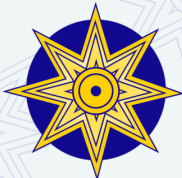


International Centre For
Sustainability
Ex Oriente Lux



Understanding Kashmir Post-370:

Assessing Security Trends

June 2024



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Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) is popularly known as the "Crown of India". The entire region has undergone significant changes in recent years. For years, Kashmir has experienced violence and socio-economic backwardness largely caused by cross-border terrorism backed by Pakistan. Since 2000, a cumulative total of 22,255 individuals have lost their lives due to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.¹ As a result, this region is regarded as having become one of the most heavily militarised zones in the world. According to officials, the Army maintains a total force of about 130,000 personnel throughout Jammu and Kashmir, with approximately 80,000 deployed along the border.² On 5th August 2019, the ruling government made a historic move by repealing Article 370, which gave Jammu and Kashmir special status under the constitution of India. Critics later questioned the move's constitutionality. In a recent development on December 11, 2023, the Supreme Court's

affirmation of the repeal of Article 370 closed the chapter on the provision's supposed permanence, ushering in a new era in Jammu and Kashmir.

More than four years after Article 370 was repealed in Jammu and Kashmir, the national and international media, opposition leaders, and public intellectuals have expressed concern about security and progress. This paper attempts to analyse the security situation, emerging challenges and progress towards restoration of 'normalcy'. It provides an overview of article 370, including a historical timeline and its implications for the people of Jammu & Kashmir. The paper relies on data from official government portals, newspapers, articles, and visiting the region to get "eyes-on" perspective. However, obtaining statistical data on Kashmir poses a challenge, as the only available source is the government portal. Independently verifiable data is difficult to come by.



Cultural and Political Roots

The history of the J&K region is often misrepresented, partially represented, or simply overlooked, suggesting its isolation is due to its mountainous terrain. Furthermore, a lot of emphasis is often placed on the presumed influences from the West and Central Asia on its culture. While certainly true, evidence spanning over two millennia also suggests Kashmir's strong influence on, and from its Indic and Sanskritic identity. Despite its absence from mainstream historical discourse in India, a closer examination reveals Kashmir's deep integration with the broader Indian civilisation. Since the 5th century BCE, Kashmir has demonstrated openness and cosmopolitanism, embodying the broader Indic culture rather than being culturally isolated. Historical sources, including ancient texts, inscriptions, and traveller's accounts, consistently position Kashmir within the Indian cultural sphere.³

Even before British colonisation, Kashmir was recognised as part of India in Sanskrit texts like the Mahabharata and later works such as the Brhat Samhita. Indo-Persian voices like Amir Khusrau and Mughal historians considered Kashmir integral to Hindustan. External sources like Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang and Iranian scholar Al-Biruni also acknowledged Kashmir's position within India.⁴ The travels of Shankaracharya in the 8th century further exemplify Kashmir's significance within Indian philosophical and cultural discourse, as he chose it as the culmination of his scholarly journeys. These historical accounts highlight Kashmir's enduring connection to the broader Indian civilisation, challenging the misconception that it was ever culturally isolated or separate from the wider cultural milieu.

The British legacy

The current Kashmir conflict originates from the British colonial legacy in India. In 1947, as India and Pakistan gained independence, the British divided the territory. While princely states could choose to join either nation, Kashmir, with a Muslim majority and a Hindu ruler, faced a dilemma. Viceroy Lord Louis Mountbatten recommended it join India due to its secularism, but its ruler, Hari Singh, initially opted for total independence. On August 14, 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh proposed a Standstill Agreement with both India and Pakistan. While Pakistan promptly accepted it, India sought further discussions. Realising the Maharaja's leaning towards India, Pakistan disrupted supplies and halted trade, breaching the agreement. Subsequently, tribesmen supported by Pakistan invaded Jammu and Kashmir in October 1947, violating the Standstill agreement.⁵ Singh requested India's assistance, but it refrained from intervening until Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession to India, formally seeking help from New Delhi. This eventually led to the integration of Kashmir into India, triggering the First Indo-Pakistan War in 1948. The conflict ended with a ceasefire and the establishment of a Line of Control (LOC), dividing the state of Jammu & Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

Following the establishment of the LOC in 1948, efforts to resolve the Kashmir conflict escalated with the intervention of the United Nations (UN). On April 21, 1948, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 47,⁶ appointing a five-member commission to facilitate peace restoration in Kashmir and oversee preparations for a plebiscite to determine its accession. This commission, initially established by Resolution 39, aimed to implement a three-step plan:

1. Evacuation of Pakistani nationals who entered Kashmir for combat.
2. Gradual reduction of Indian forces in the region.
3. Appointment of a referendum administrator by India, nominated by the UN.

While India accepted this resolution, Pakistan rejected it. India has consistently maintained that it will adhere to the UN resolution once Pakistan withdraws its army from Jammu and Kashmir, as stipulated by the UN resolution, which Pakistan has not done to date.⁷ Subsequent international negotiations were also unsuccessful, perpetuating a deadlock in resolving the Kashmir issue.



The Forced Exodus: Ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Hindus

On January 19th, 1990, a series of violent events in Kashmir led to the forced exodus of the Kashmiri Hindu community due to systemic, and organised killings by Pakistan-backed terrorists. This year marks 34 years since the attempted Kashmiri genocide. Despite the passage of time and the efforts of NGOs, justice has continued to elude Kashmiri Hindus.

