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THE CONFLICT SHIFTS FROM URBAN STREETS TO REMOTE INDUSTRIAL ARTERIES AND DIGITAL NETWORKS

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KASHMIR CENTRAL



SHIFTING RIDGE, SILENT HORIZONS

Tunnels, tracks, and cloud networks are the new frontiers of friction in Jammu and Kashmir, forcing a complex administrative balancing act between projecting economic normalcy and maintaining high-intensity military vigilance

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THE PULPIT VS. THE STATE: THE WAQF BOARD BACKLASH
THE DURBAR MOVE DILUTION AND THE WINTER SECRETARIAT MODEL
THE INDUS WATERS TREATY IN ABEYANCE: SEPARATING FACTS FROM RHETORIC

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INCISIVE REPORTING

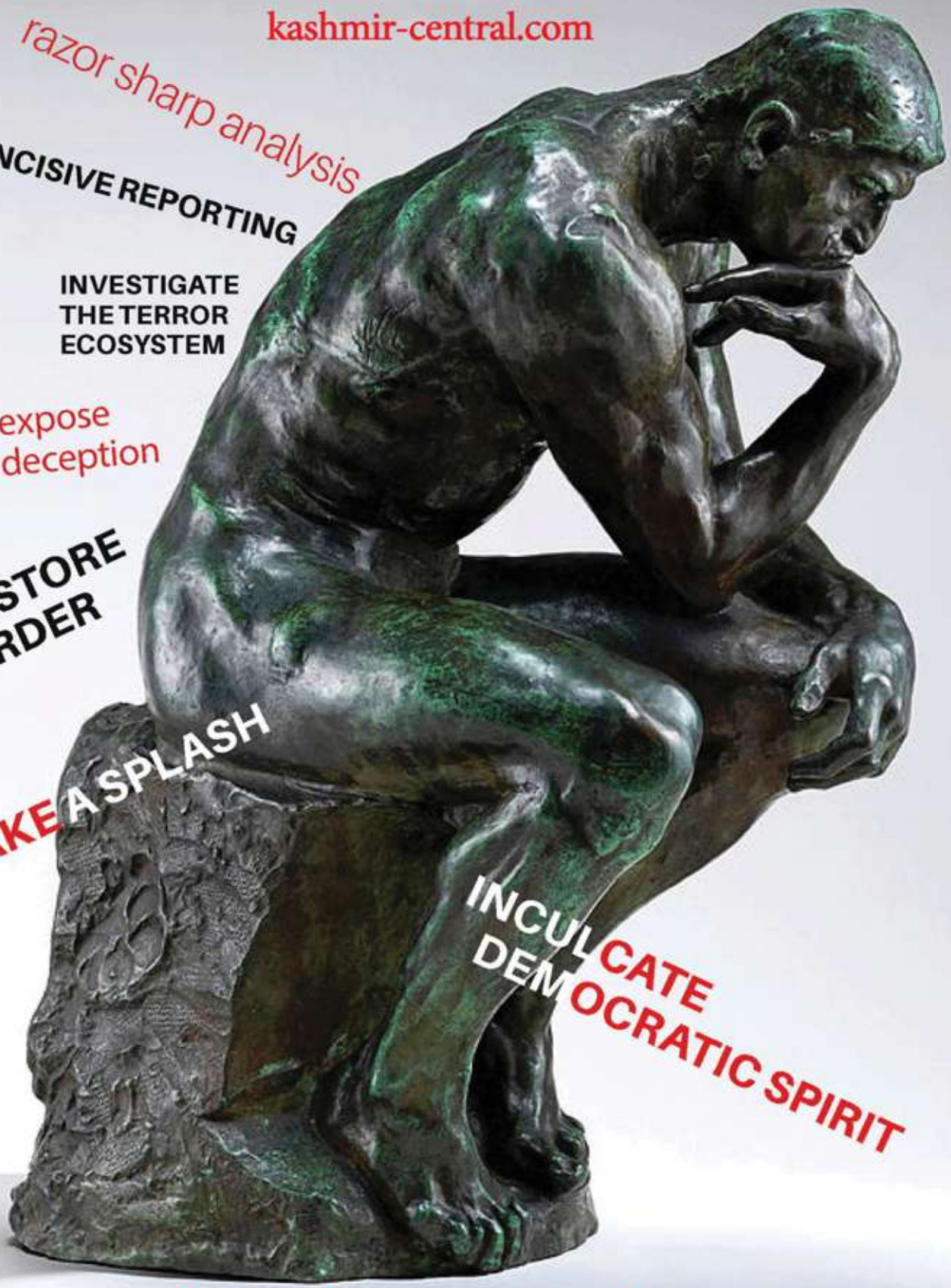
INVESTIGATE
THE TERROR
ECOSYSTEM

expose
deception

RESTORE
ORDER

MAKE A SPLASH

INCULCATE
DEMOCRATIC SPIRIT



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VOLUME 5 | EDITION 12
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THE CONCRETE TRAP



The devastating downpours that routinely submerge large parts of Jammu are no longer anomalies of nature; they are the predictable results of urban hubris. When standard late-season rainfalls transform the winter capital's primary commercial corridors and residential colonies into impassable torrents of mud and debris, the crisis cannot be dismissed as an unavoidable natural disaster. Instead, it must be recognized as an engineering indictment. The persistent inundation reveals the profound structural failures of a much-hyped urban modernization blueprint that has consistently prioritized cosmetic beautification over genuine climate resilience.

At the core of Jammu's vulnerability is a flagrant disregard for the city's natural topography. For generations, an intricate network of natural *khads* and *nallahs* served as vital ecological safety valves, safely channeling peak monsoon waters down toward the Tawi River. Today, through an unholy alliance of weak zoning enforcement and unchecked real estate speculation, these natural drainage arteries have been systematically choked. Concrete embankments, illegal housing colonies, and commercial foundations have drastically narrowed these channels. When extreme weather strikes, the volume of water remains unchanged, but the space available to contain it has vanished, forcing the excess directly into public streets and private living rooms.

This ecological destruction has been compounded by the design failures of the Smart City Mission's infrastructure upgrades. The project's signature side drains—built shallow, flat, and completely covered by permanent concrete slabs—have proven to be a major civic bottleneck. Lacking proper slope gradients, they cause rapid water stagnation during brief downpours. Furthermore, their closed design makes routine desilting and clearing of plastic debris a logistical nightmare.

Compounding this structural failure is a deep institutional vacuum. The fragmentation of municipal authority across overlapping government bodies ensures that long-term city planning remains deeply disjointed. Roads are routinely carpeted by one agency only to be dug up weeks later by another, leaving loose soil to wash into and clog the main municipal lines right before heavy rains arrive.

The lesson of these recurring flash floods is urgent and non-negotiable. True urban modernization cannot be achieved by merely laying down neat pavements and uniform slabs on paper. If the administration wishes to protect the winter capital from systemic paralysis, it must move past performative metrics. It must strictly clear illegal encroachments along natural waterways, design drains based on modern weather realities, and unify its civic departments under a single, accountable urban authority. Until the city's development frameworks respect the natural ecology of the land, Jammu will remain trapped in a cycle where substantial investments fail to translate into meaningful public safety.

Bashir Assad

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BEYOND THE POMP
THE LOGISTICAL STRAIN OF THE 3-TIER LOCAL GOVERNANCE PROMISE



by **Bashir Assad**





For twenty-eight thousand former Panchayat members across the fractured valleys and rugged highlands of Jammu and Kashmir, democracy has long been an exercise in prolonged anticipation. Following the highly publicized Assembly elections that finally restored a regional legislative assembly, the focus has abruptly shifted from the grand statecraft of the civil secretariat to the unpaved alleys of rural development. The recent announcement by the Lieutenant Governor that the long-delayed, three-tier local body elections will soon be conducted to restore Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies has been met with a mix of political triumph and deep institutional anxiety.

The backdrop to this sweeping promise is a stark administrative void. For over a year, the fundamental democratic architecture of the region has been entirely vacant. The terms of the primary Panchayats and Block Development Councils expired in January 2024, while urban municipal corporations wrapped up their tenures shortly before that. By February 2026, the five-year term of the final tier-the District Development Councils-came to a definitive close.



The terms of the primary Panchayats and Block Development Councils expired in January 2024, while urban municipal corporations wrapped up their tenures shortly before that

In the long interim, the territory has functioned under a system of pure bureaucratic administration. Through sweeping executive orders, Block Development Officers were designated as institutional administrators, replacing elected village representatives with mid-level

state officials. While this arrangement maintained the illusion of continuity on paper, the ground reality across the province has been defined by severe operational paralysis. The upcoming polls, intended to breathe life back into grassroots democracy, face an uphill battle. Rural municipal machineries find themselves severely under-equipped for a sudden decentralization of power, even as they face systemic friction from a newly structured state assembly eager to assert its own legislative domain over local development funds.

