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WIRE, WIRELESS, AND WEALTH: THE NEW REALITY OF KASHMIR'S UNOFFICIAL BORDER

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KASHMIR CENTRAL

THE INVISIBLE BORDER

BEYOND THE MILITARY FRONTIER

The Line of Control remains one of the world's most militarized frontiers, but its strategic story is no longer defined by security alone. As roads, tunnels, technology and development reshape the mountains of Kashmir, an invisible transformation is quietly redefining the frontier and the future of the region.

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KASHMIR**

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THE TERROR
ECOSYSTEM

expose
deception

RESTORE
ORDER

MAKE A SPLASH

INCULCATE
DEMOCRATIC SPIRIT

KASHMIR CENTRAL



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THE GEOGRAPHY OF CHANGE

Kashmir is often discussed through the vocabulary of conflict. Ceasefires, elections, security, diplomacy and territorial claims continue to dominate public discourse, leaving little room for a quieter but equally significant transformation taking place across the region. Beneath the headlines, Kashmir is changing in ways that demand closer attention.

The nature of borders is evolving. Infrastructure is altering patterns of mobility. Digital platforms are reshaping public opinion at a speed unimaginable a decade ago. Economic aspirations increasingly compete with political rhetoric. A generation that has grown up amid prolonged uncertainty is asking different questions from those that occupied previous generations. These changes may not erase history, but they are steadily redefining how the future will be imagined.

This edition of Kashmir Central examines these shifts through multiple lenses. We look at how the Line of Control is acquiring new economic and technological dimensions beyond its military character. We examine the growing political mobilisation and human rights discourse in Pakistan Administered Kashmir, an issue that rarely receives the sustained international attention it deserves. We also explore how the contest over Kashmir has increasingly become a contest over information, perception and digital influence, where narratives travel faster than facts and public opinion is shaped as much by algorithms as by institutions.

The challenge before scholars, policymakers and media practitioners is to distinguish enduring realities from transient narratives. In an era of instant communication, the loudest voices are not always the most credible. Serious understanding requires patience, evidence and the willingness to engage with complexity rather than convenient certainties.

At Kashmir Central, our commitment remains unchanged. We do not seek to amplify noise or reinforce established positions merely because they are familiar. Our purpose is to encourage informed discussion grounded in research, historical context and contemporary realities. We believe Kashmir deserves analysis that is nuanced rather than polarised, evidence based rather than ideological, and forward looking without losing sight of the past.

As the region continues to evolve, understanding Kashmir will require more than following events. It will require recognising the forces quietly reshaping its politics, society and economy. Those who understand these deeper currents will be better equipped to understand not only where Kashmir stands today, but where it may be heading tomorrow.

Bashir Assad



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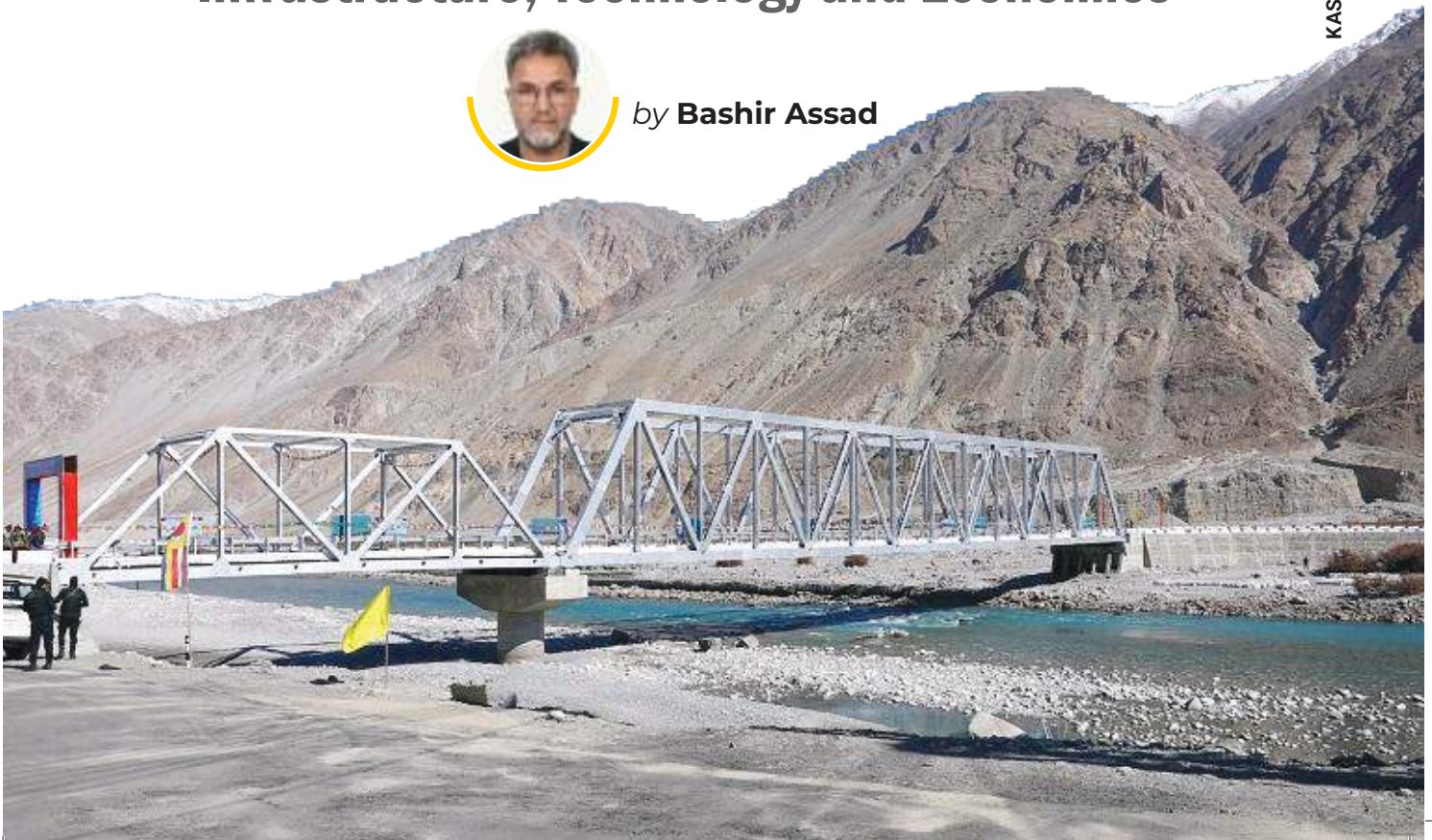
THE **INVISIBLE** **BORDER**

How the Line of Control Is Being Redefined by
Infrastructure, Technology and Economics



by **Bashir Assad**

KASHMIR CENTRAL | 1 AUGUST 2026 | 5





There are borders that announce themselves with walls, customs posts and immigration counters. There are others that exist only on maps, scarcely noticed by the people who cross them every day. The Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir belongs to neither category. It is visible enough to command one of the largest military deployments anywhere in the world, yet invisible in the legal sense because it is not recognized as an international boundary. It is a line whose political status has remained deliberately unresolved for more than seven decades, but whose practical significance has become increasingly defined by realities that neither military doctrine nor diplomatic vocabulary fully captures.

For decades, the Line of Control was understood almost exclusively through the language of conflict. It represented ceasefire violations, infiltration routes, artillery duels, military bunkers and diplomatic disputes. Every discussion about the Line revolved around soldiers, weapons and territorial claims. Maps marked it as a military demarcation, governments referred to it in strategic

statements, and the international community viewed it as one of South Asia's most sensitive flashpoints. In this conventional understanding, the Line of Control existed primarily because armies stood on either side of it.

THAT UNDERSTANDING, WHILE STILL VALID, HAS BECOME INCOMPLETE

The most profound transformation along the Line of Control today is not one that can be observed from satellite imagery alone or measured by the number of ceasefire violations in a given year. It lies in the gradual

emergence of a different kind of frontier. Military deployments continue to dominate the landscape, but beneath that visible layer another process has been unfolding quietly. Roads have begun to compete with ridgelines as instruments of strategy. Tunnels have become as significant as trenches. Fibre optic cables, surveillance grids, drone detection systems, tourism infrastructure, educational institutions, logistics corridors and expanding civilian economies are changing the meaning of proximity to the frontier. The Line of Control is no longer only where two militaries confront each other. It is increasingly where two different systems of governance, two developmental trajectories and two contrasting socio-economic experiences meet without ever truly interacting.

This transformation has received remarkably little scholarly attention. Much has been written about military strategy, constitutional developments, diplomacy and insurgency. Comparatively less effort has been devoted to understanding how the geography of the conflict itself has evolved. Geography is often treated as permanent, but strategic geography

Military deployments continue to dominate the landscape, but beneath that visible layer another process has been unfolding quietly.

is anything but static. It changes as technology changes, as infrastructure expands, as populations adapt and as states acquire new capacities to influence territory. A mountain that once served as an impregnable barrier may become less significant once tunnels reduce travel times. A valley that once functioned as an infiltration corridor may lose its strategic value when persistent aerial surveillance renders movement continuously observable. A remote village may acquire strategic importance not because of military deployment but because it becomes connected to highways, communications networks and markets.

This evolution reflects a broader truth about modern conflict. Twenty-first century states increasingly shape contested territories not merely through military presence but through governance, connectivity and economic integration. Infrastructure has become an instrument of statecraft. Roads shorten not only distances but also administrative reach. Bridges connect more than riverbanks; they connect institutions with citizens. Digital communication compresses physical isolation. Markets create incentives that political slogans often fail to generate. Economic opportunity, educational access and mobility gradually reshape how populations perceive both the state and their own future.

Nowhere is this relationship between security and development more evident than in the Himalayan frontier.

For generations, life in villages close to the Line of Control was defined by uncertainty. Agricultural cycles were interrupted by shelling. Schools closed during periods of heightened tension. Families lived with the possibility that a ceasefire violation could instantly alter the rhythm of ordinary life. Physical isolation compounded psychological insecurity. Mountain



Infrastructure has become an instrument of statecraft. Roads shorten not only distances but also administrative reach. Bridges connect more than riverbanks; they connect institutions with citizens.

terrain limited access to healthcare, education and markets, reinforcing a sense of peripheral existence. Border communities were viewed primarily through a security lens, their developmental needs often overshadowed by immediate military concerns.

Over the past decade, however, a gradual but unmistakable shift has emerged. Improved roads have reduced travel times to district headquarters. Better telecommunications have connected villages that once relied on intermittent communication. Educational institutions have expanded their reach. Tourism has begun to penetrate regions previously associated almost exclusively with conflict. Public services have become more accessible, and administrative presence more visible. While these

developments remain uneven and challenges persist, they represent a significant departure from earlier decades when proximity to the Line of Control almost automatically implied developmental disadvantage.

This does not suggest that conflict has disappeared or that security considerations have diminished. On the contrary, military preparedness remains indispensable. The terrain continues to demand vigilance, and the strategic sensitivities associated with the Line of Control remain unchanged. Yet the relationship between security and development is no longer sequential, where one waits for the other. Increasingly, they have become mutually reinforcing. Infrastructure enhances military mobility while simultaneously improving civilian livelihoods. Communications networks facilitate administrative governance as much as operational coordination. Investments justified on strategic grounds often produce substantial economic and social consequences.