While exact numbers are uncertain, several scholars estimate that around 100,000 of the 140,000 Kashmiri Hindu community fled within a few weeks during February–March 1990, leaving only about 3,600 families behind. The rest remain unaccounted for. This exodus turned the Hindus into refugees in their own country, forcing them to abandon their lives and survive makeshift temporary camps. During this period, Islamist extremists presented the Kashmiri Hindus with three options: Ralive, Tsalive, or Galive (convert to Islam, leave the area, or perish). This marked the seventh exodus in the history of the Hindus.

The attempted genocide of Kashmiri Hindus has been a prolonged and drawn-out affair, beginning as early as the 14th century with the arrival of Islam in Kashmir. Unlike earlier waves of violence, the 1990s attempted genocide occurred within the sovereign territory of secular, democratic, and multiethnic India. This systematic attack aimed to cleanse the valley of Hindus to build a nation along the ideological lines preached in Pakistan.

The imposition of Article 370 was seen by many in the Kashmiri Hindu community as anti-Hindu legislation, forcing them to live as refugees. The abrogation of Article 370 is viewed as a step towards removing a legal barrier, potentially facilitating the return of Kashmiri Hindus to their homeland.

Strategic significance

The strategic importance of Kashmir lies in its pivotal position between three nuclear-powered nations: India, Pakistan, and China. The control of different parts of this region is divided among three countries, shaped by key historical events outlined in this section.



Fig 1. Map of Jammu and Kashmir

Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir: This region comprises most of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, including the Kashmir Valley, Jammu, and Ladakh. It is governed by India as it has been an integral part of the Indian Union since 1947, following the signing of the Instrument of Accession by Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan:

As illustrated in Figure 1, Pakistan exercises control over a substantial portion of the region referred to as POK/AJK (Pakistan Occupied Kashmir/Azad Jammu and Kashmir) and Gilgit-Baltistan. These territories have been under Pakistan's control since the invasion of Kashmir by Pakistani tribesmen and the Pakistan army on October 22, 1947. Following this invasion, Maharaja Hari Singh sought military assistance from India. In return, he agreed to cede control over defence, communication, and foreign affairs, formally acceding to India on October 26, 1947. India maintains that, according to a resolution passed by Parliament in 1994, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) are both part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which became an integral part of India through this accession in 1947.

Chinese-administered Aksai Chin and Shaksgam:

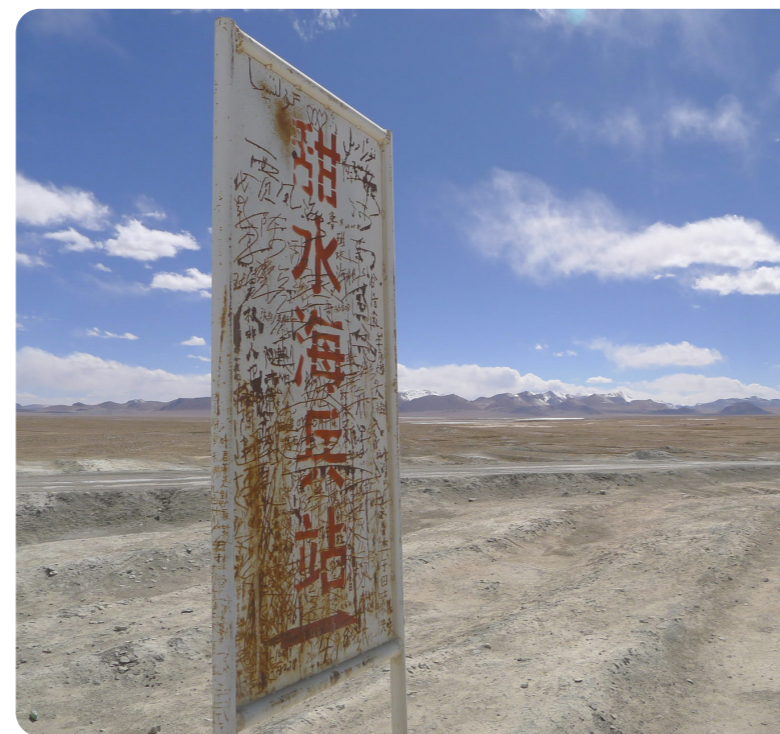
Aksai Chin is a disputed territory claimed by both India and China. In the 1950s, China began constructing highways in the region to connect Tibet with Xinjiang, a move that India strongly opposed. This disagreement escalated into border clashes and eventually culminated in the Sino-Indian War of 1962. As a result of the conflict, China gained control over 38,000 square kilometers of territory in Aksai Chin. Prior to the 1920s, no Chinese maps indicated Aksai Chin as part of their territory, but by the 1950s, China had taken control of the region and solidified its position during the 1962 war. India asserts that Aksai Chin is an integral part of the Ladakh region of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and disputes China's claim over this territory as illegitimate.

The Shaksgam tract initially came under India's control after the accession of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947. However, Pakistan gained control of the region following the First India-Pakistan War and later illegally ceded it to China through the China-Pakistan Boundary Agreement of 1963. India rejects the legitimacy of this agreement, maintaining that the Shaksgam Valley is within the Ladakh

region of Jammu and Kashmir. The dispute adds to the broader tensions along the India-China border. The region is strategically important due to its location along the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China.