THE ANATOMY OF THE YEAR-LONG VOID

When the grassroots bodies dissolved, the immediate consequence was not a sudden collapse of public order, but rather a slow, suffocating erosion of local accountability. In rural districts like Kupwara, Anantnag, and Doda, the Panchayat Ghar was transformed overnight from a bustling forum of community dispute resolution into a locked, dusty outpost of the state apparatus. Under the bureaucratic administration model, a single Block Development Officer was routinely handed administrative control over twenty to thirty distinct Halqa Panchayats. The mathematical impossibility of an individual bureaucrat effectively addressing the hyper-local grievances of forty thousand residents across distinct topographies became apparent almost immediately.

Basic village infrastructure issues, from the clearing of seasonal irrigation canals to the maintenance of rural solar grids, ground to a halt. In the border districts, where residents depend heavily on local panches and sarpanches to act as intermediaries with the security forces and central construction agencies, the lack of elected representatives left a profound representation deficit. Without a local representative to sign

In rural districts like Kupwara, Anantnag, and Doda, the Panchayat Ghar was transformed overnight from a bustling forum of community dispute resolution into a locked, dusty outpost of the state apparatus

off on small-scale projects, funding under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act experienced massive processing bottlenecks. The direct, informal channel of community dispute resolution disappeared, forcing ordinary citizens to navigate a rigid, multi-layered bureaucratic labyrinth just to obtain a basic income or residency certificate.

RURAL MUNICIPALITIES AND THE DECENTRALIZATION SHOCK

The core assumption behind the sudden push for the three-tier local body elections is that the rural municipal machinery can instantly pivot back to an empowered, decentralized model of governance. However, an objective audit of the ground infrastructure reveals a system plagued by severe administrative exhaustion.

The J&K State Election Commission has aggressively pushed forward with the technical prerequisites for the polls, finalizing the extensive Panchayat electoral rolls with a registry exceeding 72 lakh voters. Yet, the physical and administrative framework of the Rural Development Department is struggling to keep pace. Local block offices are facing severe staff shortages, lacking the necessary technical assistants, junior engineers, and account clerks required to verify and authorize grass-roots development plans.

The logistical reality of managing an abrupt transition from centralized, top-down bureaucratic control back to highly localized community planning is immensely challenging. For over a year, funding pathways have been recalibrated to bypass local consensus entirely, operating instead through executive sanctions. Reversing this top-down flow overnight requires re-training thousands of line-department officials who have grown accustomed to managing public funds without the oversight of village committees. Rural municipalities are also grappling with an immense backlog of delayed projects, meaning the newly elected



local bodies will inherit a mountain of stalled work, depleted budgets, and public distrust from day one.

THE IMPENDING INSTITUTIONAL TUG-OF-WAR

The most complex challenge facing the three-tier local governance structure is not logistical, but constitutional. The recent revival of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly has introduced a powerful new dynamic into the region's balance of power. For the past several years, in the complete absence of a regional legislative body, the three-tier Panchayati Raj system-particularly the District Development Councils-was heavily promoted by the administration as the primary democratic voice of the territory. DDC chairpersons were granted extensive protocols, substantial budgets, and direct access to state planning boards.

With a newly structured state assembly now fully operational, an intense institutional conflict over territorial authority is inevitable. Members of the Legislative Assembly are naturally eager to reclaim their traditional control over local development funds and regional planning priorities. Many MLAs view the entrenched power of the DDC structures as an artificial administrative creation designed to dilute the influence of the legislative assembly.

This impending friction manifests in several key areas. Direct competition is brewing between MLA constituency development funds and the rural development allocations managed by DDCs. Furthermore, ongoing friction regarding administrative protocols, office space allocations, and formal seating arrangements at official state functions has sparked bitter arguments over the local warrant of precedence. There is also a concerted push within the new assembly to amend regional municipal acts, aiming to bring local bodies under tighter legislative oversight. This institutional rivalry threatens to create a deeply gridlocked environment, where rural Sarpanches and district chairpersons will likely find themselves caught between the administrative directives of the civil secretariat and the political demands of their local MLAs.

A complex debate involving the State Election Commission, the ruling regional coalition, and the national opposition has effectively stalled the announcement of formal dates

THE POLITICAL BRINKMANSHIP OF DELAY

Despite the public declarations of intent from the Lieutenant Governor's office, the actual timeline for the polls remains a highly contested political issue. A complex debate involving the State Election Commission, the ruling regional coalition, and the national opposition has effectively stalled the announcement of formal dates. The primary delay stems from the complex process of finalizing reservation percentages for Other Backward Classes within the local bodies. While the State Election Commission notes that technical preparations—including the procurement of voting compartments and ballot boxes—are largely complete, the political clearance of the Dedicated Backward Classes Commission report remains bogged down in cabinet reviews.

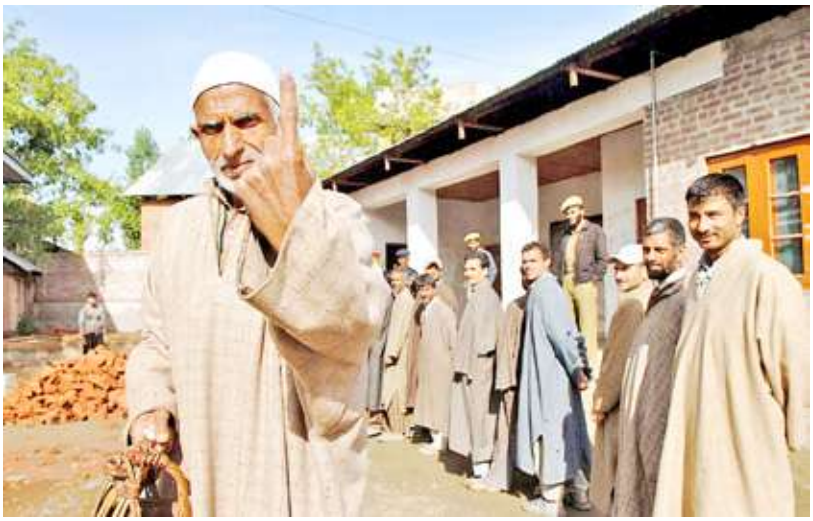


The national opposition has repeatedly accused the regional government of deliberately using these administrative hurdles to delay the local polls, arguing the ruling coalition is hesitant to test its standing at the grassroots level so soon after the assembly elections. Conversely, the ruling coalition maintains that conducting local elections without resolving the complex structural issues surrounding OBC ward rotations would permanently disenfranchise marginalized communities. Amid this political standoff, the All Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat Conference has launched a massive outreach program targeting newly elected MLAs, issuing a strict 90-day ultimatum demanding the immediate restoration of grassroots democracy and warning of widespread public agitations if local governance continues to be sacrificed for short-term political convenience.

THE COLD REALITY OF WINTER LOGISTICS

As political parties debate structural policy points, the relentless geography of the region presents a strict physical deadline. The State Election Commission had previously warned the administration that if a final decision to hold the polls was not reached before the onset of the harsh winter season, the entire electoral window would have to be deferred to the spring of the following year.

Conducting a multi-phased election across the territory's tens of thousands of polling stations requires an immense logistical deployment. Transporting voting materials, securing remote polling stations in snow-bound mountainous zones, and maintaining communication lines across isolated districts becomes nearly impossible once the winter freezes set in. While the administration has made the strategic decision to retain the additional



The State Election Commission had previously warned the administration that if a final decision to hold the polls was not reached before the onset of the harsh winter season

security forces deployed during the assembly polls within the territory to avoid high redeployment costs, the window for safe, accessible voting is closing fast. If the political logjam over ward reservations drags on much longer, the promise of immediate grassroots restoration will inevitably run into the harsh realities of winter isolation, forcing a long delay that will keep the territory under bureaucratic control well into the coming year.

THE PATH FORWARD

The path forward requires moving past high-minded rhetoric to confront the deep systemic imbalances in the region's governance model. The long reliance on bureaucratic administrators has created an insular administrative style that is fundamentally incompatible with the principles of localized, public accountability.

To ensure the long-term success of the three-tier local governance model, the administration must prioritize a strict demarcation of authority. This requires clearly defining the legislative boundaries between the regional assembly and the local panchayat structures to prevent ongoing political gridlock. Additionally, there must be a rapid capacity-building effort to substantially increase administrative staffing and technical support within the Rural Development Department before the transfer of power occurs. Finally, the depoliticization of institutional timelines is vital, establishing an independent, permanent framework for local body elections to ensure corporate terms cannot be arbitrarily extended or suspended by executive decree.

