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# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report, which was commissioned by the United States Institute of Peace, examines tourism in Kashmir as a vehicle for promoting peace and security between India and Pakistan.

It argues that tourism—by facilitating and strengthening cross-border movement, interactions, and economic cooperation—could soften the Line of Control that separates Indian-controlled and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir and thus make it permeable and irrelevant. It concludes with a series of specific recommendations for both Pakistan and India, including the proposal that the two countries should work collaboratively on tourism packages.

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## Tourism and Peacebuilding in Jammu and Kashmir

### Summary

- India and Pakistan have initiated a number of confidence-building measures in Kashmir, including the creation of a bus service and the limited expansion of trade across the Line of Control (LoC).
- The present cross-LoC confidence-building measures address primarily the divided families living on both sides of the LoC and thus are limited in scope and do not serve the entire region and all communities of Kashmir.
- It is imperative for India and Pakistan to expand cross-LoC confidence-building measures and add new initiatives that would address the imbalances in the existing interactions.
- Cross-LoC tourism will be an important initiative in further expanding the present confidence building and will allow members of the broader civil society of Kashmir to visit and interact with each other.
- Cross-LoC tourism will expand the scope of interactions between the two sides, beyond the divided families, and include everyone in Kashmir.
- Cross-LoC tourism will also create constituencies of peace beyond the select group of divided families and businessmen who already benefit from the cross-LoC bus services and truck traffic.
- As a first step, India and Pakistan should develop a “package tourism” program that would include select destinations on both sides of the LoC.
- More important, both India and Pakistan should seriously consider further relaxing travel restrictions for people to travel across the LoC.

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## Introduction

The promotion of cross-Line of Control (LoC) tourism extends the modality of making borders irrelevant between adversarial states.<sup>1</sup> The reasons are simple. Any means that promote greater interaction between the local populations on both sides of intervening borders—disputed or otherwise—enable greater understanding between neighbors. This is especially true of people who have been part of the same historical tradition until separated by the vicissitudes of international politics. Hence, freer people-to-people contacts catalyze the process of enlarging mutual understanding. These are general propositions. However, the case for cross-LoC tourism in the former princely state of Kashmir,<sup>2</sup> which was divided between India and Pakistan in 1947 and now embodies a bitter dispute that has endured over six decades, is uniquely favorable in many respects.

First, both India and Pakistan were carved out of British India. Without getting into the tangled history of the Kashmir dispute, it needs emphasizing that the problem of Kashmir coincided with British India's partition, leading to beliefs that it symbolizes the unfinished effort to redraw geographical boundaries. Naturally, this exercise has left behind considerable human debris, such as the separated families living on both sides of the LoC, whether in Pakistani-controlled Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) or Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The LoC starts in the Jammu region and meanders through Rajouri, Poonch, Baramulla, Kargil, and Turtuk before reaching NJ 9842, the end point of the LoC near the mouth of the Siachen Glacier. Divided families have a clear interest in making the LoC irrelevant by promoting greater contacts through trade, travel, and tourism and, indeed, are enthusiastic about promoting cross-LoC travel and tourism.

Second, the former Kashmir state was arbitrarily divided along this LoC, which disrupted the natural flows of trade and commerce in the region. As a result, the economies of both AJK and J&K have been adversely affected. Making borders porous and permeable through the promotion of tourism could, therefore, reinvigorate the local economies by restoring their traditional contours. This explains the local enthusiasm on both sides of the border for reviving tourism, because doing so would encourage the establishment of services, ancillary industries, and infrastructure.

Third, trade and travel between India and Pakistan through Kashmir had in the past extended to Tibet, Afghanistan, and parts of Central Asia. It is entirely possible to devise separate packages for travelers interested in adventure tourism, archaeological tourism, and religious tourism, with pilgrims visiting the ancient Buddhist sites scattered all over this region.

Fourth, the traditional culture of Kashmir centered on the secular concept of "Kashmiriyat," an inclination toward a syncretic and composite culture marked by tolerance toward different religious beliefs. Because of this concept, the communities in the region, despite their complex religious and ethnic mix, were able to live together in peace and harmony over the ages. The unfortunate events in Kashmir in more recent years—insurgency in J&K, especially in the Kashmir Valley, and growing vulnerability of AJK to Islamic radicalization—have exacerbated the local situation. Promoting cross-LoC tourism can play a major role in eroding these negative sentiments and may help reestablish the secularism that distinguished "Kashmiriyat."

## Tourism as a Logical Confidence-Building Measure in Kashmir

This study advocates the need for cross-LoC tourism as a confidence-building measure, a step that would serve as a natural corollary to the idea floated in 2006 by Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh of "making borders irrelevant."<sup>3</sup> This idea was largely agreed to

by General Pervez Musharraf, then president of Pakistan, and enjoys substantial support in the civil societies of India, Pakistan, and both parts of Kashmir.