Geopolitically, Kashmir's strategic importance lies in its location at the convergence of South Asia and Central Asia, facilitated by its border with Afghanistan. Central Asia serves as a bridge between Europe and Asia, making Kashmir an essential part of initiatives like China's Belt and Road Initiative and providing access to abundant energy and natural resources. Additionally, Kashmir is integral to China's interests, particularly in the context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Kashmir holds significance for Pakistan due to the vital Indus River, originating in the region, which is crucial for Pakistan's agriculture and provides a lifeline for the country's survival.

Both India and Pakistan possess nuclear weapons. The region's geostrategic importance is heightened by the nuclear capabilities of these two countries, which increases the stakes of any conflict or tension in the region. Regaining its territories is seen as crucial for India's security, economic interests, and influence in the broader South Asian region.



Abrogation of Article 370 & 35A

Article 370 and Article 35A were provisions in the Indian Constitution that granted special autonomous status and privileges to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. During the signing of the Instrument of Accession, Maharaja Hari Singh agreed but ensured that it did not compromise the state's sovereign status. Article 370 was included in the Indian Constitution under "Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions" in Part XXI.⁸ It was established as a temporary measure due to the wartime situation prevailing in the state. Through the Presidential Order of 1954, Article 370 granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

Article 370: This article granted special autonomous status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, allowing it to have its own constitution, flag, and significant autonomy over internal matters except defence, foreign affairs, finance, and communications. It also restricted the application of Indian laws in the state. Article 370 was a temporary provision intended to provide special status to Jammu and Kashmir until its future was decided through a plebiscite. However, over time, various modifications were made to this article, eroding some of its original provisions.

Article 35A: This article, added through a presidential order in 1954, empowered the Jammu and Kashmir state legislature to define permanent residents of the state and grant them special rights and privileges, including the right to own land and property, access to government jobs, and other forms of government aid and welfare. It aimed to protect the demographic composition of the state and prevent non-residents, particularly from other parts of India, from acquiring land and settling in the region.

The removal of Articles 370 and 35A was a significant move by the Indian government for several reasons:

Integration: The removal of these articles was seen as a step towards fully integrating the state of Jammu and Kashmir into the Indian Union, removing the special privileges and autonomy it enjoyed compared to other states. It aimed to bring Jammu and Kashmir at par with other Indian states in terms of governance, laws, and development.

National Unity and Security: Many analysts claimed that the special status granted by Articles 370 and 35A was contributing to separatism, alienation and an economic backwardness in the region. The removal of these provisions was aimed at promoting national unity and security by addressing grievances and integrating Jammu and Kashmir more closely with the rest of India.

Development: The Indian government argued that the special status granted to Jammu and Kashmir under Articles 370 and 35A hindered the region's socio-economic development by discouraging investment, economic activity, and integration with the rest of India. The removal of these provisions is expected to pave the way for greater economic development and investment in the region.

However, the removal of Articles 370 and 35A was also controversial and faced criticism from some quarters, both domestically and internationally, particularly concerning its impact on the rights and aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and its implications for regional stability and security.

Article 370: Timeline of developments

October 26, 1947

On this day the instrument of accession was signed between the government of India and Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir. From that day Jammu & Kashmir became part of India.

October 17, 1949

Article 370 was incorporated in the constitution of India. It was introduced as a temporary measure to exempt the state of Jammu and Kashmir from certain articles of the Indian constitution and allow the state to adopt its own constitution. As a result, Article 370 restricted the legislative powers of the Indian parliament in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

January 26, 1950

On this day, the Constitution of India came into force. Subsequently, the President of India, Rajendra Prasad, issued his first order, the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1950, under Article 370, which outlined the scope and full extent of the powers that the Parliament would exercise in Kashmir.

May 14, 1954

President Rajendra Prasad issued a Presidential Order to carry out the terms of the Indian Constitution's Delhi Agreement of 1952. The presidential decree ensured Jammu and Kashmir's territorial integrity and established Article 35A, which granted special rights to permanent inhabitants of Jammu and Kashmir. Article 370 and Article 35A was removed in 2019 which was a historic moment for people of Kashmir and Indians-at-large.

January 26, 1957

After a five-year process, the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution came into effect with the statement that "the state of Jammu and Kashmir is and shall be an integral part of the Union of India." The Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir was dissolved the day before, on January 25th, 1957, at 12:00 P.M., after completing the task for which it was constituted.

July 5, 1990

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) is a Parliamentary act that gives the Indian Armed Forces, as well as state and paramilitary forces, special powers in "disturbed areas". The goal of enforcing the AFSPA Act is to ensure law and order in disturbed areas. The AFSPA in Jammu & Kashmir was enacted in 1990 in order to tackle the unprecedented rise in cross border militancy and insurgency by jihadist groups in Jammu and Kashmir.

February 2015

In the assembly polls, the Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) secured 28 seats, leading the count, while the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) followed with 25 seats, both falling short of the required 44-seat majority. Despite their differing stances on various issues, BJP president Amit Shah and PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti affirmed at a press briefing that the parties had reconciled their ideological disparities and were forming a coalition government. This alliance marked the BJP's first stint in power in the state.

April 4, 2016

PDP's Mehbooba Mufti takes oath as the state's first woman chief minister. The governor's rule ends.

