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Anti-Terrorism Day 2026: 35 Years On — India's Counter-Terror Architecture

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Anti-Terrorism Day 2026: 35 Years On — India's Counter-Terror Architecture

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WHY IN NEWS:

On **May 21, 2026**, India observed **Anti-Terrorism Day** to mark the **35th death anniversary** of former Prime Minister **Rajiv Gandhi**, who was assassinated on **May 21, 1991** at **Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu**, by an **LTTE suicide bomber Thenmozhi Rajaratnam (codename "Dhanu")**. The day is observed nationwide with the **anti-terrorism pledge** administered in ministries, state secretariats, schools, and PSUs, reaffirming India's commitment to combating violence and intolerance in all forms.

RAJIV GANDHI: PROFILE OF THE 6TH PRIME MINISTER

Rajiv Gandhi (b. **August 20, 1944**, Bombay; d. **May 21, 1991**, Sriperumbudur) was the **youngest Indian Prime Minister**, assuming office at **40 years of age** on **October 31, 1984**, hours after the assassination of his mother, Indira Gandhi. He served until **December 2, 1989** and was posthumously awarded the **Bharat Ratna in 1991**.

Key Legislative & Policy Contributions

INITIATIVE	YEAR	SIGNIFICANCE
61st Constitutional Amendment	1989	Reduced voting age from 21 to 18 years under Article 326
Panchayati Raj & Nagarpalika Bills (64th & 65th CAB)	1989	Foundation for 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendments (passed 1992 under PV Narasimha Rao)
C-DOT (Centre for Development of Telematics)	1984	Telecom revolution piloted by Sam Pitroda ; STD/PCO boom
National Education Policy	1986	Operation Blackboard, Navodaya Vidyalayas
MTNL	1986	Urban telecom for Delhi & Mumbai
IPKF deployment in Sri Lanka	1987–1990	Indo-Sri Lanka Accord (Jul 29, 1987) signed with President J.R. Jayewardene
Anti-Defection Law (52nd CAA)	1985	Tenth Schedule inserted into the Constitution

His tenure is often credited with seeding India's **information technology** and **telecommunications** modernisation.

THE ASSASSINATION: SRIPERUMBUDUR, MAY 21, 1991

Rajiv Gandhi was killed during a Congress election campaign rally for the 10th Lok Sabha at **Sriperumbudur, Kanchipuram district, Tamil Nadu**. The bomber, **Thenmozhi Rajaratnam (Dhanu)**, detonated an **RDX-laden belt** while bending to garland him at approximately **10:21 PM**. Sixteen others, including the bomber and a photographer (Haribabu), were killed.

Motive: IPKF and LTTE Hostility

The **Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)** — founded in **1976** by **Velupillai Prabhakaran** — had turned against Rajiv Gandhi over the **Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)** operations against Tamil Tigers in northern Sri Lanka (1987–90). The LTTE saw a possible second IPKF deployment if Congress returned to power.

Investigation & Commissions

- **Special Investigation Team (SIT)** of CBI under **D.R. Karthikeyan** cracked the conspiracy; mastermind **Sivarasan** (“One-Eyed Jack”) and accomplices died by cyanide before capture.
- **Jain Commission of Inquiry** (Justice M.C. Jain) — set up 1991, report submitted **1997–98**; examined the larger conspiracy and security lapses.
- **Verma Commission** examined security failures.
- **TADA Court** convicted 26 accused (1998); SC commuted death sentences of three in 2014 (*V. Sriharan v. Union of India*); all seven convicts released in **November 2022** after SC invoked Article 142.
- **LTTE was banned in India under UAPA on May 14, 1992** and the ban has been periodically renewed (most recently in 2024 for five years).

EVOLUTION OF INDIA'S COUNTER-TERROR LEGAL ARCHITECTURE

India's anti-terror jurisprudence has oscillated between robust executive powers and constitutional safeguards on civil liberties.

LAW	YEAR	STATUS	KEY FEATURES
NSA (National Security Act)	1980	In force	Preventive detention up to 12 months
TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act)	1985–87	Lapsed 1995	Confessions to police admissible; misuse against minorities & dissenters; ~76,000 arrests, conviction rate <2%
UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act)	1967	In force; amended 2004, 2008, 2012, 2019	2004: incorporated anti-terror provisions post-POTA repeal; 2019: empowered Centre to designate individuals (not just organisations) as terrorists
POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act)	2002	Repealed 2004	Post-Parliament attack (Dec 13, 2001); criticised for misuse, especially in Gujarat
NIA Act	2008	In force	Created National Investigation Agency post- 26/11 Mumbai attacks (Nov 26–29, 2008)
NIA (Amendment) Act	2019	In force	Extra-territorial jurisdiction; cyber-terrorism & human trafficking added

UAPA — The Central Statute Today

- **Section 15** defines a “terrorist act”.
- **Section 35** allows designation of individuals/organisations as terrorists (added 2019).
- **Section 43D(5)** bars bail if the court, on prima facie reading of the case diary, believes the accusation is true — a high threshold widely contested.