Indeed, one of the five working groups established in 2006 by the Indian government to study different aspects of the J&K issue presaged Manmohan Singh's remarks by making similar recommendations on improving cross-LoC interactions, specifically through tourism.<sup>4</sup> Although cross-LoC tourism is not a new idea, it should be acceptable to the government of India and the Indian people at large. More important, the present imperative for cross-LoC tourism arises due to the existing limitations and inherent weaknesses of the two cross-border confidence-building measures (CBMs) that have been in place since 2005—bus services and trade.<sup>5</sup>

The first cross-LoC CBM between India and Pakistan—historic for J&K—was the inauguration of the bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad in 2005. Later, this move was followed by the establishment of bus service between Poonch and Rawalakot. Both these bus services met the needs and aspirations of divided families living along the LoC, the majority of whom live in the erstwhile Poonch princely state and are dispersed over Nowshera, Rajouri, and Poonch districts on the Indian side, and Rawalakot and Bhimber on the Pakistani side. While the number of divided families in the Kashmir Valley is fewer, there are large numbers of divided families in the Kargil and Skardu districts. The Gilgit, Skardu, Leh, and Kargil regions are important, because they constitute the largest subregion of Kashmir. Outside the Kargil district, divided families are spread throughout Ladakh.<sup>6</sup> For example, there are families in Leh town with family connections on the other side.<sup>7</sup> The family and business linkages of several families who traded along the famous Silk Route in the southern sector extend to Gilgit and Kashgar in the north and Yarkand in the east.<sup>8</sup> Turtuk region, in particular, has families more recently divided, as it was captured by India during the 1971 war.<sup>9</sup> In Jammu region, there are many divided families outside the districts of Rajouri and Poonch; in the Nowshera *tehsil* (administrative division within a district), there are families with familial links in Mirpur. There is a direct road between Mirpur and Nowshera, which was opened shortly after the earthquake in 2005.

Unfortunately, despite repeated requests for more, cross-LoC interactions among divided families, which the two bus services were designed to address, are primarily helping those in select districts in the Kashmir Valley—Rajouri and Poonch on the Indian side and Muzaffarabad, Mirpur, and Rawalakot on the Pakistani side. There is a need to enlarge this service and the regions that are connected across the LoC.

More important, the Shia Muslims of the Kargil-Skardu region and the Buddhists in Ladakh continue to have links with each other. People in Ladakh, Kargil, Skardu, and Gilgit have a Balti identity and feel that while divided families of the Kashmiri and Pahari Muslims have the opportunity to meet each other, the Baltis, especially Shia Muslims of the Kargil-Skardu regions, have been denied this opportunity.

The second major cross-LoC confidence-building measure is trade between J&K and AJK, which began in October 2008. Trucks carry specified goods from a basket of twenty-one items along the same routes on which the buses ply. Initially, the agreement called for a fortnightly movement of trucks, but, a few months after the inauguration of trade, the modalities were revised. A weekly exchange was introduced.

Like the bus service, the truck service also has serious limitations. Though the business community is happy about the opening up of the LoC for the movement of goods, significant irritants remain. Contrary to popular expectations, the trade basket and quantity of goods remain small. In addition, the trade is restricted to the geographical limits of Kashmir and is not permitted via Kashmir to other parts of India and Pakistan; the popular expectation, especially in the Kashmir Valley, was that opening the LoC for trade would allow businessmen to trade in different goods—from carpets to apples—all the way to the Gulf countries via Karachi.<sup>10</sup>

***The family and business linkages of several families who traded along the famous Silk Route in the southern sector extend to Gilgit and Kashgar in the north and Yarkand in the east.***

Lack of adequate banking facilities also hampers trade. Businessmen complain that the cross-LoC trade is being hijacked by traders who do not belong to J&K. Due to the concessions provided, the local traders believe that the Indian-Pakistani trade across the Wagah border is now being routed through Kashmir, which is not benefiting the state. Finally, both India and Pakistan treat cross-LoC trade as a political and not as an economic confidence-building measure.<sup>11</sup> Given these basic differences in approach, and the wider Indian-Pakistani trading experience, one can predict that the cross-LoC trade project will lose steam unless both countries take effective remedial steps.

Given these constraints on cross-LoC trade, and appreciating that the movement of people is not free, there is a need to look beyond these two modalities to improve cross-LoC interactions. Hence, tourism is a CBM with substantial promise whose economic and political potential are being underplayed. Cross-LoC tourism would, in fact, extend bus and truck services and should be considered an extension of the trade-in-goods. After all, tourism is an aspect of trade-in-services and thus should be the next logical cross-LoC CBM.

## Past and Present Patterns of Tourism in Kashmir

Each subregion of Kashmir has its own unique potential to attract tourism separately from and jointly with the other subregions. On the Indian side, J&K has the potential to attract tourists motivated by religious interests, leisure, or adventure. Depending on the interests of tourists, they could choose different regions or different circuits as their primary focus. The tourism potential of J&K can also be seen from the perspective of what each subregion—Jammu, Kashmir Valley, and Ladakh—can offer.

On the Pakistani side, AJK is free of violence, which makes it very attractive for tourism. The region is endowed with great natural beauty, archaeological sites, religious places, and mountainous terrain, making it attractive for religious, cultural, adventure, archaeological, and recreational tourism. However, the region's potential for tourism has remained untapped due to official apathy and ignorance.<sup>12</sup> Only in the past several years, especially after the 2005 earthquake, have efforts gotten under way to develop the tourism industry in AJK. Some basic infrastructure is now being put in place that can be used for initiating cross-LoC tourism.

Tourism as a major economic activity is clearly a postindependence phenomenon. Although tourism existed during British rule, the numbers were limited due to the region's prevailing political climate and poor infrastructure. The important routes existing before 1947 were primarily used for economic activity and the movement of people. For example, the famous Silk Route from China to Central Asia via Ladakh was primarily a trade route and not meant for tourists. The road from Gilgit to Srinagar via Astore was used for administrative, educational, and trade purposes, and not for tourism. The same can be said about the Srinagar–Rawalpindi and Jammu–Sialkot routes.