True grassroots democracy cannot be treated as a temporary administrative fix or a performative political exercise. Until the local bodies are fully restored, properly funded, and legally protected from the shifting priorities of the state assembly, the three-tier system will remain a promise unfulfilled. The ordinary citizens of the region will continue to pay the price, caught in a frustrating limbo between the absolute control of the bureaucrat and the distant promise of the ballot box.

THE PULPIT VS. THE STATE

THE WAQF BOARD BACKLASH

by **Intikhab Aalam**

For generations, the Friday congregational prayer across the Kashmir Valley has served as a profound spiritual anchor and a mirror to contemporary society. The Mimbar, or pulpit, has stood as a sacred yet highly contested space where the religious, social, and political currents of the territory converge. However, a recent initiative by the Jammu and Kashmir Waqf Board threatened to redraw the historic boundaries between state oversight and religious independence, igniting a fierce confrontation that rippled through the region's socio-religious and political landscapes.

The conflict erupted when the **Jammu and Kashmir Waqf Board**, a statutory body currently headed by a senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader, introduced a mechanism to pre-vet and standardize Friday sermons across all its affiliated shrines and mosques [J1]. The proposal aimed to establish a core committee of state-appointed Muftis, Imams, and Khateebs tasked with identifying and finalizing common sermon themes in advance. According to senior board administrators, the directive was designed to address pressing social issues, such as rampant drug abuse, late marriages, and youth suicide rates, by using a unified voice across hundreds of religious institutions. Yet, the announcement immediately triggered intense public anxiety, with critics viewing it as an unprecedented attempt by the state to prescribe religious discourse and police the historical autonomy of the Kashmiri pulpit.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE DISPUTED DIRECTIVE

The controversy took formal shape during a series of meetings convened at the Waqf Board's central office in Sonwar, Srinagar. Over a thousand



The proposal aimed to establish a core committee of state-appointed Muftis, Imams, and Khateebs tasked with identifying and finalizing common sermon themes in advance

preachers and religious scholars participated, with representatives from the Jammu region joining via video conferencing to hear the new administrative framework [J2]. During these sessions, executive magistrates associated with the board disclosed that internal directives had been in motion for a month to push preachers toward a singular, pre-selected topic each week.

More provocatively, board officials began seeking feedback on strategies to eventually expand this uniform sermon model to encompass non-Waqf-affiliated mosques, which constitute the vast majority of local places of worship across the territory. Historically, shrines and mosques across the region have operated with absolute freedom regarding their sermonic themes. Preachers routinely divide the traditional Friday address into two distinct elements: the core recitation of the historic text and a fluid commentary that interprets contemporary local issues through a moral lens. By proposing a structural filter-where a central committee would dictate the permissible boundaries of speech-the administration sought a level of uniformity never before seen in the region.

THE DOUBLE-EDGED HISTORY OF THE MIMBAR

To understand the visceral nature of the public and administrative friction over this directive, one must confront

a bitter, uncomfortable truth that defines the modern history of the Valley: the Kashmiri pulpit has long been a site of severe vulnerability and political exploitation. In the earlier, bloodiest phases of armed militancy in the late 1980s and 1990s, the sacred independence of the Mimbar was routinely weaponized by extremist religious fanatics and separatist elements.

During those turbulent decades, independent religious discourse was frequently hijacked. In countless mosques across urban and rural J&K, moderate clerics were silenced or coerced as radical elements used the weekly congregational platforms to broadcast secessionist propaganda, stoke communal passions, and issue highly polarizing dictates that fueled local militancy. For the state, the pulpit became an unmonitored node of civil disruption; for the local population, it frequently transformed from a sanctuary of spiritual peace into a source of immense ideological pressure.

The tragedy of the Kashmiri pulpit is that it now faces an ideological mirror image. Where separatist extremist elements once exploited the pulpit to advance their geopolitical goals, critics argue that the BJP-controlled Waqf Board is now attempting to lay its own heavy hand on the Mimbar to serve the state's current political narrative. For many observers, both approaches represent a fundamental violation of the sacred space. The current administrative attempt to manage theology from above is seen not as a novel social intervention, but as the continuation of a long-standing, damaging cycle where whoever holds power-whether an armed militant group or a ruling political party-seeks to control the voice of the preacher.

The coalition argued that neither the government nor an unelected board possesses the constitutional authority to script religious speeches or regulate the spiritual guidance provided to congregants

THE ULEMA COALITION RESPONDS

The backlash from Kashmir's traditional religious leadership was swift and unyielding. The **Muttahida Majlis-e-Ulema (MMU)**, a powerful umbrella organization representing leading socio-religious bodies and sects across the territory, moved decisively to reject the initiative. Headed by Kashmir's chief cleric and Hurriyat chairman, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, the MMU issued a stern public resolution declaring that the pulpit is a sacred trust that belongs exclusively to the faithful and their recognized scholars, rather than state-linked statutory bodies.

The MMU carefully distinguished between voluntary cooperation



THE HISTORICAL POLARIZATION OF THE PULPIT

ERA / ACTOR	OPERATIONAL STRATEGY ON THE MIMBAR
1990s Separatist Extremists	Weaponized the sermon for political mobilization, ideological alignment, and anti-state agitation.
2020s BJP-Led Waqf Board	Seeks top-down bureaucratic standardization and structural filtering under the guise of reform.

among scholars on pressing social issues-such as the regional fight against drug addiction-and the enforcement of an administrative command structure. The coalition argued that neither the government nor an unelected board possesses the constitutional authority to script religious speeches or regulate the spiritual guidance provided to congregants. In a sharp rhetorical counter-offensive, the Ulema urged the Waqf Board to withdraw from the realm of religious interpretation and instead confine its operations to its legal, foundational mandate: the physical maintenance, management, and protection of prime Waqf properties and endowments across the province.

THE LEGISLATIVE UPROAR

The pulpit controversy quickly escalated from a religious dispute into a volatile political standoff, drawing fierce condemnation from the territory's newly restored legislative apparatus. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah led the political charge, characterizing the uniform sermon proposal as an entirely unacceptable and misplaced attempt to please political masters in New Delhi. Abdullah demanded an immediate halt to the initiative, warning the administration against using statutory bodies to meddle in the internal religious practices of the Muslim community.

Opposition benches aligned closely with the government on the issue. People's Democratic Party President Mehbooba Mufti mounted a fierce defense of the pulpit's traditional autonomy, arguing that local imams and maulvis have protected and spread Islamic teachings for centuries without requiring administrative scripts from government officials. Mufti asserted that the move was a calculated attempt to test a wider ideological agenda in Jammu and Kashmir before rolling it out nationally, noting that since mosques are built entirely via local community donations, the state has no ownership over their internal discourse. From the halls of parliament to municipal councils, regional leaders argued that the pulpit would lose its fundamental purpose if it surrendered its independent voice to political authority. They insisted that the management of Waqf assets should be stripped from centrally appointed figures and placed back under the direct administrative purview of the elected provincial government.



From the halls of parliament to municipal councils, regional leaders argued that the pulpit would lose its fundamental purpose if it surrendered its independent voice to political authority

THE STRATEGIC RETREAT

Faced with an absolute wall of opposition from the ruling coalition, religious bodies, and civil society, the Waqf Board executed a dramatic,





public about-turn. In an urgent press conference called to defuse the growing crisis in Srinagar, Waqf Board Chairperson Dr. Darakhshan Andrabi vehemently denied that any mandatory order or official circular had been issued to enforce uniform sermons.

Andrabi sought to realign the narrative by asserting that the proposal for common themes had originated from suggestions within the clerical community itself during internal discussions on social reform. She maintained that the board's role was merely facilitative, intending to encourage preachers to speak with a collective voice against social evils like drug abuse and suicide. Reversing the executive magistrate's initial aggressive public stance, Andrabi explicitly stated that religious scholars and preachers remain entirely free to choose their weekly subjects independently, concluding that the traditional sermons would remain untouched by any state apparatus. While the board's U-turn successfully avoided an immediate street-level confrontation, the ease with which the initial directive was floated has left deep, lingering suspicions regarding the long-term protection of civil liberties in the territory.

Andrabi sought to realign the narrative by asserting that the proposal for common themes had originated from suggestions within the clerical community itself during internal discussions on social reform

THE ENDURING BOUNDARY OF FAITH

For the editorial lens of **Kashmir Central**, the rapid escalation and subsequent retreat of the Waqf Board underscores a critical truth about the contemporary governance of the region: the traditional institutions of civil society possess a resilient autonomy that resists top-down bureaucratic control. The attempt to transform the Friday sermon into a centralized channel for state-approved messaging was a profound miscalculation of the pulpit's cultural weight.

