

## O HERALDO

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## A new face for an old threat

The recent terrorist attack in the verdant meadows of Baisaran, Pahalgam, on April 22, where unarmed tourists were ruthlessly fired upon, marks a chilling reminder of the persistent and evolving threat in Jammu & Kashmir. The Resistance Front (TRF), a shadowy militant outfit, has claimed responsibility for the bloodshed, reviving concerns about the return of proxy terrorism to the Valley.

What sets this attack apart is not only its brutality, but also the re-emergence of TRF; a digital-era front designed to mask the involvement of Pakistan-based terror groups, particularly the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). While it may bear a different name, TRF is but an extension of the same machinery that orchestrated the 2019 Pulwama attack, making this assault one of the most significant civilian-targeted incidents since then.

TRF first appeared on the radar in 2019, in the wake of Article 370's abrogation. Its emergence was neither spontaneous nor isolated. Instead, it was a calculated response, designed to give militancy in Kashmir a so-called 'indigenous face'; an effort to distract from the involvement of handlers and masterminds operating out of Pakistan. The group's ideological and logistical roots, however, remain deeply embedded in the LeT and its patron, Pakistan's military establishment, particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence.

Unlike traditional militant outfits, TRF has adeptly embraced encrypted messaging apps, social media platforms, and dark web forums to radicalise youth, coordinate attacks, and avoid surveillance. This digital camouflage allows the group to operate without the global stigma associated with LeT, presenting a more "acceptable" front for exporting terror under a different banner.

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The Baisaran shooting is a significant escalation in TRF's playbook. Eyewitnesses recount a scene of chaos and horror as gunmen opened fire on unsuspecting tourists enjoying pony rides and picnics. A clear attempt not just to instil fear, but to sabotage the return of normalcy and tourism to the Valley.

Despite its attempts to distance itself from LeT, TRF's leadership and strategy unmistakably trace back to its origin. The group is reportedly headed by Sheikh Sajjad

Gul, a known LeT operative and a designated terrorist under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has identified him as the operational and digital mastermind behind TRF's campaigns, making him a high-priority target for Indian security forces.

Recognising the growing threat, the Indian government formally banned TRF under the UAPA in January 2023, declaring it a terrorist organization. Yet, its continued access to cross-border funding, arms, and training solidifies its role as a key instrument in Pakistan's asymmetric warfare strategy; one aimed at destabilising India without direct confrontation.

TRF has claimed responsibility for a series of assassinations, bombings, and attacks targeting civilians, security personnel, and political leaders across Jammu & Kashmir. Its rise represents a broader Pakistani strategy to rejuvenate militancy in the region by replacing known terror groups with new, less recognisable proxies to evade international scrutiny.

The Pahalgam attack is a grim reminder that these new facades do not conceal old intentions. Behind the rhetoric of "resistance" lies a lethal agenda designed and driven from across the border, one that seeks to unravel peace, deter investment, and prolong the suffering of Kashmir's people.

TRF's emergence, and its capacity for high-impact violence, underscores the changing face of militancy in Kashmir. It is not just a security threat, but a strategic challenge. One that demands a calibrated mix of intelligence, international cooperation, and on-ground vigilance. The rebranding may have changed the name, but the agenda remains unchanged: to disrupt, destabilise, and derail peace.

In the face of this evolving menace, India's response must be equally adaptive and resolute. The battle against proxy terrorism is no longer confined to borders or battlefields. It now extends to digital platforms, ideological fronts, and diplomatic arenas. And it is here that the next phase of the fight must be won.

## Twitter World

Shekhar Gupta @ShekharGupta

Canada is the only G7 country not to have spoken on Pahalgam yet. Or may be it really sees itself as the 51st state & believes Trump has spoken for it...A shame. When China, Iran, Turkey & hypocrisy apart, even Pakistan has called the "loss of civilian life despicable..."

Javed Akhtar @Javedakhtarjadu

Come what may, what ever the cost, what ever the repercussions, the terrorists of Pelham can not be allowed to get away. These mass murderers have to pay with their lives for their inhuman deeds.