June 20, 2018

The BJP withdrew its backing for the PDP following a surge in terrorism and violence, leading to a breakdown in the political alliance. Consequently, Governor's rule was reimposed. According to Article 92 of the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution, Governor's rule cannot exceed six months. Therefore, Governor's rule concluded on December 19th, 2018.

December 19, 2018

President Ram Nath Kovind issued a proclamation implementing President's Rule in Jammu and Kashmir under Article 356 of the Indian Constitution.

August 5, 2019

An order is issued by the President to redefine the term "Constituent Assembly." By abrogating the provisions of Article 370, the Centre grants the former state of Jammu and Kashmir a special status.

August 9, 2019

J&K bifurcated into two union territories. The Union Parliament passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act in 2019, dividing the state into two Union territories: Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. It was agreed that the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir will have a legislative assembly, but Ladakh will not.

December 11, 2023

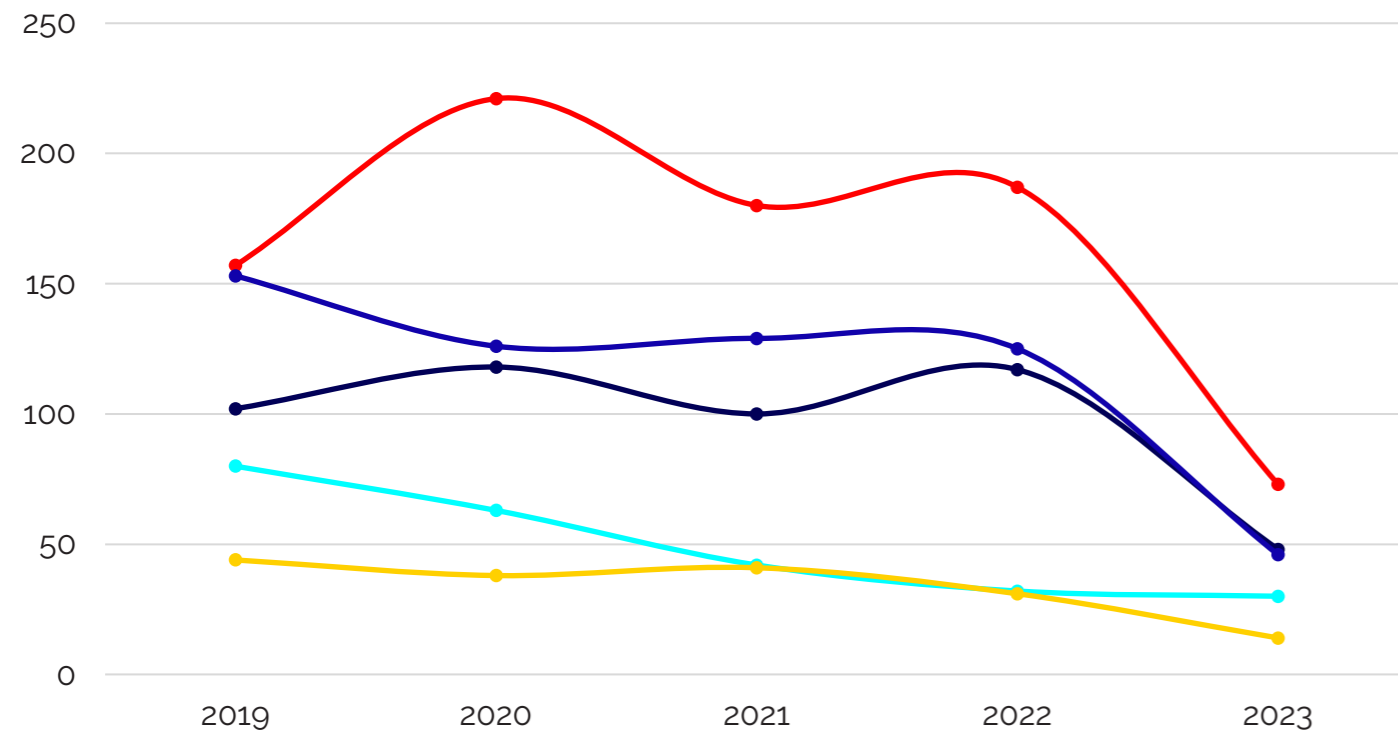
The Supreme Court affirms the government's intention to repeal Article 370 and orders that procedures be taken to hold an election for the UT Assembly by September 30, 2024. The court ruled that the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir was rendered ineffective following the repeal of Article 370.

Security situation: Impact of Repealing Article 370 & 35A

SECURITY SITUATION IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR AND LADAKH

The security situation in Kashmir has seen notable improvements in various aspects, as evidenced by available data and statements. Here are the key trends observed:

The Government has a policy of zero tolerance against terrorism and the security situation has improved significantly in Jammu and Kashmir. Details are as under:



Description	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
■ Terrorist initiated incidents	153	126	129	125	46
■ Encounters/Counter terrorism operations	102	118	100	117	48
■ Civilians killed in terrorist initiated incidents and in encounters	44	38	41	31	14
■ Security personnel killed	80	63	42	32	30
■ Terrorist killed	157	221	180	187	73

Source: CID, J&K

No terrorist incident was reported in UT of Ladakh from 2019 to 2023

Fig 2. Security Situation in Jammu and Kashmir from 2019 to 2023⁹

Decline in Stone Pelting and Organised Strikes: Incidents of stone pelting have significantly decreased, from 618 in Jan-July 2019 to 76 in 2021. Organised strikes have also seen a sharp decline, with no recorded incidents in 2023 compared to 132 in 2010.¹⁰

Reduction in Terrorism and Infiltration: According to government data, "Acts of terrorism" have decreased by 32% since August 5, 2019, accompanied by a drop of 14% in the recruitment of terrorists. Infiltration across the border has seen a notable decline, dropping from 141 in 2019 to 48 in 2023.¹¹

Decrease in Casualties and Incidents: The number of security forces deaths declined from 80 in 2019 to 30 in 2023, while civilian deaths decreased from 44 to 14 as shown in figure 2. The overall number of incidents related to terrorism and security has seen a downward trend.