However, the border districts—for example, Rajouri and Poonch on the Indian side and Mirpur, Kotli, and Bhimber on the Pakistani side—saw more tourist activity, especially in terms of visits to Sufi shrines, which are dotted all along the LoC and still exist today. Both in the Kashmir Valley and in Rajouri and Poonch districts, there are numerous shrines of Sufi saints who cut across regional and religious divides. For example, Shahdra Sharif, near Rajouri, is an important shrine where Baba Ghulam Shah is revered by Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs from all over the region.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of old pre-1947 routes, there was the famous (South) Silk Route linking Ladakh with Gilgit and Baltistan (GB), the Gilgit–Astore–Srinagar route, the Anantnag–Srinagar–Muzaffarabad–Rawalpindi route, and the Jammu–Sialkot–Lahore–New Delhi route, besides numerous smaller axes within the erstwhile Poonch kingdom. The primary movement on these major routes was economic and political, not touristic.

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## ***The Indian Side***

After the 1947 Partition and the 1962 India-China War, population movements and trade collapsed. On the Indian side, the Kashmir Valley became the primary tourist destination for national and international tourists. Dal Lake and Gulmarg have become an international tourist destination in the postindependence era. There is no comparison with the number of tourists in Kashmir Valley before. After 1947, tourism in the Kashmir Valley received a tremendous boost. Though violence since 1989 has affected the flow of tourists into the Kashmir Valley, some areas such as Gulmarg continue to attract tourists from all over the world. On the religious front, however, Hazratbal and Chara-e-Sharif have lost a substantial number of visitors from regions across the LoC and from Pakistan.

Despite its tourism potential, the Jammu region has never been an attraction for international tourists. Over the last two decades, however, the Jammu region has witnessed a tremendous increase in domestic pilgrims, primarily to Mata Vaishno Devi's temple, as part of what has now become the famous Amarnath yatra (pilgrimage).<sup>14</sup>

Rajouri and Poonch districts have numerous Sufi shrines and shrines worshiped by the Hindu and Sikh communities. Five shrines in particular—Shahdra Sharif (near Rajouri), Chota Mian (Mendhar), and Budha Amarnath, Sai Miran, and Nangali Saheb (all three near Poonch) have not only been the main attraction but have also inspired communal harmony. Shahdra Sharif shrine, in particular, has become a symbol of hope for the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian communities. These shrines, particularly Shahdra Sharif, attract pilgrims from all over the country.

Sufi shrines in these two districts have always been a powerful attraction for people living across the LoC. Until 1947, these shrines had regular visitors. Even thereafter, the local population from the other side (unofficially and often illegally!) used to visit these shrines on important festival days until the LoC became more rigid with the construction of fencing in the 1990s. Though the local population claims there is a huge potential for recreational and adventure tourism within the districts, the area has never been known for it.

Ladakh, the third major region in J&K, is a tourist paradise, especially for international tourists. From adventure to religious to heritage tourism, Ladakh has everything to offer. But most important, the region is very peaceful. Until the 1970s, New Delhi was apprehensive about opening Ladakh for international tourism. The India-China War and the Chinese occupation of Indian territories in Ladakh made India defensive in its approach. Until recently, even Indian officials needed travel documents in the form of an Inner Line Permit to visit certain subregions bordering China. The Siachen crisis in the 1980s made India feel the need to be cautious.

Jammu, Srinagar, and Leh, the administrative headquarters of the three Indian-controlled subregions (Jammu, Kashmir Valley, and Ladakh), are connected with the rest of India and to each other by air. These three subregions can be further divided into smaller regions—for example, the Zaskar and Nyoma regions within Ladakh, Gurez in Kashmir Valley, and Kishtwar and Poonch in Jammu. Climate, topography, and geology all pose serious challenges to these smaller regions as potential tourist destinations.

## ***The Pakistani Side***

Historically, Muzaffarabad and Mirpur, along with the Bhimber districts of AJK, were connected with Pakistani Punjab and Srinagar through trade routes, which can be revived for cross-LoC tourism. The present Rawalpindi–Muzaffarabad road was known as the Jehlum Valley road, which connected Rawalpindi to Srinagar via Muzaffarabad. All trade activities between Pakistani Punjab and the Kashmir Valley were carried out through this route, as it remained open throughout the year. In addition, the Sialkot–Jammu route through

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Suchetgarh connected Pakistani Punjab with the Jammu and Poonch and continued to Srinagar through Banihal pass. It was considered the shortest trade route. A third route connected Jhelum (a Pakistani city) to Srinagar through Mirpur–Kotli–Poonch–Uri. The districts of Mirpur and Rajouri and the *tehsil* of Mendhar depended mainly upon this route for their imports of daily necessities. A fourth route connected Gujarat (a Pakistani city) to Srinagar via Bhimber and Rajouri. It was known as Mughal route. All these old trade routes can be used for cross-LoC tourism.