Such dual-use infrastructure represents one of the defining characteristics of contemporary border management. A tunnel carved through the mountains is not merely an engineering achievement. For military planners, it enables faster deployment, all-weather logistics and greater operational flexibility.



For civilians, it reduces travel times, expands economic opportunities, improves healthcare access and encourages tourism. A bridge may carry military convoys during periods of heightened tension, yet for most of the year it carries schoolchildren, traders, farmers and ambulances. The same physical structure performs multiple strategic functions simultaneously.

This convergence between civilian development and strategic planning is gradually altering the meaning of the frontier itself. Historically, border regions often existed as peripheral spaces where governments concentrated military resources while economic development remained secondary. Today, many states increasingly view prosperous border regions as strategic assets. Population stability, economic resilience and institutional presence contribute to national security no less than military fortifications. A vibrant frontier can project confidence in ways that static defensive structures cannot.

The implications extend beyond

Today, many states increasingly view prosperous border regions as strategic assets. Population stability, economic resilience and institutional presence contribute to national security no less than military fortifications.

economics. Infrastructure changes perceptions. A journey that once required an entire day but can now be completed in a few hours alters how citizens relate to the state. Administrative services become more accessible. Educational aspirations expand because institutions are no longer geographically distant. Healthcare becomes more reliable when emergency transport is available throughout the year. Investment becomes more attractive when

connectivity improves. None of these changes erase political complexities, but together they reshape the everyday experience of living near the frontier.

Technology has accelerated this transformation. Surveillance systems that once depended primarily on human observation increasingly incorporate sophisticated sensors, thermal imaging, unmanned aerial platforms and integrated communications. Information travels instantly across command structures. Weather patterns, terrain conditions and movement can be monitored with unprecedented precision. The frontier remains heavily guarded, but the methods of guarding it have evolved dramatically. The traditional image of isolated posts relying solely on physical patrols no longer captures the technological sophistication of contemporary border management.

Ironically, the same technologies that enhance security also reduce isolation. Digital connectivity enables education, commerce and communication. Young entrepreneurs

can operate businesses from locations that previous generations regarded as geographically disadvantaged. Farmers gain access to wider markets. Students participate in online education. Financial services become available through digital platforms. Governance itself acquires a different character when physical distance ceases to determine administrative effectiveness.

As these developments accumulate, the Line of Control begins to acquire dimensions that conventional strategic analysis often overlooks. It remains a military frontier, but it is increasingly also a developmental frontier, a technological frontier and an economic frontier. It separates not merely territories but trajectories. Over time, these differing trajectories may prove as consequential as military deployments in shaping the future character of the region.

The most enduring borders in history have rarely been defined solely by soldiers. They have been shaped by the roads that connected cities, the markets that attracted commerce, the institutions that delivered governance and the ideas that gave populations confidence in the future. Military power can secure a frontier, but it is infrastructure, economic opportunity and effective institutions that determine how people experience it.

The Line of Control is entering such a phase. Its significance is no longer measured only by ceasefire agreements or military deployments. It is increasingly measured by how successfully competing systems transform the lives of the communities that live closest to it. In that quiet transformation lies perhaps the most important strategic story unfolding in Kashmir today—not because the guns have fallen silent, but because alongside them another contest has steadily emerged, one fought with roads instead of ridgelines, connectivity

instead of isolation, and the promise of development alongside the imperatives of security.

PART II: MOUNTAINS, TUNNELS AND THE NEW LOGIC OF STRATEGY

History has always favoured those who mastered geography. Great empires were built not merely by winning battles but by understanding mountains, rivers, deserts and seas better than their rivals. The Himalayas, stretching across northern India like an immense natural fortress, have for centuries shaped military campaigns, trade routes and political destinies. In Kashmir, no geographical feature has exercised greater influence over strategic thinking than the

Roads now penetrate valleys once considered inaccessible. Modern tunnels bypass snowbound passes that historically determined the rhythm of civilian life and military operations alike.

mountain ranges that define the Line of Control. Their towering peaks, deep ravines and narrow valleys have never been passive elements of the landscape. They have acted as participants in history, determining where armies could advance, where settlements could flourish and where political authority could realistically extend.

For much of the twentieth century, these mountains appeared to favour defence over mobility. Roads remained sparse, winters isolated entire regions for months, and altitude imposed severe limitations on military logistics. The state that controlled the heights possessed a distinct tactical advantage, while those attempting movement across difficult terrain paid an enormous physical price. Military planning therefore revolved around ridgelines, observation posts and supply routes that were vulnerable to weather as much as to hostile action. Geography dictated strategy with almost uncompromising authority.

The Kashmir of today, however, is gradually challenging that historical equation. The mountains remain where they have always stood, but the technologies designed to overcome them have advanced with remarkable speed. Roads now penetrate valleys once considered inaccessible. Modern tunnels bypass snowbound passes that historically determined the rhythm of civilian life and mili-



tary operations alike. Bridges span rivers that previously isolated entire communities. Digital communication reaches locations where physical access remains difficult. The result is not the disappearance of geography but its transformation. Mountains still matter, yet they no longer exercise the same degree of control over human movement that they once did.

This evolution represents one of the least discussed but most consequential strategic developments in contemporary Kashmir.

Infrastructure has traditionally been viewed through an economic lens. Roads facilitate trade, bridges improve connectivity and tunnels shorten travel time. In frontier regions, however, infrastructure carries a second meaning. Every kilometre of road has strategic value because it affects the movement of military forces as much as civilian traffic. Every bridge influences logistics. Every tunnel alters calculations that military planners have made for generations. The distinction between developmental infrastructure and strategic infrastructure becomes increasingly difficult to sustain because the same project serves both purposes simulta-

neously.

THE HIMALAYAN FRONTIER OFFERS PERHAPS THE clearest ILLUSTRATION OF THIS PRINCIPLE

▼ A road constructed through a remote mountain valley does more than connect villages to district headquarters. It allows agricultural produce to reach urban markets before it perishes. It enables children to attend schools throughout the year. It allows emergency medical services to reach isolated communities during winter. At precisely the same time, it provides security forces with faster access to sensitive sectors, reduces dependence on vulnerable supply routes and improves operational flexibility during emergencies. The civilian and military benefits are inseparable. One cannot meaningfully discuss one without acknowledging the other.

This convergence has become increasingly visible across Jammu and Kashmir over the past decade. Investments in highways, bridges and tunnels have often been interpreted

through the language of development, yet their strategic implications are equally profound. The completion of the Banihal Qazigund Tunnel fundamentally altered year round connectivity between the Kashmir Valley and the rest of India. The Chenab Rail Bridge, one of the highest railway bridges in the world, represents not merely an engineering achievement but a transformation in national logistics. The Udhampur Srinagar Baramulla Rail Link promises to integrate the Valley into India's broader railway network in ways that earlier generations considered almost unimaginable.

Perhaps nowhere is this new strategic logic more evident than in the Z Morh Tunnel and the under construction Zojila Tunnel. For decades, the Zojila Pass symbolised both the beauty and vulnerability of Himalayan geography. Every winter, snowfall disrupted movement between the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh, affecting civilians, trade and military logistics alike. The seasonal closure of the route imposed costs that extended far beyond transportation. It limited economic integration, constrained tourism, complicated administrative



coordination and introduced uncertainty into military planning.

The Zojila Tunnel represents an attempt to rewrite that geography. By providing all weather connectivity between the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh, it fundamentally changes the relationship between terrain and state capacity. Military planners gain reliable year round access to strategically significant regions. Civilian communities gain uninterrupted mobility, economic opportunities and access to public services. Tourism acquires greater stability because seasonal isolation becomes less severe. What appears to be an infrastructure project therefore functions simultaneously as an instrument of national integration, economic development and strategic resilience.

The significance of such projects extends beyond the physical structures themselves. They reflect a changing philosophy of border management. Earlier approaches often accepted geography as a permanent limitation that governments could only partially mitigate. Contemporary policy increasingly seeks to reshape the practical consequences of geography through engineering, technology and sustained investment. The objective is not to conquer mountains but to reduce the strategic disadvantages they impose.

THIS SHIFT HAS BROADER GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Across the Himalayas, infrastructure has emerged as one of the principal indicators of strategic competition. Roads, railways, airfields, tunnels and communication networks are no longer merely developmental assets; they signal long term political commitment to frontier regions. They demonstrate administrative reach, economic confidence and military preparedness simultaneously. The

Investments in highways, bridges and tunnels have often been interpreted through the language of development, yet their strategic implications are equally profound.

competition is therefore not confined to troop deployments or weapons systems. It increasingly involves the capacity to build, connect and sustain difficult terrain over extended periods.

Technology has amplified this transformation in ways that would have appeared extraordinary only two decades ago.

Traditional military doctrine along the Line of Control depended heavily on human observation. Observation posts occupied commanding heights. Patrols monitored infiltration routes. Local familiarity with terrain constituted one of the greatest strategic advantages. While these methods remain indispensable, they have been supplemented by an expanding technological ecosystem. Thermal imaging devices, long range electro optical sensors, ground surveillance radars, integrated communication systems and unmanned aerial platforms have altered how the frontier is monitored.

The rise of drones deserves particular attention. Their emergence has fundamentally changed assumptions about borders throughout the world, and the Line of Control is no exception. For decades, difficult terrain itself served as a partial defence because movement through mountains imposed significant physical constraints. Drones introduce an entirely different dimension. Surveillance no

longer depends exclusively upon direct human observation. Small aerial platforms can monitor terrain, detect movement and provide information with a speed that earlier generations could scarcely imagine.

At the same time, drones have introduced new vulnerabilities. The frontier is no longer challenged solely by traditional infiltration methods. Small unmanned platforms capable of transporting weapons, narcotics or communication equipment have created entirely new security concerns. Consequently, border management increasingly involves electronic warfare capabilities, anti drone technologies and sophisticated sensor networks alongside conventional military deployments.

THE FRONTIER HAS BECOME DIGITAL AS MUCH AS PHYSICAL

Yet perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this technological evolution lies not in military applications but in its civilian consequences.

Digital connectivity has transformed daily life across many frontier districts. Mobile communication, internet access and online services have reduced the psychological distance between remote communities and urban centres. Students participate in virtual classrooms. Entrepreneurs market local products beyond regional boundaries. Telemedicine connects rural patients with specialists located hundreds of kilometers away. Government services increasingly reach citizens through digital platforms rather than physical offices alone. These developments subtly alter the meaning of remoteness.

A village located near the Line of Control may remain geographically distant from Srinagar or Jammu, but digital communication compresses that distance in practical terms. Information flows rapidly. Economic transactions occur electronically. Ad-

ministrative services become accessible through technology. The frontier remains physically demanding, yet it becomes progressively less isolated from the national mainstream.

