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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 22.04.2026

GS Paper III: Economics

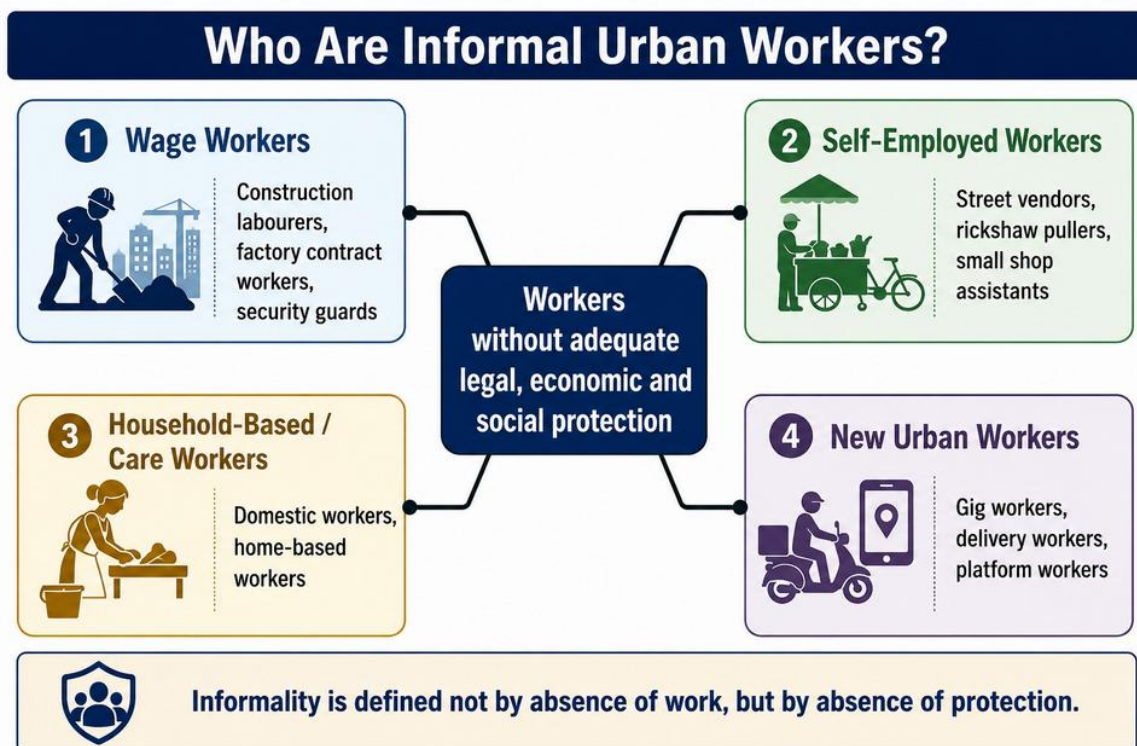
1. Informal Urban Workforce in India: Problems, Causes and Way Forward

a. Introduction

Indian cities are often described as engines of economic growth because they concentrate employment, markets, transport networks, educational institutions, health facilities and diverse opportunities. However, behind this image of urban dynamism lies a serious contradiction: a large section of the urban workforce that sustains the daily functioning of cities continues to live and work under deeply insecure conditions.

This workforce includes construction labourers, domestic workers, street vendors, sanitation workers, delivery workers, factory contract workers, rickshaw pullers, security guards, small shop assistants and migrant labourers. Many of them work without written contracts, assured wages, paid leave, social security, safe workplaces or secure housing. Their labour is essential to the city, but their rights and welfare remain weakly protected.

Therefore, the question of the informal urban workforce is not merely a labour issue. It is connected with migration, housing, poverty, urban governance, social justice, public services, climate vulnerability and inclusive development. In this sense, the condition of informal workers reveals the deeper character of Indian urbanisation itself.



b. Understanding Informal Urban Workers

Informal urban workers are those who work without adequate legal, economic and social protection. They may be employed in small informal enterprises, self-employed occupations, household-based work, contract work or even within formal companies where they are denied formal employment benefits.

Forms of informal urban work

- A construction worker may face seasonal employment, unsafe working conditions and delayed wages.
- A domestic worker may work long hours without social security or formal grievance redressal.
- A street vendor may face eviction, harassment and uncertain daily income.
- A factory contract worker may lack job permanence and bargaining power.
- A gig worker may depend on platform-based work without traditional employer protection.
- A migrant worker may struggle to access housing, ration, healthcare, identity-linked benefits and local welfare systems.

In simple terms, informal workers keep the city running, but the city often fails to provide them with security, recognition and dignity.

c. Transformation of Indian Cities and Urban Work

i. How Indian Cities Have Changed

Historically, many Indian cities were centres of formal industrial employment. Textile mills in Mumbai and Ahmedabad, for instance, employed large numbers of workers. Such workers often had clearer employer-employee relations, stronger unions and relatively better bargaining power.

Over time, this structure changed. Many formal industries declined, relocated or reduced permanent employment. At the same time, urban economies became increasingly dependent on services, construction, real estate, transport, logistics, delivery work, domestic work and small informal enterprises.

ii. Shift in the character of urban employment

- The earlier city economy was marked by factories, organised workers, trade unions and relatively stable jobs.
- The present urban economy is increasingly marked by services, contractual employment, scattered workplaces and insecure livelihoods.
- This transformation weakened collective bargaining because workers became more dispersed, less unionised and more replaceable.
- As a result, their ability to demand better wages, safe working conditions and welfare benefits declined.

This structural shift has produced a wider condition of insecurity, which can be best understood through the concept of urban precarity.

iii. Meaning of Urban Precarity

Urban precarity refers to the insecurity, uncertainty and instability experienced by poor workers in cities across several areas of life at the same time. It is not limited to employment insecurity alone.

Dimensions of urban precarity

- It includes irregular employment, low wages and lack of job protection.
- It includes housing insecurity, high rent, weak tenure and threat of eviction.
- It includes debt burden, weak access to public services and costly urban living.
- It includes exposure to floods, heatwaves, fires, unsafe settlements and other disaster risks.

A worker may have irregular employment, live in a rented room without legal protection, borrow at high interest, spend heavily on transport, and remain vulnerable to floods or heatwaves. Thus, the deeper problem is not simply low income. The more serious issue is that the worker's entire urban life remains unstable.

d. Main Problems Faced by Informal Urban Workers

i. Job Insecurity

Most informal urban workers do not have written contracts. They may be hired and removed easily, often without notice, compensation or legal remedy. Many receive daily wages, piece-rate payments or irregular income.

