the human mind, which is often filled with selfishness, jealousy, greed, and anger. The problem of ecological imbalance stems from mental imbalance, and the disequilibrium in nature mirrors the disequilibrium within human consciousness.

Secondly, the problem of pollution is closely linked to rapid population growth. To meet the demands of an expanding population, there is an increasing need for electricity, fuel, energy, automobiles, wood, wa-

ter, paper, and industrial output—all of which exert significant pressure on the environment. Additionally, modern lifestyles have intensified the demand for energy and consumer goods. As a result, forests are cleared, farmlands are replaced by expanding urban spaces, and industrial waste and emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub>, and other pollutants continue to rise. Without addressing population growth and transforming lifestyles and attitudes, the problem of environmental pollution cannot be effectively resolved. In this context, spiritual thought plays a crucial role. The solution lies not only in technology or policy but also in self-realisation and understanding our relationship with others and nature. Without moral and spiritual values, no problem can be resolved sustainably.

It is therefore essential to recognise our true nature beyond the physical self. Without this shift, scientific progress without spirituality could lead to serious global crises. Thus, we must combine scientific advancement with spiritual wisdom to cleanse thought pollution and live in harmony with nature.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and a popular columnist; Views presented are personal.

## The Iran model of warfighting: Should India adopt It?

Gaurav M Tripathi

US Vice President JD Vance has left Pakistan with his team after the failure of talks with the Iranian delegation led by Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi and Speaker Mohammed Bagher Ghalibaf. Negotiations are continuing through Pakistan, even as operations remain suspended, and the world hopes for the early and assured restoration of maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz.

However, analyses of the extended military operations have started appearing in the media. Ordinarily, third-party conflicts are best suited to study by military professionals, as they can be undertaken dispassionately. Further, Iran's success in holding off the mighty US-Israel combine is certainly worthy of attention.

Unfortunately, most analyses have been somewhat simplistic and have tended to link desired outcomes in the Indian scenario with recommendations cherry-picked from the Iranian experience, but without context. This has led to a flawed narrative gaining ground—that drones and

missiles can replace expensive fighters, and that if Iran can take on a superpower, then that is the path India must follow.

This narrative is based on certain notions whose correctness is questionable. These are, firstly, that a drone/missile-based approach is more cost-effective than one based on fighters; secondly, that drones and missiles will be effective in creating the required effects at the military/operational level; and lastly, that they can generate the strategic impact needed to achieve the desired political outcome.

However, direct transplantation to the Indian scenario may not work. It begins with the difference in the notion of victory. For Iran, faced with a vastly superior grouping of adversaries, matching them was never an option. It therefore adopted an ultra-defensive strategy of resilience based on force protection and counter-attacks using drones and missiles.

It invested heavily in subterranean storage, reportedly going as deep as 500 m. This was key to its success, as it ensured survival and enabled

retaliation. This infrastructure did not come cheap. Estimates for tunnels at 50 m depth in Tehran range from \$150-188 million for a 5 km stretch. Deeper tunnels in remote mountains would cost more. Most estimates suggest 30 or more such 'cities', while some even mention 'hundreds'. Were India to adopt a similar posture, the investment required would be at least two to three times higher. The notion of drones and missiles offering a cost advantage therefore, falls flat. Secondly, US forces in the Gulf region are based at a limited number of locations and within specified areas of shared bases, as per relevant inter-governmental agreements. These factors severely constrained the US ability to disperse assets or move them frequently, and offered Iran a set of fixed, discrete, well-defined targets. Launching missiles and drones in large numbers against such targets provides a reasonable chance of success. However, Pakistan would be able to disperse rapidly across its territory. China presents an even greater challenge and already possesses extensive sub-

terranean protective infrastructure, along with a dense air defence ecosystem. Creating the same operational impact with drones and missiles would therefore be far more difficult for India than it was for Iran.

Thirdly, Iran operated under a unique set of conditions: a superpower adversary with a maximalist notion of victory (regime change); a hardline, faith-based polity for which direct conflict with the US and Israel was seen as an opportunity rather than a threat; a dominant position with respect to a major choke point; and numerous significant economic and strategic targets within range. It adopted a counter-value targeting approach, including against neutral third-party maritime traffic, effectively closing the Strait of Hormuz and delivering a major economic shock globally. Amplified by social media—and contrasted with perceived US overconfidence and questionable legality—this created a strategic impact disproportionate to the actual military effects. It is difficult to identify any parallel between such a setting and the Indian context. Kamikaze drones and missiles

also cannot perform reconnaissance (ISR), visual interception, signalling, air policing, or be switched 'wave to wave' between domains (land to sea), or between roles within the same sortie, with extended range through refuelling. The economics also favour reusable platforms (such as fighters or UAVs) over single-use systems like kamikaze drones or missiles. There is a reason why reusable launch systems, such as those pioneered by SpaceX, are widely pursued. Furthermore, Iran's approach effectively ceded control of its sovereign airspace to the US and Israel, allowing their air forces to conduct largely unrestricted operations. If India were to adopt a similar approach, it could result in the decimation of its land and sea offensive capabilities, severely undermining deterrence. In sum, the cost argument does not hold, as a successful ultra-defensive posture requires substantial investment in protective infrastructure. The operational effects achieved by Iran cannot be reliably replicated in the Indian context. Finally, the strategic impact of those effects cannot be achieved by India

due to fundamentally different targeting philosophies, domestic political considerations, and relative power equations with its adversaries.

That said, drones and missiles do have a significant role to play. They enable scale, expand the threat spectrum, and can overwhelm adversaries. They can shape the battlefield and support more precise and heavier ordnance delivery by reusable platforms, whether manned or unmanned. The Indian Air Force anticipated this and supported several start-ups in developing indigenous swarm capabilities under its Mehar Baba initiative (2019-2021). It also has multiple ongoing programmes for both kamikaze drones and missiles. The optimal approach lies in a nuanced mix of capabilities, rather than simplistic doctrines that could commit the country to an ultra-defensive strategy with little prospect of victory and a limited ability to avoid defeat.

The writer, Air Commodore Gaurav M Tripathi, VSM retired from the Indian Air Force in 2025; Views presented are personal.