Rise in Arrests of Over-Ground Workers (OGWs): The OGWs are individuals who offer logistical assistance to terrorists and aid them in their clandestine movements. The term is commonly used by the security establishment. By significantly intensifying the application of anti-terror legislation such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and the Public Safety Act (PSA), security forces have targeted Over Ground Worker (OGW) networks. The establishment of the multi-agency Terror Monitoring Group (TMG) and the State Investigation Agency (SIA) by the Jammu and Kashmir administration has fuelled this crackdown. The arrest of OGWs of militant groups has increased.¹²

Attacks in Jammu: There has been a resurgence of attempts by militants to target Hindu-dominated areas in Jammu, a trend not seen since the early 2000s.¹³ Terrorists in the Kashmir Valley are turning to dense forests to target security troops due to the challenges they face in urban areas. Since 2020, terrorist groups have notably shifted their operations from the Valley to the forested regions of Poonch and Rajouri in the Pir Panjal range of mountains.

The recent attack in Reasi district, Jammu and Kashmir, stands out as one of the most dangerous attacks on civilians in the region in recent years. Terrorists targeted a bus carrying Hindu pilgrims, resulting in the tragic loss of nine lives and injuring 33 others.¹⁴ Official data reveal that since the abolition of Article 370 in August 2019, the Jammu region has experienced a surge in terrorist activities, as evidenced by certain security indicators, such as the recruitment of terrorists, which have exhibited an upward trend for nearly four years.¹⁵

Attacks on minorities and non-residents: Following the abrogation of Article 370, the Valley experienced a surge in targeted killings. Incidents of such killings have risen in Kashmir, with terrorists focusing particularly on Kashmiri Hindus, migrant workers, and even local Muslims employed in government or police roles, whom they perceive as a threat. Since August 5, 2019, terrorists have attacked non-local labourers.¹⁶

Increase in foreign militants: According to assessments conducted by central agencies, the state of Jammu and Kashmir witnessed a substantial rise in foreign militants in 2023, predominantly Pakistanis, as opposed to local terrorists.¹⁷ Between 2019 and 2022, security forces in the Union Territory killed at least 750 militants, with native Kashmiris accounting for 83% of the total. However, the presence of foreign terrorists began to grow in 2022, as 43 percent of all militants killed that year were non-Indian/Kashmiri.¹⁸

Emergence of New Security Challenges: There are emerging challenges, such as the use of low-cost drones to drop small weapons and the engagement of 'hybrid terrorists' by handlers in Pakistan.¹⁹ These part-time terrorists, who often lead regular lives in the Valley, pose a new threat and have been linked to targeted killings, mainly of Kashmiri Hindus and non-Kashmiri people. The emergence of hybrid terrorists began in 2020 and continues to be a problem because they are hard to identify.

Positive developments post abrogation of Article 370

Following the constitutional reforms and reorganisation of the former State of Jammu-Kashmir, the Union territories of Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh have been completely integrated into the national fabric. As a result, the people of Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh now have access to all the rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, as well as the benefits of all Central Laws. Below, several positive advancements following the abrogation of Article 370 are outlined:

Increased Political Representation for Marginalised Communities: This is the first time that nine assembly constituencies out of ninety have been reserved for the Scheduled Tribe (ST) community. Now, individuals belonging to the Valmiki community, Gorkhas, and Western Pakistani migrants are eligible to participate in elections of the union territory.²⁰ With these updates, the J&K assembly will now consist of 114 seats, with 24 reserved for residents of Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (POJK), 43 for Jammu, 47 for Kashmir, and two seats allocated for Kashmiri Pandits, a sub-caste within Hindus.²¹



Clock tower at Lal Chowk, Srinagar. A place that has witnessed extreme violence, intimidation and bloodshed. Today, it is a regular iconic tourist attraction and a busy traffic junction.