Confronting the history of the Valley means acknowledging that the pulpit must be protected from all forms of political manipulation. Just as the exploitation of the Mimbar by separatist extremists in the past damaged the social and spiritual fabric of Kashmir, any current or future attempt by a state apparatus to control religious speech risks repeating those historical errors. The Waqf Board's primary responsibility must remain the transparent, efficient administration of the vast public properties and educational trusts under its care. Moving forward, the stability of the region relies on acknowledging that certain spaces must remain outside the reach of political intervention, proving that the independence of the pulpit remains a non-negotiable boundary for the community.

THE DURBAR MOVE DILUTION AND THE WINTER SECRETARIAT MODEL





For nearly a century and a half, the seasonal rhythm of governance in Jammu and Kashmir was dictated by a monumental administrative migration. Introduced in 1872 by Maharaja Gulab Singh, the bi-annual **Darbar Move** saw the entire government machinery-complete with thousands of employees, ministers, and truckloads of official files-pack up and travel across the treacherous Jammu–Srinagar National Highway. For six months, the state engine hummed in the summer capital of Srinagar, before transitioning to the winter warmth of Jammu.

This historic practice was abruptly halted by the Raj Bhawan administration in 2021 under the guise of digital transformation and cost reduction. However, following the high-stakes Assembly elections, the restoration of the Darbar Move became a focal point of regional identity and democratic representation. The newly elected cabinet, led by **Chief Minister Omar Abdullah**, moved swiftly to fulfill its core manifesto promise by restoring the age-old tradition for the 2026–27 winter session.

Yet, as the official convoys prepare to move downward on October 31 and November 1, the structural framework of the shift looks fundamentally different. Rather than a complete uprooting of the state apparatus, the administration is executing a hybrid model: the main administrative engine will reopen in Jammu on November 2, while a permanent, fixed **Winter Secretariat** remains behind in Srinagar to handle the needs of the Valley. While presented as a modern compromise between administrative efficiency and regional inclusion, the model faces significant logistical challenges. It remains an open question whether this split arrangement will genuinely preserve public access during the harsh winter months or worsen bureaucratic delays for ordinary citizens.

The newly elected cabinet, led by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, moved swiftly to fulfill its core manifesto promise by restoring the age-old tradition for the 2026–27 winter session

THE LOGISTICAL FRICTION OF A DIVIDED ENGINE

At the heart of the new model lies



a complex logistical puzzle for the Chief Minister's office. Operating a government across two distinct geographical zones separated by unpredictable mountain passes requires seamless technical and administrative coordination. The General Administration Department has been tasked with drafting strict monthly rosters for cabinet ministers and administrative secretaries who must rotate shifts at the Srinagar outpost starting in November.

This rotation is intended to ensure that a high-ranking government authority is always physically present in the Valley to oversee emergency winter public works, food distribution, and power shortages. However, the practical application of this model introduces immediate executive friction. When a citizen approaches the Winter Secretariat in Srinagar with a critical grievance regarding electricity disruption or localized health infrastructure, the minister in attendance can rarely provide an immediate resolution. Because the central data files, budget controllers, and senior department heads are located hundreds of kilometers away in the Jammu Civil Secretariat, the local outpost often acts as little more than a post office. Petitions are digitized and sent south, re-entering the very bureaucratic loop the system was designed to bypass.

The physical strain on the moving workforce also complicates the transition. The J&K Road Transport Corporation has deployed fleets of buses to ferry employees across the highway, accompanied by extensive security escorts and en-route medical camps to mitigate the risks of early winter landslides. To ease the transition, the state has sanctioned special casual leaves and a Special Move Travelling Allowance of twenty-five thousand rupees per employee.

Yet, split offices mean split resources. Departments operating on a camp basis are left understaffed in both capitals. The Estates Department faces the continuous challenge of managing dual official accommodations, while the Power Development Department must ensure the Srinagar Secretariat remains structurally functional during peak winter blackouts without drawing power away from nearby residential grids.

THE HYBRID WINTER GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE

JAMMU CIVIL SECRETARIAT	SRINAGAR WINTER SECRETARIAT
(The Main Engine)	*(The Local Outpost)*
* Full Legislative Authority	* Roster-Based Ministerial Presence
* Primary Executive Cabinet	* Minimal Core Staff Structure
* Central Head of Departments	* Citizen Grievance Redressal Only
* Digital Data Warehousing	* Limited Financial File Clearance

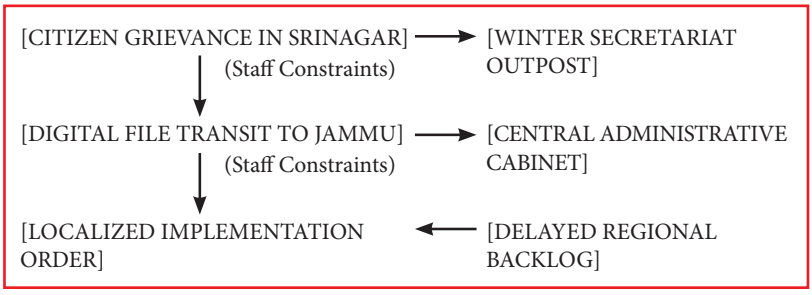
Operating a government across two distinct geographical zones separated by unpredictable mountain passes requires seamless technical and administrative coordination

ACCESSIBILITY VS. BUREAUCRATIC DRIFT

For the ordinary resident of Kashmir, the dilution of the traditional Darbar Move represents a double-edged sword. Proponents of the fixed Winter Secretariat argue that it shields citizens from the complete administrative desertion that used to define the valley from November to April. In the past, if a local vendor needed a dynamic departmental clearance or a rural delegation sought an audience with a policymaker, they were forced to endure a costly, hazardous journey down the national highway to Jammu. Under the current framework, the physical structure in Srinagar remains open, providing a sense of psychological continuity and public access.

However, the counter-narrative from civil society and opposition blocks points toward a worsening bureaucratic drift. By capping the staff strength of camp offices at a fraction of their normal size, the speed of executive decision-making has slowed significantly. Financial authorizations, structural sanctions for rural infrastructure projects, and policy clearances for essential services must wait for the main engine in Jammu to process them.

During severe winter weather, when the valley is frequently isolated by heavy snowfall and highway closures, the nominal presence of



a roster-bound minister cannot compensate for the lack of a fully staffed, autonomous administrative center. Instead of bringing the government closer to the people, critics argue the model has created a tiered hierarchy of governance, where the Valley is managed by an outsourced skeleton crew while the real power center operates in the south.

THE POLITICAL BALANCING ACT

Beyond the logistical challenges, the dilution of the Darbar Move touches upon deeply rooted issues of regional representation and political balance. The century-old migration was never merely a logistical exercise; it functioned as a vital sociocultural bridge between two distinct demographics. The annual influx of thousands of Kashmiri families into Jammu during the winter, and the subsequent return of Jammu officials to Srinagar in the summer, fostered a unique economic interdependence and cross-cultural dialogue that helped unify a fractured territory.

By scaling down this migration and restricting it to a digital-heavy hybrid model, the current administration satisfies the political demands of the Jammu business community, which had suffered severe economic losses when the move was suspended in 2021. At the same time, the government attempts to reassure the Valley by maintaining the Srinagar outpost.



The century-old migration was never merely a logistical exercise; it functioned as a vital sociocultural bridge between two distinct demographics

This political compromise, however, leaves both regions somewhat dissatisfied. The business circles in Jammu argue that a partial or camp-based move dilutes the economic boost their markets historically anticipated each November. Meanwhile, political commentators in the Valley view the arrangement as a permanent concession that diminishes Srinagar's status as a co-equal capital, reinforcing the perception that true administrative authority has drifted away from the region.



THE PATH FORWARD

The evolution of the Darbar Move highlights the ongoing struggle to balance administrative efficiency with genuine regional representation. The hybrid Winter Secretariat model is a pragmatic attempt to navigate the complex geography and politics of the territory, but its current execution remains flawed. If the Srinagar outpost is to serve as a meaningful democratic institution rather than a performative bureaucratic facade, it must be granted greater operational autonomy.

The Chief Minister's office must empower the rostered ministers with independent financial and administrative powers, enabling them to execute emergency winter decisions without needing constant approval from the Jammu secretariat. Furthermore, the digital infrastructure connecting the two capitals must be upgraded to ensure that split files do not lead to prolonged bureaucratic delays. Until these structural adjustments are made, the dilution of the Darbar Move risks transforming a celebrated tradition of administrative accessibility into a disjointed system, leaving ordinary citizens caught in the friction between two distant capitals.