Security planners increasingly recognize that such connectivity itself contributes to resilience. Communities with stronger educational institutions, reliable communications, expanding economic opportunities and effective public services are generally better positioned to withstand the uncertainties associated with life near sensitive frontiers. Development therefore becomes an integral component of strategic stability rather than a separate policy objective. This represents one of the defining characteristics of twenty first century border management.

The traditional image of frontier security emphasized fences, bunkers and military outposts. Those elements remain essential, but they no longer tell the entire story. Modern border management increasingly depends upon roads that support logistics, communication networks that enable rapid coordination, educational institutions that strengthen communities, healthcare systems that improve quality of life and economic opportunities that encourage long term settlement. Security is no longer understood exclusively as the absence of threats. It is increasingly understood as the presence of resilient institutions.

THE LINE OF CONTROL ILLUSTRATES THIS TRANSITION WITH UNUSUAL CLARITY

It remains among the world's most heavily militarized frontiers, yet military preparedness alone cannot explain its contemporary character. Equally important is the expanding web of infrastructure that sustains both civilian life and national capability. Every completed highway reduces logistical uncertainty. Every

Armies continue to guard the frontier, but increasingly they do so within a landscape that is more connected, more technologically integrated and more economically dynamic than at any previous point in its modern history.

operational tunnel enhances strategic flexibility. Every school, hospital and communication tower extends the practical reach of governance. Every technological innovation modifies the relationship between geography and power.

None of these developments diminish the importance of military readiness. Rather, they redefine the environment within which military readiness operates. Armies continue to guard the frontier, but increasingly they do so within a landscape that is more connected, more technologically integrated and more economically dynamic than at any previous point in its modern history.

The transformation remains incomplete. Harsh weather continues to test infrastructure. Mountain terrain still imposes formidable engineering challenges. Environmental concerns require careful attention as development accelerates. Security risks persist and occasionally evolve faster than the technologies designed to address them. Nevertheless, the broader trajectory appears unmistakable. The strategic value of the frontier is increasingly determined not only by the number of troops deployed or weapons positioned but also by the quality of roads, the reliability of communications, the resilience of institutions and the confidence of the communities that inhabit these mountains.

The old military map of the Line of Control is gradually being overlaid by another map, one composed not of defensive positions but of transport corridors, digital networks, logistics hubs and expanding economic activity. It is this second map that may ultimately shape the frontier's long term significance. Wars can alter territorial control, but infrastructure alters the everyday relationship between people, place and the state. In the long sweep of history, that relationship has often proved more enduring than the outcome of individual battles.

If the twentieth century taught military planners that geography determines strategy, the twenty first century is demonstrating that infrastructure increasingly determines how geography itself is experienced. The invisible border is therefore becoming something far more complex than a line separating opposing forces. It is evolving into a frontier where engineering, technology and governance quietly redefine the balance between distance and connectivity, isolation and integration, vulnerability and resilience.

PART III: WHERE GEOGRAPHY ENDS AND HUMAN EXPERIENCE BEGINS

Every border ultimately acquires two meanings. One belongs to states, the other to people. States view borders through the language of sovereignty, military preparedness, diplomacy and territorial integrity. People experience them through schools, hospitals, markets, employment, mobility and the quiet routines of everyday life. The first meaning dominates headlines. The second shapes history.

The Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir has long been examined almost entirely from the perspective of states. Governments debate its strategic implications. Military institutions evaluate its operational

challenges. Diplomats negotiate its political significance. Yet the most enduring transformation taking place along this frontier cannot be understood solely through the language of geopolitics. It is equally a story about how geography gradually influences societies, how prolonged separation creates distinct developmental experiences, and how borders, even when not internationally recognized, begin to shape identities through the cumulative force of everyday life.

Borders rarely transform societies overnight. Their influence is incremental, often imperceptible to those living through the process. A child attending school today is unlikely to recognize how profoundly infrastructure, governance and economic opportunity will shape the way that child understands the world twenty years later. A trader choosing between local and regional markets seldom considers that such decisions contribute to broader economic integration. A family seeking better healthcare or higher education makes choices based on immediate needs, yet collectively those choices reveal the trajectory of an entire society. History frequently advances not through dramatic political announcements but through millions of ordinary decisions made by ordinary people.

This gradual accumulation of everyday experience may ultimately become the most consequential aspect of the Line of Control.

For decades, communities living near the frontier on both sides shared remarkable similarities. They inhabited comparable mountain landscapes, spoke related languages and dialects, celebrated many common cultural traditions and faced similar environmental challenges. Families separated by conflict often retained memories of social and economic connections that predated partition and the wars that followed. Geography encouraged continuity even when politics imposed division.



Time, however, has introduced another force into the equation.

The passage of generations under different administrative systems inevitably produces institutional divergence. Education systems evolve independently. Public health structures develop according to different priorities. Legal frameworks shape distinct administrative cultures. Economic policies influence investment patterns. Infrastructure projects alter mobility. Employment opportunities affect aspirations. Information ecosystems create different public conversations. None of these processes alone determines the future of a society. Together, sustained over decades, they gradually produce different lived realities.

The significance of this divergence extends beyond material conditions. It influences perception.

Human beings understand political systems less through constitutional documents than through personal experience. The efficiency of public institutions, the accessibility of services, the quality of roads, the availability of employment and the predictability of governance collectively shape public confidence. Political legitimacy, while

undoubtedly influenced by ideology and history, is also reinforced or weakened by the daily interaction between citizens and institutions.

This observation applies universally. Throughout history, states have recognised that durable authority depends not only upon security but also upon administrative effectiveness. Roads that remain open during winter, reliable electricity, functioning schools, accessible healthcare and expanding economic opportunities are not merely indicators of development. They represent the practical face of governance. Citizens often judge institutions less by abstract political principles than by whether those institutions improve everyday life.

In this respect, the strategic significance of development acquires an entirely different dimension. Infrastructure does more than connect places. It connects citizens to the state. Educational institutions do more than produce graduates. They cultivate expectations about opportunity and social mobility. Markets do more than generate economic activity. They create networks of dependence and confidence that extend well beyond commerce itself.

This relationship between governance and security has become increasingly apparent across contemporary conflict regions worldwide. Military stability may establish the conditions necessary for development, but sustained development often reinforces long term stability by reducing isolation, expanding opportunity and strengthening institutional credibility. Security and development therefore become mutually reinforcing rather than sequential objectives.

The evolution of the Line of Control illustrates this principle with unusual clarity.

The frontier remains militarily sensitive, yet the contest surrounding it increasingly extends into domains that traditional strategic literature often overlooks. Universities, tourism, digital connectivity, entrepreneurship, healthcare and transportation now possess strategic relevance because they influence how populations experience governance. Economic resilience contributes to national resilience. Social confidence enhances institutional confidence. Administrative presence strengthens territorial integration in ways that military deployment alone cannot achieve.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this transformation is that it proceeds quietly.

Unlike political speeches or diplomatic negotiations, infrastructure rarely attracts sustained international attention once completed. Schools seldom dominate strategic debates. Hospitals are rarely discussed in military journals. Digital communication networks appear technically mundane. Yet these are precisely the institutions that shape the long term relationship between citizens and the state. They influence migration patterns, investment decisions, educational aspirations and demographic stability. Over decades, their cumulative impact may prove more enduring than individual political crises.

The Line of Control therefore con-

fronts strategic analysts with an important question. What ultimately defines a frontier in the twenty first century?

Is it merely the location where opposing military forces maintain vigilance? Or is it increasingly the point where different systems of governance, economic organization and institutional development produce distinct social outcomes?

The answer is likely both.

Military deterrence remains indispensable. No serious assessment of the Line of Control can ignore the realities of security. Cross border tensions, infiltration attempts, technological adaptation and regional geopolitical competition continue to demand sustained preparedness. Yet military readiness alone no longer explains the changing character of the frontier. Parallel to the visible security architecture has emerged another architecture composed of highways, tunnels, communication systems, educational institutions, financial networks and expanding civilian infrastructure.

These two architectures are not competitors. They reinforce one another.

The soldier stationed in a remote post depends upon the same road that enables local farmers to transport produce to market. The communica-

tion network that supports operational coordination also allows students to attend online classes. The bridge that facilitates military logistics also carries tourists, teachers, ambulances and traders. Modern frontiers increasingly rely upon this convergence. Security creates space for development, while development enhances the resilience that security seeks to protect.

This convergence also reshapes international perceptions.

For decades, external discussions about Kashmir have frequently centered upon conflict, diplomacy and constitutional questions. Those dimensions remain significant, but they do not fully capture the region's contemporary transformation. Increasingly, Kashmir presents a more complex picture in which strategic competition coexists with economic investment, technological modernization and institutional expansion. Any serious observer seeking to understand the future of the region must therefore examine not only military deployments but also highways under construction, railway networks approaching completion, educational institutions expanding their reach and communities adapting to new opportunities.

The invisible border is, in this sense, a metaphor for a broader strategic transition. It describes the gradual movement from a frontier defined exclusively by confrontation towards one increasingly influenced by connectivity, governance and economic capability. It does not suggest that political disputes have disappeared or that historical disagreements have been resolved. Rather, it recognizes that the instruments through which states exercise influence are becoming more diverse.

POWER ITSELF HAS CHANGED

Throughout much of history, territorial control depended

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primarily upon military superiority. Contemporary statecraft remains inseparable from military strength, but it increasingly incorporates additional forms of capacity. States compete through infrastructure, technology, logistics, institutional performance and economic resilience. The frontier consequently becomes a space where these capabilities are demonstrated simultaneously.

For India, this transformation carries profound strategic implications. The long term stability of Jammu and Kashmir will depend not solely upon preventing security threats but equally upon sustaining economic opportunity, strengthening institutions and ensuring that border communities experience tangible improvements in quality of life. Strategic success in the twenty first century is measured as much by the confidence of citizens as by the readiness of armed forces.

This lesson extends beyond Kashmir.

Across the world, contested frontiers are being redefined by roads instead of rivers, fibre optic cables instead of telegraph lines, digital networks instead of physical isolation. Geography has not disappeared, but technology has altered how geography influences politics. Mountains remain formidable, yet tunnels diminish their isolating effect. Distance persists, yet digital communication compresses it. Borders continue to separate territories, yet infrastructure determines how those territories develop.

The Line of Control illustrates this emerging reality more vividly than almost any other frontier in Asia.

Its future will certainly continue to involve soldiers standing watch across difficult mountains. That image is unlikely to disappear. But alongside those soldiers another story is steadily unfolding. Engineers drilling through rock, railway lines approaching completion, communication towers extending digital reach, students pursuing education in previously iso-



lated districts, entrepreneurs building businesses, tourists travelling where conflict once discouraged movement and institutions gradually strengthening their presence all contribute to a quieter transformation.

History often remembers battles because they are dramatic. It sometimes overlooks the roads built after the battles, even though those roads frequently determine the peace that follows. The great strategic shifts of the future may not be announced by artillery fire or diplomatic declarations. They may emerge through concrete poured into mountain valleys, fibre optic cables laid beneath the soil, trains crossing bridges once thought impossible and communities discovering that proximity to a frontier need not condemn them to perpetual isolation.