Gender Equality and Legal Reforms: The revocation of Articles 370 and 35A has brought significant benefits to women in Jammu and Kashmir. Prior to this, discriminatory practices were in place, particularly affecting Kashmiri women. For instance, they were disadvantaged in matters of property inheritance²² and lacked protection against domestic violence under certain laws. Additionally, Muslim women in the region were not safeguarded against the practice of triple-talaq, an arcane Islamic law which allowed a man to say, "talaq" three times to divorce his wife, often leaving her destitute. Another notable development is the achievement of 33% reservation for women in the J&K assembly. However, with the abrogation of these articles, these disparities have been addressed, granting women in Jammu and Kashmir equal rights and protections as women in other parts of the country.²³

Historic Muharram Processions in Srinagar: In 1989, authorities banned the Muharram procession in Jammu and Kashmir due to security concerns. After 34 years, the procession resumed in Srinagar, marking a significant day for the Shia community. Despite previous bans due to unrest, this time, 25,000 people marched along the traditional route. Shia leaders praised the government for allowing this historic event. The Lieutenant-Governor's government referred to this momentous development as a "testimony to normalcy"²⁴

Infrastructure Development: Fifty-three projects worth £5.52 billion in sectors like roads, power, health, education, and tourism have been implemented. Jammu-Srinagar National Highway was upgraded by building 8.45km of twin-tube Qazigund-Banihal tunnel at an estimated cost of £295 million, reducing average travel time from 10 hours to 5 hours and lowering costs of transport for goods and services to the valley. Air traffic to and from Kashmir has more than doubled since 2019.

Jammu and Srinagar now offer night landings, which previously were deemed too unsafe.²⁵ New Delhi has prioritised a project focused on establishing direct rail connectivity in the strategically important Kashmir Valley. Delays due to legal issues, challenging geography, and security concerns have led to direct monitoring by the Prime Minister and Railway Minister. Expected completion for the project is estimated to be by year-end (2024), the project includes the world's highest Chenab Bridge and the first cable-stayed rail bridge, enhancing connectivity and beautifying the region. These infrastructural advancements will bolster the horticulture sector, a vital component of the local economy. It will also grant India a tactical advantage by facilitating quicker deployment of defence equipment and forces to border areas if needed.²⁶

Education and Skill Development: Establishment of Institute of Technology (IIT) Jammu, Institute of Management (IIM) Jammu, and 50 new degree colleges. Enhancement of educational infrastructure aims to provide quality education and foster skill development among youth. Seven new government medical colleges have been operationalised. Twenty-eight nursing colleges and 19 paramedic colleges have been established. Furthermore, 800 more medical seats have been added, totalling 1300.²⁷

Hydro Power Generation: MoUs for five projects attracting an investment worth £3.29 billion have been signed. These projects once fully operational are planned to provide around 7000 MW of hydro generating capacity in phases over the next 8 years. The development of these initiatives will have a significant impact on the economic growth of Jammu and Kashmir, including the generation of jobs in economically impoverished areas.²⁸ According to official data, the energy deficit in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir has decreased from 17.8% in 2018-19 to 1.5% in 2023-24 (as of November 2023).²⁹

Water and Sanitation: The government has sanctioned expenditure of £1.2 billion on 3346 water supply schemes. This will ensure that 75% of J&K's rural population will have access to clean tap water connections.³⁰

Sustainable Agriculture: The Jammu and Kashmir government has given the green light to a five-year, £44 million project to support sustainable agriculture and empower farmers with technology-based agricultural services. A major part of this project involves setting up 2,000 village-level farmers-led working committees called Kisan Khidmat Ghar. These centres will act as convenient hubs for farmers, providing a range of services related to agriculture and other connected sectors. They will be equipped with modern tools to facilitate easy access to information on supplies, technology, marketing, and more.³¹

Economic Empowerment: A sum of £237 million was credited directly into the bank accounts of 1.25 million eligible farmers across the J&K region. The repeal of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir has led to an what some have called an economic revolution, with Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) doubling in four years. Investment, infrastructure, and business increased when article 370 was removed. Official estimates show the GSDP has doubled to nearly £21 billion from £9 billion before article 370 was repealed in August 2019.³²

Tourism Development: During India's hosting of the G20 summit, J&K also hosted delegates, marking the region's first international event in over 70 years. Fifty-seven delegates from twenty-seven countries came together in Srinagar, the capital of J&K. The regions handicraft and textiles industries have flourished in recent years. Total exports from the region grew from £53m to £105m in 18 months between 2021-2023.^{33*}

Moreover, over 18.8 million tourists visited Jammu and Kashmir in 2022, a record high. 2023, was set to surpass these numbers.³⁴ As the security situation in J&K improves, and credit and liquidity increase, we can expect more tourists, higher exports and greater employment for Kashmir's youth.

Healthcare: The Prime Minister's new health scheme, effectively a health insurance initiative, extends free insurance coverage to every resident of the Jammu & Kashmir, offering up to £4,717 per family per annum for urgent care and treatment. Almost 900,000 Kashmiris have taken advantage of the healthcare insurance totalling £125 million in distributions.³⁵

