

Relief Camps Cannot Wait

The Jammu region is reeling under a calamity of extraordinary proportions. In less than three weeks, torrential rains, flash floods, cloud-bursts, and landslides have claimed nearly 130 lives. Hundreds of homes and structures have been swept away, and thousands more lie damaged or uninhabitable. Entire families, once secure under their own roofs, now live under tarpaulins, in half-collapsed houses, or out in the open—exposed not only to the fury of nature but to the indifference of the administration. No one disputes that Jammu has faced a once-in-a-century disaster. The Chisoti cloudburst of August 14, which killed 65 people, marked the beginning of an unrelenting cycle of destruction that has stretched from Kathua to Ramban, from Reasi to Rajouri, Udhampur, and Jammu itself. Yet what is shocking is that even now, weeks into the crisis, the administration has not set up fully functional relief camps for the displaced. This omission is not just bureaucratic neglect; it is a reckless gamble with human lives. Officials themselves admit that the situation will take at least a month to stabilize. How then can the affected population—children, the elderly, women, and the infirm—be expected to survive for weeks without shelter, sanitation, or security? The flood-hit areas are no longer livable. Houses have cracked walls and broken foundations, many buried under landslides. Roads and bridges lie washed away. Worse still, sewage systems are broken, creating festering pools of waste that threaten to trigger epidemics. With rains continuing, the risk of waterborne and vector-borne diseases such as cholera, malaria, typhoid, and dengue grows by the day. It is not a question of “if,” but “when.” Relief camps, therefore, cannot be treated as optional—they are life-saving necessities. Camps in schools, community halls, universities, or government buildings would provide safe, temporary housing. More importantly, they would allow the administration to centralize relief distribution. Food, water, medicines, and essentials could be delivered efficiently to concentrated zones rather than scattered hamlets, reducing both cost and delay. For the displaced, these camps would provide not just physical protection but dignity and reassurance that the state stands by its citizens in their darkest hour. Equally urgent is the need to mobilize Daily Rated Workers (DRWs), who remain an untapped force in this crisis. Jammu and Kashmir has more than 60,000 DRWs—men and women who, for decades, have formed the backbone of essential services in electricity, water supply, and public works. In emergencies, they have always risen to the task, restoring lifelines with speed and commitment, often without recognition. Today, when the administration struggles to restore power and water connections, these workers could serve as frontline responders. They are skilled, embedded in local communities, and deeply motivated. What they require is not elaborate incentives but acknowledgment and inclusion. With official backing, they could become “Post-Flood Warriors,” helping to rebuild infrastructure and restore normalcy. This disaster has exposed grave lapses in preparedness. But it has also given the government a chance to redeem itself. Establishing relief camps and engaging DRWs are two immediate, practical steps that could transform the situation. Delay, on the other hand, risks not only lives lost to exposure and disease but also a collapse of public trust in governance. The time to act is now. History will not measure the fury of the floods, but the compassion—or neglect—of the state’s response.

Failed when most put to test, Kashmiriyat just a word today

■ MRIDULL THAPLU

There was a time when people would speak of Kashmiriyat with romanticism. Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits were said to have a united brotherhood and shared culture, which distinguished the Valley. For many years, the term “Kashmiriyat” was used as a label, a tactful way to refer to a group of people who used to coexist peacefully. To be honest that notion fell apart a long time ago. Kashmiriyat is not what we now have. What we now have is either nostalgia or guilt and neither is meaningful in the absence of justice.

Let’s quit deceiving ourselves. When Kashmiriyat was most put to the test, it failed. When Islamic extremism and separatism supported by Pakistan seized the control of Kashmir in 1989 and the years that followed, it was more than just a political movement. An whole population was violently purged. Islamist rioters drove away almost the entire Kashmiri Pandit community. They had no protection. No warning was given to them. Not even mourning was done for them. Their neighbours remained silent. Rioters occupied the houses of the Kashmiri Pandits and desecrated temples. Kashmiri Pandits lost their culture and the entire Valley remained silent despite the fact that it happened in full view.

