

**ELECTRICITY REACHES EVERY CORNER OF THE COUNTRY FOR THE FIRST TIME**

- 18000 villages electrified for the first time since independence
- 2.5 crore families languishing in darkness, get electricity



**NAMUMKIN AB MUMKIN HAI**



**FIRST SIGNS OF BORDER DE-ESCALATION | US AND SAUDI STEP IN TO DEFUSE CRISIS**

# Release & Relief

**Pakistan climbs down, says will return IAF pilot today**



Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman

**New Delhi underlines: No deal, act on terror**

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 28

IN FIRST signs of de-escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan a day after both countries downed a fighter each, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan Thursday announced that captured IAF pilot Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman would be released Friday as a gesture of peace and the "first step to open negotiations with New Delhi."

The Pakistani announcement came after it sought an assurance — the US led global efforts to try and defuse the crisis — that India would not retaliate for targeting of its military installations by the Pakistan Air Force and downing of Varthaman's MiG-21 Bison.

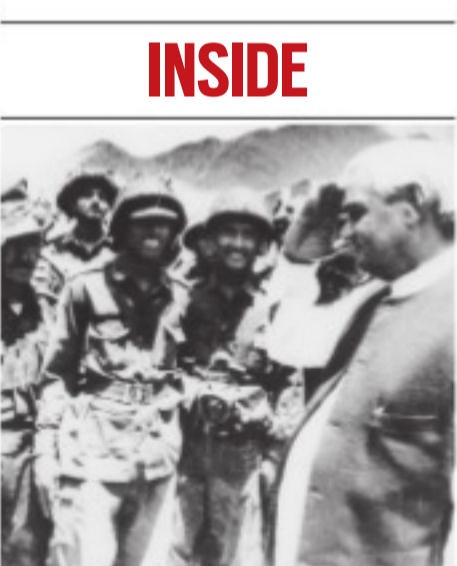
After Khan told a joint session of Pakistan parliament that the Indian pilot would be repatriated Friday, the Indian armed forces, at a joint press briefing in New Delhi, assured the country of "a resolute, swift and strong response when needed."

Major General Surendra Singh Mahal, addressing the press along with Air Vice Marshal R G K Kapoor and Rear Admiral Dalbir Singh Gujral, said: "Despite the present turn

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Parts of an AMRAAM missile from the downed Pakistani F-16 were displayed at a joint press conference by the Armed Forces in New Delhi on Thursday. Tashi Tobgyal



**GLOBAL DIPLOMACY IN INDIA-PAK EXPLAINED | PAGE 16**

**OIC: AN OPENING IN QATAR BY CRAJA MOHAN**

**IMRAN: TRIED TO CALL UP MODI TO SAY WE DON'T WANT ESCALATION PAGES 9, 14**

## India's Exhibit A: Debris of AMRAAM missile that nails Pakistan's F-16 denial

**SUSHANT SINGH**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 28

A DAY after Pakistan claimed it never used American F-16s in its attempted air strike on military installations in the Rajouri sector, India Thursday presented parts of a fired AMRAAM missile which can only be fired from an F-16 aircraft.

"There is enough evidence to show that F-16s were used in this mission and Pakistan is trying to hide this fact. Also, parts of AMRAAM air-to-air missile, which is carried only on the F-16s in PAF, were recovered east of Rajouri within Indian territory," Air Vice Marshal R G K Kapoor said at a joint briefing by the armed forces where parts showing the cover and serial number

**BUSINESS AS USUAL**

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markings were displayed. On Thursday, *The Indian Express* reported that Pakistan Air Force (PAF) used four F-16s in its fleet that violated Indian airspace and attempted to hit

## PM's science quip: Pilot project over, real one left



Modi on Thursday. Amit Mehra

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 28

IN REMARKS interpreted as a reference to the IAF raid on a terror camp inside Pakistan and the return Friday of captured Indian pilot Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Thursday said a "pilot project" just got over and the "real one" was still to be done because it was "practice" earlier.

Speaking at the award ceremony for the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize for Science and Technology in New Delhi — he made these remarks shortly after Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan told his country's parliament that the Indian pilot would be released Friday — Modi told the gathering of scientists: "You spend your life in laboratories. There is a tradition of conducting a pilot project first. And after the pilot project, it is made scalable. A pilot project has just been done. Now the real one has to be done, it was practice earlier."

These remarks of the Prime Minister were also tweeted by the BJP.

## Slowdown in farm and manufacturing pushes GDP growth to 6.6%, 6-quarter low

**AANCHAL MAGAZINE**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 28

INDIA'S ECONOMY grew at the slowest pace in six quarters at 6.6 per cent in October-December, the third quarter of this financial year, dragged down by the base effect and a combination of weak manufacturing and farm growth, data released by Central Statistics Office (CSO) showed Thursday.

The overall GDP growth estimate for 2018-19 was also revised downwards to a five-year low of 7.0 per cent as per the second advance estimates released by government, against a 7.2 per cent growth estimated in first advance estimates for the full year released on January 7.

The quarterly numbers released Thursday is the last estimate to be published before the upcoming general elections later this year. The 7 per cent GDP estimate for the full year is sharply lower than the Reserve Bank of India's projection of 7.4 per cent for this fiscal.

The downward movement in

annual GDP comes on the back of a sharp upward revision in the growth numbers for the last fiscal — 2017-18 — to 7.2 per cent from the 6.7 per cent estimated earlier. GDP growth was recorded at 7.7 per cent in October-December quarter of the previous financial year.