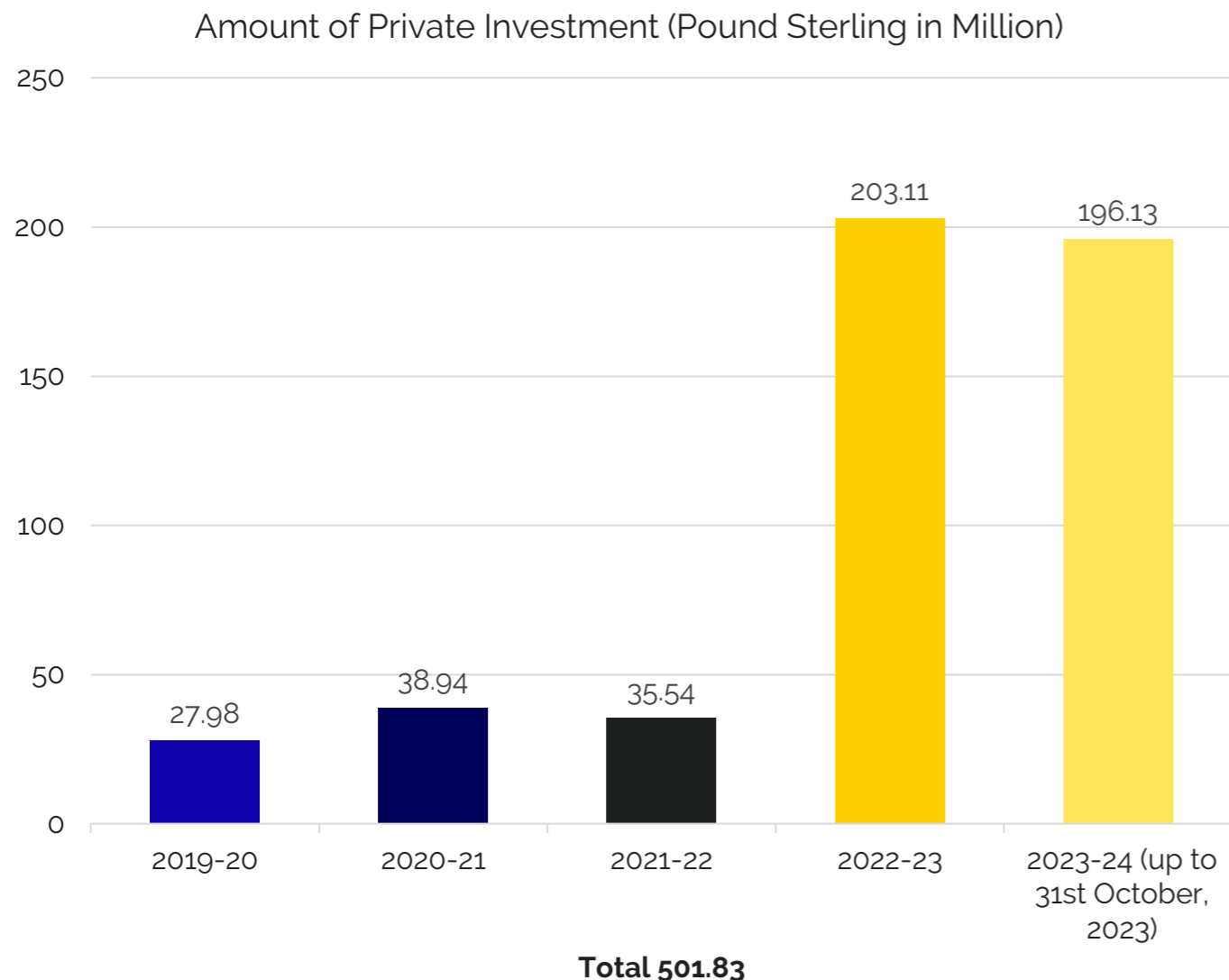


Fig 3. Details of private investment in J&K's economy³⁶

Private investments & Industrial development: Private investors from across the rest of India, and a small number of international investors have begun to arrive into J&K. Official data shows that during the financial year 2022-23, J&K attracted investments amounting to £203.11 million (Fig. 3), marking the highest figure recorded in any financial year over the last decade.

While the Government of Jammu and Kashmir is taking steps to make the Union Territory an investor-friendly destination, there is still notably a long way to go before J&K attracts the type of investment it would need to make it a serious economic state. One notable early investor from the UAE has made their formal entry into J&K by building a shopping mall and a multipurpose tower on the outskirts of Srinagar. Another example of entrepreneurship in the region is a local horticulture startup called Qul Fruitwall Farm Installations. The start-up has secured £5.6 million to modernise the sector through operations and research, hopefully paving the way for increased foreign institutional investment in the region.³⁷

According to J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, the New Industrial Policy has received investment proposals from more than 5,000 domestic and foreign companies.³⁸

Analysis and way forward

While inside Pakistan and China the removal of Article 370 is seen as contentious, most Indians consider it as essential for the progress of Jammu and Kashmir and India's national security. Four years since its abrogation, significant changes have occurred, yet much more remains to be addressed for the betterment of Kashmir's populace, who have endured decades of conflict and socio-economic isolation and backwardness.

Since the abrogation of Article 370, there has been noticeable improvement in the overall security situation. Reductions in terrorist incidents, organised strikes, cases of stone pelting, infiltration, encounters, and casualties among civilians and security forces indicate progress. The upsurge in tourism, successful hosting of the G20 meeting, foreign investments, infrastructure enhancements, legal reforms, large-scale projects, and economic empowerment initiatives all signify Kashmir's advancement and its gradual transition towards normalcy. The revival of Muharram processions after 34 years serves as another indicator of this positive shift, previously marred by militants and separatists. India hopes that by focusing on development, education, and employment opportunities, which if successful, will play a pivotal role in countering radicalisation and thwarting terrorist recruitment.

Despite these positive developments, challenges remain, particularly the threat to minorities, notably non-Kashmiris and Hindus, who face an increased risk of targeted killings. While the abrogation of Article 370 initially brought hope to the Kashmiri Hindu community, the subsequent wave of targeted killings has only deepened their fear. Moreover, members of this community are increasingly losing faith in the authorities, as promises of dignified relocation to their ancestral land remain unfulfilled amidst grim ground realities. Furthermore, there has been an increase in the infiltration of foreign terrorists, primarily from Pakistan, leading to a surge in terrorist activity in previously peaceful areas such as Jammu.

This highlights a concerning pattern: while security has improved in Kashmir, Jammu now faces heightened terrorism risks, with minorities and tourists increasingly becoming targets. The rise of hybrid terrorists is also a significant cause for concern. Addressing psychological fear and countering false cross-border propaganda are pivotal for fostering and attaining lasting peace. The government's policy against terrorism has led to a substantial increase in arrests, focusing on dismantling the terror economy and network. Naturally this has raised concerns amongst human rights organisations around the rights of those arrested to a free and fair trial, as well as a call for more transparency in how the security services conduct themselves.



Jammu and Kashmir was integrated into the General elections in 2024. This is the first large scale democratic exercise in the region since the abrogation of Article 370. The Lok Sabha elections in the region unfolded across five phases, with the vote count scheduled for 4th of June. This election recorded the highest voter turnout in 35 years. According to the Election Commission, voter participation in various constituencies reached historic levels: Srinagar at 38%, Baramulla at 59%, and Anantnag-Rajouri at 54%. Udhampur and Jammu also saw significant turnout, with rates of 68% and 72%, respectively.

This marks a significant shift, particularly compared to previous elections, which were often marred by violence, where candidates and voters faced threats from militant groups. These elections have been peaceful, and although security personnel were in high numbers, voters felt safe enough to come and exercise their rights.

The 2024 general election results in Jammu and Kashmir highlighted a diverse mix of candidates securing victories across various constituencies. Mian Altaf Ahmad of Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) won in Anantnag-rajouri, while independent candidate Abdul Rashid Sheikh triumphed in Baramulla. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) saw success with Jugal Kishore in Jammu and Dr. Jitendra Singh in Udhampur, marking the third consecutive year the BJP won seats in Jammu, although it did not field any candidates in Kashmir. Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi of JKNC won in Srinagar. Notably, former chief ministers Omar Abdullah of National Conference (NC) and Mehbooba Mufti of People's Democratic Party (PDP) lost in Baramulla and Anantnag, respectively. This outcome, featuring two candidates each from BJP and JKNC, along with an independent candidate, underscores the complex political dynamics in the region.

Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar has confirmed that state elections will soon be held, restoring statehood to Jammu and Kashmir (excluding the Union Territory of Ladakh), following the Supreme Court's directive for the union government to conduct elections for the J&K assembly by September 30, 2024.

It is important for policy makers and journalists in the United Kingdom, and the Europe, to understand and acknowledge the complexities of the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. The region is characterised by diverse religious, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and tribal identities, alongside divergent political aspirations. Even though the Indian government and security establishment is incredibly sensitive to foreign interference and would prefer a "hands-off" approach from the international community, it is nevertheless imperative that the United Kingdom stands for democracy, free and fair elections, human rights, and the opening of the region for economic development. To achieve this, this brief recommends the following:

1. Engage India's experts on J&K region, including the security establishment on realities on the ground.
2. To visit J&K to see the realities on the ground.
3. To support the cessation of all violence, threats and intimidation; and encourage peaceful dialogue between the various actors.
4. To encourage investment into J&K both philanthropic and investment funds
5. To empower women – their safety, education, liberties, and access to independent work.
6. To highlight and encourage India to pursue an ecological model of development in J&K, and where possible for British and European expertise to proactively support.
7. To encourage British and European NGOs from the UK that are culturally sensitive to work in J&K, especially those that are rooted in the Indian diaspora. Charities such as SEWA International or Go Dharmic are well established charities that could be encouraged to work in the field to extend British and European support.

Glossary of terms

Gorkhas:

Known as Nepali Indians, the Gorkha community in India primarily speaks Nepali. Their ancestors migrated to Jammu and Kashmir from Nepal several decades ago to serve in the former Dogra Army. Numerous families within the community have at least one member who is a war veteran.

Kashmiri Pandits:

A community of Brahmin Hindus, have a history dating back 5,000 years and were among the earliest settlers of the Kashmir Valley in northern India. Renowned for their intellectual prowess and academic accomplishments in ancient times, the Hindus of Kashmir are widely recognized as Kashmiri Pandits throughout India.

Kisan Khidmat Ghar (KKG):

A centralized hub for farmers to conveniently access a variety of agriculture and related sector services.

Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK):

Centers that create high-quality technological products like seeds, planting materials, bio-agents, and livestock for farmers. They also conduct outreach activities, document farm innovations, and collaborate with other relevant programs and initiatives.

Overground workers (OGWs):

Individuals who provide logistical support, financial aid, shelter, and other resources to militant or terrorist groups in Jammu and Kashmir.

Panchayat:

The local governing body of a village.

Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe:

These are officially designated groups of people and among the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups in India.

Stone pelting:

In Kashmir, the term refers to the act of Kashmiris throwing stones at security forces. In India the throwing of stones by individuals or mobs at security personnel, police forces, healthcare workers, and trains is considered as a criminal assault.

Valmiki community:

The Valmiki community, categorized as a Scheduled Caste. They were brought to J&K in 1957 as sanitary workers. Due to Article 35A, they were deprived of fundamental rights such as education, employment, voting, and residence. Their rights have now been restored after the repeal of Article 370 and 35A of the Constitution of India.

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