In the prepartition era, Muzaffarabad served as a transit point and not as a tourist center in itself due to its poor infrastructure, in terms of its lack of roads and suitable accommodation, making it unattractive as a destination in comparison to Srinagar. Even the last maharaja of Kashmir hardly ever visited Muzaffarabad and reportedly (besides traveling by car) used bullock carts or horse carts while traveling to Muzaffarabad and inside the city. The Mughals used the Bhimber–Srinagar route to visit the Kashmir Valley. Bhimber is mentioned by the emperor Jahangir in his book *Tuzh-e-Jahangiri*. There is also some evidence that the British and other foreigners came to fish in the Poonch and Jehlum Rivers, but serious tourists went to Srinagar; European tourists generally traveled to Ladakh or GB for adventure tourism.<sup>15</sup> The upper reaches of AJK, especially the Neelum Valley, have great potential for adventure tourism but have historically remained inaccessible. It has very limited communication links with the GB region to this day. There has also been little development of road links between these two regions in Pakistan in the post-1947 period. Presently, a new road is under construction that will connect Rattigali in Neelum Valley with Naran, a tourist attraction in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.<sup>16</sup>

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AJK is rich in archaeological sites, including ancient Buddhist ruins at Sharda, Sharda Fort, and Kishan Ghati in Neelum; Hindu temples in Muzaffarabad; and a number of Muslim shrines, such as Saheli Sarakar, Shah Mehmood Ghazi, Kaiyan Sharif, Pir Shah Ghazi, Khari Sharif, Baba Shaadi Shaheed, and Khwawja Ghulam Mohi-u-din. They would not only attract tourists from Jammu, Ladakh, and Kashmir Valley but also promote interfaith harmony in Kashmir. There are also a number of historical forts and destinations for recreational and adventure tourism and places for water sports throughout AJK. In 2009, the paragliding and polo festivals held in Muzaffarabad, Rawalakot, and Neelum Valley attracted a large number of domestic and foreign tourists.

With added focus on the development of the tourism industry in the AJK, the governments in the AJK and Pakistan have increased the tourism development budget from a meager Rs 7.3 million in 2005–06 to Rs 200 million in 2010–11.<sup>17</sup> They also launched the Piyara Kashmir (Beautiful Kashmir) program in 2009 in the areas that fall within a half-kilometer belt along the LoC. Under this program, Rs 275 million has been set aside for tourism-related infrastructure development.<sup>18</sup> Ninety percent of the tourism budget is for infrastructure development, such as tourist rest houses, huts, lodges, motels, and related facilities.

### ***Tourist Numbers***

There is a difference in terms of how AJK and J&K attract tourists from outside. This difference partly reflects the strength of the tourist industries across the LoC. On the Indian side of Kashmir, it is well developed both at the national and provincial levels; on the Pakistani side, the tourism industry in AJK remains underdeveloped relative to Pakistan's overall tourism industry—both at the governmental and civil society levels. This inhibits the AJK's ability to attract tourists from Pakistan or abroad.

In AJK, the domestic tourist inflow has picked up over the last few years despite limited accommodation at various tourist destinations. According to estimates provided by the AJK

**Table 1. Tourist visits to J&K, 2006–2008**

Year	Number of visits by domestic tourists (in lakh)	Number of visits by foreign tourists (in lakh)
2006	76.46	0.46
2007	79.15	0.53
2008	76.39	0.55

Source: Ministry of Tourism, "Tourist Inflow in J&K," November 20, 2009, <http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=54275>.

Note: 1 lakh = 100,000.

Department of Tourism and Archeology, domestic tourist traffic into AJK assessed in terms of inbound vehicular movement at nine entry points was about 1.84 million in 2008.<sup>19</sup> It went up to 1.93 million in 2009 and was projected to touch 2.03 million in 2010. In addition, a large number of visitors come as religious tourists. Nearly one million tourists visit famous shrines such as Khari Sharif, Narian Sharif, Baba Shadi Shaeed, Mai Toti Sahiba, and Saheli Sarkar each year. The increased inflow of domestic tourists is due to improvements in infrastructure, exposure to AJK as a tourist destination in the wake of the 2005 earthquake, a shift away from conflict-ridden Swat to AJK as a tourist destination, and the secure and hospitable environment of the AJK.

AJK has a rich Kashmiri diaspora living across the world that visits their homeland quite regularly. Thus, the majority of international visitors to the AJK come mostly from this group. A conservative figure provided by the AJK Department of Tourism and Archeology states that about one hundred thousand diaspora Kashmiris visit the AJK each year.

On the Indian side, there is substantial domestic and foreign tourist inflow (see table 1).

As a part of its infrastructure initiatives to increase the inflow of both domestic and foreign tourists, J&K has created more than fifteen exclusive tourism development authorities in Leh, Kargil, and Zaskar (in Ladakh); Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonamarg, Manasbal, Kokernag, Verinag, and Budgam (in Kashmir Valley); and Rajouri, Poonch, Patnitop, Mansar, Bhaderwah, Kishtwar, and Sartal (in Jammu).

Although politics, geography, and bad governance pose a serious challenge to maintaining and improving new routes in all parts of Kashmir and to building on these numbers, adequate basic infrastructure exists on which the tourism industry could be further developed and exploited through cross-LoC movements.

## Cross-LoC Tourism in Kashmir: Benefits

Far more so than the existing CBMs in Kashmir, which cater only to select communities in select regions, cross-LoC tourism will be a political, social, and economic boon to the entire population of J&K, irrespective of community and subregion.

### *Tourism as an Agent of Peace*

Tourism development can be a tool for peace, but much depends on the intensity and nature of the conflict. No one seriously questions the positive link between cross-LoC tourism and peacebuilding in India-Pakistan relations, which has been neglected for so long. Given the intractability of the Kashmir conflict, cross-LoC tourism may not have a dramatic impact in changing the dynamics of the Kashmir conflict, but it can certainly play an important role in bringing Kashmiris together and will certainly act as a catalyst for peace between Pakistan and India. Cross-LoC tourism will have a positive economic impact as well and develop stakes for the business communities on both sides. Collectively, these impacts will help to support

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the normalization process, to reduce tensions along the LoC, and to transform the Kashmir conflict through people-centric approaches.

