

THE POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES OF GOVERNOR'S RULE

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With the BJP pulling the rug under the feet of the PDP, J and K is back under governor's rule. For Jammu and Ladakh there would be better governance and implementation of development plans as these were ignored by valley dominated political parties. Whatever be the reason for the BJP to quit the coalition, the reality is that the state is under governor's rule.

A major discussion in all forums is impact of governor's rule on the future of Kashmir. Considering the present environment in Kashmir, it is unlikely that any other coalition may come forward to take the mantle and possibly burn its fingers. Thus, governor's rule is likely to continue for a prolonged duration.

Logically, the BJP would claim that it has tried its utmost. With some semblance of normalcy returning to the valley, it went ahead and appointed an interlocutor, Dinesh Sharma, who made multiple visits to the valley and met a cross section of society. It even accepted multiple requests from the Mehbooba government, none of which seemed to work. Based on hers and Dinesh Sharma's request, despite objections from security forces, the centre pardoned over 11,000 stone throwers, who instead of reforming, went back to the same business.

The government even declared NICO (Non-Initiation of Combat Operations) on Mufti's demand, which though indicated a drop-in violence, brought forth no tangible results. The Hurriyat refused to engage in negotiations and encouraged an increase in violence as soon as NICO terminated. There was no surrender of local militants, as was expected, nor did any youth join militancy. The planned assassination of Shujaat Bukhari, on the final days of NICO was the tipping point, which gave the BJP the excuse it needed. It was a message sent clearly that peace will not be permitted to reign.

Governor's rule is in place. Such an action has happened multiple times before. There are occasions, even if violence levels are not high enough for central control, to remove political interference for restoring order, while enhancing government schemes leading to development. Thus, there are always positives and negatives of governor's rule.

The positives flow from the fact that any political party, which has its maximum supporters in the valley would always seek to restrict anti-terror operations in their region of interest, preferring securing of vote banks to increase in militancy. They would always seek to mollycoddle their youth (vote bank) and desire a soft approach, when the reverse may be essential.

The DGP of Police J and K, SP Vaid stated in an interview post establishment of governor's rule, 'With the centre directly controlling the state, we think now that there will not be much political interference in our anti-militancy operations. A civilian government has many political compulsions.' The hint is evident that whichever valley dominated party comes to power, it has compulsions.

The army has faced lesser political pressures, except the fact that to appease her constituents, Mehbooba has had FIRs lodged against the army even when they have not been at fault. However, restrictions on local police sharing intelligence has impacted operations.

Hinderance to security forces operations by stone throwing was encouraged by their being pardoned by Mehbooba. It gave them the confidence that pardoning would continue as they are vote banks for future elections. It is unlikely that they would enjoy this freedom anymore. Hence, despite availability of funds, it would witness a drop. Simultaneously, calls for surrender of recent entrants to militancy would increase.

There were many political decisions, which could not be taken as there was disagreement between the coalition partners, which the state would now be able to handle. The surrender policy was in limbo and alongside it the rehabilitation policy for surrendered militants. Managing the influx of Rohingyas in the Jammu belt was a cause of distancing between the two parties. Thus, governor's rule would provide answers to issues which an uncomfortable political coalition could not provide.

The major failures in the valley which have encouraged anti-national activities are mainly political. These would now be overcome. A key factor has been poor governance and lack of outreach by political leaders, who rarely visited their constituencies for security reasons, thus disconnecting with the masses and ignoring development and managing local issues. With political leaders out of the way, the governor would make bureaucrats at each level accountable. They would be forced to perform and ensure governance. Thus, development would become visible and so would resolution of local issues.

The NIA and ED had commenced their raids on the Hurriyat with publicity and gusto seeking to block the movement of hawala funds which were funding violence and terrorism in the valley. Inputs indicate that Mehbooba had desired these be slowed down, hoping it would lead to talks and peace. Demonetization dried stone throwing and reduced militancy, forcing militants to target banks to fund their cadres. The situation reversed slowly. Presently, there appears to be no dearth of funds. These raids would now commence with full vigour seeking to bring them to book.

Thus, considering the limitations under which the state political machinery was functioning, governor's rule would be a welcome change. Pressure would mount on anti-national elements and anti-militancy operations would increase in tempo. With the forthcoming Amarnath Yatra, threats to which always exist, security forces would act without pressures.

While governor's rule is a benefit in some respects, it also has its negatives. The most prominent is the message being conveyed that the state has not been able to control the valley and it is now under army control. In case the next governor is a retired army officer, this message would be become more vocal. This is also possibly the reason, why the centre has not allowed the governor to appoint a retired army officer as an advisor, though many with immense experience of the valley exist. On the contrary, in case the government desires to convey a strong message, ignoring local and international criticism, then it would place a retired military officer at the helm.

Army led operations also need to be implemented with care and caution, seeking to limit collateral damage. One misdirected incident would gain headlines condemning the government nationally and internationally. On the contrary, the army's continuing local outreach would be more effective as political interference would be missing.

There are two musts for the governor to implement to bring forth normalcy. The first is stopping burial of local militants by the village. In case it desires to permit them, then it should have a restricted group and under the control and supervision of security forces. There would be initial resistance, but it must be enforced as these are breeding grounds for recruitment of locals into militant ranks. No political party in power can contemplate to stop or restrict this as it impacts vote banks, but the governor can.

The second is to relocate the Hurriyat, for security reasons, out of the state. This action, even for a short duration, would suddenly provide a reduction in resistance and violence against security forces action. The government by placing the state under governor's rule has clearly sent a message that it is not seeking talks for now, but a reduction in violence and militancy to push forward an agenda of development. Hence, the only stumbling block, the Hurriyat, need to be made inoperative.

Placing the state under governor's rule has positives and negatives. A carefully crafted strategy seeking to push instigators away from the region, controlling the use of burials as a breeding ground and relentless operations with sound intelligence would soon create an environment of near normalcy. In case no coalition is willing to assume the mantle of the state, then while security forces can create better conditions, the bureaucracy pushes the agenda of development forward, opening doors to peace and reconciliation.

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