That is why the Line of Control should no longer be understood only as a military line.

It remains one of the world's most sensitive security frontiers, and it is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Yet beneath its visible military architecture another frontier has quietly taken shape. It is a frontier where governance competes with geography, where infrastructure challenges isolation, where technology alters strategic

calculations and where the quality of everyday life increasingly becomes part of the broader contest over stability and legitimacy.

The invisible border is therefore not invisible because it cannot be seen. It is invisible because its most profound transformations occur beyond the range of conventional strategic analysis. They unfold gradually, silently and cumulatively, reshaping societies long before they reshape maps. Those who continue to view the Line of Control only through the prism of military confrontation risk overlooking the deeper currents that are redefining the region. For in the end, borders endure not merely because armies defend them, but because institutions sustain them, economies strengthen them and people find within them the confidence to build their future.

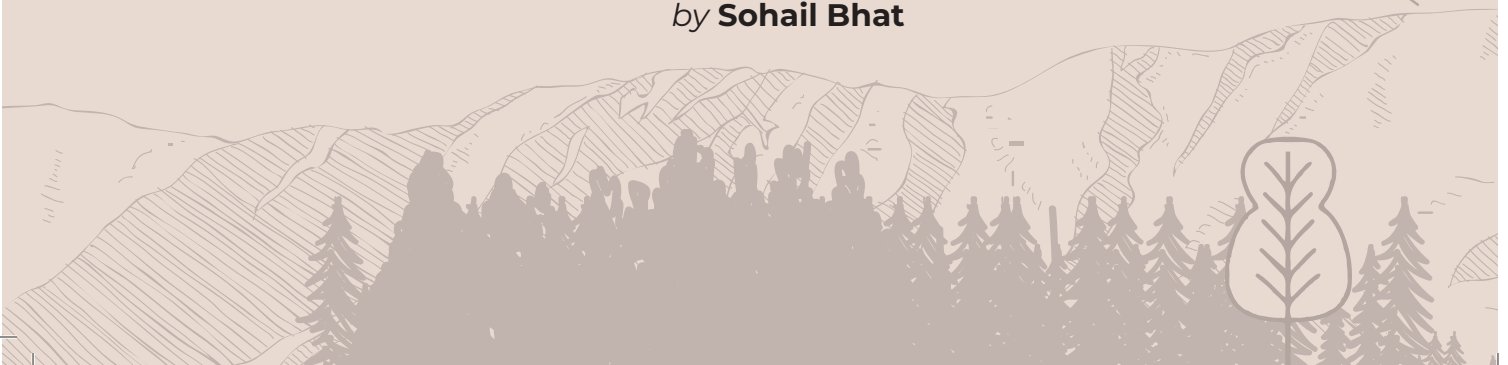
The future of the Line of Control will undoubtedly continue to be influenced by geopolitics, diplomacy and military preparedness. But its most enduring legacy may well be determined by something less visible and ultimately more powerful: the ability of competing systems to improve the lives of the people who live closest to the mountains where history once paused, but where the future is quietly being built.

Human Rights, Governance and the Search for Dignity in Pakistan Administered Kashmir



THE OTHER KASHMIR

by Sohail Bhat



The recent protests were only the visible expression of a deeper transformation. As expectations rise and questions of governance become more pronounced, Pakistan Administered Kashmir is entering a new phase of political and social awakening that deserves far greater international attention.

Every conflict has two histories. One is recorded in military maps, diplomatic exchanges and official communiqués. The other unfolds in the everyday lives of ordinary people, where politics is experienced through schools, hospitals, employment, courts and the responsiveness of public institutions. For decades, Pakistan Administered Kashmir has been viewed largely through the first lens. International debate has focused on territorial claims, ceasefire violations and the strategic contest between India and Pakistan. Far less attention has been paid to the society itself.

The most consequential change taking place across the Line of Control today is not confined to the streets where recent protests drew headlines. It lies in a quieter transformation, as an increasingly informed and connected society begins to question not only economic hardship but also the quality of governance, the distribution of authority and the relationship between the citizen and the state.

Political change rarely begins with crowds. By the time thousands gather in public squares, the foundations of dissent have often been laid over years of private conversations, growing expectations and accumulated frustrations. It takes shape around family dining tables, in university classrooms, in lawyers' offices, in traders' associations and in the routine encounters between citizens and government institutions. Before people

Before people challenge governments in public, they begin by asking simple questions in private.

challenge governments in public, they begin by asking simple questions in private. Why are important decisions taken elsewhere? Why do public services fail to keep pace with expectations? Why do opportunities appear unevenly distributed? Why do institutions so often seem remote from the people they are meant to serve?

Those questions have become increasingly difficult to ignore in Pakistan Administered Kashmir.

When *Kashmir Central* examined the wave of public protests in its July edition, the focus was on the political moment itself. The demonstrations,

the economic pressures behind them and the unprecedented scale of public mobilization deserved careful attention because they marked an important chapter in the region's recent history. But protests, however dramatic, are rarely the whole story. They are usually the visible expression of something that has been building beneath the surface for years. This article begins where the previous one ended.

It is less interested in the slogans raised during demonstrations than in the lives of the people who raised them. It asks a different set of questions. What has everyday governance meant for those living in Pakistan Administered Kashmir? How have young people, professionals, traders and ordinary families come to view the institutions around them? Why has the language of rights begun to feature more prominently in public discourse? Above all, why has the demand for dignity emerged alongside demands for economic relief and political





representation?

These questions deserve attention because Pakistan Administered Kashmir has long occupied an unusual place in discussions about the wider Kashmir conflict. It is frequently referred to in diplomatic exchanges between India and Pakistan, occasionally mentioned in international reports and almost always viewed through the prism of geopolitics. What is often missing is a sustained examination of the society itself.

TERRITORIES DO NOT POSSESS ASPIRATIONS. PEOPLE DO

▼ *The distinction matters.*

Political maps can remain unchanged for decades while societies transform almost beyond recognition. New generations inherit old disputes but do not necessarily inherit the same priorities. The concerns of a university graduate searching for employment are not identical to those of his

Young people worry about employment, higher education and economic mobility. Traders speak of markets, regulations and purchasing power.

grandparents. A young entrepreneur trying to build a business measures progress differently from someone whose political memory was shaped by events half a century ago. Time changes expectations, and expectations eventually reshape politics. That change is visible across Pakistan Administered Kashmir.

Walk through its towns today and one notices a society that is younger, better connected and considerably more aware of the world beyond its mountains than any generation before it. Satellite television, affordable

smart phones and social media have compressed distances that geography once imposed. News travels in minutes. Comparisons are instant. A student in Muzaffarabad can watch parliamentary debates in London, university lectures from New Delhi, election campaigns in Europe and economic reforms in the Gulf, all before the day is over. Whether those comparisons are fair is almost beside the point. They shape expectations, and expectations have a way of unsettling political certainties.

That is perhaps the most important story unfolding in Pakistan Administered Kashmir today.

The debate is no longer confined to questions of identity or territory. Increasingly, it revolves around the quality of governance. Citizens discuss roads and hospitals with the same intensity that previous generations reserved for constitutional questions. Young people worry about employment, higher education and economic mobility. Traders speak of markets, regulations and purchasing power. Lawyers debate

institutional authority and legal accountability. Journalists navigate an increasingly complicated information environment. None of these concerns exists in isolation. Together, they reveal a society that is becoming more demanding of the institutions that govern it.

HISTORY OFFERS MANY EXAMPLES OF SUCH MOMENTS

Political systems rarely come under sustained public scrutiny simply because people become dissatisfied. They come under scrutiny when societies become more confident, more educated and more willing to articulate expectations. Education changes the vocabulary of public debate. Digital connectivity changes its speed. Economic pressures sharpen its urgency. Together they create citizens who ask not merely whether they are being governed, but how they are being governed.

THAT DISTINCTION IS SUBTLE BUT PROFOUNDLY IMPORTANT

For much of the past seven decades, Pakistan Administered Kashmir occupied a relatively quiet corner of international attention. The Valley across the Line of Control dominated

The story of Pakistan Administered Kashmir, therefore, is no longer simply about a disputed territory caught between competing national narratives.

headlines. Diplomatic exchanges revolved around New Delhi and Islamabad. International organizations focused on broader developments within the dispute. Meanwhile, the internal evolution of Pakistan Administered Kashmir attracted comparatively little sustained scholarly or journalistic attention. It existed in the margins of the conversation, acknowledged but seldom examined in depth. The consequence of that neglect is that many assumptions about the region have remained frozen in time.

SOCIETIES, HOWEVER, DO NOT REMAIN FROZEN

The child born in Muzaffarabad in 2005 has grown up in a world profoundly different from that experienced by his parents. He has known digital communication rather

than isolation, social media rather than state controlled narratives alone, and global economic aspirations rather than purely local horizons. His understanding of governance is shaped not only by local experience but by constant exposure to how governments function elsewhere. He evaluates public institutions against standards that previous generations rarely encountered. This does not automatically produce political unrest. It produces something far more enduring. It produces expectations. And once expectations become part of public consciousness, they are difficult to reverse. That is why the recent political mobilization in Pakistan Administered Kashmir deserves to be understood as more than a series of protests. Demonstrations eventually end. Crowds disperse. Markets reopen. Governments make announcements. But the expectations that brought people onto the streets do not disappear with equal ease. They remain, quietly influencing how citizens judge institutions, how they discuss politics within their families and how they imagine the future of the place they call home.

The story of Pakistan Administered Kashmir, therefore, is no longer simply about a disputed territory caught between competing national narratives. It is increasingly about a society discovering its own voice. That voice is not uniform. It speaks through students seeking opportunity, lawyers demanding institutional accountability, traders worried about economic uncertainty, journalists attempting to widen public debate and ordinary citizens who expect governance to be measured not merely by authority but by fairness, transparency and responsiveness.

The search for dignity begins there. Not in slogans or speeches, but in the ordinary conviction that government should be close enough to hear its people and confident enough to answer them.



WHO OWNS KASHMIR'S STORY?

HOW THE DIGITAL AGE HAS REWRITTEN THE BATTLE OF NARRATIVES

by Irfana Shafi

Kashmir's future will be influenced not only by diplomacy and security but also by the digital ecosystems that shape global understanding. As algorithms replace traditional gatekeepers, the challenge is no longer controlling information but earning trust in an age of competing narratives.



PART I: WHEN THE STORY ESCAPED THE STATE

Who owns Kashmir's story?

The answer was once straightforward. Governments issued official statements, newspapers interpreted events and diplomats framed international opinion. That order has quietly collapsed. Today, a student with a Smartphone, an influencer in another continent, a Diaspora activist, an anonymous social media account or an artificial intelligence system can shape global perceptions of Kashmir before any government has issued its first statement. The contest over Kashmir has entered a new era, where the most influential battlefield is not always the one marked on military maps, but the one hidden inside digital platforms and the algorithms that govern them. The consequences of this transformation are only beginning to be understood.

