

People, Politics, Propaganda – The Way Ahead in J&K

On October 14, all post-paid mobile services were restored in J&K.^[i] The temporary, preventive measures were taken anticipating malicious activities by Pakistan and other radical elements to destabilise the situation in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

Pakistan upped its psychological operations and diplomatic offensive against India's internal decision to de-operationalise Article 370 and Article 35A and bifurcate the state of J&K into union territories of J&K, and Ladakh, even as Pakistan's economy continued to sink with a depreciating Pakistani rupee, mounting external debts, and a balance of payment crisis. Perhaps Pakistan does not realise that these steps are legally tenable, within the provisions of the Constitution.

While the international community has more-or-less rightly accepted the *fait accompli* presented by India as her internal matter, there is insufficient Indian narrative to counter malicious and false propaganda, especially by Pakistan. The government may hence consider dedicating a special section of the website *india.gov.in* to international readers, especially the international media, explaining its rationale and/or perspective on various issues of relevance. The government must also ensure its wide circulation and readership.

While some crucial points with regard to the August 5 decision were raised in some sections of the national media, it perhaps didn't form a part of the larger, international discourse. These were –

- Those claiming that the Aug 5 move is a violation of rights should contemplate as to whether Article 35A would qualify as a Human Rights violation, condemning a group of people – the Valmikis – to the job of *safai karamcharis* (sanitation workers) failing which, they would have lost their permanent resident (PR) status in J&K.
- The J&K legislature had the right to decide who gets the PR status and hence, the privileges that accompany it, such as the right to own property, the right to vote, etc. There has been selective grant of same. It had not been granted to refugees from Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir or Indian citizens from other states, while Uighurs from Xinjiang and Tibetan Muslim families have been settled in J&K with full citizenship rights!^[ii] This is not just grossly discriminatory, but also constitutes a security threat.
- While Pakistan has maintained a deafening silence on the issue of Uighurs and accused India ad nauseam of excesses in Kashmir, the Uighurs in J&K state that their counterparts in Xinjiang craved for the “freedom” the former have in India.^[iii]
- Due democratic means, including taking consent of 2/3rd of the Parliament, were followed for the passage of Jammu and Kashmir (Reorganisation) Bill, 2019. It should be underscored that the now void Article 35A was also inserted through a Presidential Order as was the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 2019.
- Due to Article 370 and 35A, progressive legislations pertaining to women's rights, minorities, etc. could not be introduced in J&K.

Cases of Pot Calling the Kettle Black?

On China's intervention, the United Nations Security Council did hold a meeting on Jammu & Kashmir, but an informal and closed-door one without any formal pronouncements. It is pertinent to note that China itself is in possession of two parts of J&K, the Shaksgam Valley (illegally ceded to China by Pakistan in 1963) and Aksai Chin (occupied by China post 1962). It may be noted that China provides no real autonomy in these (or any other) areas, with the local statutes requiring the approval of the National People's Congress.^[iv] Moreover, China has been urged to "allow meaningful access to Xinjiang" by several countries and international organisations.^[v]

While Pakistan is shouting herself hoarse on India's internal issue of modification of Article 370, it conveniently overlooks the issue of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) – Indian territory of J&K illegally occupied by it. It was Pakistan which first revoked the 'special status' of J&K by abolishing the State Subject Rule in G-B in 1974.^[vi] This resulted in Pakistanis from outside G-B purchasing land in G-B and changing its demographic profile (Shia character) and bringing in Punjabi and Urdu influence. In fact, the so-called 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' High Court had declared G-B a part of the so-called 'Azad Jammu & Kashmir' in 1993! This decision was, however, overturned by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. In 2018, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan gave an in-principle approval to accord the status of a 'provisional' province to G-B, in line with the recommendations given by the Sartaj Aziz Committee.^[vii] This made the administrative affairs of G-B more Pakistani Prime Minister-centric.

Expressing "deep concern" over the India's modification of Article 370, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) called for the respect of the "fundamental rights" of the people.^[viii] This is almost facetious given the dubious record of the member countries on fundamental rights, and the fact that earlier this year, the OIC commended China for its efforts "in providing care to its Muslim citizens".^[ix] The entire world knows about the suppression and the state-led detention of the Uighurs in Xinjiang. The OIC's statement is more reflective of the economic realities than social realities.

The Way to the Heart of the 'Awaam'

The issue of J&K is multi-faceted and requires a whole-of-government approach. It is exigent for the government to keep the 'ummeed' or hope of the people alive and win them over psychologically. The communication blackout, closure of schools, damage to business, etc. would have significantly led to an increased feeling of alienation, distrust, and dismay. Hence, it is imperative that the people, especially the youth, see development and feel emancipated. The government also needs to restore communication services, including internet connectivity, post-haste. It should be ensured that 'governance with accountability' is provided to the people with focus on infrastructure development, health, education, and provisions for the disabled and marginalised communities, including sexual minorities. In this regard, the following points are of relevance –



1. *Employment Opportunities*

- According to a survey conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, on the Kashmiri youth, majority of the participants preferred to have a central government job and stay in Kashmir. [x] The government should act on this aspiration and come out with a **calendar of recruitment** for various ministries and give it vast publicity. This will give the youth adequate time to prepare for the same. Simultaneously, some preparatory help in terms of tuitions/orientation can be made available to the youth.
- The government should make the people aware of the government schemes that have now become applicable to J&K. This can be done by publicising the same in the vernacular media, pamphlets/stickers in areas of large congregation such as mosques and trading areas, vernacular press, etc.
- Actors perceived as non-partisan, such as captains of private industries, should lead the way in creating jobs in J&K and opening skill centres for the youth.
- Engaging the business community of J&K is of utmost importance. This is the community which has one of the highest stakes in having stability in the region. They should be one of the prime beneficiaries of state-backed incentives and exemptions.
- The entertainment/modeling industry should open consultancy/recruitment offices in J&K to meet the aspirations of the youth.
- Empowerment of women should be one of the pivots for all development plans. The governments should set up 'women cooperatives'. The all-women environment will be an added incentive for women to make use of employment opportunities. Such cooperatives should have an attached crèche so that that the children are cared for and spend their time in the right environment amidst toys and cartoons.
- Since the economy of J&K is mainly agrarian, the government should focus on how technology and foreign collaborations can help floriculture, horticulture, etc. The state of Gujarat, for example, has gained immensely from the Indo-Israel Agriculture Work Plan.