To be sure, cross-LoC tourism will create a huge constituency for peace. It has been repeatedly urged that people-to-people contact is the need of the hour not only between the two parts of Kashmir but also between India and Pakistan and across the whole of South Asia. Cross-LoC tourism will bring people together, and every visitor can become an ambassador for ushering peace and harmony into the region. People from divided families who have visited the other side of the LoC are quoted as saying that their visits helped to remove many of their wrong impressions and misperceptions. The traders and businessmen from J&K and AJK feel that there will be a positive impact of cross-LoC tourism on cross-LoC relations and on India-Pakistan relations.<sup>20</sup> They argue that any step that promotes interaction between the people on both sides of the LoC will be positive as it brings them closer together and helps them understand one another. Further, hotel representatives feel that cross-LoC tourism will promote cultural, economic, and trade interactions between the two parts of Kashmir, which will benefit the AJK economy.<sup>21</sup> Cross-LoC tourism will also help to reestablish the Kashmiriyat, which has come under pressure due to the unfortunate events in Kashmir in recent years—insurgency in J&K, especially the Kashmir Valley, and growing vulnerability of AJK to Islamic radicalization. Promoting cross-border tourism would play a major role in eroding these negative sentiments.

### ***Tourism as an Economic Boost***

Measures to develop religious, adventure, and heritage tourism are likely to give a fillip to economic activities on either side and encourage the attendant establishment of services, ancillary industries, and infrastructure. From building small dhabas (eating places) to constructing large hotels, the economic benefits of cross-LoC tourism will positively influence political issues. The movement of people for tourism purposes will raise economic activity and improve people-to-people contact between the two sides, as evidenced in Rajouri and Poonch districts after the cross-LoC bus service started.

Cross-LoC tourism will benefit all the subregional economies. From Poonch to Gilgit, there are numerous places of importance that would attract people from other parts of J&K. In addition, at a time when both India and Pakistan are finding it difficult to provide employment, tourism, as an industry, with its several ancillary branches, will be a major boon for the region. In the long run, it will address the important problem of unemployment and prevent the youth from pursuing a radical path.

For years policymakers ignored the economic potential of tourism in Islamabad and Muzaffarabad. It was only after the 2005 earthquake that AJK was exposed to the outside world and that officials realized the potential economic benefits of exploiting the region's natural and historical resources. In December 2005, then Pakistani prime minister Shaukat Aziz, during a visit to Rawalakot, announced that AJK would be opened for tourism to exploit the area's full potential and to help generate economic opportunities for its people.<sup>22</sup> With little industrial development and declining agricultural productivity, the mainstay of the AJK economy, the tourism industry can play an important role in expanding livelihood opportunities, especially for the rural poor. The private sector, especially expatriate Kashmiris, might also be encouraged to invest in the tourism sector and to boost local economy by restoring its traditional contours.

### **Cross-LoC Tourism in Kashmir: Challenges**

Who is likely to object to cross-LoC tourism in Kashmir, and what are the risks? First and foremost, the security forces, especially the intelligence agencies, would object for obvious security reasons. Intelligence agencies from both sides fear that the other side will send militants/agents in

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the garb of tourists. Due to this ingrained fear, both countries should consider the Chinese model of allowing tourism in Tibet, which encourages group tours over individual tourist visits.

Second, the Home, Defense, and Internal Affairs Ministries in New Delhi and Islamabad would like to go slow on any new initiative on cross-LoC or cross-border movement. The bureaucracies in these ministries are traditionally suspicious of the other side and have always adopted a negative approach.

Third, separatist leaders in the Kashmir Valley, including those of the Hurriyat and the militants, are also likely to be a major obstacle to cross-LoC tourism. The separatists are afraid that cross-LoC interactions will relegate the Kashmir dispute to the back burner and convert the present status quo on the LoC to a permanent divide. In addition, Muslim leaders in the Kashmir Valley, including separatists and some in the mainstream, fear that cross-LoC movement will bring the non-Kashmiri-speaking population together, a political risk for the Kashmiri-speaking leadership.

On the Pakistani side, different shades of opinion have emerged regarding the political impact of cross-LoC tourism, ranging from uncertainty to having positive or outright negative views. Broadly speaking, political leaders in the AJK support cross-LoC tourism but feel it will remain constrained until there is normalcy on the LoC, something not possible unless India and Pakistan make peace with each other. Former AJK prime minister Raja Farooq Haider supported the idea of initiating cross-LoC tourism and stressed that Kashmiris on both sides—whether they are Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist or are residing in various parts of Pakistan—should be allowed to travel across the LoC for tourism purposes. He believes that cross-LoC travel and trade has “diluted the sanctity of LoC,” as Kashmiris are not using passports to travel across the line. Likewise, intra-Kashmir tourism will be a move “toward integration of the two parts of Kashmir and would strengthen indivisibility of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.”<sup>23</sup> He has also endorsed the idea of package tourism and the promotion of quality tourism in the Neelum Valley, while pointing out that many of the AJK’s most beautiful spots are located close to the LoC and thus cannot be fully developed until there is peace between India and Pakistan.