The latest book " Moral Rupture of Kashmir Society: impact of prolonged conflict by Bashir Assad is scheduled to be released on September 28 at the India International Centre in New Delhi. Readers can order a copy of the book online through platforms like Amazon India or Flipkart.



KEY THEMES OF THE BOOK

Instead of discussing politics, this book focuses on how prolonged conflict changes local society.
Social Breakdown: It looks at the erosion of values and public trust.
Psychological Impact: The book examines how people cope through daily silence.

IDENTITY SHIFT:

It details changes in a once pluralistic culture.

EROSION OF SOCIAL TRUST:

The book examines how deep-seated ideological division and ongoing political instability have severely weakened interpersonal relationships and fractured community ties.

Structural Division: The text is structured across 23 chapters. The first half focuses heavily on the theoretical and philosophical impact of trauma, while the second half assesses contemporary social changes, corruption, and the shifting collective memory of the valley.

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When a highly skilled engineer or a specialized heavy machinery operator from another state is targeted, the impact ripples far beyond the immediate casualty count. It triggers an immediate crisis of confidence among private corporate sub-contractors.



THE CONNECTIVITY CONUNDRUM

HYBRID VULNERABILITIES IN THE TRANS-REGIONAL GRID

by **Insha Sofi**

For generations, the primary objective of the security architecture in Jammu and Kashmir was defined by predictable paradigms. The state apparatus focused on securing urban population centers against street agitation, while simultaneously reinforcing the multi-layered counter-infiltration grids along the Line of Control. However, the contemporary landscape has quietly shifted toward a far more calculated and sophisticated arena. Today, the most pressing strategic challenge is not the low-tech asymmetric friction of the past decade, but the protection of the region's much hyped infrastructural integration against targeted external disruption.

This structural evolution places the security apparatus in a complex operational position. The traditional military grid, designed for area domination and visible deterrence, is being forced to adapt to a highly fluid, hybrid threat matrix. This contemporary challenge bypasses conventional military outposts to target the logistics, data systems, and human resources that drive the region's physical connectivity. To understand the depth of this friction, the situation must be evaluated not through the polarizing lens of political narratives, but through the objective realities of three distinct security factors currently reshaping the territory.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE GRID TRANSFORMATION

To accurately analyze the present operational vulnerabilities, it is necessary to examine how the security architecture reached this current state. For decades, the security presence in the Valley was primarily configured as an internal security mechanism. Police stations, paramilitary bunkers, and army sectors were arranged to counter mass public gatherings, maintain law and order in dense urban townships, and manage active militancy within identifiable territorial pockets like North Kashmir's orchards or South Kashmir's countryside villages.



The traditional military grid, designed for area domination and visible deterrence, is being forced to adapt to a highly fluid, hybrid threat matrix

The apparent reduction in urban volatility did not signify the end of the region's security challenges; rather, it forced an evolutionary shift. As the central administration accelerated its trans-regional connectivity initiatives to physically bind the landlocked territory to national markets, the nature of the conflict mutated. The focus shifted away from the civilian streets and onto the vast, exposed physical arteries of this integration, creating an entirely new matrix of structural friction.

1. THE VULNERABILITY OF THE INDUSTRIAL UNDERBELLY

The primary vulnerability facing modern security planning stems from the sheer geographical scale of the region's current industrial footprint. The ambition to establish year round, weather proof transit corridors has required the execution of monumental engineering projects, including the Udhampur Srinagar Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) and multi-tier high-altitude tunnels through the mountain ranges. By their very nature, these mega-projects cannot be contained within fortified garrisons; they must cut through isolated valleys, deep gorges, and

unmapped mountainous zones.

This creates an incredibly vast and porous target area. A construction site for a railway bridge or a tunnel ventilation shaft often sits in a remote valley, hours away from the nearest rapid response military base. These sites operate continuously, relying on thousands of non-local technical experts, specialized machine operators, structural engineers, and manual laborers who are housed in temporary, far-flung base camps.

Recent events have exposed how effectively small, agile groups can exploit this industrial underbelly. When kinetic actions are directed at these soft targets, the primary goal is not the acquisition of territory or the direct engagement of armed forces; it is the generation of systemic psychological panic. The target is the human resource element driving the economic transition.

When a highly skilled engineer or a specialized heavy machinery operator from another state is targeted, the impact ripples far beyond the immediate casualty count. It triggers an immediate crisis of confidence among private corporate sub-contractors. Insurance premiums for construction firms skyrocket, technical experts request immediate transfers out of the region, and manual labor forces experience mass anxiety, threatening to bring critical infrastructure timelines to a grinding halt.



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Consequently, the state's security apparatus is forced into a highly challenging, defensive position. To prevent such economic stalling, the administration must divert massive human resources from active, offensive counter-insurgency duties to establish static security pickets around every brick kiln, infrastructure barracks, labor settlement, and railway station across the province. This defensive deployment dilutes the



overall effectiveness of the security grid, scattering personnel across thousands of vulnerable points and creating the exact operational gaps that mobile groups use to navigate the territory undetected.

THE CORPORATE-SECURITY DILEMMA

This industrial vulnerability has also introduced a complex operational challenge regarding the coordination between private capital and state security. Historically, public infrastructure development in the region was managed by state owned corporations working under direct military protection. Today, the much hyped infrastructural integration relies heavily on private multinational consortiums, corporate sub-contractors, and independent engineering firms.

These private entities operate on tight profit margins and strict commercial timelines. Implementing the intense security protocols demanded by state intelligence agencies, such as maintaining enclosed labor zones, enforcing strict nighttime curfews for staff, and vetting every local supplier, introduces significant operational friction.

Corporate managers frequently find themselves caught between the state's demand for absolute security fortification and the economic necessity of fluid, uninterrupted construction schedules. When a security breach occurs, the immediate reaction of the administration is to militarize the project zone, transforming a commercial engineering site into a highly restricted, high-security bubble. While this may offer temporary physical protection, it fundamentally alters the economic viability of the project, increasing operational costs and illustrating the difficulty of achieving true normalization under conditions of persistent asymmetric threat.

Historically, public infrastructure development in the region was managed by state owned corporations working under direct military protection

2. THE TACTICAL REALITIES OF THE SOUTHERN RIDGE

The logistical challenges confronting the security architecture are further compounded by a significant geographical shift in the conflict's primary theater. For nearly three decades, the core focus of counter-insurgency operations was the Valley floor, an area defined by wide plains, clustered villages, and dense urban networks. Over the past several operational cycles, the absolute saturation of this Valley floor with electronic surveillance, localized human intelligence networks, and multi-layered paramilitary cordons has made conventional operations there increasingly unsustainable for armed groups.

As a direct consequence, the primary operational focus has moved south of the Pir Panjal range, centering on the rugged, mountainous terrain of the Jammu division, particularly the districts of Poonch, Rajouri, Kathua, and Udhampur. This geographical pivot has completely transformed the tactical environment for conventional military forces.

The southern ridge presents an entirely different set of operational conditions compared to the Valley floor. Instead of flat orchards and interconnected towns, the landscape is defined by vast tracts of unmapped alpine forests, sheer cliffs, deep rocky gorges, and complex natural cave networks. In this environment, the traditional cordon and search method, which relies on rapidly encircling a specific, localized area with thousands of troops, becomes logistically impossible. A single forested ridge line can span dozens of kilometers, allowing small groups to evade detection indefinitely.

Furthermore, recent field intelligence reveals that the groups operating in these southern zones possess a significantly upgraded technical profile. The frequent recovery of M4 carbines, specialized steel-core armor-piercing ammunition, tactical night-vision devices, and advanced military gear indicates access to highly structured





external training programs.

Crucially, these cells have abandoned standard mobile and cellular networks, which are easily tracked by the state's advanced electronic surveillance hubs in Srinagar and Jammu. Instead, they utilize highly encrypted satellite communication platforms that operate outside conventional cellular interception capabilities, allowing them to coordinate movements and gather intelligence without leaving a digital trail.

This technical and tactical evolution has altered the dynamic of encounters. When an army patrol or a specialized police unit makes contact with a cell in the southern forests, the confrontation rarely ends quickly. The terrain heavily favors the ambusher, who can exploit high-altitude positions and thick undergrowth to inflict initial casualties before melting back into the mountain system.

As a result, what used to be swift, afternoon operations in the Valley have turned into prolonged, weeks-long high-altitude sieges in the south. These campaigns demand immense logistical mobilization, requiring the deployment of elite commandos, heavy helicopter support, and continuous drone surveillance to clear a single mountainous sector.