## comment



JOHN DAYAL

## Death in the meadows

India mourns the death of 26 people, 24 of them Indian tourists, two foreigners and two Kashmiris, in a terrorist attack in the crowded Baisaran meadow near Pahalgam in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Twenty were injured, some critically. The foreigners were from Nepal and the United Arab Emirates. The four attackers reportedly included two Pakistani nationals and two locals.

This is touted as the most serious attack on civilians in the Kashmir valley since the 2019 Pulwama bombing, and has serious repercussions on tourism, which is the lifeline of the valley and the chief source of livelihood of local people, including porters, and syces of horses and mules.

In 2024, Kashmir saw record tourist arrivals, with Pahalgam's meadows and glaciers drawing millions.

Kashmir's tourism industry, a cornerstone of its economy, has long been a target for militants. The insurgency, ongoing since 1989, has seen periods of intense violence, with civilians, security forces, and militants among the tens of thousands killed. While tourists were rarely targeted on such a scale, recent years have seen a disturbing pattern of attacks on pilgrims and non-locals.

After bifurcation, and its formation as a union territory, Jammu and Kashmir has a unique governance system. While the civil government is under an elected chief minister - Omar Abdullah - the security apparatus is under the direct control of the Union government through the Lieutenant Governor.



In the general outrage over the killing, which is attributed to the Resistance Front, a part of the Pakistan based Lashkar-e-Taiba, questions need to be asked over the summary intelligence failure at all levels, which left the meadows, favourite of tourists, totally bereft of any security cover.

There is no question but that the attack was timed to coincide with the visit by US Vice President JD Vance to India. It

was a coincidence perhaps that the Prime minister was in Saudi Arabia, a visit he cut short on hearing of the Pahalgam mayhem.

There are reports that warnings were either ignored or inadequately acted upon. There had been rumours of possible or potential attacks on tourists for over a week, including Srinagar city as a target.

The region, which has an estimated 500,000 Indian troops, has an extensive surveillance and intelligence grid. However, the attack's success in a high-traffic tourist area, far from the heavily guarded urban centres, speaks volumes of gaps in coordination and proactive measures.

The Baisaran meadow, lacking armed security presence, was a soft target, contrasting sharply with the fortified checkpoints and patrols in nearby Pahalgam town.

The involvement of local operatives, as suggested by intelligence sources identifying two attackers from Bijnhera and Tral, points to another critical failure: the inability to dismantle local militant networks. Despite intensified counter-insurgency operations since 2019, groups like TRF apparently continue to recruit and operate with support from sympathetic civilians.

It would seem obvious that there is inadequate coordination among central agencies, including the Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and local police.

The lack of actionable response to prior warnings suggests deficiencies in real-time threat assessment and dissemination. Credible newspapers and people have been calling for "sharper intelligence and tighter coordination," with proactive measures like enhanced vigilance and community engagement.

The attack particularly highlights the challenge of securing remote tourist areas. While urban centres like Srinagar are heavily fortified, rural destinations like Baisaran meadow are harder to patrol. Deploying permanent security posts in such areas risks militarising tourist experiences, but the absence of protection leaves visitors vulnerable.

A balanced approach, combining discreet security measures with community-based intelligence, could mitigate risks without deterring tourism.

Also disconcerting is the attack's ethnic targeting—evident in the assailants' focus on Hindu tourists—raising concerns about furthering communal polarization.

The Pahalgam attack reflects

deeper structural issues in India's approach to Kashmir. The heavy military presence, while effective in urban areas, has not eradicated militancy, which continues to draw support from Pakistan-based groups and local grievances.

Pakistan's role, though denied officially, is evident in the involvement of Pakistani nationals and Lashkar-e-Taiba's backing of TRF. India's insistence on treating the insurgency as purely Pakistan-sponsored terrorism overlooks the domestic roots of discontent, including alienation fuelled by the 2019 revocation and subsequent crackdowns.

The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which grants security forces broad powers, has been criticized by groups like Amnesty International for enabling human rights abuses, further eroding trust in the government.

Observers have spoken about the inadequate political action required in the state. The assembly was revived, and after general elections, a civil government is in place. This government is not involved in the security process. That in many ways also impacts intelligence gathering as political workers feel themselves alienated instead of actively seeing themselves involved in helping enhance security.