- The air charges for travelling to J&K are rather expensive and restrictive right now. The government should make travelling to J&K more traveller-friendly.
- The government should introduce an app-based ride-hailing service. This will achieve the twin purpose of creating employment opportunities and well as boosting tourism.
- The people should be educated on how to use the internet for income generation – be it through sale of home-made products online, offering home-stay facilities (like Airbnb), etc.

2. *Prevailing in the Cognitive Domain*

- The government needs to engage with the families of dead militants, provide psychological support and ensure that the militant does not become an example to emulate, but an example to shun in the family/locality.
- An **independent, professional approach to influence operations** is required, drawing people from various fields such as academics, theology, videography, media, military, etc. to not just counter fake and radical Pakistani narratives, but also promote *Kashmiriyat*. In the TISS survey, majority of the participants believed that the identity of being a Kashmiri was very important to them. The government should take note of this and promote the idea of being a Kashmiri – one that is syncretic and tolerant. Creative, short-form content-makers should be hired for making engaging content with the subtle message of syncretism and tolerance and circulated through social media, keeping the target audience in mind. The comment-section should be suitably moderated to preclude any hate speech from appearing. In addition, people should be sensitised on responsible use of social media, especially during sensitive times. Social media is an important tool as the majority of the youth use internet primarily for accessing social media, according to the TISS survey. An independent, professional information operations body is of utmost importance as one gets an impression that the attempts in the recent times have not been very successful.[\[xi\]](#)
- According to the TISS survey, the participants felt that an Urdu newspaper published in Kashmir was most likely to present accurate information. This should be borne in mind while carrying out influence operations.
- The TISS report also revealed that the participants trusted their families the most and spent a majority of their free time with their families. While providing succour to the families who have lost their loved ones to militancy, the difficulties faced by these families due to such acts by their kith and kin may be highlighted.
- Though the media cannot and should not be controlled in a free country, the news channels should effect responsible self-censorship if discussions get polarising in nature.

3. *'Governance on Ground'*

- The government should mull something on the lines of appointing a ward/council head who should personally visit families and homes under his/her care, listen to the grievances of the people and work towards addressing the same. The energetic and dynamic youth of the state are best-suited for this job.

- The government may look at observing August 5 as good governance/grievance-redressal day, making it a day of citizen-centric festivities/activities. The government/non-governmental entities may also look at organising culinary competitions with national and international chefs focusing on local cuisine and local produce. The same can be done for music, art, and other media. Additionally, the government should be ready to counter any Pakistani plans of making Aug 5 as a 'black day'.
- The government should initiate a dialogue with the people and listen to their grievances. People should be empowered to complain against governance-related and/or social issues through apps/web-portals/telephones. Immediate, demonstrable action should be taken to address the same.
- Enhancing inter-gender, inter-community, and inter-region (i.e., Jammu, Kashmir, & Ladakh) interaction/dialogue is a must. This can be done by way of holding local singing/elocution/quiz competitions, promoting adventure sports, educational tours, etc. in schools, colleges, and universities.
- With the improvement in security situation, the gradual opening of movie theaters/multiplexes, amusement parks, etc may be deliberated upon as this will give the youth a place for spending leisure time and socialising. Additionally, urban screens displaying movies, songs, etc. keeping cultural sensitivities in mind may also be tried.
- The government should organise an orientation for the locals wanting to work or travel to other parts of the country. People from remote areas should be encouraged to explore other parts of the country.

4. ***Reforming the Education Sector***

- The government should first start by providing better infrastructure facilities. The TISS survey brought out that bad infrastructure was the second most important reason for the dissatisfaction of the participants with the course they were pursuing.
- Great care has to be taken to ensure that the teachers grooming future leaders do not have links with organisations such as the Jamaat-e-Islami. The selection of teachers and the teaching in schools needs monitoring.
- Gradually, smart classrooms need to be introduced in J&K. The best set of teachers should be selected to teach through, if required, teleconferencing. These videos should also be available on platforms such as YouTube or any a dedicated website dealing with the education of the people in J&K. This will not only impart the requisite skills to the children of J&K, but also make sure radical elements such as those from the Jamaat-e-Islami are not able to infiltrate the education system and influence young minds.
- The religious teachers should be educated to highlight the true form of religion.

5. ***The 'Healing' Touch***

- ‘Mohalla Clinics’, which are successful in other parts of India, should be replicated in J&K. Providing medical consultation and health-care free-of-cost to the people, especially in remote areas, is the best way of showing the people that the government cares for them.
- The government should lay extra emphasis on addressing the mental health issues of the people in general, and children in particular. The pellet gun victims and people who have witnessed/experienced traumatic incidents should get continued psychological help.
- To ensure that a climate of despair does not take roots in J&K, celebrities such as those from the Indian film industry, sports team, etc should visit the state and meet the youth. This could be for the inauguration of welfare schemes, sports infrastructure, recruitment drives, etc.

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