In the Kashmir Valley, years of counter-insurgency operations allowed the state to build an extensive network of local informants, village officials, and electronic interception posts

THE NOMADIC FACTOR AND LOCAL INTELLIGENCE

The shift to the southern ridge has also complicated the human intelligence network that the security forces rely on so heavily. In the Kashmir Valley, years of counter-insurgency operations allowed the state to build an extensive network of local informants, village officials, and electronic interception posts. In the rugged expanses of the Jammu hill districts, however, the population is far more dispersed and seasonally mobile.

During the summer months, the high pastures of the Pir Panjal are populated by nomadic Gujjar and Bakarwal communities who move their livestock across the mountain passes. These communities possess an unparalleled knowledge of the terrain, tracking every hidden mountain path and natural cave system.

Ensuring the security of these vast border regions requires maintaining deep, trust-based relationships with these nomadic groups. However, the transient nature of their lives, combined with the immense fear generated by highly trained, mobile cells operating in the forests, makes consistent intelligence gathering extremely difficult. If the nomadic populations feel caught between



the pressure of active cells in the wilderness and the aggressive verification processes of the security forces, they may opt for silence, depriving the state of its most vital early warning system in the mountains.

3. THE SILENT HORIZON: THE CYBER AND DATA FRONT

While the physical challenges of securing infrastructure camps and navigating high-altitude forest gorges dominate the public narrative, an equally critical vulnerability has emerged within the region's digital infrastructure. Over the years, the administration has pursued a rapid, comprehensive digitization of the entire governance framework of Jammu and Kashmir. Everything from land revenue records and civil secretariat communications to public utility management and citizen service interfaces has been migrated onto centralized cloud networks.

While this digital shift has significantly streamlined administrative processes and reduced conventional bureaucratic corruption, it has simultaneously opened a massive, silent front in the hybrid conflict landscape. The target matrix has expanded to include the region's data sovereignty and digital infrastructure.

Everything from land revenue records and civil secretariat communications to public utility management and citizen service interfaces has been migrated onto centralized cloud networks.



This digital threat is no longer a theoretical concern for security planners; it has manifested in highly sophisticated cyber offensives aimed at disrupting the state's administrative engine. The absolute vulnerability of these centralized networks became apparent when the administration was forced to abruptly implement unprecedented data security measures across all government offices.

The emergency directives-which included an absolute, blanket ban on the use of personal laptops, external flash drives, unverified Wi-Fi networks, and private email services within official departments-demonstrate the seriousness of the digital threat. Security audits revealed that hostile actors were actively attempting to infiltrate administrative databases, not merely to gather intelligence, but to acquire the capability to execute systemic sabotage.

A successful cyber attack on

the region's digitized infrastructure represents a nightmare scenario for the security architecture. By targeting the automated control systems of major power grids, the digital signals regulating the new trans-regional railway links, or the centralized databases containing land and residency records, a remote cyber operative can induce a state of total administrative paralysis.

Such a digital shutdown could disable essential services, freeze commercial activity, and disrupt transit corridors just as effectively as a physical strike on a highway bridge, all while leaving no physical trace, requiring no border crossing, and bypassing the entire conventional military cordon on the ground.

THE CHALLENGE OF DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE LEGALITY

The expansion of the cyber front has also forced the security architecture to adopt an aggressive, all-encompassing stance on digital surveillance within civil society. To prevent the coordination of hybrid threats, the administration has continuously utilized localized internet suspensions, social media monitoring, and the deep packet inspection of digital traffic across the territory.

While these measures are defended by security planners as essential tools to counter the spread of encrypted instructions and digital sabotage, they introduce significant long-term friction into civilian life. The continuous monitoring of digital platforms creates an atmosphere of pervasive surveillance that slows down the growth of the region's emerging IT sector, complicates daily online commerce, and creates a sense of systemic distrust between the tech-savvy youth population and the state apparatus. The challenge for the administration is immense: how to build a robust, secure digital society



when the very tools of openness are continuously perceived as potential gateways for systemic subversion.

Evaluating the contemporary security scenario requires looking past the rhetoric of both absolute stabilization and immediate crisis. The reality facing the territory is one of complex institutional mutation. The security grid is no longer fighting a visible, localized insurgency; it is managing a sophisticated, multi-layered, and geographically fluid hybrid challenge that seeks to disrupt the region's economic and digital connectivity.

The current situation places the administration in a delicate balancing act. To sustain the critical influx of tourism, private investment, and corporate partnership necessary to justify the much hyped infrastructural integration, the state must project an image of absolute normalcy, openness, and civil peace. Yet, to safeguard that very integration from targeted industrial strikes, southern ridge ambushes, and sophisticated cyber offensives, the security architecture must operate under conditions of intense vigilance and continuous mobilization.

The path forward cannot rely on the conventional metrics of the past. Simply counting the number of active cells neutralized or increasing the visibility of urban checkpoints is no longer sufficient to guarantee long-term stability.

True resilience demands the development of a modern, multi-layered security doctrine that integrates advanced physical fortification of infrastructure assets with absolute cyber sovereignty and proactive, trust-based community engagement in the remote border districts. Until the state can completely secure both the physical arteries of trans-regional transit and the digital networks of civilian governance without placing an unsustainable burden on the daily liberties and economic life of the local population, the management of this infrastructure cordon will remain the defining administrative challenge of the region's future.

THE SILICON RAVINE

GLOBAL CAPITAL, REMOTE TECH, AND KASHMIR'S SOVEREIGN DIGITAL FRONTIER

by **Sohail Bhat**



In the quiet, low-lit cafes lining the Bund in Srinagar and within the minimalist co-working spaces cropping up across Srinagar and Jammu, a quiet macro-economic transformation is unfolding. While traditional diplomatic dossiers on Jammu and Kashmir remain tethered to the familiar rhythms of agrarian cycles, high-altitude tourism, and geopolitical friction, a new class of economic actors is quietly reshaping the region's relationship with global capital. Armed with high-speed fiber connectivity, advanced degrees in machine learning, and borderless digital identities, a rapidly expanding cohort of software engineers, quantitative analysts, and tech freelancers are integrating the Valley into the global digital economy.

This is not the conventional story of state-sponsored technology parks or subsidized call centers. Instead, it is an organic, decentralized boom driven entirely by remote knowledge exports. For an international diplomatic audience accustomed to viewing the region through the lens of developmental aid or security gridlocks, this tech boom offers a compelling case study in structural economic resilience. It demonstrates how highly skilled human capital can bypass traditional geographic and physical trade bottlenecks, establishing direct, high-value economic linkages with financial hubs in San Francisco, London, Berlin, and Dubai.

Armed with high-speed fiber connectivity, advanced degrees in machine learning, and borderless digital identities, a rapidly expanding cohort of software engineers, quantitative analysts, and tech freelancers are integrating the Valley into the global digital economy.

THE BORDERLESS KNOWLEDGE ARBITRAGE

Historically, the economic narrative of the territory was constrained by its landlocked geography. The physical export of premium goods—whether saffron, hand-knotted silk carpets, or fresh horticulture—depended entirely on the highly volatile logistics of the Jammu–Srinagar National Highway. Landslides, seasonal closures, and transit checks acted as permanent, unpredictable tariffs on the region's economic growth.

The remote technology boom completely neutralizes these physical constraints. For a senior data engineer operating out of an independent studio in Baramulla or a full-stack developer in Srinagar, the only infrastructure that matters is a reliable



power grid and an uninterrupted broadband pipe. By exporting pure intellectual capital, these digital actors are participating in a highly lucrative global knowledge arbitrage. They command international dollar- and euro-denominated contract rates while living in a regional economy with significantly lower operational overheads, creating a powerful influx of untethered disposable wealth that is quietly transforming local real estate, banking sectors, and consumer markets.

This economic mobility has also triggered a profound cultural shift among the region's educated youth. For decades, the ultimate aspirational goal for a university graduate in the Valley was the security of a government job—a dependency that created an overcrowded, fiscally strained public sector. Today, the elite stratum of local engineering talent is consciously turning away from administrative clerkships. They choose instead to design automated trading algorithms for European fintech firms, manage cloud infrastructure for American logistics giants, or build decentralized applications for global Web3 consortiums, asserting a high degree of economic independence from traditional state patronages.

To maintain international corporate trust and meet strict service-level agreements (SLAs), remote workers have developed redundant infrastructure systems.



NAVIGATING THE GEOPOLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE GAP

For the international diplomatic observer, the most remarkable aspect of this digital economy is its ability to thrive within an inherently complex infrastructure landscape. Operating a global tech enterprise from the region requires navigating structural hurdles that would paralyze conventional corporate startups elsewhere.