This came out embarrassingly sharply in the post violence security review under union home minister Amit Shah who had rushed to Srinagar. Chief Minister Abdullah was pointedly excluded from the meeting for a review of the security situation.

The Pahalgam terrorist attack of April 22, 2025, was a tragic consequence of multiple levels of intelligence failures, local complicity, amidst the broader complexities of the Kashmir conflict.

Patchwork solutions will not work. The massacre, which claimed 26 lives and injured many more, calls for improved intelligence coordination, enhanced security for tourist areas, and a nuanced approach to counter-terrorism that addresses both external and internal drivers of militancy.

The path forward lies in combining robust security measures with genuine efforts to address local grievances.

Addressing these grievances requires not only security measures but also political engagement, as suggested by Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge's call for cross-party talks to ensure safety and unity.

(John Dayal is an author, Editor, occasional documentary film maker and activist.)

## people's edit

## THE DREADED CAMERAS

K S S PILLAI

"We are going only to the shop. Why are you taking so much time to make up?" the husband asks. "Don't you know there's a CCTV camera near the shop?" the wife replies. The conversation shows how cameras have affected our lives.

Years ago, the newlyweds used to go to the nearest studio and get photographed. Then came the photographer at the wedding venue. Black-and-white photographs of all who attended the marriage were taken and delivered after about a week. They were pasted into an album for future reference. The couple often relived their past by going through the album.

In the late 1960s, a film roll that could take ten black-and-white photographs cost Rs 5. After taking photos, the camera was taken to a studio, where the film was 'washed' in chemicals in a dark room and hung to dry. Prints were taken afterwards and handed over to the customer, along with the exposed film.

Colour photography and the appearance of smartphones with cameras have changed everything. Though the device is called a phone, it is mostly used for other purposes. Photographs can be edited or morphed, making them dreaded equipment for many. They have great value as proof, as the courts punish or acquit people based on expert opinions.

Some movies show the villain going after those recording his nefarious activities and the latter trying to save them as proof. Many divorces have been granted based on photographs of the spouse indulging in activities of unfaithfulness.

CCTVs have become a tool for catching lawbreakers and bringing them to justice. Shoplifters, trespassers and other offenders are scared of cameras that have become integral parts of public roads and places like residential complexes. Traffic offenders are fined based on these photos. When riots take place, the criminals hide their faces by wearing masks. The first thing criminals do nowadays is to disable these cameras before embarking on their activities.

Newspapers are now full of news items and advertisements in colour photographs. Public figures spend much time and money in beauty parlours and dress in costly garments while appearing in public as they know their photos will be flashed over social media. Even ordinary folks have become conscious of their appearance for the same reason. People upload visuals of their sojourns to distant places or visits to costly restaurants.

Politicians behave like gentlemen if photographers are present. Some sit on the floor and eat with people denounced as 'low-caste' and ensure that their actions are recorded and published. They are scared of hidden cameras everywhere.

Some actors and actresses, once famous for their glamour, run away from cameras as time has made them ugly and fragile. They refuse to be photographed, and many have stopped appearing in public places.

Long after nations are devastated by wars, photographs of a half-buried child's dead body or people running away from death travelling on the roof of trains haunt us. Countries where criminals are sentenced to death after short trials use photographs of the beheading to warn potential criminals.

Photographs have become a part of our lives, making it impossible to imagine a world without them.

## Barbaric and inhuman act

Endless shrieks must have pierced the skies of Baisaran meadows in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir last Tuesday, as tourists lay motionless in pools of blood following one of the deadliest terror attacks on civilians in recent years in the valley.

The barbaric and inhuman act by the terrorists, killing 26 people, including two foreign tourists, need to be condemned severely, and such incidents have no place in a civilised society. The incident marks a significant escalation in violence directed at civilians in J&K, a region that has been striving hard to recover from years of militancy.

The tragic event has not only claimed precious human lives but has also cast a shadow over the efforts to revive tourism in J&K, a region rich in natural beauty and cultural heritage. A multifaceted approach that includes military, political, and socio-economic strategies is necessary to address the complex challenges in the region. Policy-makers, security forces, and the community must work together to ensure long-term peace and stability in the valley.