For decades, discussions on Kashmir revolved around territory, sovereignty and security. Military deployments, elections, constitutional developments, diplomatic exchanges and episodes of violence dominated public attention. Every major development was filtered through established institutions. Ministries briefed journalists. Editors determined headlines. Television channels framed the evening debate. International correspondents interpreted events for audiences thousands of kilometers away. Information travelled in one direction, from recognized institutions to the public. That architecture no longer exists.

The digital revolution has dismantled the monopoly once enjoyed by governments and traditional media. Information now moves horizontally rather than vertically. It travels instantly



The digital revolution has dismantled the monopoly once enjoyed by governments and traditional media. Information now moves horizontally rather than vertically.

across continents, crossing political boundaries with little regard for geography or official authority. News is no longer simply reported; it is recorded, commented upon, edited, translated, challenged, amplified and republished by countless individuals within minutes of an event taking place. The distinction may appear technical. It is, in fact, strategic.

The first casualty of this transformation has not been truth, as the familiar saying suggests. It has been authority. The question is no longer who possesses information. Almost everyone does. The more important question is who succeeds in making their version of events credible enough to influence public

understanding. This is where Kashmir occupies a unique position.

Few places in the world generate such intense emotional investment among people who have never visited them. Diplomats analyze it as a strategic imbroglio. Military planners study it as a security challenge. Historians approach it through competing interpretations of the past. Journalists focus on breaking developments. Human rights organizations document civilian experiences. Members of the Kashmiri Diaspora often see it through memory and identity. Social media users encounter it through fragments of video, photographs and commentary that rarely provide the whole picture. Each group tells a story. None tells the whole story.

For most of the twentieth century, these stories existed within relatively stable institutional frameworks. Newspapers competed with newspapers. Governments responded to governments. Academic journals debated academic journals. Even disagreement followed established conventions. The internet, however, dissolved those boundaries.

A university student in Srinagar, a researcher in London, a journalist in Washington and a member of the Kashmiri Diaspora in Toronto can now participate in the same conversation at the same moment. Geography no longer determines participation. Connectivity does. This has made the debate fragmented. It has also made it immeasurably more complex.

The abundance of voices has not necessarily produced greater clarity. Instead, it has multiplied interpretation. Every significant event now generates dozens of competing explanations before verified facts are fully assembled. Images circulate without context. Historical references are compressed into slogans. Thirty-second video clips become substitutes for years of political history.



Emotional engagement often outruns careful analysis because digital platforms reward immediacy far more effectively than reflection.

This is not unique to Kashmir. It characterizes nearly every major international crisis today. Kashmir, however, presents an especially revealing case because the conflict has always been sustained as much by competing interpretations as by competing territorial claims. Politics in Kashmir has never been confined to the movement of soldiers or the decisions of governments. It has always involved history, memory, identity and symbolism. Digital technology has not created these dimensions; it has accelerated them. And the speed of that acceleration is remarkable.

Consider how political communication functioned only two decades ago. Governments announced policy through press conferences. Newspapers appeared the following morning. Television channels debated events throughout the day. Public opinion

evolved gradually as information accumulated.

TODAY, THE SEQUENCE HAS BEEN REVERSED

▼ The first images often emerge from mobile phones carried by ordinary citizens. They appear online before television crews arrive. Reactions spread internationally before official confirmations are issued. Governments increasingly respond to conversations that have already begun rather than initiating them. The information cycle has become so compressed that institutions designed for a slower age frequently struggle to

Politics in Kashmir has never been confined to the movement of soldiers or the decisions of governments. It has always involved history, memory, identity and symbolism. Digital technology has not created these dimensions; it has accelerated them. And the speed of that acceleration is remarkable.

keep pace.

THE IMPLICATIONS EXTEND WELL BEYOND JOURNALISM

▼ Foreign ministries now monitor digital platforms alongside diplomatic reporting. Intelligence agencies devote growing resources to open-source information. Armed forces around the world increasingly recognize information as an operational domain rather than merely a supporting activity. Election campaigns are influenced by online ecosystems. International reputations rise and fall through digital engagement. Public

diplomacy, once dependent upon embassies and official broadcasters, now competes with creators whose audiences exceed those of many national media organizations. Power has become decentralized. Influence has become distributed. Authority has become contested. Nowhere is this more evident than in the evolution of the Kashmir discourse.

The phrase “battle of narratives” has become commonplace in discussions of the region. It appears in conferences, policy papers and television debates with almost ritual regularity. Yet the expression no longer captures the reality of the information landscape.

A battle suggests identifiable opponents. The digital world rarely offers such clarity. Instead of two competing narratives, there are hundreds. Governments produce official accounts. Journalists publish investigations. Academic researchers contribute historical context. Civil society organizations document specific concerns. Diaspora communities interpret developments through personal memory. Political activists mobilize support. Independent creators package complex issues into short videos. Artificial intelligence summarizes thousands of pages into a few paragraphs. Recommendation systems quietly decide which version reaches which audience.

The contest is no longer linear. It is ecological. Every participant influences every other participant. A video recorded in one neighborhood may shape discussion in another continent. A speech delivered in Parliament may receive less attention than a sixty-second online clip. A detailed policy report may struggle for visibility against an emotionally compelling photograph. The rules governing influence have changed because the architecture governing attention has changed.

Attention has become the most

This distinction matters profoundly for conflicts like Kashmir. Events no longer compete solely on the basis of factual significance. They compete for visibility.

valuable currency in the digital age. This is where algorithms enter the story. Most users imagine they choose the information they consume. In reality, information increasingly chooses them. Recommendation systems built by technology companies determine which posts appear first, which videos continue playing automatically, which topics trend and which disappear almost unnoticed. These systems are designed to maximize engagement, not necessarily understanding. They reward material that keeps users watching, reacting and sharing. Accuracy is important, but attention is profitable. This distinction matters profoundly for conflicts like Kashmir. Events no longer compete solely on the basis of factual significance. They compete for visibility.

An incident that generates emotional engagement may travel farther than one carrying greater strategic importance. Dramatic visuals often outperform nuanced explanations. Outrage spreads more rapidly than context. Complexity struggles against brevity because digital platforms are built to reward speed. This does not mean that facts have become irrelevant. It means that facts now operate within an environment where visibility often determines influence. That reality

presents a challenge for every participant in the Kashmir discourse. Governments cannot rely solely on official communication.

Journalists cannot assume professional reporting will automatically reach the largest audience. Researchers cannot expect detailed scholarship to compete with instant commentary. Citizens themselves must increasingly distinguish between information that is merely persuasive and information that is genuinely reliable. The contest has therefore moved beyond competing narratives. It has become a contest over credibility itself.

In earlier decades, credibility was largely inherited through institutions. Newspapers earned it over generations. Universities built it through scholarship. Governments derived it from constitutional authority. Today, credibility must be earned repeatedly in a crowded information marketplace where every claim is immediately tested, challenged and compared against countless alternatives. The result is a profound redistribution of communicative power. No single institution now possesses uncontested authority over Kashmir’s story. That story is constantly rewritten, revised and renegotiated across thousands of digital conversations unfolding simultaneously around the world. The question is no longer who speaks first. The question is who is believed.

That distinction may ultimately become as important to the future of Kashmir as any political discourse or diplomatic initiative, because in the digital age, perception does not merely reflect reality. Increasingly, it helps shape it.

PART II: THE INVISIBLE EDITORS

▼
If the twentieth century belonged to editors, the twenty first belongs to algorithms. That sentence would have

sounded absurd only fifteen years ago. Editors decided what appeared on the front page, producers chose which stories led the evening bulletin and publishers determined which voices deserved public attention. Those decisions were often criticized, sometimes celebrated, but they were visible. Readers knew who had made them.

TODAY'S EDITORS RARELY HAVE NAMES

They are mathematical systems operating silently behind digital platforms, analyzing billions of interactions every day and deciding, within fractions of a second, what each individual user is most likely to watch, read or share. They do not ask whether a piece of information is strategically significant or historically important. Their primary objective is simpler and commercially more valuable. They seek to maximize attention. This quiet shift has altered the politics of information more profoundly than many governments have yet acknowledged.

Kashmir offers an unusually revealing example. Every major development in the region now exists in two forms. The first is the event itself. The second is the digital life that event acquires after it is uploaded, shared, edited, commented upon and recommended to millions of users. Increasingly, these two realities evolve independently of one another. An event may be modest in its immediate consequences yet dominate international discussion because it performs well within digital ecosystems. Conversely, developments carrying considerable long term significance may receive comparatively little attention because they lack dramatic imagery or emotional immediacy.

The digital world does not always reward importance. It rewards engagement. That distinction explains why certain stories about Kashmir

Its history is layered, its politics contested and its realities often contradictory. Digital platforms nevertheless encourage users to think in binaries.

travel extraordinary distances while others disappear almost unnoticed.

The architecture of social media encourages compression. Long historical arguments become short captions. Constitutional debates become thirty second videos. Strategic assessments are distilled into infographics designed for rapid consumption. Every platform develops its own grammar, rewarding brevity, certainty and emotional clarity over complexity and ambiguity. Yet Kashmir has never been a subject that fits comfortably into simplified narratives. Its history is layered, its politics contested and its realities often contradictory. Digital platforms nevertheless encourage users to think in binaries. Victim or aggressor. Truth or propaganda. Freedom or occupation. Nationalism or separatism. Such framing generates engagement

because it offers emotional certainty. It rarely produces understanding. This is not simply a technological problem. It is also a psychological one.

Human beings have always preferred stories that confirm what they already believe. Digital platforms magnify this tendency. Recommendation systems observe individual behavior and gradually construct personalized information environments. A user who consistently engages with one interpretation of Kashmir is increasingly shown similar material. Over time, alternative perspectives become less visible, not necessarily because they have disappeared, but because the algorithm has concluded they are less likely to retain the user's attention. The result is not censorship in the traditional sense. It is curation. Invisible, continuous and highly personalized. Two people living in the same city, searching for information about the same event, may encounter entirely different digital worlds. Their timelines, recommendations and suggested videos may reinforce completely different understandings of reality. The difference lies not in the event itself but in the architecture through which it is presented.

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR PUBLIC DISCOURSE ARE CONSIDERABLE

Traditional journalism sought, at least



in principle, to establish a common set of facts from which disagreement could begin. Digital ecosystems increasingly encourage fragmented audiences, each consuming different evidence, different interpretations and different emotional cues. Consensus becomes more difficult because citizens are no longer debating from the same informational foundation. Kashmir illustrates this fragmentation with remarkable clarity.

A single development may simultaneously generate official government briefings, local reporting, independent commentary, international media coverage, Diaspora activism, think-tank analysis, satellite imagery, citizen journalism and countless social media reactions. None of these sources exists in isolation. Each influences the visibility of the others. Algorithms observe this interaction and accelerate whichever material generates the strongest engagement. Attention becomes self reinforcing. Visibility creates further visibility. Emotion amplifies emotion.

The old information hierarchy has dissolved into a network where influence often depends less upon institutional authority than upon digital performance. This transformation has also altered the role of the individual. For much of modern history, ordinary citizens were primarily consumers of political information. Today they are also producers.