The religious leadership belonging to the ruling Muslim Conference, such as Allama Sahabzada Pir Muhammad Saleem Chisti, who is also the chairman of the AJK’s Ullema-o-Mushaikh Council, believes that cross-LoC tourism, like cross-LoC travel and trade, will allow Kashmiris to come closer to one another and will not affect the Kashmir cause. In fact, he feels that closer interaction between Kashmiris will strengthen Kashmir, because Kashmiris coming from across the LoC will be able to “make a distinction between *Azadi* [freedom] and occupation.”<sup>24</sup>

However, some political parties and leaders express the opinion that cross-LoC tourism would undermine the Kashmiri cause. The J&K People’s Party leader, Sardar Khalid Ibrahim, believes that resumption of cross-LoC tourism, such as cross-LoC travel and trade, would undermine Pakistan’s position on the Kashmir issue.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Abdul Rasheed Turabi of the Jamaat-i-Islami AJK does not favor cross-LoC tourism because he believes it would compromise the Kashmiri struggle for the right to self-determination. He feels that “India is projecting cross-LoC confidence-building measures as a solution of Kashmir” but that this “is not acceptable to Kashmiris.” For Kashmiris, he says, “LoC is irrelevant and it is their right to go across.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite these serious differences, however, the majority of leaders and the majority of the population would support an initiative on cross-LoC tourism.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The peace potential of cross-LoC tourism to serve as a confidence-building measure between India and Pakistan needs no further elaboration. But the difficulties in pursuing this modality also need recognition before discussing how cross-LoC tourism might be enlarged.

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The constituencies that favor and obstruct this measure are easily identifiable. The local citizens, especially the divided families, are the natural constituencies favoring the softening of borders and the promotion of cross-LoC tourism. Other constituencies in favor of this are traders, civil society, and professional groups that either have common interests or wish to establish closer links across the LoC. Tourism, as a manpower-intensive industry, offers immense opportunities to provide gainful employment and improve the quality of life of the local population. However, the opposition to deepening people-to-people contacts and cross-border tourism is also entrenched. It includes the political parties that have adopted separatism as their operating philosophy and that believe that a resolution of the Kashmir problem will not serve their political interests. The security community, which comprises armed, paramilitary, and police forces and especially the intelligence agencies, is wholly skeptical and believes that cross-LoC tourism would only add to problems of terrorism and insurgency. In addition, it holds the unstated belief that any free movement of people and goods across softened borders would erode its centrality in Kashmir.

Promoting cross-LoC tourism requires addressing the concerns of this opposition. An effective strategy suggests that these problems be studied along with the local population. A high-level committee with representation from political parties, civil society groups, and bureaucratic interests—civil and military—should be formed to examine these questions and suggest ameliorative measures. The two national committees could then meet to iron out their differences, if any, and build upon areas where interests converge. A joint understanding on these issues would go some way toward making borders permeable, promoting cross-LoC tourism, and establishing a propitious milieu for pursuing such options. The selling point would be the potential of cross-LoC tourism to resurrect the local economy, particularly in neglected areas along the LoC, by upgrading the local infrastructure and by providing greater employment opportunities.

To avoid a grand cross-LoC tourism strategy that might collapse under its own weight, the following recommendations are made:

### ***Start with Package Tourism***

India and Pakistan should start the entire process with package tourism. Among the numerous tourist circuits mentioned in this report, both countries could identify a few on which to focus, while ensuring that each subregion is covered in the circuits. Both countries should also prescribe the maximum number of days for completing each circuit. Some circuits, for example, in Ladakh and GB, may need more time given their geographic spread. Depending on the level of interest in package tourism, the level of confidence in the two countries, and the economic benefits engendered, India and Pakistan could then expand the scope of the circuits and the sites that could be visited.

It is worth remembering here that trade and travel between India and Pakistan through Kashmir had extended in the past to Tibet, Afghanistan, and parts of Central Asia. Longer term, it is entirely possible to devise separate packages for travelers interested in adventure tourism, archaeological tourism, and religious tourism, with pilgrims visiting the ancient Buddhist sites scattered all over this region.

### ***Make Distinctions between Types of Visitors***

Both India and Pakistan could make a conscious effort to pursue a step-by-step approach regarding the classes of visitors. For example, the bus service is used at present only by divided families and is limited only to the residents of Jammu, and the Kashmir Valley and Azad Kashmir. The divided families in Kargil, Skardu, and Gilgit, for example, are not allowed to travel by the two bus services.

Clearly, there are different categories of tourists—international, regional, and national. Similarly, there are different categories of places to visit—highly sensitive and sensitive places and places that are insignificant from a security perspective but of enormous interest from a human perspective. Where there are serious reservations, India and Pakistan could start by allowing only international tourists, and then consider other sets of tourists. However, at present, there is not much support for cross-LoC package tourism that caters to Indian or international tourists, largely due to political and security reasons. Hence, it would be practical to start package tourism with divided families and the residents of various subregions of Kashmir and gradually extend these packages to Pakistani citizens, Indian citizens, and international tourists. Indian and Pakistani citizens should need only their passports in terms of travel documentation.

### ***Relax Travel Restrictions to Regional Festivals and Border Melas***

Not only are families divided across the LoC but so too are cultures, such as the Pahari and Gujjar cultures. The people of Rajouri and Poonch districts on the Indian side and Rawalakot and Poonch districts on the Pakistani share a common history and heritage, as they all once belonged to the erstwhile Poonch kingdom. A similar division occurred between the people of Gurez and Astore on the Indian and Pakistani sides of the LoC, respectively. More importantly, the people of Kargil, Leh, Gilgit, and Skardu have the Balti culture in common with others along the Silk Route. Unfortunately, both countries have a defensive attitude toward their peripheral regions, and border regions such as Poonch, Rajouri, Gurez, Skardu, and Astore have become culturally and geographically isolated.

Thus, besides tourism circuits and travel packages, India and Pakistan should consider relaxing travel restrictions so that members of these divided cultures could organize and join regional festivals and border *melas* (gatherings) along the LoC.

