

Kashmir Issue

Why Kashmir is volatile?

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- Jammu & Kashmir, then ruled by a king, acceded to India in 1947 through Article 370 of the Constitution of India.
- Over the years, that Article has been breached many times.
- Kashmir Valley, home to seven million people, is the centre of the conflict.
- The people of the Valley have reacted aggressively to the denial of the autonomy that was promised when J&K acceded to India.
- A small number wants the Valley to become part of Pakistan.
- An overwhelming majority demands azadi.
- Every government in J&K and at the Centre has responded to the challenge with more warnings, more troops and more laws.

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What is the reason for recent conflicts?

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- The people of the Kashmir Valley have alternated between hope and despair.
- The current slide to chaos began in July 2016 with the killing of Burhan Wani.
- The state government has remained passive and helpless while the armed forces have implemented a muscular policy to quell dissent and disturbance.
- Since July 2016 and up to January 20, 2017, the violence in J&K claimed 75 lives.

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- Besides, 12,000 people were injured, 1,000 lost vision in one eye due to pellet injuries and five were blinded.

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What is the present situation?

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- There were two by-elections — in Srinagar and Anantnag constituencies. Srinagar constituency, spread over three districts, went to the polls on April 9.

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- The voter turnout was 7.14%, the lowest in 28 years. There was widespread stone-pelting.

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- Re-polling in 38 booths took place and no voter turned up in 20 of those 38 booths, and the voting percentage in the re-poll was 2.02%.

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- Meanwhile, polling in Anantnag constituency was postponed to May 25.

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- The non-vote is actually a vote of no confidence against the state government and the Central government.

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- The situation cannot be retrieved through a 'muscular' policy — tough talk by ministers, dire warnings from the Army Chief, deploying more troops or killing more protesters.

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What should be done?

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- The core issue is not holding territory, it is giving people confidence in the Indian project.

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- The border with Pakistan should be defended by all means, taking deterrent action against infiltrators but 'counter-terrorist operations' in the Valley should be put on hold.

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- The presence of the army and paramilitary forces should be reduced and the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the Kashmir Valley should be

handed over to the J&K police.

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- Interlocutors should be appointed to pave the way for talks.
- The Central government should begin a dialogue with all the stakeholders including civil society groups, student leaders and eventually the separatists.

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Source: The Indian Express

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