So, where was Kashmiriyat? The simple fact is that the expulsion of the Pandits killed the concept of Kashmiriyat.

And it wasn’t only a humanitarian catastrophe that ensued. It was a wound to civilization.

In this situation, its not the two parties that were hurt. It was the Kashmiri Pandits that were hurt. They worked for the government, were artists, teachers and priests.

They were exiled within their own nation, despite being the intellectual and spiritual center of Kashmir.

No one has been held responsible for their exile to this day. Not one. And those who shout about terrorists and stone-pelters,’ human rights are silent on one of the biggest genocide that took place in independent India.

What is this form of secularism? Is this really justice? Nevertheless, they are the same individuals that advocate for the revival of Kashmiriyat. However, if you don’t accept how something died, how can you

bring it back to life?

Additionally, let’s clarify what Kashmiriyat was and wasn’t. It was never intended as a justification for minimizing nationalism. The goal was never to maintain harmony by weakening our sense of civilization.

The culture, ideas and spirit of Kalhana, Abhinavagupta, and Lal Ded’s Kashmir were all proudly Indian. It was the home of spiritual discourse, Sanskrit study and Shaivism. That Kashmir existed for a very long time before extremism crossed its boundaries. However, subsequent events attempted to obliterate that recollection.

It attempted to Islamize a land that had long stood for plurality based on Indian principles rather than some imported ideology.

Because of this, raising the national flag at Lal Chowk today is more than simply a symbolic gesture. A space that was lost to fear is being reclaimed. Separatists and those who support them created the impression that India was occupying Kashmir for many years. Now, however, things are different.

The Indian flag is being proudly raised in the open for the first time in decades, rather than behind bunkers. This is important.

The fact that Kashmir is proudly and completely Indian must be unavoidable before Kashmiriyat can even be considered. In spirit as well as in land.

Let’s be honest, too. Things were made worse by the political muddle that ruled the state for many years.

In Srinagar, politicians who represented nationalism in Delhi would adopt a separatist stance.

That period of time has over. Ambiguity is no longer an option. If you love Kashmir, you can’t ignore the Pandit exodus.

You cannot support terrorists and still identify as a Democrat. Between India and Pakistan, there is no middle ground. Complete adherence to the Indian Constitution is the first step in any “Kashmir solution.”

There is no need for further soft talk in Kashmir. Nor does it require more sham peace. Clarity is what it really needs. People continued to ignore the truth for many years.

They made an effort to please everyone. They addressed people with risky beliefs in a kind manner. The actual issues were never resolved as a result.

This type of misunderstanding allowed hatred and separatism to flourish. Some leaders continued to play both sides

while the general populace suffered. Never should that occur again.

Kashmir now need a fresh approach. A cultural and civilizational renaissance is required. This entails returning to the core values of Kashmir, which were education, contemplation, harmony, and customs.

Not division, not fear, nor false pride. However, the top cannot make this change. Not from high-level meetings or expensive offices. The ground, where actual people reside, must be the starting point.

First, the Kashmiri Pandits’ return is more than just a news story. Surely it’s a mission. Not in token plots or isolated gated settlements, but in complete dignity. If a Pandit family is going to return to the Valley, they must be welcomed with open hearts.

If a temple is going to be rebuilt, it must be done with respect and support from the people around it.

They have to go back to their cities and villages as the legitimate heirs to their land, not as strangers or exiles. Infrastructure, complete cultural freedom, and security must be provided by the local government.

More significantly, though, society as a whole has to accept them with respect rather than sympathy.

Second, the whole truth needs to be shared with Kashmir’s younger generation. Not the censored versions propagated by separatists.

Today’s youngsters have no idea what transpired in 1990. They learn about the acts of security forces, but they never learn about the threats that occur at night, the cries for Pandits to flee or perish, or the mosques’ explicit support for Pakistan.

This ignorance is harmful. Education must become more truthful. The complete tale must be taught in schools. Spaces for speaking the truth, not playing victim, must be established in colleges.