The primary operational challenge remains the history of connectivity vulnerabilities. While the current stabilization has brought widespread 5G access and fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) networks, the memory of prolonged digital blackouts from the previous decade continues to shape the risk management strategies of local freelancers. To maintain international corporate trust and meet strict service-level agreements (SLAs), remote workers have developed redundant infrastructure systems.

It is common practice for a freelance collective to maintain multiple independent internet connections from competing service providers, backed up by dedicated satellite hot-spots and heavy industrial power banking units to

survive winter grid collapses. This resilience has institutionalized a unique corporate subculture: an elite Kashmiri developer is defined not just by their coding proficiency, but by their logistical resourcefulness—their proven ability to deliver flawless deliverables to a Silicon Valley client while operating inside an unpredictable administrative environment.

Furthermore, international financial integration remains a complex puzzle. Due to strict national regulatory frameworks and intensive compliance checks on foreign inward remittances to Jammu and Kashmir, local remote workers must clear extensive bureaucratic hurdles just to receive their monthly contract payments. Platforms like PayPal, Stripe, and traditional international wire systems frequently trigger automatic compliance flags, forcing local engineers to navigate an intricate maze of tax filings, digital invoicing, and foreign exchange verifications to prove the legitimacy of their global earnings.

THE DIGITAL DIASPORA AND DECENTRALIZED CAPITAL

The engine driving this remote tech boom is heavily fueled by a dynamic, reverse brain-drain phenomenon. Over the past decade, thousands of highly successful Kashmiri tech professionals migrated to global technology hubs, building influential careers within Fortune 500 corporations and elite academic institutions.

Today, this global digital diaspora is leveraging its structural privilege to pull local talent up into the international matrix. Rather than requiring young engineers to emigrate, diaspora members are acting as institutional bridges—founding remote-first startups, establishing decentralized



The Silicon Ravine represents a highly progressive, self-directed economic vanguard that has successfully integrated itself into the high-tech supply chains of the developed world.

development nodes, and consciously outsourcing high-value programming contracts back to specialized teams located in their home towns.

This flow of decentralized capital is creating a self-sustaining ecosystem. Young developers who cut their teeth on international contracts are gradually evolving into tech entrepreneurs themselves, establishing boutique digital agencies, UI/UX consultancies, and specialized data-annotation firms within the region. This organic growth model bypasses the need for massive, high-visibility corporate campuses, creating instead a resilient network of small, highly profitable micro-studios scattered across urban and semi-urban centers, completely immune to the conventional challenges of industrial land acquisition.

THE DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC TAKEAWAY

The rise of this remote digital elite offers a fresh, sophisticated perspective on the region's contemporary reality. It proves that the territory can no longer be accurately analyzed solely through the historical framework of developmental stagnation or regional dependency.

The Silicon Ravine represents a highly progressive, self-directed economic vanguard that has successfully integrated itself into the high-tech supply chains of the developed world. As international embassies and global trade bodies monitor the strategic evolution of South Asia, recognizing the potential of this borderless knowledge economy is vital. The true stability of the region may ultimately be secured not by the traditional blueprints of industrial zoning, but by the fingers of its youth tapping away on keyboards, permanently wired into the global digital future.

THE INDUS WATERS TREATY IN ABEYANCE

SEPARATING FACTS FROM RHETORIC

by **Devendra Kumar Sharma**
Member, National Security Advisory Board
Former Chairman, Bhakra Beas Management Board



The Indus Water Treaty (IWT), signed in Karachi on September 19, 1960, by the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistani President Ayub Khan, was a historic water-sharing Agreement. Negotiated under the auspices of the World Bank, the Treaty was originally expected to secure peace and stability for both emerging nations. Decades later, however, it has become clear that technological advancements have outpaced the original intent and spirit of the Treaty. Today, the Treaty's technical parameters are widely considered outdated, leaving its framework rigid and 'frozen' in time.

THE INDUS RIVER BASIN

The Indus River (*Vedic name: 'Sindhu'*) system is characterized by two major river systems, i.e., the Kabul River, a major right-bank tributary flowing from Afghanistan, which meets the Indus river just upstream of Attock in Pakistan and the Panjnad ('*Panchnad*') which represents the convergence of the Jhelum ('*Vitasta*'), the Chenab ('*Asikni*'), the Satluj and the Ravi with the Indus. The Beas River, also part of the Indus System, meets river Satluj upstream of the Harike barrage.

As per Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab are classified as the 'Western Rivers' whereas the Ravi, Beas, and Satluj are designated as the 'Eastern Rivers'. This Indus system ultimately discharges into the Arabian Sea south of Karachi. *The Indus Water System is shown in Fig. 1.*

HOLDING THE IWT IN ABEYANCE

Since its signing, the IWT survived three major wars inflicted by Pakistan on India in 1965, 1971 and 1999. It also survived several terrorist attacks,



Fig. 1 The Indus River System

On 22nd April, 2025, terrorists, rogue elements and groups supported by Pakistan segregated and killed 26 people based on religion at Pahalgam in Kashmir. Faced with credible evidence of Pakistan acting directly against supreme national security interests of India, the latter was forced to hold the Treaty in abeyance



including 2001 Parliament attack, the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, the 2016 Uri terrorist attack, and the 2019 Pulwama terrorist attack on CRPF convoy.

However, on 22nd April, 2025, terrorists, rogue elements and groups supported by Pakistan segregated and killed 26 people based on religion at Pahalgam in Kashmir. Faced with credible evidence of Pakistan acting directly against supreme national security interests of India, the latter was forced to hold the Treaty in abeyance.

India's position on the IWT remains consistent: the IWT stands in abeyance in response to Pakistan's continued sponsorship of cross-border terrorism, and Pakistan must credibly and irrevocably abjure its support for cross-border terrorism.

BACKGROUND OF THE WATER DISPUTE

Water disputes in the undivided Punjab and Sindh provinces predate independence. However, with the emergence of India and Pakistan after Independence in 1947, these took the shape of an international dispute.

When the British Parliament passed the Indian Independence Act on July 18, 1947, the management of river waters was left to the future governments of the two dominions to decide.

Sir Cyril Radcliffe, Chairman of the Punjab Boundary Commission, could not proceed to lay down any arrangement of water sharing as it was not within his terms of reference. He stated in his award, "*to preserve the undivided irrigation system of the Upper Bari Doab Canal*": he could only express a hope that *"a solution may be found by the Agreement between the two States for some joint control of what has hitherto been a valuable common service*".

WATER DISTRIBUTION



Deliberately or accidently, West Punjab (Pakistan) did not take any steps utill 31st March, 1948 to negotiate any Agreement with East Punjab regarding supply of water to Central Bari Doab Canal and Dipalpur canal

IMMEDIATELY AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The partition left a stark infrastructural imbalance. Out of 143 canals in the undivided Punjab, only 12 canals came to East Punjab (India) and 131 canals went to West Punjab (Pakistan). Most profitable schemes and those technically feasible had been in West Punjab (Pakistan) and the East Punjab (India) was completely deprived of development with many areas distant from the rivers.

Most of the large canals lay entirely in Pakistan and a few entirely in India. Complicating matters, Upper Bari Doab Canal (UBDC), which was the only canal system with its origin from Madhopur Headworks, had been severed by the new boundary at several places. Lower portions of the several channels of the UBDC which went to West Punjab (Pakistan) and are known as Central Bari Doab Canal (CBDC) had to receive water supply from upper portion of those channels in East Punjab (India). Dipalpur Canal, which exclusively served West Punjab (Pakistan), had its headworks at Ferozepur.

To manage this, at the instance of West Punjab (Pakistan), the Chief Engineers of East Punjab and West Punjab entered into an Agreement on 20th December, 1947 to continue the status quo ante on the UBDC and Ferozepur Headworks till 31st March, 1948. Deliberately or accidently, West Punjab (Pakistan) did not take any steps utill 31st March, 1948 to negotiate any Agreement with East Punjab regarding supply of water to Central Bari Doab Canal and Dipalpur canal. Consequently, in the absence of any Agreement, East Punjab on 1st April, 1948 discontinued use of its installations for the benefit

of CBDC in West Punjab.

Acknowledging this administrative failure, Chaudhuri Muhammed Ali, the then Secretary-General of Pakistan and later the Prime Minister, said, *"On part of the West Punjab there was neglect of duty, complacency and lack of common prudence, which had disastrous consequences for Pakistan".*

Despite its internal admissions of negligence, Pakistan created false narrative that India turned off water of all the six rivers on 1st April, 1948. On 16th December, 1952, M. Zafrulla Khan, Pakistan's Representative in Security Council debate stated *"… On 1 April, 1948, … India turned off the waters of these rivers which used to flow into Pakistan".* Ironically, the record of the meeting does not show any doubt having been cast on the accuracy of this statement by any of the permanent or temporary members of the Security Council.