Every Smartphone is simultaneously a camera, a publishing house, a broadcasting station and an archive. Every user possesses the ability to document events, offer interpretation and reach audiences that would once have been accessible only to established media organizations.

This democratization of communication has expanded public participation in undeniable ways. Voices that were previously marginalized now possess unprecedented opportunities to contribute to public debate. Local communities can document



Human beings have always preferred stories that confirm what they already believe. Digital platforms magnify this tendency. Recommendation systems observe individual behavior and gradually construct personalized information environments.

their own experiences rather than relying entirely upon outside observers. Independent researchers publish findings directly. Young journalists establish audiences without institutional backing. Citizens challenge inaccurate reporting in real time. These developments represent genuine advances in public communication.

However, democratization should not be confused with equal influence. The digital economy rewards those who understand its incentives.

Professional content creators study audience behaviour with remarkable sophistication. They know which headlines attract attention, which thumbnails encourage clicks, which emotional tones encourage sharing and which controversies sustain engagement. The objective is not always persuasion. Frequently it is simply visibility. The distinction matters because visibility itself has become a form of power. Influencers

occupy a particularly interesting position within this new environment.

Unlike journalists, they are rarely constrained by editorial institutions. Unlike governments, they are not expected to speak with diplomatic precision. Unlike academics, they are not required to produce exhaustive evidence. Their authority rests upon personality, consistency and audience loyalty rather than formal credentials. Some contribute valuable analysis. Others simplify extraordinarily complex issues into emotionally compelling narratives. Many operate somewhere between those two extremes. Regardless of quality, their influence is increasingly difficult to ignore.

For younger audiences, especially those who consume information primarily through short form video platforms, digital creators often function as the first point of contact with international affairs. Long before readers encounter policy papers or scholarly



books, they may have formed durable impressions through creators whose expertise varies enormously. Kashmir has become part of this phenomenon.

A dispute once interpreted primarily through diplomatic correspondence and newspaper editorials is now explained through podcasts, Instagram reels, YouTube documentaries, live streams and visual explainers designed for audiences whose attention spans are measured in seconds rather than minutes.

The medium shapes the message. Complexity becomes expensive. Certainty becomes profitable.

The Kashmiri diaspora represents another influential participant in this evolving information ecosystem.

Historically, diaspora communities contributed to political discussion through advocacy organizations, cultural associations and occasional public campaigns. Digital communication has transformed both their reach and their immediacy. Distance no longer imposes the limitations it once did. Individuals living in London, Toronto, Dubai, New York or Melbourne participate almost instantly in conversations unfolding within Kashmir itself.

This transnational conversation has expanded the global visibility of the region. It has also internationalized disagreement. Geography no

The Kashmiri diaspora represents another influential participant in this evolving information ecosystem.

longer determines participation. Connectivity does. Artificial intelligence introduces yet another layer of complexity. For the first time, information is not merely being transmitted or recommended by machines. It is increasingly being produced by them.

AI systems summarise reports, translate documents, generate images, write commentary, create audio, edit video and answer questions in natural language. These capabilities hold enormous promise for education, research and accessibility. They also create new challenges for societies attempting to distinguish authentic material from synthetic content. The significance extends beyond misinformation.

Artificial intelligence influences not only what is created but also how knowledge is organized. Millions of users increasingly rely on AI systems to explain complicated political issues

rather than consulting original documents. The quality of those explanations depends upon training data, design choices, available sources and the user's own questions. The implications for contested subjects such as Kashmir are profound. Future generations may first encounter the region not through books or classrooms but through conversations with artificial intelligence.

Who, then, shapes those conversations? Which sources become authoritative? Which historical interpretations receive greater visibility? Which voices remain absent? These are no longer hypothetical questions. They are emerging policy questions.

The debate over Kashmir has therefore entered a phase where influence depends upon far more than persuasive writing or diplomatic skill. It depends upon understanding digital architectures that remain largely invisible to ordinary users. Recommendation systems, search engines, platform policies, creator economies, translation tools and artificial intelligence collectively determine how information moves through society. None of these actors was elected. Few are publicly accountable in the conventional political sense. Together they exercise extraordinary influence over global perception. Perhaps that is the defining paradox of the digital age. The most powerful editors in the world no longer work inside newspaper buildings. Many work inside computer servers. Most people never notice them. Still they quietly decide which version of Kashmir millions of people are most likely to encounter. That silent power may prove to be one of the most consequential strategic developments of the twenty first century.

PART III: NARRATIVE SOVEREIGNTY IN AN AGE OF ALGORITHMS

For centuries, states measured

power through familiar instruments. Armies defended borders, diplomacy secured alliances, economies financed national ambition and institutions projected political authority. The information age has not diminished the importance of these pillars. It has added another, one that is less visible but increasingly decisive: the ability to sustain credibility in a world where information moves faster than governments, where perception often precedes evidence and where attention has become the most fiercely contested strategic resource.

This is where the discussion about Kashmir must move beyond the familiar phrase “the battle of narratives.”

The digital ecosystem has transformed the nature of that contest. The challenge is no longer to produce a persuasive narrative alone. Every actor is already producing one. Governments issue statements, journalists publish investigations, researchers write analyses, think tanks produce reports, citizens upload videos, influencers offer commentary and artificial intelligence generates explanations within seconds. The real question is no longer who speaks. The real question is who is trusted. Trust has quietly become the most valuable strategic asset of the information age.

This is why the idea of **narrative sovereignty** deserves greater attention.

Narrative sovereignty should not be confused with information control. Nor does it imply the elimination of competing viewpoints. Such ambitions belong to an earlier communications environment that no longer exists. Information now travels across borders almost instantaneously, carried by platforms that operate beyond the authority of any single government. Attempts to monopolize public conversation usually produce diminishing returns because audiences possess more alternatives than ever before.

Narrative sovereignty means

something different.

It is the ability of a state, an institution or even a society to maintain sufficient credibility that its account of events remains influential despite the existence of countless competing voices. It rests not on censorship but on confidence, not on volume but on consistency, not on repetition but on evidence. The distinction is fundamental. A message may reach millions of people and still fail to persuade them. Another message may reach fewer people but become more influential because it is regarded as reliable.

In previous decades, governments often assumed that communication was largely a matter of dissemination. Information was produced, distributed and expected to shape opinion. Contemporary audiences behave differently. They compare sources, verify claims, search for alternative interpretations and frequently encounter contradictory information before reaching any conclusion. Authority is no longer presumed simply because information originates from an official institution. It must be earned repeatedly.

The evolution demands institutional adaptation. Governments accustomed to communicating through carefully structured press releases now operate within an environment that rewards speed without sacrificing credibility. Delayed communication creates informational vacuums that others quickly fill. Yet excessive haste risks inaccuracies that can damage long-term trust. Balancing responsiveness with reliability has become one of the defining challenges of modern governance.

The same challenge confronts journalism.

Professional reporting has never been under greater pressure.

Digital platforms reward immediacy, but journalism derives its authority from verification. The temptation to publish first competes con-

stantly with the obligation to publish accurately. This tension is especially acute in conflict regions, where incomplete information often circulates before reporters have gained full access to events. The value of journalism therefore lies not in matching the speed of social media but in providing something social media frequently cannot: context. Context explains why an event occurred rather than merely recording that it occurred.

It distinguishes structural change from temporary disruption. It separates verified evidence from speculation. In an environment saturated with information, these functions become more rather than less important. The same principle applies to scholarship.

Universities and research institutions often appear slow compared with the pace of digital debate. Academic studies require time, evidence and careful review. This deliberate approach represents one of their greatest strengths. Serious scholarship provides historical perspective that instantaneous commentary rarely possesses. It reminds societies that complex political conflicts cannot be understood solely through the events of a single week or a single news cycle. Kashmir requires precisely this balance. Immediate reporting remains indispensable. So does long-term analysis.

The digital age often encourages the illusion that every event is unprecedented. History suggests otherwise. Political developments become more intelligible when viewed as part of longer institutional and social processes. Strategic patience, an increasingly rare quality within digital culture, remains essential for understanding regions shaped by decades rather than days.

Civil society also occupies a changing role. Community organizations, researchers, educators and independent experts increasingly contribute to public understanding

by documenting local realities, challenging misinformation and expanding public debate. Their influence depends less upon formal authority than upon demonstrated credibility. In fragmented information environments, trusted intermediaries become indispensable because they help audiences navigate competing claims. None of these actors, however, can succeed independently. Narrative sovereignty is ultimately cumulative. It emerges when institutions reinforce rather than undermine one another. Reliable journalism strengthens informed citizenship. Serious scholarship enriches public debate. Transparent governance builds confidence. Responsible civic engagement broadens participation.

Together they create an information environment capable of resisting manipulation without suppressing legitimate disagreement. This lesson carries particular relevance for Kashmir.

The region has often been described as a battlefield of competing narratives. Increasingly, it should be understood as a test case for democratic communication itself. How does a society maintain informed public discussion when information moves at unprecedented speed? How should governments respond when every policy decision is instantly interpreted through competing ideological frameworks? How can journalism preserve public trust in an age of algorithmic amplification? How should educational institutions prepare citizens to distinguish persuasive content from reliable knowledge? These questions extend far beyond Kashmir. They confront democracies across the world.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the digital age is that no participant enjoys complete control. Governments influence but do not dominate. Journalists investigate but do not monopolize. Influencers persuade but do not determine.

Artificial intelligence organizes information but does not possess independent judgment. Algorithms recommend content but cannot create public trust on their own. Power has become distributed. Responsibility has become shared. This reality should encourage a measure of humility.

The ambition to “win” the narrative may itself belong to an earlier era. Digital ecosystems are too decentralized, audiences too diverse and technologies too dynamic for any single actor to maintain permanent informational dominance. Attempts to overwhelm public debate with volume alone rarely produce lasting credibility. Repetition may attract attention for a time. It cannot substitute indefinitely for consistency, transparency and evidence. The future therefore belongs not to those who shout the loudest but to those who are believed when it matters most. The developments in Pakistan Administered Kashmir actually provide an insight as to how the narrative constructed over decades through noise and repetition cannot substitute for transparency and accountability. Credibility accumulates slowly.

It is strengthened by accuracy during moments of uncertainty, by transparency when mistakes occur and by a willingness to engage with complexity rather than reduce it to slogans. In the long run, trust proves more durable than virality. This observation carries strategic significance. Military capability protects territorial sovereignty. Economic strength sustains national resilience. Institutional credibility increasingly underpins narrative sovereignty. The three are becoming inseparable. A nation that communicates effectively while maintaining public confidence possesses a strategic advantage that cannot be measured solely through conventional indicators of power.

Kashmir will remain the subject of political disagreement, diplomatic engagement and strategic competition for years to come. That reality is unlikely to change. What has changed is the environment in which those disagreements unfold.

The next generation will not encounter Kashmir first through newspaper editorials or government archives. Many will discover it through search engines, recommendation feeds, podcasts, AI assistants, short-form videos and digital conversations that cross continents in seconds. Their first impressions will often be shaped long before they consult a book or a policy paper.

The opening question of this article therefore deserves one final answer.