Nature of employment insecurity

- A construction worker may find work for twenty days in one month, ten days in another month and no work during illness, injury or monsoon.
- However, rent, food expenses, transport costs and school fees continue irrespective of employment availability.
- This mismatch between irregular income and regular expenses lies at the heart of urban vulnerability.

Job insecurity also weakens the worker's capacity to negotiate, making low bargaining power another major feature of informal urban employment.

ii. Low Bargaining Power

Informal workers generally have weak bargaining power because they are easily replaceable in the labour market. If they demand higher wages or better working conditions, employers may replace them with other workers willing to accept lower terms.

Reasons for weak bargaining power

- The decline of trade unions in many urban sectors has weakened collective bargaining.
- Informal workers are scattered across households, streets, platforms, construction sites and small establishments.
- This scattered nature of work makes organisation and representation difficult.
- Unlike organised industrial workers of the past, many informal workers lack a stable employer, fixed workplace and collective voice.

Weak bargaining power keeps wages low, but the problem becomes more severe because city life itself is expensive.

iii. High Cost of Living

Urban wages may appear higher than rural wages, but urban living is also far more expensive. Informal workers spend a substantial part of their income on rent, food, transport, electricity, water, healthcare, schooling, mobile connectivity and debt repayment.

The problem of the working poor

- Employment does not necessarily ensure dignity in urban areas.
- A person may be employed throughout the month and yet remain unable to save, invest in children's education or cope with emergencies.
- This explains the problem of the working poor, meaning people who work but continue to remain poor due to low wages, insecure employment and high living costs.

Among all components of urban cost, housing is often the most severe because it directly affects safety, health, dignity and access to livelihood.

iv. Housing Insecurity

Housing is one of the most serious challenges faced by informal urban workers. Many live in slums, unauthorised colonies, rented rooms, chawls, temporary shelters, pavement settlements or worksites. These spaces often lack adequate sanitation, drainage, drinking water, ventilation and legal protection.

Housing as a source of vulnerability

- Informal workers often live close to workplaces because daily commuting from distant areas is costly and time-consuming.
- Their settlements are often viewed as illegal or temporary, making them vulnerable to eviction.

- Slums and working-class settlements may be removed during road widening, redevelopment, beautification projects or attempts to create a “world-class city” image.
- This creates a painful paradox: workers build and maintain the city, yet they are frequently pushed out from the city.

Housing insecurity becomes even more burdensome when basic urban services are delivered through costly user-fee models.

v. Shift from Public Services to User-Fee Models

Basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity, public transport, health and education were traditionally viewed as public responsibilities. However, in many urban contexts, there has been a gradual shift towards user charges and market-based delivery.

Impact on informal workers

- For middle-class households, such costs may be manageable.
- For informal workers with irregular income, even small increases in water charges, electricity bills, transport fares or health expenses can produce serious hardship.
- This means poverty in cities is not merely a problem of low wages. It is also a problem of costly access to essential services.

When income is irregular and services are expensive, workers often depend on informal credit, which can push them into debt traps.

vi. Financial Exclusion and Debt Traps

Many informal workers lack stable income documents, collateral, formal credit history or permanent address proof. As a result, they find it difficult to access bank loans or affordable institutional credit.

Debt cycle among informal workers

- Workers often depend on local moneylenders, employers, contractors or informal lenders who charge high interest.
- Borrowing may begin as a response to illness, unemployment, rent pressure or family obligations.
- Over time, high interest repayments reduce savings and deepen vulnerability.
- Thus, low income leads to borrowing, borrowing leads to high interest burden, and debt further reduces the worker’s capacity to escape poverty.

Debt vulnerability becomes worse because most informal workers lack strong social security protection.

vii. Weak Social Security

Informal urban workers often lack paid leave, provident fund, pension, maternity benefit, health insurance, unemployment support and accident compensation. Even when welfare schemes exist, access remains limited.

Barriers to social security access

- Lack of documents and identity-linked exclusions.
- Migration and absence of fixed residence.
- Poor awareness of schemes and entitlements.
- Digital barriers in registration and claim processes.
- Fragmented implementation across departments and states.
- Weak portability of benefits for migrant workers.

For migrant workers, the problem is more severe. Benefits linked to domicile, local registration or fixed residence may not reach them easily. As a result, the urban poor often remain present in the economy but absent from welfare systems.

Along with economic insecurity, informal workers also face disproportionate exposure to environmental and disaster-related risks.

viii. Climate and Disaster Vulnerability

Many informal settlements are located in unsafe areas such as low-lying land, riverbanks, drains, railway tracks, industrial zones and flood-prone spaces. These locations are often chosen not out of preference, but because they are cheaper and closer to employment.

Climate risks faced by informal workers

- Floods may damage homes, tools, documents, savings and children's school materials.
- Heatwaves directly affect construction workers, street vendors, sanitation workers and delivery workers who spend long hours outdoors.
- Fires, disease outbreaks and extreme weather events disproportionately affect dense and poorly serviced settlements.
- Disaster losses are not only physical; they also disrupt income, mobility, schooling and access to welfare.

These problems do not operate separately. Together, they create a combined burden that defines the everyday insecurity of informal urban life.

e. The Triple Burden of Urban Informal Workers

The condition of the informal urban worker can be understood through a simple framework: informal work, insecure housing and expensive city life combine to produce urban precarity.

How the triple burden operates

- Job insecurity reduces income stability.
- Housing insecurity increases the risk of eviction, poor health and social instability.
- Expensive urban services reduce savings and increase dependence on debt.
- Lack of social security prevents workers from recovering from shocks.
- Climate and disaster risks further deepen vulnerability.

Therefore, informal urban poverty must be understood as a combined crisis of livelihood, residence and access to basic services.

f. Causes Behind the Crisis

i. Decline of Formal Industrial Employment

One major cause is the decline of formal industrial employment in many cities. Organised industries either closed, shifted to peripheral locations or reduced permanent employment. Contractualisation increased, and firms increasingly relied on temporary, outsourced and casual labour.

Consequences of industrial decline

- Stable employer-employee relations weakened.
- Permanent jobs were replaced by casual and contractual work.
- Workers lost bargaining power and access to formal benefits.
- A large number of workers were pushed into insecure forms of employment.

The weakening of formal employment coincided with a model of urban development that often prioritised investment and real estate over labour welfare.

ii. Market-Led Urban Development

Urban development has increasingly focused on high-end infrastructure, commercial real estate, expressways, malls, gated housing, business districts and investment-oriented projects. While such development may improve investment and urban image, it often neglects the needs of workers who sustain the city.

Labour-blind urban planning

- Affordable rental housing, worker hostels and public toilets rarely receive adequate priority.
- Vending zones, safe worksites and affordable transport are often treated as secondary concerns.
- The city becomes attractive for capital but harsh for labour.
- Workers are seen as service providers, but not as legitimate claimants to urban space and welfare.