Specifically, both countries should therefore consider organizing a regional festival for a period of four to ten days. Until both countries reach an understanding on allowing cross-LoC movement, there could be parallel festivals on the Indian and Pakistani sides during this period. Besides week-long regional festivals, day-long border *melas* could be held at Sufi shrines that, until 1947, had remained great institutions of peace and harmony.

### ***Open the Jammu–Sialkot and Kargil–Skardu Routes***

Since 2005, only two routes (Srinagar–Muzaffarabad and Poonch–Rawalakot) have been opened for the movement of people and goods. Since there are popular demands from other regions of Kashmir for further openings, both countries should consider opening the Jammu–Sialkot and Kargil–Skardu routes for the movement of people and goods. Though the Jammu–Sialkot route has a different legal implication for the local population in Jammu region, because Sialkot is part of Pakistan’s Punjab province and is thus across an international border, it should be included as a part of larger cross-LoC interaction.

The road between Jammu and Sialkot, which has fallen into disuse, is not totally unusable. With minimum efforts, both countries could easily open the road and rebuild rail links. Because there is already an existing Samjhauta Express between New Delhi and Lahore, there should not be any concern in either country about restarting the rail connection, which existed until 1947. In fact, during the British period, the main train link between Jammu and New Delhi went through Sialkot and Lahore!

Apart from the Jammu–Sialkot link, both countries should consider opening the Kargil–Skardu road. This, in fact, should be done immediately, given that Jammu and the Kashmir Valley already have at least one link each across the LoC and Ladakh has none. While the Indian side seems to have few problems in opening this axis, Pakistan appears to be more

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apprehensive. Given the fact that Islamabad recently provided an autonomy package to GB and, more importantly, given that New Delhi seems to have relinquished its claims over this region (with the exception of some periodical rhetoric), Pakistan should not be concerned about opening this route on the grounds that it might affect its hold over the subregion.

### ***Ease Travel and Communication Restrictions***

The travel and communication regime for divided families and traders should be made simpler. India should restore telephonic linkages and allow people on its side of J&K to call the other side directly.

### ***Create Necessary Infrastructure and Help Civil Society to Build Parallel Structures***

There is a clear need to build basic facilities, from hotels, restaurants, and *dhabas*, to related tourist infrastructure. Poonch, on the Indian side, despite being a district headquarters, has only one hotel that meets basic tourist standards. Though it is below average in quality, it cannot accommodate more than twenty-five people. Government guesthouses are not easy to book, and there are very few tourist bungalows in this region.

Aside from accommodation, adequate transport facilities are also needed to facilitate travel. The quality of existing buses, taxis, and jeeps is very poor, and a family may find it very inconvenient to travel by what is currently available.

While the state needs to build the basic infrastructure, it should help civil society to build similar structures through a government–civil society initiative. This will also help in expanding the constituencies interested in building peace. From roadside *dhabas* to transport facilities, the government can help the local population to create this infrastructure through loans and subsidies.

### ***Allow Closer Interaction between the AJK and J&K Tourism Departments***

Cross-LoC tourism cannot take off without closer interaction between the tourism departments of the two sides. Indeed, there is much scope for cooperation between them, and the AJK Department of Tourism and Archaeology can learn a lot from the J&K Department of Tourism, which is far more experienced in developing tourism.

### ***Build Infrastructure and Develop Professional Training***

Since the AJK tourism sector is relatively undeveloped, it lacks professional training capacities and is not in a position to provide qualified personnel for expanding tourism within AJK or with J&K. A joint hotel management training institute must be established in AJK where training in the hospitality sector can be provided to individuals wishing to join the tourism industry. Similarly, there is a need for setting up vocational training institutes specific to the tourism industry on both sides.

There is also an urgent need to establish a tourism development corporation in AJK to promote the growth of the tourism industry. There is a proposal to set up a tourism development and promotion cell in Muzaffarabad and information centers at Kashmir House in Islamabad, Nathiagali, and Murree. Similar “joint cells” can be opened in Muzaffarabad, Mirpur, Rawalakot, and Neelum in AJK and Srinagar, Jammu, and Ladakh in J&K to create awareness and facilitate the travel plans of tourists.

### ***Allow Public-Private Partnership***

AJK's hotel industry and hospitality sector is very weak and can be strengthened by involving the private sector in the tourism-related services sector. Similarly, on the Indian side, while the tourism industry in Kashmir Valley and Ladakh is well organized, the tourism industry in Rajouri, Poonch, and Gurez is poorly developed and would benefit by private investment.

While the public sector should build physical infrastructure like roads, communication systems, and electrical grids and ensure safety for the tourists in the AJK, the private sector should invest in the services sector. Such investment is essential because the AJK Department of Tourism and Archaeology alone does not have the resources to develop and maintain the needed transport, hotels, and hospitality services. In fact, given the misuse of guesthouses, the AJK government should lease them out to the private sector. Further, encouraging families and individuals to convert a portion of their homes into a guest or bed-and-breakfast facility would allow the local population to become direct beneficiaries of tourism.

As a final note, the success of any peace process based on confidence-building measures such as cross-border tourism will depend on the overall state of relations between the governments in question. Better relations require not only a clear vision but also tenacity in their central leadership. In the case of Kashmir, neither is apparent on the Pakistani or Indian side. A controversial issue is whether American persuasion has been the primary motivating force that has brought the two estranged leaderships together to pursue confidence-building measures. The American role in defusing past India-Pakistan crises is well documented, whether in the Kargil conflict (1999), the border confrontation crisis (2001–02), or the standoff after the Mumbai attacks (November 2008). This role will continue in the future, if only for the reason that the United States wants India-Pakistan relations to normalize so that it might better pursue its strategic objectives in Afghanistan and the wider Central Asian region. Indian-Pakistani confidence-building measures such as cross-LoC tourism will therefore be an important modality for pursuit by both India and Pakistan and will require encouragement by the United States.

