

Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir, commonly known as Kashmir, territory in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent bounded on the north-west by Afghanistan, on the north-east by China, on the south by the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, and on the west by the North-West Frontier and Punjab provinces of Pakistan. Kashmir has an area of about 222,236 sq km (85,806 sq mi).

Both India and Pakistan claim all of Kashmir, but the territory has been partitioned between them since 1947. India controls the southern half of Kashmir, which it has organized as the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Before India's defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian War, the state of Jammu and Kashmir also included the north-eastern section of the territory, which India still claims as part of Jammu and Kashmir State, but which has since been occupied by China as Aksai Chin. Pakistan controls the northern and western portion of Kashmir which is organized into three main regions: Azad (Free) Kashmir, occupying the crescent of land on the western border of Kashmir, between the state of Jammu and Kashmir on the east and Pakistan on the west; and Gilgit and Baltistan (the Northern Areas) located in the Karakorum Range in the far north-west. Azad Kashmir has a government protected and financed by Pakistan; Gilgit and Baltistan are notionally autonomous, but in practice are administered by political agents of the Pakistani government. The capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir is Srinagar. The administrative centre of Azad Kashmir is Muzaffarabad; Gilgit town and Skardu are respectively the capitals of Gilgit and Baltistan. The area of Jammu and Kashmir State was about 138,200 sq km (53,448 sq mi), before the Sino-Indian war; excluding the area occupied by China it is now about 101,387 sq km (39,145 sq mi). It has a population of 10.1 million (2000). The area controlled by Pakistan is about 84,100 sq km (32,494 sq mi), of which Azad Kashmir comprises about 1,680 sq km (650 sq mi). The population (1985 estimate) of the three Pakistani-controlled areas is about 2.8 million.

Kashmir is almost entirely mountainous. The Jammu plain in the extreme south-west is separated by the Lesser Himalaya from the large, fertile Vale of Kashmir, which has long been the economic and demographic heartland of Kashmir. The Vale is formed by the basin of the upper reaches of the River Jhelum, and contains Srinagar, by far the most populous town (1991, 595,000) of Kashmir. The north and west is dominated by the mountains of the western Himalaya, notably the peaks of the Karakorum Range, including K2 (8,611 m/28,250 ft), the world's second highest mountain (in Pakistani controlled territory). Within this area is the plateau region known as Ladakh, which is cut by the valley of the River Indus. Kashmir generally possesses a more equable climate than that of southern and central India, and the beautiful Vale of Kashmir is a noted resort region. Kashmir is the habitat of numerous game animals, including the markhor and ibex (wild goat), stag, and bear.

Most of the population is engaged in agriculture; the principal crops are rice, maize, wheat, and oilseeds. Among livestock raised are buffalo, cattle, sheep, goat, and poultry. Silk weaving and carpet weaving are major industries. In the southern area of Kashmir, people

are Muslims to the west of the city of Jammu, and Hindu and Sikh to the east; Hindi, Punjabi, and Dogri are their main languages. The people of the Vale of Kashmir, who comprise the majority of the population, are predominantly Muslim, and speak Urdu and Kashmiri. The sparsely inhabited northern and western region of Ladakh and beyond is home to Buddhist Mongoloid peoples speaking Balti and Ladakhi.

Kashmir is an ancient country, much fought over because of its strategic location. According to tradition, its name derives from the Khasi, a people who lived in the northern mountains several centuries before the Christian era. The country was originally a stronghold of Hinduism; Buddhism was introduced about 245 BC. Beginning in the mid-14th century AD, Muslim sultans controlled the area for two centuries. Akbar, the Mughal emperor of Hindustan, conquered Kashmir between 1586 and 1592, and it became a part of the Mughal Empire. Between 1756 and 1819 it was under Afghan rule; in the latter year, Kashmir was conquered by Ranjit Singh, the Sikh maharaja of the Punjab. In 1846 Kashmir was annexed to the (Hindu) Dogra kingdom of Jammu; the Dogra dynasty continued to rule the region until August 1947, when British India was partitioned into a predominantly Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India.

Following partition, a section of the Muslim population of Kashmir demanded accession to Pakistan. The reigning maharaja, Sir Hari Singh, a Hindu, resisted the pro-Pakistani movement. Pakistan invaded the area, after which the maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession to the Indian Union. India thereupon dispatched troops to Kashmir, and in the ensuing conflict forced the Pakistanis to yield ground. Through mediation organized by the United Nations, a ceasefire agreement between the two nations was concluded in January 1949. Subsequent UN efforts to secure troop withdrawals and develop a plebiscitary plan satisfactory to both sides were unsuccessful. Heavy border fighting broke out in 1965 and again in 1971, and led to the "line of control" which has since formed the boundary between the Indian- and Pakistani-controlled sections of Kashmir. China began conducting military manoeuvres in the border areas of eastern Kashmir in the 1950s. Since India's defeat in the Sino-Indian war of October 1962, the north-eastern part of Ladakh, in Jammu and Kashmir state, has been occupied by China. The Chinese authorities have since built a strategic road throughout the disputed territory, connecting Sinkiang with Tibet.

Following the bitterly contested state elections in 1987 unrest in Jammu and Kashmir increased. From 1989 Muslim Kashmiri separatists began guerrilla attacks against Indian officials and troops deployed in the state. India responded by increasing its troop deployment in the region. Following violent clashes between militants and security forces, President's Rule was imposed by the Indian government in Jammu and Kashmir State in July 1990. The situation further strained relations between India and Pakistan; Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto gave her public, verbal support to the rebels. In January 1994 the two governments held talks concerning Kashmir, but no real progress was made. There was a new upsurge in guerrilla activity, including the kidnapping of foreign tourists, as well as reports of severe measures by Indian troops. Elections were held in Jammu and Kashmir in May 1996 for the first time since the imposition of direct rule in 1990. There was high security in the face of calls by several separatist groups for an electoral boycott and threats of violence and disruption by militants. Separatist groups claimed that members of the

Indian security forces were coercing people to vote. Elections in 1998 were also marred by violence and boycotts. The ruling National Conference, which supports the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India, was re-elected on both occasions.

Talks resumed between India and Pakistan on a resolution to the Kashmir situation in early 1998, but any progress was halted in April by a series of nuclear tests carried out by both countries. The two countries came to the brink of war in the Kargil Crisis that began in May 1999 when Pakistan-backed Islamic guerrillas made an incursion into the Indian-controlled area of the territory. India responded with air strikes on the guerrilla targets and over the next eight weeks Indian and Pakistani troops and Pakistan-backed militants were involved in a major military campaign that cost many lives. Action was suspended in July when Pakistan agreed to secure the withdrawal of the Islamic insurgents from Indian territory. A number of militant Islamic separatist groups continue to operate within Jammu and Kashmir State. They have declared a jihad or "holy war".

Violence, boycott calls, and threats by militants against potential voters again resulted in a low turnout in elections in 1999, in which the ruling National Conference were re-elected once more. The region has been quieter since late 2000, when India declared a unilateral ceasefire for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan that has subsequently been extended and to which Pakistan responded with an offer of "maximum restraint" along the Line of Control. Village elections were held in Jammu and Kashmir State for the first time in 23 years in January 2001, and voter turnout was strikingly high. Hopes for a negotiated settlement on the future of the region have been raised by these developments.

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