This market-led approach becomes more exclusionary when essential services become costlier and less accessible to low-income households.

iii. Privatisation and Costly Essential Services

When essential services such as water, electricity, transport, education and health become costlier, informal workers experience greater economic pressure. Their vulnerability increases not only because they earn less, but because they must spend more to access the minimum conditions of urban life.

Poverty as income and access deprivation

- Low income limits purchasing power.
- Costly services increase household expenditure.
- Irregular employment makes monthly payments difficult.
- Lack of affordable public services converts everyday survival into a financial burden.

The pressure of costly services is further intensified when redevelopment processes displace poor workers from central urban locations.

iv. Gentrification

Gentrification refers to the transformation of a poor or working-class area into a higher-income area, often leading to the displacement of existing residents. For example, a slum, old market area or working-class settlement may be cleared or redeveloped for luxury housing, commercial complexes, beautification projects or high-value urban infrastructure.

Effects of gentrification on workers

- Poor workers are pushed away from employment centres.
- Resettlement on the urban periphery increases travel cost and commuting time.
- Displacement weakens social networks, livelihood links and access to schools and services.
- The poor lose access to central urban land even though their labour sustains the central city economy.

Such exclusion is difficult to correct when urban local bodies themselves remain institutionally weak.

v. Weak Urban Local Bodies

Urban local bodies often lack adequate funds, trained staff, planning capacity and autonomy. As a result, they struggle to provide affordable housing, basic services, livelihood spaces and inclusive urban planning.

Incomplete decentralisation

- The 74th Constitutional Amendment sought to strengthen urban local governance by empowering local bodies.
- However, its implementation remains incomplete in many states.
- Functions, funds and functionaries are often not fully devolved.
- Without empowered urban local bodies, the needs of informal workers remain weakly addressed.

Institutional weakness is accompanied by another serious problem: informal workers are rarely represented in the planning process.

vi. Poor Representation of Informal Workers

Informal workers are rarely included in city planning and decision-making. Plans are often prepared by officials, consultants, experts and developers, while the workers who run the informal economy remain voiceless.

Consequences of exclusion from planning

- Planning may look efficient on paper but fail to reflect lived realities.
- Vending, rental housing, migrant shelters and informal transport may be treated as encroachments instead of livelihood systems.
- Domestic workers, construction workers, migrants, vendors and slum residents remain outside formal channels of consultation.
- This produces policies that regulate or remove informality without understanding why it exists.

These causes show that the issue is not merely economic. It is fundamentally about governance, rights and the distribution of urban resources.

g. Why This Is a Governance Issue

The condition of informal urban workers should not be studied only as a question of poverty. It is fundamentally a governance issue because the state decides who gets access to land, housing, water, sanitation, labour protection, transport, welfare and participation in planning.

Governance dimensions of the issue

- Urban governance determines who is protected from eviction.
- It decides who receives tenure security and who remains legally invisible.
- It determines whose livelihood is recognised and whose work is treated as illegal or temporary.
- It shapes whether urban policy serves only real estate interests and investors or also protects workers, migrants and tenants.

A truly inclusive city must balance economic growth with social justice. It must recognise that the right to urban life belongs not only to property owners and investors, but also to workers, migrants, vendors, tenants and service providers.

When governance fails to ensure such inclusion, the effects are visible not only in workers' lives but also in the overall functioning of Indian cities.

h. Impact on Indian Cities

i. Growth Without Inclusion

Indian cities may grow economically, but if workers remain insecure, growth becomes unequal. The city may produce wealth while reproducing deprivation among those who sustain its everyday functioning.

Nature of exclusionary growth

- Infrastructure and investment may expand without improving worker welfare.
- Urban productivity may rise while labour security remains weak.
- The benefits of growth become concentrated among formal, property-owning and higher-income groups.

This creates a situation where poverty exists within employment itself, producing hidden forms of urban deprivation.

ii. Rise of Hidden Urban Poverty

Urban poverty is often hidden because many poor workers are employed. However, employment without security, savings, social protection or decent housing does not guarantee dignity.

Why urban poverty remains hidden

- Workers may earn daily wages but lack long-term security.
- They may not appear unemployed but remain unable to meet basic needs.
- They may live close to prosperity but remain excluded from its benefits.
- This is why the category of the working poor is important for understanding Indian cities.

Hidden deprivation can gradually produce frustration, protest and social tension.

iii. Social Tension

When workers face low wages, eviction, rising costs and exclusion from planning, social tension may increase. Protests by workers, street vendors, slum residents and migrant groups often reflect deeper failures of urban governance.

Sources of social tension

- Forced evictions without proper rehabilitation.
- Harassment of street vendors and informal workers.
- Lack of affordable housing and rising rent.
- Exclusion from welfare and decision-making.

Such social tensions are also linked with poor health outcomes, which affect both workers and the wider urban economy.

iv. Poor Health and Productivity

Unsafe housing, overcrowding, poor sanitation, heat stress, pollution and lack of healthcare affect worker health. Poor health reduces productivity and increases household expenditure, creating a cycle of illness and poverty.

Health-productivity link

- Overcrowded housing increases disease transmission.
- Poor sanitation affects dignity and public health.
- Heat stress reduces work capacity for outdoor workers.
- Medical expenses push households into debt.

When these disadvantages affect children, urban poverty becomes intergenerational.

v. Intergenerational Poverty

Children of informal workers may face poor schooling, malnutrition, unsafe living conditions and frequent displacement. This weakens social mobility and allows poverty to continue across generations.

How poverty is transmitted

- Frequent evictions disrupt schooling.
- Poor nutrition affects learning outcomes.
- Lack of stable housing affects emotional and social security.
- Early entry into work may reduce educational opportunities.

i. Government Measures and Policy Linkages

India has introduced several measures that are relevant to the welfare of informal urban workers. However, their effectiveness depends on implementation, portability, awareness and convergence with urban planning.

- **Code on Social Security, 2020:** The Code on Social Security, 2020 seeks to expand social security coverage to unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers. Its significance

lies in recognising new forms of insecure work, although implementation remains the key challenge.

- **e-Shram portal:** The e-Shram portal aims to create a national database of unorganised workers. If linked with meaningful benefits, portability and state-level welfare delivery, it can become an important tool for targeted support.
- **PM SVANidhi scheme:** The PM SVANidhi scheme provides credit support to street vendors. It is significant because street vending is one of the most visible forms of urban informal livelihood.
- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban:** Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban aims to provide affordable housing in urban areas. However, ownership-based housing alone is insufficient for migrants and highly mobile informal workers. Rental housing requires stronger attention.
- **Affordable Rental Housing Complexes:** Affordable Rental Housing Complexes are important for migrant workers and the urban poor who cannot immediately own homes in cities. Such housing can reduce commuting burden and improve livelihood security.
- **Street Vendors Act, 2014:** The Street Vendors Act, 2014 recognises the rights of street vendors and provides for Town Vending Committees. Proper implementation can protect livelihoods, reduce harassment and integrate vending into urban planning.

While these measures provide an important foundation, the larger challenge is to move towards a worker-centred model of urbanisation.

j. Way Forward

i. Make Urban Planning Worker-Centric

Cities should not be planned only around cars, malls, commercial real estate and high-income housing. Urban planning must also include rental housing, worker hostels, vending zones, public toilets, affordable transport, childcare spaces and safe worksites.

Elements of worker-centric planning

- Affordable rental housing near employment centres.
- Safe and legally recognised vending spaces.
- Public toilets, drinking water and sanitation facilities.
- Affordable and reliable public transport.
- Childcare centres and safe worksites.

A worker-centric city recognises that labour is not external to urban development. It is the foundation on which urban development rests.

Such planning must be supported by strong and portable social security systems.

ii. Strengthen Social Security

Informal workers need access to health insurance, accident insurance, pension, maternity support, unemployment assistance and emergency relief. The e-Shram database should be linked with actual welfare delivery rather than remaining only a registration exercise.

Principles for effective social security

- Benefits must be portable across states and cities.
- Registration should be simple and worker-friendly.
- Welfare delivery should be linked with actual needs, not merely databases.
- Migrant workers should not be excluded due to domicile or residence barriers.

Social security can protect workers from shocks, but stable housing is equally necessary for dignity and livelihood security.

iii. Improve Affordable Rental Housing

Ownership-based housing is not enough for migrants, seasonal workers and low-income urban households. Cities require affordable rental housing, dormitories, night shelters and worker hostels near employment centres.

Benefits of rental housing

- It reduces travel costs and commuting time.
- It improves living conditions and health outcomes.
- It protects workers from exploitative rental arrangements.
- It allows migrants and seasonal workers to access the city without being forced into unsafe settlements.

Affordable housing policy must also protect workers from forced displacement.

iv. Protect Against Forced Evictions

Slum removal should not be the first response to urban poverty. The focus should be on in-situ upgrading, basic services, legal tenure and community participation wherever possible.

Safeguards against eviction-related hardship

- Eviction, if unavoidable, must be accompanied by prior notice.
- Rehabilitation and compensation should be ensured.
- Livelihood protection must be part of resettlement.
- Resettlement sites should not be so distant that employment becomes unviable.

Protection from eviction requires capable and accountable urban local bodies.

v. Strengthen Urban Local Bodies

Urban local bodies need greater funds, staff, functions and autonomy. Without empowered local governments, inclusive urbanisation cannot be achieved.

Required reforms

- Genuine devolution of functions, funds and functionaries.
- Better planning capacity and trained municipal staff.
- Stronger financial autonomy.
- Improved accountability and citizen participation.
- Implementation of the spirit of the 74th Constitutional Amendment.

Empowered local bodies should also institutionalise worker participation in city governance.

vi. Include Workers in City Governance

Cities can create workers' councils, livelihood committees and participatory planning forums where informal workers, trade unions, street vendors, domestic workers, migrant groups and civil society organisations are represented.

Benefits of participation

- Planning becomes more democratic and grounded in lived realities.
- Workers' livelihood concerns receive formal recognition.
- Conflicts over vending, housing and public space can be resolved more fairly.
- Policy design becomes more responsive to migrants, tenants and informal workers.

Participation must be complemented by protection of urban commons, which are central to both livelihood and social life.

vii. Protect Urban Commons

Public land, streets, footpaths, parks, water bodies and vending spaces should not be fully captured by commercial interests. Urban commons are important for livelihoods, ecology and social life.

Importance of urban commons for workers

- Streets and footpaths support vending and mobility.
- Public spaces provide livelihood opportunities and social interaction.
- Water bodies and green spaces contribute to ecological resilience.
- Community spaces support collective life among low-income groups.

For informal workers, access to streets, markets and public spaces is not merely a matter of convenience. It is often central to survival.

Finally, urban policy must recognise that climate vulnerability and labour vulnerability are closely connected.

viii. Ensure Climate-Resilient Urbanisation

Slum upgrading, drainage improvement, heat action plans, flood protection, fire safety and disaster preparedness must be integrated with urban poverty policy.

Socially just climate resilience

- Informal settlements should be included in drainage, sanitation and flood-management plans.
- Outdoor workers need heat protection, rest facilities and drinking water.
- Fire safety and disaster preparedness must reach dense settlements and worksites.
- Climate adaptation should protect livelihoods, not merely infrastructure.

Poor workers should not be left to bear the highest climate risks while contributing the least to the causes of environmental degradation. Climate-resilient urbanisation must therefore be socially just.

These reforms together point towards a broader shift from exclusionary urban growth to inclusive and rights-based urban development.

Conclusion

The issue of India's informal urban workforce reveals a central contradiction of Indian urbanisation. Cities depend on informal workers for construction, transport, sanitation, delivery services, domestic work, vending and everyday maintenance, yet these workers themselves remain insecure in jobs, housing, credit, welfare and access to basic services.

The solution lies in moving from a real-estate-centred model of urban development towards a worker-centred and rights-based model. Inclusive urbanisation must ensure not only economic growth, but also dignity of labour, affordable housing, social security, participatory governance and climate-resilient living conditions.

Only then can Indian cities become not merely productive spaces, but genuinely liveable, inclusive and just communities.

GS Paper III: Security

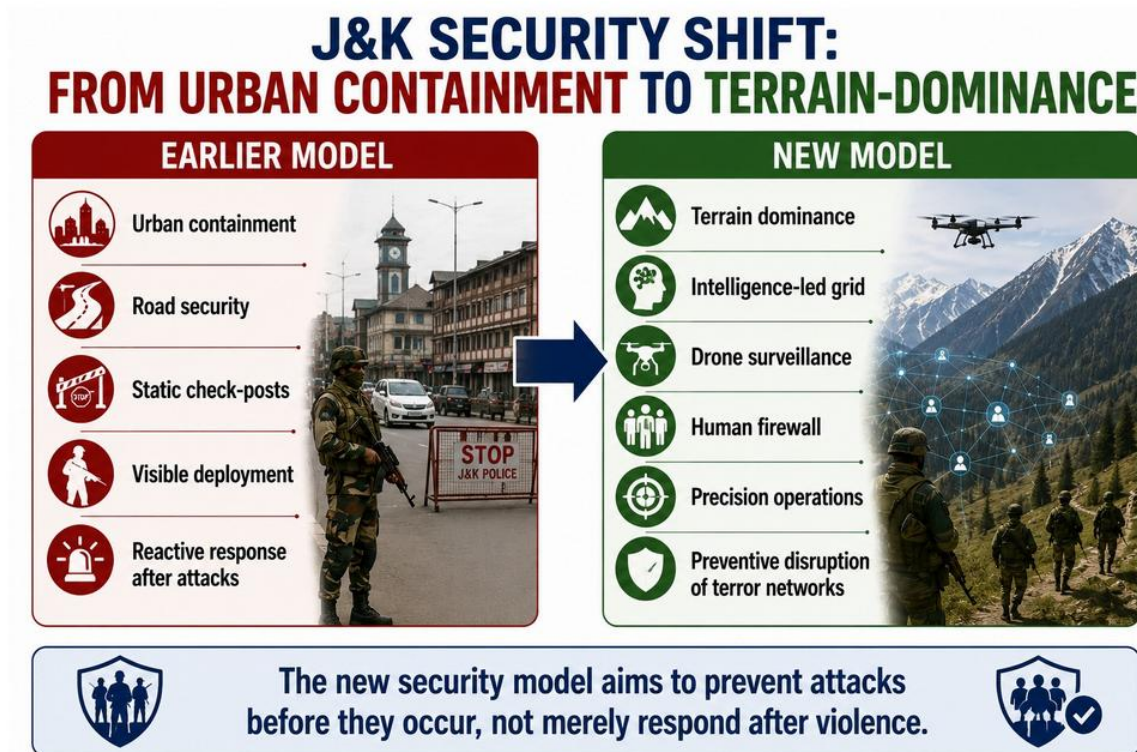
2. Security Shift in Jammu and Kashmir after the Pahalgam Attack

a. Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir's security situation has undergone an important transformation in recent years. Earlier, the main emphasis of security forces was on containing violence in towns, highways, markets and other visible urban spaces. This approach was suited to a phase when terrorist activity was concentrated around populated centres, security installations and major movement routes.

However, the Pahalgam terror attack exposed a newer kind of vulnerability. It showed that remote tourist locations, high-altitude meadows, forest corridors and older infiltration routes could become soft targets if tourism expansion was not matched by corresponding security adaptation. As a result, the security approach has moved towards a more dispersed, intelligence-led and terrain-dominance model.

The broad shift may be understood in simple terms. The earlier model was more reactive, focused on responding after incidents and securing towns, roads and check-posts. The emerging model is preventive, focused on dominating difficult terrain, generating intelligence, using technology and disrupting terrorist networks before they can strike.



b. Background: Why the Security Approach Changed

The Pahalgam attack revealed a serious gap in the security grid. Tourist areas in remote meadows and high-altitude locations had been opened for public movement, but the security presence in such areas had not expanded at the same pace.

Many scenic tourist destinations in Jammu and Kashmir are located close to old infiltration routes, forest corridors, mountain tracks and difficult terrain. These places are attractive for tourists, but they are difficult for security forces to monitor continuously. The same geography that makes them beautiful also makes them vulnerable.

Emergence of soft frontiers

- Soft frontiers are areas that are open to civilians and tourists but difficult to secure fully.
- Their vulnerability comes from terrain, forests, altitude, dispersed movement and limited surveillance.
- In such areas, high tourist movement, difficult geography, thin security presence and historical infiltration routes combine to create a soft security vulnerability.
- Therefore, the attack underlined the need to move beyond conventional road-centric and town-centric security.

The new requirement was to secure not only towns and roads, but also ridges, forested slopes, trekking routes, meadows and local support networks.

c. Earlier Security Model in Jammu and Kashmir

The earlier security model in Jammu and Kashmir was shaped by the pattern of violence that existed at the time. The focus was largely on urban containment, road security, static deployment and response after terrorist activity.

Urban containment meant preventing attacks in towns and cities. Road security meant securing highways, markets, transit routes and other visible movement corridors. Static check-posts were used for physical verification and area control. Security planning also relied on known militant patterns, such as attacks on security forces, government buildings, convoys or crowded urban locations.

Core features of the earlier model

- Protection of towns, roads, markets and transit routes.
- Use of check-posts and visible security deployment.
- Focus on known militant patterns and familiar target zones.
- Greater emphasis on response after terrorist activity.
- Stronger attention to visible spaces than remote terrain.

This model was useful when violence was concentrated in urban areas and along visible routes. However, it was less effective in remote tourist locations, forested slopes, high-altitude meadows and ridgelines where movement is dispersed and detection is difficult. In such terrain, terrorists can use forests, slopes and mountain routes for infiltration, concealment and movement towards targets.

Thus, the earlier model needed revision because the threat had shifted from visible urban spaces to dispersed, difficult and low-surveillance zones.

d. The New Security Model: Intelligence-Led Grid

After the Pahalgam attack, the security establishment has moved towards an intelligence-led security grid. This means that the focus is not merely on guarding places after they become vulnerable, but on identifying, tracking and neutralising threats before they are able to carry out attacks.

The model recognises that terrorism survives not only through armed militants but also through logistics, shelter, communication, recruitment, propaganda, finance and local knowledge. Therefore, the new security approach seeks to disrupt the entire support ecosystem rather than merely respond to the final act of violence.

Main features of the new model

- Terrain dominance in ridges, forests, meadows and infiltration corridors.
- Greater use of human intelligence and local community networks.
- Drone-based and technology-enabled surveillance.
- Better inter-agency coordination and real-time communication.
- Precision operations based on specific intelligence.
- Integration of local communities into the wider security ecosystem.

The emphasis has shifted from simply guarding roads and towns to tracking terrorist networks, movement corridors, support systems and potential soft targets.

This broader intelligence-led approach is best captured by the conceptual shift from holding the road to holding the ridge.

e. From Holding the Road to Holding the Ridge

One of the most important conceptual changes is the movement from holding the road to holding the ridge.

Earlier, security forces mainly focused on roads, check-posts, towns and visible movement routes. The new approach seeks to dominate ridgelines, forests, mountain tracks, high-altitude meadows and infiltration corridors. Holding the ridge means occupying, monitoring and controlling higher terrain from where terrorists may move, hide, observe security movement or plan attacks.

Contrast between the two approaches

- The old approach emphasised road security, static check-posts, urban containment, visible policing and reaction after an attack.
- The new approach emphasises terrain domination, mobile deployment, temporary operating bases, intelligence-led surveillance and prevention before an attack.
- The old approach secured visible movement routes, while the new approach seeks to deny terrorists the advantage of difficult geography.
- The old approach was more location-specific, while the new approach is more network-based and terrain-sensitive.