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## Notes

1. This report is a follow-up to a 2007–08 study by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, which was supported and published by the United States Institute of Peace and was later published as a monograph in India, that more generally examined ways in which the LoC could be made irrelevant and that recommended softening the LoC through tourism. See PR Chari and Hasan Askari Rizvi, *Making Borders Irrelevant in Kashmir*, Special Report 210 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, September 2008), and PR Chari, Hasan Askari Rizvi, Rashid Ahmed Khan, and D. Suba Chandran, *The Kashmir Dispute: Making Borders Irrelevant* (New Delhi: Samskriti, 2009).
2. For the purposes of this study, the three subregions of Kashmir will be referred to as they are termed by the respective governments—India and Pakistan. Jammu, Kashmir Valley, and Ladakh will be referred to as Jammu and Kashmir, Muzaffarabad and Mirpur will be referred to as Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and Gilgit and Baltistan, which was until recently referred to as the Northern Areas, will be referred to as GB. The Indian government refers to the regions under Pakistan's control (Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit and Baltistan) as Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, while the Pakistani government refers to the region under India's control (Jammu, Kashmir Valley, and Ladakh) as Indian-held Kashmir.
3. In a speech marking the opening of bus service between two parts of Punjab in March 2006, Singh declared that “borders cannot be redrawn but we can work towards making them irrelevant—towards making them just lines on a map. People on both sides of the LOC should be able to move more freely and trade with one another.” See Manmohan Singh, “PM's speech on launch of Amritsar–Nankana Sahib Bus Service” (speech, Amritsar, March 24, 2006), <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech/content.asp?id=302>.
4. See the Working Group's report titled “Jammu and Kashmir: Strengthening Relations Across the Line of Control,” January 2007, [www.hinduonnet.com/nic/jk/jkreport\\_2.pdf](http://www.hinduonnet.com/nic/jk/jkreport_2.pdf)
5. For a history of CBMs across the LoC, see PR Chari et al., *The Kashmir Dispute*. For a report on the need to explore the possibilities of tourism as the third major cross-LoC CBM, see D. Suba Chandran, *Expanding Cross-LoC Interactions*, Issue Brief 131 (New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, October 2009).
6. Author interviews with divided families in Kargil in 2009–10.
7. Author interview with a historian in Leh, whose brother and his family live in Baltistan.
8. Author interview with Hussain Munshi, curator of the Aziz Bhat Museum in Kargil. Munshi's grandfather was the last in his family to trade using the Silk Route; items in the museum reveal the extent of this trade from Central Asia to Tibet and Amritsar.
9. Author interviews with divided families in Turtuk.
10. Author interviews with businessmen in J&K.
11. Author interviews with officers of the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Jammu Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The president of the Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Zulfikar Abbasi, expressed the same views in an author interview.
12. A random sample survey was conducted among seventy-five respondents from the business community, chambers of commerce, the hotel and handicraft industry, the transport industry, the media, local administrations, the security sector, political parties, religious groups, and civil society.
13. Author interviews with different sectors of society in Rajouri, Poonch, Surankot, and Mendhar.
14. Although Amamath lies in the Kashmir Valley, most of the pilgrims visit Vasihno Devi before returning home. Mata Vaishno Devi's temple is near Katra, sixty kilometers from Jammu. Tourists take a train up to Jammu and then hire taxis or take buses to Katra, from where they trek to the temple. Many of them cross the Banihal tunnel by road and visit the Amamath temple in Pahalgam.
15. Author interview with Mohsin Shakil, director general of the AJK Tourism and Archeology Department, Muzaffarabad, January 2010.
16. Author interview with Col. (ret.) Raja M. Naseem Khan, minister of the AJK Department of Public Works, Muzaffarabad, December 2009.
17. Data based on figures provided by the AJK Tourism and Archeology Department and the Planning and Development Department.
18. Figures come from the AJK Planning and Development Department's unpublished document, “Piyara Kashmir Program,” PC-1.
19. These data are based on the World Tourism Organization's definition of “tourist”: “people who travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited.”
20. Based on author interviews with a number of traders on both sides of the LoC involved in cross-LoC trade and with Zulfikar Abbasi, president of the Federation of Jammu and Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
21. Author interview with representatives of Pearl Continental, Sangam Hotel, and Regency Hotel Mirpur.
22. “Entire Kashmir to Be Opened for Tourism,” *Nation* (Pakistan), December 13, 2005.
23. Author interview with AJK prime minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan, Muzaffarabad, January 2010.
24. Author interview with Allama Sahabzada Pir Muhammad Saleem Chisti, chairman of the Ulemaa-o-Mushaikh Council, Muzaffarabad, December 2009.
25. Author interview with Sardar Khalid Ibrahim, Islamabad, December 2010.
26. Author interview with Abdul Rasheed Turabi of Jamaat-i-Islami, Muzaffarabad, November 2010.

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- *My Kashmir: Conflict and the Prospects for Enduring Peace* (2008) by Wajahat Habibullah
- *Promoting Cross-LoC Trade in Kashmir* by Moeed Yusuf (Special Report, September 2009)
- *Tourism in the Developing World* by Martha Honey and Raymond Gilpin (Special Report, October 2009)
- *Making Borders Irrelevant in Kashmir* by P. R. Chari and Hasan Askari Rizvi (Special Report, September 2008)



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