Another important statement in this regard is, *"The economy of West Pakistan is Agriculture… The flow of water in rivers and canals is the life-blood of the country."*

This narrative was factually unfounded. It is evident that after independence in August, 1947, India had not constructed any structure on any of these six rivers during 9 months till 31st March, 1948 which could control water of all the six rivers. Even today, 74 years after issuance of this statement by Pakistan in 1952, India does not have structure to control water of the Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.

IMBALANCE IN WATER DISTRIBUTION IN INDUS WATERS TREATY

After signing of IWT, India was allowed exclusive use of the waters of the Eastern rivers which was estimated at 40.7 BCM (billion cubic meter) or 33 MAF (millions acre feet). Pakistan was allowed to utilize the whole of the Western rivers which was estimated at 168 to 170 BCM or around 135 to 140 MAF. Ironically, India is allowed only around 19.6% of the water share of the Indus river system through the Eastern rivers

Even today, 74 years after issuance of this statement by Pakistan in 1952, India does not have structure to control water of the Indus, Chenab and Jhelum



though it has almost double the catchment area of this percentage. On the other hand, Pakistan receives around 81% of the water share of the Indus system, having around half of the catchment area of this percentage falling in Pakistan.

This allocation also ignored demographic realities. Population depending on the waters of the Indus systems, according to 1941 census was 25 million (54%) in Pakistan and 21 million (46%) in India. Forty six percent of the population on the Indian side received only 19.6% of water whereas 54% of population on Pakistan received around 80% of water. Out of 26 million acres of irrigated land by the Indus canals, 21 million acre feet went to Pakistan and only 5 million acre feet came to India. The newly imposed political environment after partition not only disrupted the food supply line but also suddenly severed the hydrologic unity of the Indus system. It posed serious threat to development of several million acres of highly arid but otherwise fertile land in the Indian part of the Indus Basin.

In 2019, Pakistani officials reported that they received 168.6 BCM in the Western rivers and an additional 6.04 BCM in the Eastern rivers. Pakistan receives 19 to 28 MAF of water from Kabul river in Afghanistan. Out of total water in the Indus system around 40 MAF flows to the Arabian Sea due to inefficiencies in Pakistan's water system.

Pakistan was given disproportionate and excess share of water despite having lesser catchment area. On the other hand, on Indian side, there is acute shortage of water in the States of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and the National Capital Region of Delhi.

WATER CRISIS IN INDIAN STATES

While Pakistan allows massive



volumes of water to escape to the sea, Indian states face acute shortages. In Indian State of Punjab, net dynamic ground water resources are 21.44 MCM (million cubic meters), whereas net draft (pumping of ground water) is 31.16 MCM, leading to ground water deficit of 9.72 MCM each year. Thus, the stage of ground water development for Punjab state in India as a whole is 145% and the State falls under "over- exploited" category. Ground water table in most parts of Punjab is more than 200 m to 300 m below surface. Out of the State's area of 5.03 million hectares, 4.32 million hectares has a severe problem of falling ground water level. Similarly, the Indian State of Haryana (carved out of Punjab in 1966), having an area of 4.42 million hectares is suffering badly and is under severe water stress.

The State of Rajasthan having Thar desert, receives only 83 mm of annual rainfall in its Jaisalmer district. Large stretches of land in Rajasthan, a State having so many communities impacted with high temperature of more than 50 degree celcius, are covered under desert with sand dunes. Water availability for survival of growing population in the State is under severe stress.

Indus basin has a strong strategic component from the overall food security angle and for socio-economic development of the country

In addition, the region is characterised by increasing population and decreasing per capita water availability. Indus basin has a strong strategic component from the overall food security angle and for socio-economic development of the country. The States of Punjab and Haryana accounting for 4% of total population in India, produce 25% of total wheat production. The State of Punjab, known as the breadbasket of India is facing water crisis. It is vital to meet water requirement of the States of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, in the Indus basin in India, in order to support their financial and human advancement and to ensure food security to 1.4 billion people in India.

FALSE NARRATIVE BUILDING BY PAKISTAN

Much like in 1952, Pakistan continues to construct a misleading false narrative after the IWT has been held in abeyance. The core of these allegations is that India controls the river waters to engineer droughts in Pakistan, while conversely accusing India of causing floods during the monsoon season. By levelling these charges of upstream manipulation regarding flow fluctuations in the Chenab River, Pakistan overlooks both hydrological realities of water availability and the established operational and maintenance practices of run-of-river hydropower

projects. This rhetoric has been amplified on international platforms by Pakistan.

The rhetoric by Pakistan is frequently accompanied by extreme threats. A Pakistani Cabinet Minister reportedly threatened to "chop off" the hands of anyone constructing diversion structures on the Western rivers. Similarly, during an address to the Pakistani diaspora in Tampa, Florida, General Asim Munir issued direct military and nuclear threats against India. Among these threats, he warned that Pakistan would launch missile strikes to destroy any future Indian dams built on the Indus River basin. Such statements significantly heighten tensions.

CONCLUSION

The Indus basin represents a unique global anomaly: an upper riparian state is restricted from meeting the basic water demands of its population, while the lower riparian state enjoys the luxury of systemic wastage nearly double the volume of the upper state's total allocation. It is well known that Pakistan receives around 81 percent of the water of the Indus river system, while India has been allocated only 33 MAF or 19 percent. Even out of this share of 33 MAF, around 6 to 7 MAF still flows to Pakistan due to local site constraints. Currently, Pakistan is using around 135 to 140 MAF of water. Out of this, approximately 30 to 40 MAF escapes unutilized into the Arabian Sea, while an additional around 30 MAF is lost due to operational inefficiencies and unlined irrigation canals.

Consequently, Pakistan's system suffers an aggregate annual loss of more than 60 MAF. This luxury of systematic wastage of 60 MAF of water out of total available water of 135 to 140 MAF by Pakistan compared with India's restricted usage of just around 27 MAF as the upper riparian state, starkly illustrates the current imbalance in the Indus basin. Even while accounting for mandatory ecological baseline of 8.6 MAF of water flow below Kotri barrage near Hyderabad/Jamshoro and upstream from Karachi, as recommended by the international Panel of Experts, there is wastage of around 52 MAF within Pakistan's water management system.



At a time when Northern India faces severe drinking water shortages, modernizing the operational realities and allowing India to use its fair share of water serves the mutual interests of both nations

Furthermore, India should have the necessary operational flexibility to adopt best international sediment management practices on the Western rivers, such as hydraulic sluicing via low-level under-sluices, mirroring the exact technical standards Pakistan employs for its own dam projects.

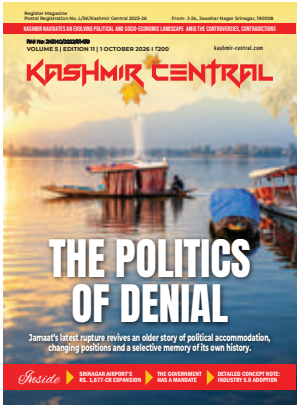
Rather than propagating unsustainable rhetoric at domestic and international forums, Pakistan should focus on minimizing its internal water wastage and optimizing its resource management to foster regional peace and stability in South Asia. Attempts by Pakistan to create false narratives for its own public as well as at the international forums are not sustainable. At a time when Northern India faces severe drinking water shortages, modernizing the operational realities and allowing India to use its fair share of water serves the mutual interests of both nations.

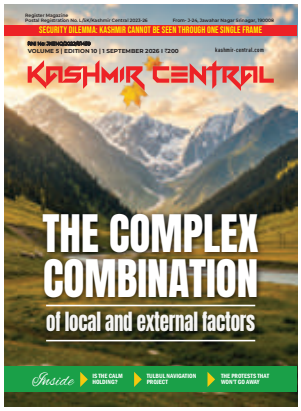
The Indus basin, thus, has become a unique global anomaly where an upper riparian state is deprived of its natural rights in use of rivers which flow through its territory from meeting the basic water demands of its population, while the lower riparian state continuously is having the luxury of shedding nearly double that volume in systemic wastage.

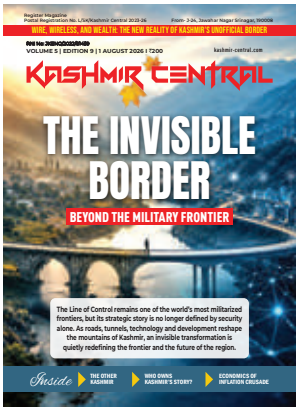
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