It is highly unfortunate that red-roses that parade the beautiful snow capped valley of J&K and offer visual delight to the locals and tourists seem to painfully often turn themselves into stains of blood, signifying madness of violence when they should actu-

ally embody their true nature of beauty, love and passion.

Ranganathan Sivakumar,  
Chennai

## Tragic failure of J&amp;K policy

Terrorists killed 26 tourists in Pahalgam, Kashmir, including foreigners. J&K has been cleaved in two and the Centre has complete control over law and order. Recently, a meeting on the security situation in the valley was held, but Chief Minister Omar Abdullah was asked to leave before the confabulations.

The blame for the deaths of these innocent tourists squarely lies at the PM's and HM's door. Nobody else is responsible.

Their Kashmir policy has been a spectacular failure. The much-touted abrogation of article 370 of the Constitution was supposed to herald the dawn of peace in the valley. But will the media which shrieks Hindu-Muslim 24x7 ask for accountability? No, the talking heads have started blaming Pakistan's ISI and some vague Lashkar outfit for the killings even as evidence is yet to come by. This is simply ring-fencing the top two from any blame. The murders happened in an area where there are army checkpoints @ every 100

meters, yet the terrorists sneak in with heavy weapons and ammunition. Was this an intelligence failure? Sinister shades of Pulwama all over again, how many more people will be killed before the PM and HM shoulder responsibility and resign? Oh, by the way remember Manipur?

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaalim  
Heinous act  
Terrorists Killing tourists in Pahalgam (J&K) is a heinous cowardly inhuman act. Pope, Mahatma Gandhi always said peaceful negotiations is the only meaningful humane way out for humans. It is self defeating for J&K because it will lose on tourism earnings. Who will visit a unhappy sadistic killer place (or killer organisation)?

Top class expert scientists invent, construct, build, save humanity and lives. Terrorists nullify their achievements by killing, destruction, sadism and harm.  
Sreelekha PS, Telangana

## The government must provide answers

Regarding the Pahalgam murders, the shocking fact is that LoC (Line of Control) is located approximately 150 to 200 km from Pahalgam. If the attacks on Tuesday were carried out by 3 FTs (foreign terrorists) and 1 In-

dian militant, then the big question that arises is how did these 3 FTs penetrate so deep inside the heavily guarded valley? Secondly if these terrorists are so efficient in breaking the counter-terrorism grid then what stops them from creating mayhem in Srinagar or the rest of India?

After the incident, these men would obviously take refuge in the deep forests and mountains of Baltal and Tral. For how long can the terrorists sustain themselves? Do they have some kind of local ground support? If so, then how many groups have set up base and may strike in the future?

This mass murder points to an intelligence failure first and foremost, the Kashmir valley is a place where there is an army checkpoint every 100 metres, the roads are constantly patrolled by soldiers and every tourist and local has to show a government issued identity document when asked.

It is obvious that the terrorists must have been waiting and watching inside the security grid before they attacked, it was a meticulously planned and executed operation.

The government must answer several questions before any unreasonable retaliatory "strike" takes place. 'Kadi ninda' and the usual 'zero tolerance for terror-

ism' statements won't do; it is time to use the hammer of Thor.  
Misha, Varca

## Crush terrorism with an iron hand

Indian forces in the Kashmir valley have tasted a great deal of success over the years. Both home-spun militancy and the external terrorism appeared to be on the wane. The much acclaimed "Operation Jackboot" conceptualised by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval had claimed its scalps in quick succession in the valley.

Elimination of dreaded terrorists like Burhan Wani, Abu Dujana, Abu Ismail and Riyaz Naikoo had dumbfounded the local terror groups and their Pakistani handlers. And, of course, abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A had infused comfort and confidence into peace-loving locals, and tourists who throng the valley all year.

The deadly terror strike that targeted tourists in the picturesque meadows of Baisaran near Pahalgam on Tuesday, therefore, has numbed the people of the state and the country. It is amply clear that the devilish and sick Pakistani based terror minds operating across the LoC were shocked by the peace that was prevalent across the valley.

Tourism footfall was at its peak and locals were reaping rich dividends through the profitable tourism and hospitality industry. How will the Centre react to the tense situation?

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola