

**The Kashmir Times May 25, 1995**

**Burning of Charar-e-Sharief**

Dear Editor,

With conflicting stories being put out by the militants and the security forces with regard to the cause of the fire that burnt down the town of Charar-e-Sharief and the holy shrine it may be difficult to get at the truth but not impossible if the situation is properly analysed .

If the possibility of an accident is ruled out in view of the fact that the fire started a second time immediately after it was first put down, the needle of suspicion would undoubtedly point towards the militants. The militants were besieged and running out of ammunition if not rations. The only way out for them, other than surrender and acceptance of the humiliating safe passage offer, was to set fire to the town and try and escape under the confusion so caused. As a matter of fact, the Army's claim to the contrary notwithstanding, many of them do seem to have managed to escape through the cordon. The added advantage has been the impetus that this act has provided to their dying movement. Coming as it did soon after the militant leaders meeting with Pakistan's President at Delhi, one might even infer that the militants had sought and obtained the approval of their mentors before committing the heinous crime. Paradoxically the Mujahids are quite capable of so rationalising their acts as not to suffer any qualms with regard to such acts of sacrilege.

The security forces had all to lose by setting the shrine on fire. So why would they have done such a thing and invite trouble for themselves. Even small militant organisations in Srinagar admit that the security forces stand to lose by the act of burning down of the shrine, but they allege that the sacrilege was committed by the security forces not realising the consequences that would follow, This is rather hard to swallow.

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