This shift matters because terrorists often use forests and ridges for movement and concealment. If security forces dominate only roads, terrorists may still move through higher terrain and reach vulnerable targets. However, if ridgelines and forest corridors are monitored, terrorist movement becomes more difficult and risky.

To operationalise this terrain-dominance model, Temporary Operating Bases have become an important security instrument.

f. Temporary Operating Bases and Their Importance

A major element of the new security approach is the establishment of Temporary Operating Bases in the higher reaches of the Pir Panjal region.

Temporary Operating Bases are short-duration security camps or operating points created in difficult terrain. From these locations, security forces can patrol, monitor, gather intelligence and respond quickly. They are especially useful in areas where permanent deployment is difficult but periodic security presence is necessary.

Importance of Temporary Operating Bases

- They help monitor infiltration routes.
- They reduce response time in remote areas.
- They deny safe spaces to terrorists.
- They support patrols in forests, ridges and high-altitude zones.
- They help secure tourist areas without turning every tourist spot into a heavily militarised zone.

This reflects a shift from permanent, road-centric deployment to flexible, area-dominance deployment. It also allows security forces to adapt their presence according to threat perception, terrain and seasonal movement patterns.

Along with physical deployment, technology has become a major force multiplier in this new security grid.

g. Role of Technology in the New Security Grid

Technology as a Force Multiplier

Technology has become an important part of the new security architecture in Jammu and Kashmir. However, it is not a replacement for human intelligence. Rather, it acts as a force multiplier by improving surveillance, mobility, verification and response.

Drones

Drones are being used to monitor meadows, forest areas, trekking routes, ridgelines and difficult terrain where physical patrolling is challenging.

- They help security forces observe areas that may otherwise remain invisible due to altitude, vegetation or distance.

- In high-altitude terrain, drones assist surveillance without exposing personnel to unnecessary risk.
- In forests and snowbound areas, they support search operations, route monitoring and threat detection.
- Some drones are used for camera-based surveillance, while others may have offensive capability depending on operational requirements.

The importance of drones lies in their ability to extend the eyes of security forces into areas where regular patrols are slow, risky or physically difficult.

Counter-drone systems

Counter-drone systems have also become necessary because hostile actors may use drones for weapon dropping, surveillance, explosive delivery, smuggling or cross-border support.

- They help protect vulnerable areas, security installations, tourist zones and border-adjacent regions.
- They are especially relevant in border states where drones may be used to deliver arms, narcotics, ammunition or communication devices.
- They recognise that technology is no longer used only by the state; terror groups and their handlers may also use low-cost technology to create high-impact security threats.

Facial recognition and digital verification

Facial recognition devices and QR-coded identity systems are being used at selected transit points and tourist zones. Their purpose is to verify identities quickly and reduce the possibility of over-ground workers or suspicious elements entering the tourism economy under false or unverified identities.

- These tools can strengthen preventive security.
- They can improve identity verification in sensitive tourist and transit zones.
- However, they also raise concerns related to privacy, data protection and misuse.
- The democratic challenge is to ensure that technology improves security without creating unchecked surveillance.

All-terrain vehicles

All-terrain vehicles allow security forces to move faster in forests, ridges, snow-covered areas and rough mountain tracks where normal vehicles may not operate effectively.

- They reduce response time.
- They improve mobility in difficult terrain.
- They support patrolling and rapid response.
- They are crucial because surveillance without quick physical response cannot ensure effective terrain dominance.

Technology strengthens the security grid, but in difficult terrain, local knowledge remains equally important. This is where the idea of a human firewall becomes significant.

h. Human Firewall: Meaning and Importance

The idea of a human firewall is central to the new security approach. A human firewall means creating a protective network of local people who can help identify suspicious activity, support early warning and strengthen security awareness.

In tourist areas, people such as pony handlers, guides, photographers, vendors, shopkeepers, transporters and local service providers are being brought into verified databases and awareness networks. These groups are important because they are present on the ground every day and understand local movement patterns better than outsiders.

Importance of the human firewall

- It improves early warning in remote areas.
- It helps detect unfamiliar movement or suspicious behaviour.
- It prevents hostile elements from exploiting the local service economy.
- It strengthens trust-based community participation in security.
- It complements technology in areas where terrain and weather limit surveillance.

Terrorist networks often depend on local support for shelter, food, transport, information, local guidance, fake identity support and communication links. These support systems are often described as over-ground worker networks. A human firewall helps prevent such networks from quietly entering or exploiting the local service economy.

The idea is not to treat local communities with suspicion, but to make them partners in security. Community cooperation can provide early warning that technology may miss, especially in remote areas.

i. Over-Ground Workers: Simple Explanation

Over-Ground Workers, often called OGWs, are individuals who may not directly participate in terrorist attacks but support terrorist activity indirectly. Their role may include providing shelter, food, transport, medicines, communication support, intelligence about security movement, recruitment assistance, financial channels or local guidance.

Why OGWs matter in counter-terrorism

- Terrorism does not survive only through armed militants.
- It survives through a wider support ecosystem.
- A militant may carry the weapon, but the network may provide hiding places, movement routes, funds, propaganda, local contacts and operational information.
- Therefore, controlling over-ground worker networks is essential for effective counter-terrorism.

If the armed militant is the visible face of terrorism, the over-ground network is often the hidden infrastructure that allows terrorism to continue.

Disrupting such hidden networks requires precise intelligence-backed operations rather than only large area-wide searches.

j. Intelligence-Led Precision Operations

A major shift after the attack has been towards precise, intelligence-backed operations. Instead of relying only on large area-wide operations that may disturb civilians and tourists, security forces are focusing on targeted action based on specific intelligence.

Such operations usually depend on a clearly identified target, real-time intelligence, inter-agency coordination, drone support, rapid execution and an effort to minimise collateral damage.

Significance of precision operations

- They allow security forces to act against terrorist modules without creating avoidable disruption for ordinary citizens.
- They are especially useful in tourist areas and populated regions.
- They reduce the need for excessive force or large-scale cordon operations.
- They help balance operational effectiveness with civilian sensitivity.
- They are suited to a security environment where threats are dispersed and network-based.

