

1. Story of the infamous Alcatraz prison, which Trump wants to reopen now**Why in News?**

US President Donald Trump said that he had directed the government to reopen and expand Alcatraz, the notorious former prison on an island off San Francisco, closed more than 60 years ago.

Also called "The Rock" and "Devil's Island", the facility housed some of the most infamous criminals in the United States. It has captured the public imagination for decades and featured in several books and movies, such as *The Rock* starring Sean Connery and *Nicolas Cage*. Here is a look at the history of Alcatraz and why

it was shut down.

From fort to prison

The prison was originally a defence fort on Alcatraz Island, about 22 acres in size and located about 2 kilometres offshore from the city of San Francisco.

In 1846, the US gained control of the island after John C Frémont, then military governor of California, bought it from naturalised Mexican citizen Francis Temple in the name of the federal government.



Four years later, then US President Millard Fillmore recognised the island's strategic military value. A fort was thus constructed on the island, with the initial structure completed in 1858. Around 100 cannons and military men were stationed. The West Coast's first operational lighthouse was also built on Alcatraz in 1854.

However, over time, the island's necessity for defence purposes diminished (Alcatraz never fired its guns in combat). As it was isolated from the mainland due to the strong ocean currents and cold Pacific waters, the island began to be seen as a secure detention centre. By the late 1850s, the Alcatraz Fort was being used as a military prison to house various military personnel, including those convicted of offences by court-martial, deserters, and those deemed a security risk.

Morphing into Devil's Island

Alcatraz stopped operating as a military prison in 1933 due to the increasing maintenance costs. After the prison shut down, the military left the island, and it was acquired by the US Department of Justice, which turned it into a federal prison.

Closure and later years

Much like the US military, the Federal Bureau of Prisons found it extremely expensive to run the Alcatraz prison. A 1959 report found that its operation costs were three times those of a comparable prison.

Another issue was that the perpetual salt exposure due to the surrounding waters corroded its structures. An estimate suggested that it would cost \$5 million to repair the damage. These factors eventually led to the prison's closure on March 21, 1963.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: Indian Express

2. Arabian Gulf or Persian Gulf

Why Now?

United States President Donald Trump plans to announce that the US would refer to the Persian Gulf as "Arabian Gulf" or the "Gulf of Arabia" going forward.



What's with Trump and Names?

Trump does have an affinity for changing the names of places: on Day 1 of his second term in the White House, he renamed the Gulf of Mexico "Gulf of America", the Alaskan peak Denali "Mount McKinley, and Fort Liberty, the sprawling US Army base in North Carolina, "Fort Bragg" after the Confederate general Braxton Bragg.

Impact of Recommendation

Trump likely wants to signal to Saudi Arabia his agreement with the Kingdom's preferred nomenclature of the body of water that lies between Iran to the east and Saudi, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates to the west, as the "Arabian Gulf".

This body of water – connected to the Arabian Sea through the Gulf of Oman – has been called "Persian Gulf" or Gulf of Persia since at least the 16th century, after Persia, the older name of Iran.

However, many countries, especially the Arab countries, refer to it as the Gulf of Arabia or Arabian Gulf.

The US military has for years referred to the "Arabian Gulf" in its statements and images. Google Maps in the US refers to "Persian Gulf (Arabian Gulf)", while Apple Maps only says Persian Gulf.

Opposition by Iran

This is an emotive issue for Iran. The name harkens to the civilisational glory of Persia and remains a source of Iranian national pride and inspiration.

Back in 2012, the government of Iran had threatened to sue Google because it had decided not to label the gulf at all in its maps. Then, in 2017, when Trump became President for the first time and used the name Arabian Gulf, Iran's then President Hassan Rouhani suggested that he should "study geography".

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

3. Operation Sindoor signals: Three takeaways from India's action against Pak terror

Operation Sindoor 2025 Analysis



The Indian Armed Forces carried out Operation Sindoor in the early hours of May 7, "to deliver justice to the victims of the Pahalgam terror attack and their families".

Nine terrorist camps in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Pakistan were targeted and successfully destroyed, the government said in a press briefing.

What signals did the Indian military action send? Here are three broad takeaways from Operation Sindoor.

First, India's response was not just about the terrorist attack in Pahalgam last month.

By framing Sindoor as a reply to the string of attacks since 2001, India has changed the causal chain that links Pakistan with terrorism in this country.

Rather than focus solely on Pahalgam, press briefing framed Sindoor as a response to all significant acts of terrorism sponsored by Pakistan since the attack on Parliament two dozen years ago.

These attacks have been perpetrated and claimed by Pakistan-based and Pakistan-sponsored terrorist groups such as the Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, which have long been designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations Security Council.

As an example of Pakistan's failure to act legally against these terrorist outfits, India invoked the example of Sajid Mir, the Lashkar terrorist involved in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks whom Pakistan first declared dead, and later showed as having been arrested in 2022 as part of actions taken to comply with requirements imposed by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

These same FATF-based compulsions guided the LeT and JeM to switch from directly claiming responsibility for terror attacks in India, to raising proxies such as The Resistance Front or People's Anti-Fascist Force etc, and to ostensibly present their actions as part of a non-religious/ non-Pakistan sponsored "Kashmiri resistance".

Hence, having characterised Pahalgam as the latest and most heinous in a long line of attacks by these terrorist groups, Sindoor targeted the temporary and permanent infrastructure of both the JeM and LeT (and Hizbul Mujahideen) across Pakistan.

Second, India is, for now, focused on the terrorist infrastructure across the Line of Control/ International Border without deliberately targeting the Pakistani military.

India's public messaging to justify its strikes deep into Pakistani territory shows a continuation of the reasoning that it adopted in 2016 and 2019 – that it will act militarily against terrorist infrastructure across the LoC and IB (sub-conventional targets), but without deliberately hitting conventional military targets.

The implication: India continues to make a distinction between terrorist infrastructure and Pakistan military targets in order to preserve some element of escalation control. That said, however, the scale of India's response has changed dramatically.

In 2016, the Indian surgical strikes hit terror camps across the LoC in PoK. In 2019, India struck camps in undisputed Pakistan across the LoC (Jabba Top, Balakot).

And in Op Sindoor, it struck targets deep inside Pakistan, including those across the International Border, along with targets across the LoC.

Third, while striking Pakistan, India has signalled that it does not seek full-scale war. But what happens now remains up in the air.

India has described Sindoor as "focused, measured and non-escalatory in nature", signalling to Pakistan and the international community that it does not seek full-scale conventional war.

However, the strikes have decisively punctured Pakistan's deterrence against India, and the credibility of the threats that it delivered to India between April 23 and May 6.

Any action by Pakistan now will be loaded with further escalatory potential, and would open the door for India to target Pakistan Army infrastructure, should it cross India's threshold of tolerance.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

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