Judicial Interpretation of UAPA Bail

- **NIA v. Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali (2019)** — SC held that courts cannot weigh evidence at the bail stage; case diary’s prima facie reading suffices. This made UAPA bail extraordinarily difficult.
- **Union of India v. K.A. Najeeb (2021)** — SC carved out a constitutional exception: prolonged incarceration without trial violates Article 21, permitting bail despite Section 43D(5).
- **Vernon Gonsalves & Arun Ferreira v. State of Maharashtra (2023)** — SC granted bail in the **Bhima Koregaon case**, requiring genuine application of mind to evidence, not mere reproduction of charges.
- **Sudha Bharadwaj** — Bombay HC granted default bail (Dec 2021) for procedural lapses by the Special Court in extending custody.
- **Athar Parwez & Jalaluddin Khan v. UoI (2024)** — SC reiterated “bail is the rule, jail is the exception” even under UAPA.

INSTITUTIONAL COUNTER-TERROR FRAMEWORK

BODY	YEAR	FUNCTION
Intelligence Bureau (IB)	1887 (oldest)	Internal intelligence under MHA
NSG (National Security Guard)	1984	Post- Operation Blue Star ; “Black Cats”; counter-hijack & hostage rescue
Special Protection Group (SPG)	1988	PM & former PMs protection (post-Indira Gandhi assassination)
Multi-Agency Centre (MAC)	2001 (revamped post-Kargil)	Under IB; intelligence sharing across 28+ agencies
NIA (National Investigation Agency)	2008	Federal anti-terror investigation; HQ New Delhi
NATGRID (National Intelligence Grid)	2009 (op. 2020)	Real-time database integration
NCTC (National Counter Terrorism Centre)	Proposed 2012	Stalled due to states’ federalism objections (esp. Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Odisha)
CRPF & COBRA	1939 / 2008	Anti-Naxal & internal security; COBRA = jungle warfare
NTRO (National Technical Research Organisation)	2004	Technical intelligence; reports to NSA

OPERATION SINDOOR & INDIA’S NEW DOCTRINE

Following the **Pahalgam terror attack (April 22, 2025)** that killed 26 civilians, India launched **Operation Sindoor on May 7, 2025** — precision missile and drone strikes on nine terror-launchpads in Pakistan and PoK including **Bahawalpur (JeM HQ)** and **Muridke (LeT HQ)**. The four-day kinetic exchange (May 7–10, 2025) ended in a DGMO-level understanding on **May 10, 2025**.

Strategic Shifts

- **Indus Waters Treaty (1960) placed in abeyance** by India on **April 23, 2025** — first such step in 65 years.
- **SAARC visa exemption scheme suspended** for Pakistani nationals.
- **Attari–Wagah ICP closed**; Pakistani diplomats expelled.

- Doctrine articulated: terror sponsorship will invite **conventional retaliation across the LoC and IB**, with nuclear blackmail not deterring kinetic response.

This represents a **paradigm shift** from Uri (2016 surgical strikes) and Balakot (2019 air-strike) — Operation Sindoor was deeper, wider, and explicitly tied to a **water-treaty cost imposition**.

INTERNATIONAL COUNTER-TERROR FRAMEWORK

UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001)

Adopted on **September 28, 2001** after 9/11 under **Chapter VII**, it is the **cornerstone of global counter-terrorism** obligations:

- Criminalise terror financing.
- Freeze terrorist assets without delay.
- Deny safe haven to terrorists.
- Establishes the **Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC)**.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

- Founded **1989** (G-7 summit, Paris).
- 40 Recommendations on AML/CFT.
- **India's Mutual Evaluation Report (2024)** placed India in the “**regular follow-up**” category — the **highest compliance bracket**, joining the UK, France, and Italy.
- **Pakistan** removed from the “**grey list**” in October 2022; under continuous scrutiny.

India's CCIT Push

The **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)** — proposed by **India in 1996** at the UN General Assembly — remains **stalled for three decades** due to:

- Disagreement on the **definition of terrorism** (state vs non-state actors).
- OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) insistence on exempting “national liberation movements”.
- Differences over **armed forces' actions** in non-international conflicts.

India has consistently raised CCIT at the UNGA (most recently in PM's 2024 address) and the BRICS Counter-Terror Working Group.