Who owns Kashmir’s story? No government does. No journalist does. No influencer, platform or artificial intelligence system does.

Kashmir’s story now belongs to a conversation in which countless voices compete to explain a place the political landscapes. The influence of each voice depends less on its ability to dominate the conversation than on its capacity to contribute something increasingly rare in the digital age: evidence, perspective and trust. That is both the challenge and the opportunity of the twenty first century.

The future of Kashmir will continue to be shaped by diplomacy, security, constitutional politics and economic development. But the future of how Kashmir is understood will be shaped elsewhere as well—in search engines that rank information, algorithms that recommend content, classrooms that teach critical thinking, newsrooms that verify facts, research institutions that preserve historical context and citizens who choose whether to share certainty or seek understanding. The maps of Kashmir may remain unchanged for years. The map of influence already has.

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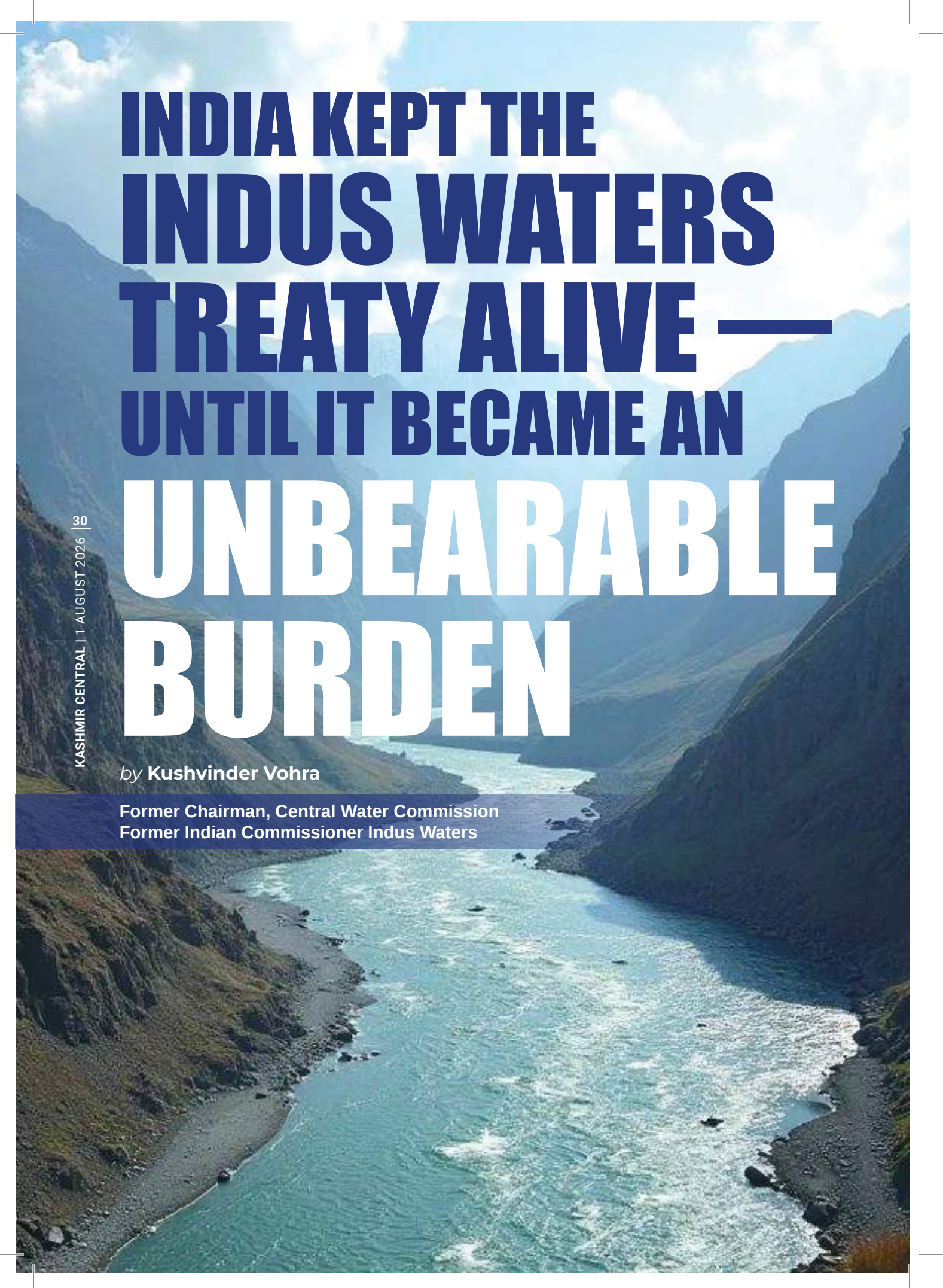


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INDIA KEPT THE INDUS WATERS TREATY ALIVE — UNTIL IT BECAME AN UNBEARABLE BURDEN

KASHMIR CENTRAL | 1 AUGUST 2026 | 38

by **Kushvinder Vohra**

Former Chairman, Central Water Commission
Former Indian Commissioner Indus Waters

For decades, the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) has been celebrated globally as one of the world's most successful international water-sharing agreements. It survived wars, military stand-offs, and prolonged hostility between India and Pakistan. Yet one fundamental question has rarely been examined honestly: *what actually kept the Treaty alive for over six decades?*

The answer is unequivocal - India's unilateral magnanimity.

As someone associated with the Indus system for over 37 years, including as Indian Commissioner of Indus Waters and Chairman of the Central Water Commission, I witnessed first-hand that the Treaty survived not because of mutual trust, but because of India's extraordinary restraint, patience, and willingness to accommodate Pakistan far beyond what is normally expected from an upper riparian state.

India's efforts to preserve the Treaty continued despite wars, terrorism, and persistent obstruction by Pakistan against even those hydroelectric projects that were fully permissible under the Treaty. Ultimately, sustained cross-border terrorism from Pakistan and systematic misuse of Treaty provisions made the continuation of the existing framework untenable. The terrorist attack in Pahalgam proved to be the

Pakistan received nearly 80% of the Indus basin waters (135 MAF) from the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab, while India retained only about 20% through the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej systems.

final trigger behind India's decision to keep the Treaty in abeyance. Prime Minister Narendra Modi summed up the national sentiment succinctly: *"Water and blood cannot flow together."*

INDIA MADE EXTRAORDINARY CONCESSIONS FROM THE BEGINNING

Even during the IWT negotiations, India repeatedly accommodated unreasonable Pakistani demands to ensure an agreement could be reached in the spirit of goodwill. Shri N.D. Gulhati, India's chief negotiator, recorded in his seminal book *Indus Waters Treaty - An Exercise in International Mediation* that the Treaty itself represented "a series

of limitations on India's freedom of action on waters within her own territories."

The most striking concession was the allocation of waters. Pakistan received nearly 80% of the Indus basin waters (135 MAF) from the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab, while India retained only about 20% through the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej systems. Such a settlement is virtually unprecedented for an upper riparian country.

India also agreed to highly burdensome transitional arrangements and even financed replacement works in Pakistan at enormous cost. Despite serious reservations, India accepted these terms hoping the Treaty would usher in lasting peace and cooperation.

PEACE NEVER FOLLOWED THE TREATY

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru candidly remarked in Parliament in 1960 that India had effectively "purchased peace" through the Treaty. That hope was quickly shattered. Soon after signing the agreement, Pakistan's leadership linked the waters issue to its claim over Jammu & Kashmir.

N.D. Gulhati later recalled Nehru lamenting in 1961 that even India's concessions in the Treaty had failed to improve broader relations between the two countries. Subsequent wars, proxy conflicts, and decades of terrorism demonstrated that India's concessions did not moderate Pakistan's hostility.

INDIA PRESERVED THE TREATY EVEN TO ITS OWN DETRIMENT

The clearest evidence of India's commitment lies in how it handled implementation of the Treaty over time.

At the Salal Dam project on the Chenab, Pakistan objected to design





features that were technically sound and fully permissible under the Treaty. To avoid confrontation in the early years of implementation, India accepted Pakistan's demands. Low-level sediment outlets were sealed, spillway levels were raised, and pondage required for efficient power generation was reduced to virtually zero.

These concessions later proved extremely damaging to India. The reservoir suffered severe siltation, turbine damage increased, and the project lost peaking capability essential for grid stability. India sacrificed even its legitimate rights under the Treaty merely to keep the Treaty functioning smoothly.

The story repeated itself at the Tulbul Navigation Project on the Jhelum. The project was intended to support winter navigation and tourism through regulated releases from Wular Lake. Although non-consumptive uses were clearly permitted under the Treaty, Pakistan raised specious objections. Acting purely in good faith and beyond the requirements of the Treaty, India suspended construction in 1987. The project remained stalled and Jammu & Kashmir suffered substantial

India sacrificed even its legitimate rights under the Treaty merely to keep the Treaty functioning smoothly.

economic losses.

PAKISTAN SYSTEMATICALLY WEAPONISED THE DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS

From the 1990s onwards, Pakistan increasingly began using Article IX of the Treaty not to raise or resolve any genuine disputes, but to obstruct India's legitimate hydropower development.

The Baglihar Dam dispute is a prime example. Pakistan challenged virtually every technical aspect of the project, despite many of these being standard engineering practices. The Neutral Expert appointed in the case

substantially upheld India's design, including the controversial gated spillways, exposing the weakness of Pakistan's objections.

The same pattern continued with the Kishanganga Hydroelectric Project. Pakistan sought to halt construction through international arbitration, causing delays and uncertainty. Eventually, the Court of Arbitration upheld India's right to divert waters for power generation, validating India's interpretation of the Treaty.

Yet Pakistan persisted in repeatedly escalating technical issues to international forums, even when previous decisions had already settled the principles involved. The objective increasingly appeared to be strategic delay rather than genuine dispute resolution.

The situation worsened further when the World Bank simultaneously entertained proceedings before both a Neutral Expert and a Court of Arbitration on overlapping issues related to Kishanganga and Ratle projects, an approach that risked contradictory outcomes and undermined the Treaty's carefully structured dispute-resolution hierarchy. India rightly opposed this

departure from the Treaty framework.

WHY INDIA FINALLY DREW THE LINE

▼
The Indus Waters Treaty survived for over six decades primarily because India exercised exceptional restraint as the upper riparian state. India continued sharing hydrological data, allowed uninterrupted flows, and adhered to Treaty obligations even during wars and sustained terrorist attacks originating from Pakistan. Few nations would have displayed similar patience under such circumstances.

Pakistan, meanwhile, not only benefited disproportionately from the Treaty's water allocation but also persistently attempted to obstruct India's lawful development rights on western rivers through political pressure and legal maneuvering.

Pakistan's consistent conduct rooted in bad faith laid bare the pernicious form of 'water terrorism' practised by it against India to defeat the legitimate development and water security rights of Indian people, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir. The cumulative burden of this malicious conduct, coupled with Pakistan's policy of using violent and extremist cross-border terrorism as a tool against India, eventually became unbearable. The Pahalgam terror attack in April 2025 proved to be the final breaking point. No treaty can survive indefinitely when one



The cumulative burden of this malicious conduct, coupled with Pakistan's policy of using violent and extremist cross-border terrorism as a tool against India, eventually became unbearable.

party continues sponsoring hostility while simultaneously exploiting the agreement to impede the other side's legitimate interests.

