

**THE GOVERNMENT MUST ACT AGAINST THE HURRIYAT BEFORE
IMPLEMENTING NEW POLICIES
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The chilling videos of youth targeting CAPF vehicles in the valley in a planned and organized manner, seeking to cause casualties and force security forces to break Non – Initiating of Combat Operation (NICO) by opening fire has hit a raw nerve across the nation. Any individual with basic military knowledge would admit that these attacks have all the hallmarks of a planned ambush including elements deployed to block escape routes. Thus, there is an organization behind the protests, seeking to draw blood, either of security forces or of local youth, to enhance violence levels in the valley.

There has also been a spurt in grenade throwing incidents on police personnel as also an attempted attack by a group of five to six militants on an army camp. It appears to be a plan to force security forces to recommence its operations, which they had suspended. All this while the government mulls options to expand its outreach in the valley.

The Home Ministry announced that it is seeking to evolve policies to 'reintegrate misguided youths' in the valley. This policy is focussed around sports, tourism and employment. In the Centre's opinion, though there are rounds of sporadic violence, levels of stone throwing have dropped post the announcement of NICO.

The ministry elaborated on this policy claiming the intention was to counter the increasing numbers of youth joining militancy. It could possibly have been based on a study conducted by the J and K Police, which claims a link between encounter killing and youth from the same neighbourhood joining militancy. The study traced the antecedents of as many as 35 youngsters who became militants after the elimination of Burhan Wani.

In an interview to a leading daily the Interlocutor for Jammu and Kashmir, Dineshwar Sharma stated, 'the biggest challenge is to calm down sentiments of the people, particularly the youth'. The other issue is to prevent local youth from joining militancy and ensure return of those who have joined. Simultaneously, there has been the rejection of the Hurriyat to the offer of talks by the Centre, despite Mufti's fervent appeal. Latest inputs indicate that the interlocutor may interact with the Hurriyat.

It is well established that the Hurriyat's demands are such that no Indian government can ever accept. It demands tripartite talks with Pakistan and India, which is beyond comprehension. The intention remains that since India would not accept its offer, violence would continue. Thus, logically the Hurriyat needs to be side-lined.

A recent video on social media where frustration on the Hurriyat was being vented by an individual, Irfan Sheikh a cousin of the youth run over by a security forces vehicle escaping violence, is possibly the tip of the iceberg. A subsequent video, where the same individual withdraws his anger and claims the Hurriyat is family, indicates the level of local power of the Hurriyat.

These two videos convey a few messages. Firstly, frustration is rising against the Hurriyat and secondly, the Hurriyat continues to hold sway over the region as it pays and controls violence. It still instils fear within the public, with few daring to speak against them. Since the videos have gone viral, Irfan may be safe for the moment, however would remain under intense pressure.

Also doing the rounds on social media is an open letter from a business graduate from Srinagar, questioning the Hurriyat's source of funds for their luxurious lifestyle, medical bills, travel expenses and costly cars. Slowly there is a realization amongst the moderate youth seeking peace and growth, that unless the Hurriyat is side lined, peace will not return. Further, side lining must be done by the local population, assisted by the Centre.

The pace of NIA and ED investigation including their raids, which had the Hurriyat on tenterhooks has suddenly vanished, reasons for which remain unclear, thus giving them a second life. They have bounced back with vigour and regained control of violence, with the re-emergence of hawala funds. Unless the investigation proceeds and pulls the Hurriyat out of the valley, chances of peace would continue remaining low.

The aim of the government appears to be to diffuse anger within the youth. The youth, which has been fed with the concept of 'Azadi' since birth, and believe it is a reality, would not give it up, unless the local leadership, fuelling this anger is removed from the scene or proved to be misleading. Thus, the removal of the Hurriyat would break the trust on the organization which has been at the forefront of lies and deceit and open doors for amalgamation of youth into society.

The army's conduct of sporting and other events in the hinterland has witnessed immense participation. In no event were there calls for 'Azadi' nor

were they disrupted. Disturbances occur either in areas where encounters are frequent or in cities, where the youth in educational institutes are fed with this thought, day and night, as also directly influenced by the Hurriyat's financial clout.

The policy of terrorist groups masterminded by Pakistan has been to target political leaders in their home constituencies. This has forced most to remain away breaking the contact between the leaders and the led. It has also dented the confidence of the local public on the state leadership. Political rallies have all but ceased. The one addressed by Mehbooba recently was a rare one. It is this break in communication which needs to be re-established. These ground actions must be re-commenced at the earliest, or the initiative would pass onto anti-national elements.

Before the government mulls any policy decisions, it needs to involve the Army, whose views it ignored while ordering NICO, and which interacts at the grassroots levels, hence has indepth knowledge. Kick starting political outreach is equally important. For any policy to be effective, side lining the Hurriyat is essential or else they would remain policies on paper, with no progress on ground.

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