Third, Kashmir has to start its cultural reset. Stop spreading the myth that tradition and spirituality are outdated. Before extremist Islam, the Valley had a rich spiritual past.

Why is Abhinavagupta not being taught in schools? Why do schools not teach Lalleshwari’s poetry? Why does Shaivism not exist in its own birthplace’s public life? In order to revive Kashmiriyat, the roots must be restored rather than obscured by foreign philosophies.

Fourth, Let’s cease considering the peace to be fragile. Since the state is now in control, it is steady. Since Article 370

has been repealed, the state is stable. Due to the removal of the special status that shielded separatist sentiment, Kashmir is stable.

This was no coincidence. It was the outcome of political determination to take action that previous administrations were too scared to do. The legislation was not the only thing altered by the ruling.

The Valley’s course was altered. The administration prioritized national interest before vote-bank calculations for once. And it was successful.

Fifth, and most urgently, we require a new generation of Kashmiri leaders. Not The faces of dynastic families that earned millions as the Valley burned. Leaders who make it obvious that soft separatism has no place are what we need. Victimhood is not the language of Vikas.

Those who oppose bandh calls and will instead open schools. No plan is more significant than this political change. We shall revert to the previous cycle if we do not have it.

Kashmir is more than a state. It serves as the gateway to the northern region of Bharat, which is spiritual and civilized. We can no longer let it float in the confusion’s breezes.

A vision of national unity, cultural pride and civilizational regeneration must guide the future. We must resist emotional blackmail and misleading narratives in order to achieve this.

Neutrality is not appropriate at this time. It’s time to make a decision. Do we wish to bring back Kashmir’s authentic, Indian-based spirit? Or do we want to continue acting as though symbolic gestures and slogans are sufficient?

If Kashmiriyat is to have any significance once more, it must start with the truth. Not selective truth. Not comfortable truth. But the whole, harsh and honest truth. And justice must follow from that reality. And a new Kashmir, one that is Indian not only in geography but also in every house, school, and spirit, must result from that justice.

Kashmir doesn’t require historical healing. What was taken away has to be restored. Being brave is the only way to go forward, not being neutral. Through transparency, not through concessions. Not with tenderness, but with character and power.

The Kashmiriyat is still alive. However, it won’t come back by itself. We must fight for it with the spirit of India, truth and justice rather than with bullets.

India needs Sharper Swadeshi

■ SHIVAJI SARKAR

The weaponizing of tariff runs deeper than it appears. When US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent described India—US ties as “very complicated and not over the Russian oil,” he signalled something grave: retaliation.

The message is blunt — punish a defiant India that refuses to open its farm, dairy, and other sensitive markets. The result is the imposition of an additional 25 per cent tariff, doubling the blow to 50 per cent.

This isn’t about oil. It’s about disciplining the world’s most populous country and its vast consumer market. Washington’s strategy is clear: force New Delhi into submission, with Bessent boasting of “full support from our European partners.” That raises the stakes for India’s ongoing free trade talks with the EU, as Brussels comes under US pressure.

The mindset is stark: nothing short of total compliance will do. In effect, India is expected to play a servile partner — or face the consequences.

History offers parallels. The US once wielded such pressure against Latin American countries. It did machinations against India during and after the 1971 Bangladesh war under the Henry Kissinger doctrine. It has many gory remembrances.

Now it is promoting rogue regimes through Mohd Yunus in Bangladesh and General Asim Munir in Pakistan.

Bessent’s warning that President Donald Trump “will not budge on tariffs if India doesn’t” reinforces the hard line against India.

Trump himself is quiet as minions continue to vilify India. The US administration

broadened its crackdown on travel, business and students’ visas, alleging that India was the biggest misuser of visas.

India knows that it’s a wider game where it hits jobs, exports but the tone and tenor of the big brother may indicate more.

The 50 per cent levy slams 70 per cent of India’s U.S. sales, slicing exports from \$87.3 billion to \$49.6 billion, and already shuttering Tirupur, Noida and Surat plants. Prices jump 35 per cent, shaving 0.5 per cent off GDP.

Yet China, bigger Russian-oil buyer, stays tariff-free as Trump pursues Vladimir Putin. That’s theatre, not strategy.

The consequences are already visible. The Sensex shed 1,828 points in three days, wiping out Rs 7 lakh crore in value; over the past two months, stock losses have exceeded Rs15 lakh crore.

Export-oriented sectors — textiles, handlooms, gems and jewellery, leather, and marine products — are reeling. The slowdown in export-oriented sectors, despite a shifting to electronics and engineering may cost a fortune.

Yet, India still struggles to leverage critical technology transfers in areas like jet propulsion, metallurgy, and nuclear systems for decades despite the India-US nuclear deal in 2008.

Washington does not allow entry of India-made cars. India exports cars to numerous countries, with major destinations including South Africa, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Chile, and, more recently, Japan, signalling India’s growing role as a global automotive production hub. Other key markets for Indian-made vehicles include Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and parts of Europe.

The government is pushing a ‘Swadeshi’ mantra to reduce the economy’s reliance on

exports, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi calling on Indians to be “vocal for local” and buy Indian goods on August 26, 2025.

Anything produced locally is the new swadeshi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi says. India and the U.S. are negotiating a bilateral trade pact (BTA) since March. So far, five rounds of talks have been completed. The U.S. team postponed its scheduled August 25 visit to India.

The government is pitching “vocal for local” and swadeshi production as the antidote, with Modi urging Indians to buy local goods. (It has not yet acted against online American retail giants).

Simultaneously, India is scrambling to diversify close to \$60 billion worth of exports once US-bound. Targets include Europe, Japan, Korea, and Australia, though success will demand long-term strategies, buyer exploration, and overcoming non-tariff barriers.

India has signed 13 FTAs, including with ASEAN, EFTA - Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland, the UAE, and Australia, while talks with EU are underway. But the differential US tariffs that favour competitors like Vietnam, Bangladesh, China and Turkey — all under the 20 per cent tariff line — mean India risks losing ground in marine products, textiles, and more.

Winning back lost markets could be even tougher. The UK FTA, a contrast with the US, will waive tariffs on 99 percent of Indian exports, significantly boosting Indian manufacturers and potentially leading to a substantial Indian trade surplus.

On the ground, the impact is severe. Textile units are stalling new orders. Leather workers, gem cutters, and shrimp processors face wage cuts and job losses. The poor, dependent on low-paying jobs in these sectors, bear the brunt. Rural demand is holding up

thanks to recent good monsoons, but urban export-linked industries face a sharp downturn.

India’s challenge is not only to withstand Washington’s tariffs but also to rethink its economic playbook. Reliance on foreign brands, lack of indigenous brand-building, and dependence on unstable global demand have left vulnerabilities.

The path forward may lie in building strong local brands and developing resilient, diversified markets. What can India do? Look for alternate markets? Develop ‘make in India’ or experiment?

It has to give up lop-sidedness in brand building. ‘Maruti’ evolved as a brand. Lack of farsighted approach led it to be subsumed by Suzuki through different Indian regimes allowing dilution of its stake. Stable policies are needed to create new markets, a strenuous task.

Producing a battery car that the US is abandoning is not a solution for India even if made by a top brand in India.

Battery often called the toy car is yet not a solution with battery itself being a problem.

Battery leading to more imports and strategic dependence is not a viable solution. It has to promote the ICE engine vehicle producing companies and ancillaries.

India has to go back to its diesel, which it sells to Europe. It is inexpensive, easily available better than ethanol and with imagination could be sold at half the present price, as the country is doing to some neighbouring countries.

Bessent may soothe by saying, “at the end of the day, we will come together,” but the immediate reality is harsher. India is staring at tariffs that could reset trade dynamics for years, testing its resilience as it negotiates between protectionism abroad and self-reliance at home.--INFA

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