

This is the balm Kashmir needs

The Centre's offer to suspend operations is a political outreach

The Centre has extended an olive branch to the Kashmiris by announcing the suspension of hostilities, albeit a conditional one, ahead of the holy month of Ramzan. Security forces have been asked not to launch any operations for the next thirty

days, although they have been told they can retaliate if attacked. The decision, announced by Home Minister

Rajnath Singh, should be welcomed and reciprocated. It is an important political outreach that comes at a time when the Valley has been caught in an endless cycle of killings.

Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mehbooba Mufti, whose Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) shares power with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), recently held an all-party meeting, out of which, the idea of such a suspension was born. She asked the Narendra Modi government to take a leaf out of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's book. Mr Vajpayee, who too headed an NDA government, in December 2000, announced a suspension. He was forced to call it off after a few months. This time around, the army was opposed to a suspension, as was the defence ministry.

The Centre, though, seems to have been convinced by the ground realities in the state. Young Kashmiris have been leaving the comfort of their classrooms to disappear into the mountains and resurface with guns. April alone saw 28 locals joining militancy. The number is the highest in any given month, since the killing of militant poster boy Burhan Wani in 2016.

The suspension will provide just the balm the wounded Valley needs. It will help change a narrative that has been dominated by the security forces and the army in particular. Army chief, General Bipin Rawat recently re-endorsed the hard line, indicating that security forces "don't enjoy" killing but that if anyone wants to "fight us then we will fight you with all our force". The Centre has clearly taken a political decision and announced a cessation of armed hostilities. The announcement also sets the context for Mr Modi, who is expected to visit the state later this week, to follow up and reach out to the people.

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