The GDP estimates for previous quarters were revised downwards in the fresh data. As per the second advance estimates, GDP growth rate for April-June was estimated at 8.0 per cent and for July-September at 7.0 per cent, down from 8.2 per cent and 7.1 per cent respectively, as per the first advance estimates, the CSO said.

According to the new methodology followed by CSO, the GDP is calculated by adding product taxes to the Gross Value Added (GVA) at basic prices, and removing subsidies. Growth in terms of GVA at basic prices has been estimated at 6.3 per cent for October-December quarter as against 7.3 per cent during the corresponding quarter in

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## Jamaat-e-Islami (J&K), is banned, Govt says it is in close touch with militants

**BASHARAT MASOOD & RAHUL TRIPATHI**  
SRINAGAR, NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 28

SIX DAYS after the government launched a crackdown to detain its leaders and activists across the Valley, the Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel) Jammu and Kashmir was declared an "unlawful organisation" on Thursday.

Banning the organisation for five years under Section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said the Jel is "involved in anti-national and subversive" activities "intending

to cause disaffection".

In a notification issued after a high-level meeting on security chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the MHA said the Jel "has been indulging in activities which are prejudicial to internal security and public order, and have the potential of disrupting the unity and integrity of the country."

"Jel is in close touch with militant outfits and is supporting extremism and militancy in J&K and elsewhere. Jel is supporting claims for secession of a part of the Indian territory from the Union and supporting terrorist and separatist groups fighting to

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**WORLD**



**AS KIM PLAYS HARDBALL, TRUMP WALKS AWAY**  
**NETANYAHU TO BE INDICTED FOR GRAFT**  
PAGE 20

**BEHIND-THE-SCENE DIPLOMACY THAT SET DE-ESCALATION ROLLING**

## Pak worked phones, rang alarm bells — but how it was nudged to yield in India's favour

**SHUBHAJIT ROY**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 28

THE RELEASE of Indian Air Force pilot Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, which was a key question on South Block's table, is a crucial marker. It has set the ball rolling for de-escalation between the two nuclear-armed countries in an otherwise unknown and uncertain

escalation ladder. But behind this, there was a fair bit of diplomacy.

When Islamabad dialled interlocutors from major countries across the world, including the P-5 on Wednesday, it told them that India was planning three offensive actions — moving Naval ships towards Karachi; planning to launch ballistic missiles and

amassing troops along the India-Pak border.

Rattled, the foreign governments reached out to New Delhi. The Indian side is learnt to have told them this was "fictitious and manufactured". In fact, they said that Indian Naval ships were moving in the direction away from Karachi. Delhi told them that since these

countries have the capability to "detect" these movements with their eyes in the sky, they could, on their own, verify these Pak claims.

India made it clear that while it was not looking at escalation and had conducted a "non-military counter-terror pre-emptive" strike deep inside Pakistan, it was Pakistan which had tried to hit Indian military installations.

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**PAGE 1 ANCHOR**

## Rumours to jet streams in the air, Srinagar's nights without end

**NAVEEDIQBAL**  
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 28

IN THE days since the Pulwama attack, there has been a sense of walls closing in, leaving room only for fear and anxiety in the Kashmir Valley. And over the last three days, the eerie silence of the night has been punctuated by the sound of jets tearing through the sky.

Internet services are operating at reduced speeds; schools and colleges are shut, with the

long winter break extended at least twice; leave to medical staff has been cancelled; and, food-grains have been sold urgently. Traffic on the streets and highways is thin due to the severe fuel shortage, shutdown calls and an uneasy calm. And the rumours continue to keep the tension simmering.

On Wednesday, the Jammu-Srinagar highway was shut due to landslides. For nearly five hours, the Valley remained cut off as the airspace over northern India was closed following the

intrusion of Pakistani aircraft into Indian airspace and an Mi-17 helicopter crashing in Budgam.

Late in the night, with the announcement of oil tankers reaching Srinagar, fuel stations were crowded with commuters trying to get their tanks filled. The chorus: "What's next for us?"

Apart from social media, groups of individuals sitting outside storefronts reference World War movies when speaking of airstrikes while those huddled together in homes near the bor-



Security personnel at the Dal Lake on Thursday. Shuaib Masoodi

der remind each other to remain vigilant. "There is only one casualty in this tussle between the two countries — Kashmir. And we are the only people who cannot do anything about it," said Iram Bashir, a young mother and an engineer, in Srinagar.

Closer to the border, talk of shelling, bunkers and displacement has returned to conversations with children spotting contrails in the sky by day and adults maintaining vigil by night.

Since tensions escalated between India and Pakistan,

residents of border villages have remained on edge with the narrative shifting between attack and retaliation. "Hectic exchange of messages between relatives, moving and stocking essentials and making arrangements just in case one needs to move, this has been the last few days. Basically, following every snippet of information and hoping against hope," said Irfan Rashid, a school teacher in Uri.

In a surreal twist, there is also a sense of relief, since all the speculation over the Centre

"doing away with Article 35A" has died down since India announced the airstrike on a Jaish-e-Mohammad facility in Pakistan's Balakot.

In the days leading up to the strike, authorities were bracing for another spate of unrest in the Valley. The rumours had gathered pace after the state government initially did not provide an explanation for the movement of 100 companies of Central Armed Police Forces. There was also speculation over

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