

Kashmir: on the brink of a “catastrophic” war

Kashmir has experienced its share of violence over the past 70 years, said **Daily Excelsior (Jammu)**, but last week’s massacre in the “idyllic” Baisaran valley was a “grim” new low for the Indian-administered territory. As families and honeymooners relaxed in Pahalgam, one of Kashmir’s “most tranquil corners”, gunmen from a militant group called The Resistance Front slaughtered 26 people in a meadow, all but one of whom was Indian. Relations between India and Pakistan are now “cratering”, pushing the nuclear-armed rivals to the brink of



The mighty Indus: the river that feeds the two nations

outright war, said Rhea Mogul on **CNN (New York)**. India’s prime minister, Narendra Modi, accused Pakistan of organising the attack, vowing to pursue the perpetrators “to the ends of the Earth”; New Delhi then downgraded ties with Islamabad and shut a key border crossing. The two sides have exchanged fire over the “line of control” in the Himalayan territory, and India has taken the unprecedented step of suspending a vital treaty that allows both countries to share control of the Indus River System – a move that Islamabad called an “act of war”.

Pakistan may deny it “a hundred times”, said Aaj Ki Baat on **India TV (Noida)**, “but the entire world” knows it was behind this attack. Just look at the videos of the massacre: they show gunmen kitted out with sophisticated weapons and bodycams killing their Hindu victims at point-blank range. This was “a planned, professional job”, most likely organised by Pakistan’s army and its powerful intelligence agency, the ISI. It has been the same with almost every major attack on India, said Vir Sanghvi in **The Print (New Delhi)**. After the 2008 Mumbai attacks, when 166 people were killed by Pakistani Islamists, the Manmohan Singh government ignored the angry cries for retribution, saying a war would not benefit anyone. Hailed as “statesman-like”, such restraint now “looks more and more like a terrible miscalculation”. Pakistan walked away knowing it could kill Indian civilians without consequences. It’s time India

showed Pakistan that terrorism has a price, even if that means war.

India wants to drag Pakistan into this “deplorable” episode, said **Dawn (Karachi)**. But perhaps Modi’s nationalist government should look a little closer to home and “review its brutal rule” in Kashmir, and the “immense discontent” that has bred in the “occupied” territory. In 2019, Modi revoked Kashmir’s already limited constitutional autonomy, bringing it under the direct control of New Delhi. He claims “all is well” in the region, but there will

be no end to these “blood-soaked episodes” if India continues to stamp out Kashmiri autonomy “through brute force and intimidation”. Modi’s long-term goal is to choke off Pakistan’s water supply, said **The Nation (Lahore)**, and he happily seized the opportunity last week by withdrawing from the Indus Waters Treaty, which splits control of the rivers flowing down from the Himalayas between India and Pakistan. The Indian PM is “playing with fire”: 80% of Pakistan’s irrigated agriculture is supported by that treaty, and if he disrupts that supply and undermines our economic and food security, Pakistan will have no choice but to respond – with possibly “catastrophic” results “for the entire region”.

India can’t actually disrupt Pakistan’s water supply, said Abhishek De in **India Today (New Delhi)**. It would take years to build the reservoirs and dams required to plug the water flow from the Indus. It’s more of a “psychological” tactic by Modi, who is under severe domestic pressure to respond to the attacks. India won’t be the last country to “weaponise” rivers, said Matthew Campbell in **The Times (London)**. China controls much of the world’s water tower, as the Himalayan glaciers are known, and Beijing is already building dams that could stop their flow to India. The decline in glaciers is only adding to tensions. If any of the other 800 international water treaties unravel, we could be entering “a new age of ‘water wars’”.