India's decision to keep the Treaty in abeyance is therefore not about stopping river flows; it is about

reclaiming its rightful developmental space under the Treaty framework, ending decades of systematic obstruction and making Pakistan give up its policy of perpetrating terror attacks in India through proxy groups.

CONCLUSION

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The Indus Waters Treaty endured not because it was balanced, but because India chose to uphold it with remarkable patience and responsibility. India made extraordinary concessions during negotiations, accepted operational disadvantages during implementation, and tolerated repeated obstruction in the hope that peace and cooperation would eventually prevail over hostility.

Pakistan misread this restraint as weakness. Instead of building trust, it leveraged the Treaty as a political and strategic instrument against India while continuing cross-border terrorism.

India has clearly signalled that this state of affairs cannot continue indefinitely. Cooperation in a shared river basin requires reciprocity, trust, and good faith from both sides, not perpetual hostility from one and endless accommodation from the other.



ECONOMICS OF INFLATION CRUSADE

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KASHMIR CENTRAL | 1 AUGUST 2026



by Dr Mehraj Ud Din Shah



Inflation is swiftly unfolding macroeconomic fallout across the various sectors, wiping out income, savings, investment, demand, and employment, thereby giving a rude shock to the countries. The existing Inflationary phenomenon is intensively destabilizing the budget plans and regular consumption patterns of the majority of consumers across the globe, including in India. Understandably, the demand-supply disequilibrium, coupled with the conflict-driven fallouts like crude oil supply disruptions, rising commodity prices in the global market, export and import delays, and controlled buffer stocks, has pushed inflation to new heights. The global inflation rate is expected to touch between 4.7% to 5.0% in 2026. Nevertheless, the inflation scenario is somewhat relaxed in advanced economies like the USA, 3.5%, and in fast developing country like China, 1.0% respectively. While in 2026, countries, like Venezuela (378%), Sudan (75%), Iran (68.9%), Argentina (30%), Lebanon (20%), Nigeria (16%), and Egypt (14%) are experiencing hyperinflation. The inflation in these countries is significantly pushed by their national monetary mismanagement policies, along with the existing geopolitical fallout in the Gulf and disrupted commodity flows and merchandise. The International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2026) reports that the blockades have forced global crude oil prices (like Brent) past **\$100 per barrel**. This has effectively halted the global post-pandemic disinflation trend, forcing central banks worldwide to keep interest rates painfully high to discourage the short term borrowings and restrain money supply.

Admittedly, in India, inflation is in the walking phase. It is expected to rise further from the RBI's benchmark of 2-6%. At present,

The International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2026) reports that the blockades have forced global crude oil prices (like Brent) past \$100 per barrel.

India's retail inflation (CPI) has reached 4.38%. It is consecutive rising over the last three months. The wholesale Price Index (WPI) has touched at 9.7% mainly due to high fuel and power costs. The inflation in India is within the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) tolerance band of 2-6%. The steady increase is driven primarily by rising food prices—including a sharp spike in tomato and ginger costs—and imported cost pressures from crude oil. Rightly, the inflation for the core products hovering around 3.5% is well within the limits of the monetary authorities. While the existing inflation for non-core products is mainly the byproduct of many global and domestic factors. The inflation for non-core products is pegging between 30%-50% and may swell further in the immediate

future, if plausible policy measures are not addressed. Understandably, this can be addressed through inward and outward policy measures. Apparently, the experts hint that the present inflation scenario is mainly due to crude oil constraints, as India imports a significant portion of its oil consumption, 90% from the Gulf countries and Russia. Accordingly, the Reserve Bank of India's decision on the monetary policy front is still in the wait-and-watch mode. However, still at home, many other factors are significantly raising the inflationary pressures on consumers. They include climate challenges, supply shocks, Minimum Support Price (MSP) policy changes, and the management of controlled buffer stocks.

The Weak monsoon rainfall, registering roughly 19.3% in 2026 below normal levels, has directly impacted agriculture. The productivity of many essential and basic crops has been affected by the delayed rains, and as a result, the overall kharif crop acreage dropped by 16%, leading to lower projected harvests. Moreover, vulnerable rain-fed agricultural zones are experiencing a productivity squeeze. The slow adoption of high-yielding, climate-resilient crop varieties makes domestic yields highly sensitive to extreme heatwaves and flash floods.



The traditional HYV crops like Rice, Wheat, Maiz and Sugarcane are deeply susceptible to climate variations. The rising heat stress increases evaporation rates, forcing farmers to over-pump depleting aquifers. When monsoons fail, these crops dry out quickly, leading to total stunting. These crops need genome editing to augment their climatic resilience and productivity. Further, the policy apathy of the Government's Minimum Support Price (MSP) is profoundly impacting the supply side of the essentials and is sending inflationary signals. The MSP policy is subject to a limited number of crops and in select states of the country, and awareness about MSP among farmers is not significantly low. This phenomenon demotivates farmers from raising crops that are essential for consumption. Although the Government of India recently approved notable absolute increases in MSP for 14 essential Kharif crops and also raised support prices to ensure farmers receive at least a 50% margin over their cost of production, the same is

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insufficient and inadequate to raise the market supplies. Nonetheless, the government faces tough scrutiny at the hands of the World Trade Organization (WTO) for overbidding and is seen as a major violation of trade-distorting support limits. Moreover, the buffer stock policy of the government is somewhat callous and less helpful in dealing with the situations of galloping inflation. Understandably, the government releases foodgrains through the Open

Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) to actively cool down inflation pressure. However, perishable vegetables lack extensive buffer infrastructure, and the government relies heavily on swift, reactive trade intervention. The perishable crops shortage swiftly trickles up inflation and jolts the consumers' income-consumption patterns. Consistent with the national level, the retail inflation in Jammu and Kashmir has moderated to around 3.8%, reflecting a 0.7 percentage-point decrease and aligning closely with the national average. Despite this recent cooling, the region continues to experience persistent price pressures and cost-of-living challenges, particularly in essential food, fuel, and transportation, due to its challenging terrain and reliance on external supply chains. Moreover, the revision in power tariffs has contributed to higher non-tax revenue collections for the administration, but this has simultaneously increased operational and living costs for both households and local businesses. While government economic surveys indicate that Gross State Value Added (GSVA) is expanding—driven primarily by the service and agriculture sectors—the gap between J&K's inflation trends and national averages means households remain under financial strain. The administration maintains ongoing investments in infrastructure and supply chain logistics to cushion vulnerable sections and stabilize commodity stocks. However, the state continuously boils in deep inflation.

Thus, the macroeconomic conditions are shifting rapidly as the geopolitical landscape evolves. This phenomenon creates a ripple effect of price movements of essentials and drags down the purchasing power of the common man across the globe and in India. This situation demands a strategic macroeconomic approach rather than a conventional monetary policy discourse.



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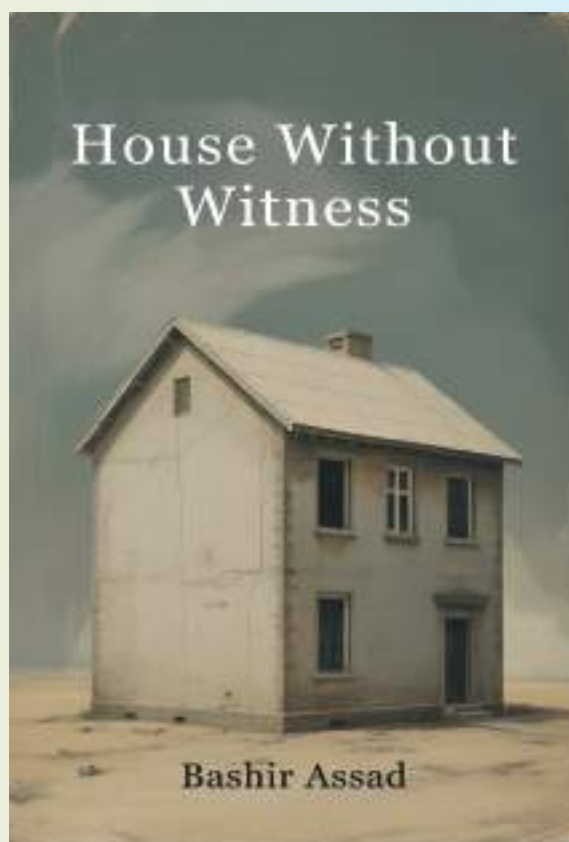
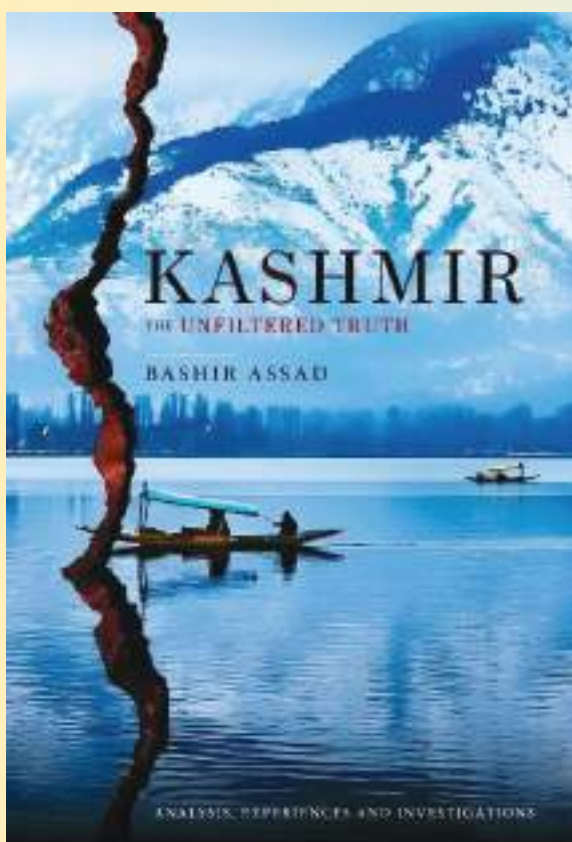
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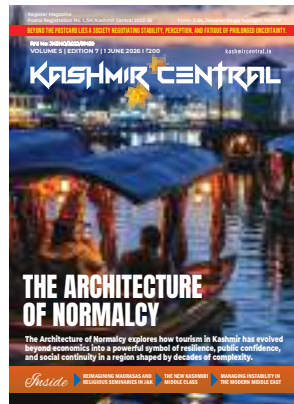
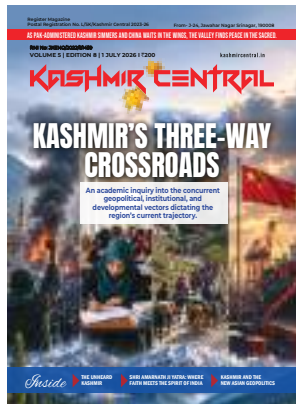
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