Precision operations become more effective when different security agencies communicate quickly and directly with one another.

k. Lateral Communication Between Security Forces

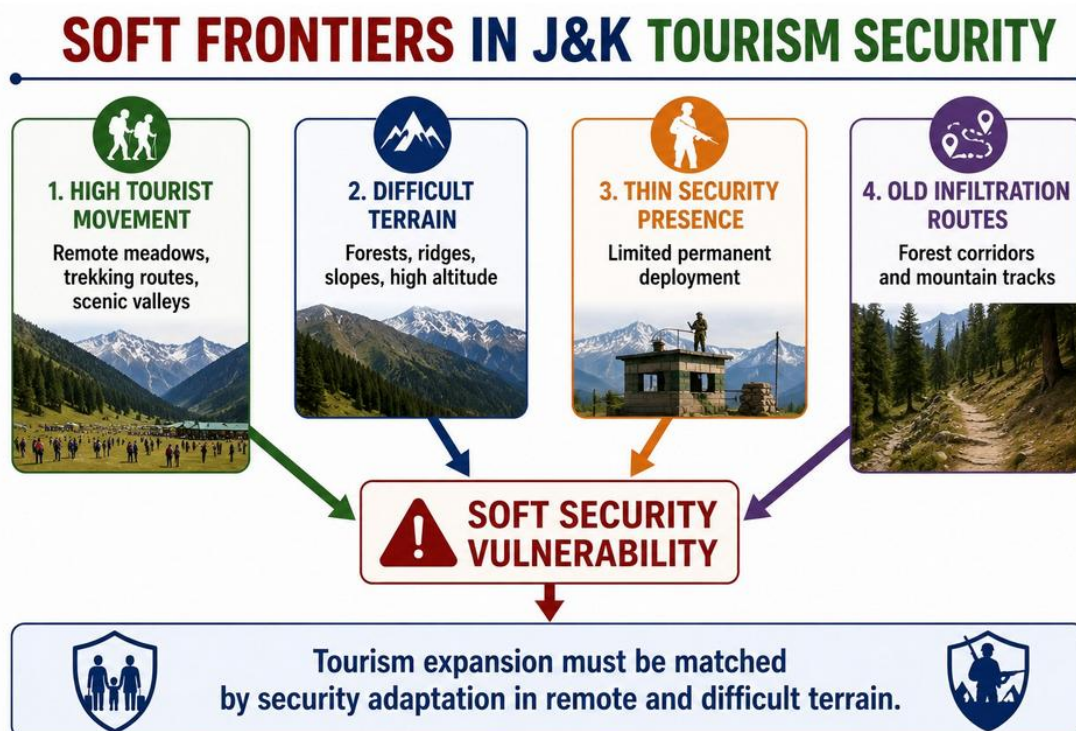
Another important change is the emphasis on better communication between security agencies. Jammu and Kashmir has a complex security environment where the Army, Jammu and Kashmir Police, Central Reserve Police Force, Rashtriya Rifles, intelligence agencies and other paramilitary forces operate together.

In such a situation, delays in information sharing can affect response time and operational success. The new approach emphasises real-time lateral communication. Lateral communication means direct and quick information sharing between different units and agencies without unnecessary delay or rigid hierarchy.

Benefits of lateral communication

- It improves response time.
- It strengthens coordination among different agencies.
- It improves target tracking and operational clarity.
- It avoids duplication of effort.
- It reduces the risk of intelligence remaining trapped within one agency while another agency may be better placed to act.

Such coordination is especially important because tourism has become both an economic asset and a security-sensitive sector in Jammu and Kashmir.



1. Why Tourism Security Has Become Important

Tourism is important for Jammu and Kashmir's economy, employment and image of normalcy. It supports hotels, transporters, guides, pony handlers, photographers, vendors, restaurants and local markets. A terror attack on tourists therefore affects not only security but also livelihoods and public confidence.

However, tourism also creates security challenges. Tourists often travel to remote, open and difficult-to-secure locations. These places may include meadows, trekking routes, valleys, forests and high-altitude spaces. Unlike towns, such areas do not always have a permanent security grid.

Security dilemma in tourist areas

- Security forces must protect tourists.
- They must avoid excessive militarisation of tourist spaces.
- Too much visible security may create fear and reduce the sense of normalcy.
- Too little security may create vulnerability.
- The aim is maximum security with minimum visible disruption.

The emerging approach is to provide strong but low-visibility security through surveillance, local networks, intelligence, verification systems and rapid response capacity.

Despite these improvements, several operational, technological and governance gaps continue to remain.

m. Remaining Gaps in the Security Grid

Despite improvements, the security grid is not perfect. Several gaps remain and require careful policy attention.

Infiltration remains a challenge

- The Line of Control and adjoining forest corridors remain vulnerable to infiltration attempts.
- Even a small terrorist group can cause serious damage if it enters, hides and receives local support.
- Therefore, counter-infiltration efforts must remain continuous and adaptive.

Difficult terrain

- The Pir Panjal region has thick forests, high ridges, deep valleys, narrow tracks and harsh weather.
- These features make continuous surveillance extremely difficult.
- Dense vegetation reduces visibility, while altitude and weather affect movement.
- In simple terms, forests, poor visibility and difficult weather together create a detection challenge.

Weather limits technology

- Drones, ground sensors, cameras and communication systems may not function effectively in heavy snow, fog, rain, cloud cover or dense forest cover.
- Technology can improve detection, but it cannot fully eliminate the role of human intelligence.
- This is why technological security must be combined with community networks, local informants, patrolling and terrain familiarity.

Human intelligence gaps

- Human intelligence remains weak in some dense forest and remote areas.
- Small terrorist modules are often best detected through local knowledge rather than only through technical surveillance.
- Local communities, shepherds, forest workers, shopkeepers, transporters and service providers can notice unusual movement, unfamiliar faces or suspicious behaviour.
- Without trust-based local intelligence, even advanced technology may miss low-signature threats.

Privacy concerns

- Aadhaar-linked databases, QR-coded identity systems and facial recognition may improve security.
- However, they also raise concerns about privacy, surveillance and possible misuse.
- A democracy must ensure that security technologies are governed by law, accountability and safeguards.
- Security measures must be effective, but they must not become instruments of unchecked monitoring of ordinary citizens.

Sustainability of intensive monitoring

- Continuous deployment of forces requires manpower.
- Drones, databases, all-terrain vehicles and surveillance systems require funds, training and maintenance.
- Inter-agency coordination requires administrative discipline.
- Therefore, the long-term sustainability of such an intensive security model must be examined.

These gaps show that the security challenge is not only operational. It also involves the governance balance between strong security and civil liberties.

n. Significance of the Security Shift

The new security model is significant because it moves beyond reactive containment and seeks to prevent attacks through intelligence, terrain control, technology and community participation.

Better prevention

- The new approach focuses on preventing attacks before they happen.
- Instead of waiting for an incident and then responding, security forces try to detect suspicious movement, disrupt support networks and dominate vulnerable terrain in advance.

Reduced collateral damage

- Intelligence-led precision operations reduce harm to civilians.
- They avoid unnecessary disturbance in tourist and residential areas.
- This is important in a sensitive region where civilian confidence is central to long-term peace.

Better terrain control

- Holding ridges, forests and mountain routes makes it harder for terrorists to move undetected.
- Terrain control denies terrorists the advantage of geography.

Protection of the tourism economy

- Improved security helps restore confidence among tourists and local service providers.
- Since tourism supports many livelihoods in Jammu and Kashmir, tourism security is also economic security.

Improved inter-agency coordination

- Real-time communication between agencies reduces delay.
- It improves response and strengthens operational efficiency.
- In a multi-agency security environment, coordination is as important as capability.

However, the same model also faces challenges that must be addressed carefully to make it sustainable and rights-respecting.

o. Way Forward

i. Strengthen Human Intelligence

Technology is useful, but human intelligence remains central. Local communities, shepherds, forest workers, pony handlers, guides, shopkeepers, transporters and village networks can provide early warning of suspicious movement.

Measures required

- Build trust-based local intelligence networks.
- Engage communities respectfully rather than treating them with suspicion.

- Protect local livelihoods to encourage cooperation.
- Ensure grievance redressal and transparent communication.
- Use local knowledge to detect unfamiliar movement and low-signature threats.

Human intelligence must be built through trust, not fear. Respectful engagement, protection of livelihoods and grievance redressal are essential for community cooperation.

Human intelligence should be supported by surveillance systems capable of functioning in difficult weather and terrain.

ii. Improve All-Weather Surveillance

India needs better satellite support, ground sensors, thermal imaging, night-vision devices and drones capable of functioning in difficult weather. Surveillance systems must be adapted to forests, snow, fog, high altitude and low-visibility conditions.

Required improvements

- Develop layered surveillance systems.
- Use ground sensors in vulnerable corridors.
- Improve night-vision and thermal imaging capacity.
- Strengthen satellite and aerial surveillance.
- Avoid overdependence on any single technology.

The goal should be to create layered surveillance where no single technology becomes the sole point of dependence.

Such surveillance must be integrated with stronger border and infiltration management.

iii. Strengthen Border and Infiltration Management

Surveillance along the Line of Control should be strengthened through sensors, drones, patrols, intelligence sharing and better coordination among forces. Since infiltration routes evolve over time, counter-infiltration strategy must also remain adaptive.

Border management priorities

- Combine physical deployment with technological monitoring.
- Strengthen patrols along vulnerable stretches.
- Improve intelligence sharing between agencies.
- Track changes in infiltration routes and tactics.
- Integrate counter-infiltration with local area intelligence.

Border management must combine physical deployment, technological monitoring and intelligence-based anticipation.

At the same time, surveillance technologies must be regulated through legal and institutional safeguards.

iv. Regulate the Use of Surveillance Technology

Facial recognition, Aadhaar-linked databases and digital monitoring should be governed by legal safeguards. There must be clarity about the purpose of data collection, duration of storage, access control, accountability and grievance redressal.

Safeguards required

- Define the legal basis of surveillance.
- Ensure purpose limitation in data collection.
- Limit data retention to necessary periods.
- Establish access controls and audit mechanisms.
- Provide grievance redressal for misuse.
- Ensure independent oversight where required.

Security should not become unchecked surveillance. A democratic security system must be effective as well as accountable.

Effective regulation must go hand in hand with better inter-agency coordination.

v. Improve Inter-Agency Coordination

There should be seamless coordination between the Army, police, Central Reserve Police Force, intelligence agencies and local administration. Joint databases, real-time communication and common operational protocols can reduce delays and duplication.

Coordination reforms

- Create common operational protocols.
- Strengthen real-time communication channels.
- Improve joint training and joint exercises.
- Use shared databases with proper access controls.
- Ensure that intelligence flows quickly to the agency best placed to act.

Inter-agency coordination is especially important because terrorists exploit gaps between institutions.

Coordination should also ensure that tourist spaces remain secure without appearing excessively militarised.

vi. Avoid Excessive Militarisation of Tourist Areas

Tourism security should be strong but not intimidating. The aim should be maximum security with minimum visible disruption. This can be achieved through low-visibility surveillance, local verification networks, rapid response teams and intelligence-led monitoring.

Principles for tourism security

- Maintain low-visibility but effective security.
- Use local service networks for early warning.
- Ensure rapid response capacity near vulnerable tourist areas.
- Avoid creating fear among tourists.
- Protect both security and the image of normalcy.

Tourists must feel protected, not trapped inside a conflict zone.

Sustainable tourism security depends deeply on trust between security forces and local communities.

vii. Build Trust with Local Communities

Local cooperation is essential for sustainable security. Security forces must maintain trust through respectful conduct, protection of livelihoods, transparent communication and prompt grievance redressal.

Trust-building measures

- Maintain respectful engagement with local communities.
- Protect the livelihoods of pony handlers, guides, vendors and transporters.
- Create channels for local feedback and grievance redressal.
- Avoid arbitrary suspicion of entire communities.
- Recognise locals as partners in security, not merely as subjects of surveillance.

Without community trust, intelligence gathering becomes weak. With community trust, local society becomes the first layer of early warning.

Finally, counter-terrorism must target not only armed terrorists but also the wider support ecosystem that enables violence.

viii. Target Terror Support Networks

Security policy should not focus only on armed terrorists. It must also dismantle recruitment, financing, logistics, propaganda, communication links and over-ground worker networks.

Areas requiring action

- Recruitment networks.
- Financing channels.
- Logistics and shelter networks.
- Propaganda and radicalisation systems.
- Communication links.
- Over-ground worker support systems.

A terrorist attack is usually the final event in a long chain of preparation. Counter-terrorism must therefore break the chain before it reaches the stage of violence.

These measures together create a smart security model that is preventive, precise, community-linked and constitutionally accountable.

Conclusion

The post-Pahalgam security shift in Jammu and Kashmir shows that internal security challenges are constantly evolving. The focus has moved from reactive urban containment to intelligence-led, technology-supported and terrain-based security management. This reflects a deeper recognition that terrorism today may exploit remote terrain, tourist movement, local support networks and technological gaps.

However, redeployment and technology alone cannot fully solve the problem. Dense forests, infiltration routes, over-ground worker networks, weather limitations and privacy concerns remain serious challenges. Therefore, the way forward lies in combining smart surveillance, human intelligence, community trust, inter-agency coordination and democratic accountability.

A secure Jammu and Kashmir must protect national security while also preserving the confidence of ordinary citizens, tourists and local communities. The most effective internal security model is one that is strong in capability, careful in execution and accountable in governance.

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Dear Aspirant,

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While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

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