TRENDS IN INDIA'S INTERNAL SECURITY LANDSCAPE

- **Left Wing Extremism (LWE)** affected districts have fallen from **126 in 2013 to 38 in 2024** (MHA data); Union HM Amit Shah set a target of **March 31, 2026** for ending LWE — partially achieved with major operations in Bastar, Sukma, Bijapur (Chhattisgarh).
- **J&K** post-Article 370 abrogation (Aug 5, 2019): terror incidents declined from 417 (2018) to under 50 (2024), but recent Pahalgam attack reopened debates on the **Reasi-Rajouri-Poonch** soft belt.
- **Northeast insurgency**: AFSPA progressively withdrawn from large parts of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh (2022 onwards), though Manipur ethnic violence (May 2023 onwards) remains a flashpoint.
- **Cyber & radicalisation**: I4C (Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre) under MHA tackles online radicalisation; **UAPA Section 15(1)(a)(iiia)** added cyber-terrorism in 2019.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 1 — Post-Independence India / Modern History

- Rajiv Gandhi era reforms; IPKF & Sri Lankan Tamil question; computerisation drive; assassination as turning point in PM security and India's Sri Lanka policy.

GS Paper 2 — Polity & Governance

- Centre-state friction over NCTC; UAPA & federalism; SC jurisprudence on bail (Articles 14, 21); Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection); 73rd/74th Amendments lineage.

GS Paper 3 — Internal Security

- Counter-terror laws (TADA, POTA, UAPA, NIA Act); terror financing & FATF; LWE; cross-border terrorism; Operation Sindoor doctrine; cyber-terrorism.

GS Paper 4 — Ethics

- Liberty vs security trade-off; ethics of preventive detention; long under-trial incarceration under stringent laws; conscience-keeping role of judiciary; **rehabilitation** vs retribution (Rajiv Gandhi convicts' release).

Probable Mains Questions

- 1 *"India's counter-terror legal framework has oscillated between robust executive powers and constitutional liberties. Critically examine in the context of UAPA jurisprudence."* (GS-3, 15 marks)
- 2 *"Operation Sindoor (2025) marks a doctrinal shift in India's response to cross-border terrorism. Discuss its strategic implications."* (GS-3, 10 marks)

- 3 “Three decades after India proposed the CCIT at the UN, why does a universal definition of terrorism remain elusive?” (GS-2, 15 marks)

Prelims Pointers

- **Anti-Terrorism Day:** May 21 (Rajiv Gandhi death anniversary).
- **UAPA:** Enacted **1967**; major amendment **2019** (individual designation).
- **NIA:** 2008; HQ — New Delhi.
- **LTTE banned in India:** 1992 under UAPA.
- **TADA:** 1985, lapsed 1995. **POTA:** 2002, repealed 2004.
- **UNSC Resolution 1373:** Sept 28, 2001 (Chapter VII).
- **FATF:** founded 1989; HQ Paris. India in “regular follow-up” (2024).
- **CCIT:** proposed by India, **1996**.
- **61st CAA, 1989:** voting age 21 → 18.

FACTS CORNER

Rajiv Gandhi: Born August 20, 1944, Bombay; sworn in as 6th PM on October 31, 1984; youngest Indian PM at 40; awarded Bharat Ratna posthumously, 1991; assassinated May 21, 1991 at Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu.

Assassin: Thenmozhi Rajaratnam (“Dhanu”), LTTE suicide bomber.

LTTE: Founded 1976 by Velupillai Prabhakaran; banned in India under UAPA, May 14, 1992; militarily defeated by Sri Lankan forces in May 2009.

UAPA: 1967; key amendments — 2004, 2008, 2012, 2019 (individual terrorist designation).

TADA: 1985; lapsed 1995. **POTA:** 2002; repealed 2004. **NIA Act:** 2008.

NSG: raised October 16, 1984 (post-Op Blue Star, June 1984).

NIA HQ: New Delhi; first DG — Radha Vinod Raju.

Operation Sindoor: May 7–10, 2025; in response to Pahalgam attack (Apr 22, 2025).

Indus Waters Treaty (1960): Placed in abeyance April 23, 2025.

CCIT: Proposed by India at UNGA, 1996; still pending.

UNSC Resolution 1373: Adopted September 28, 2001 under Chapter VII.

FATF: Established 1989; India’s MER 2024 — “regular follow-up” category.

Jain Commission: Headed by Justice M.C. Jain; final report submitted 1997–98.

61st Constitutional Amendment, 1989: Voting age reduced 21 → 18 (Article 326).

Indo-Sri Lanka Accord: Signed July 29, 1987 by Rajiv Gandhi and J.R. Jayewardene.

Sources: [PIB](#), [MHA](#), [The Hindu](#)

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