

Cédric Gerbehaye

UNSTABLE LIFE

For his long-term project, *Kashmir. Wait & See*, the Belgian photographer focusses on the region of Kashmir, which has been divided between India and Pakistan since 1947. A visual essay that documents the resulting conflicts reflected in people's everyday lives.



Workers in front of graffiti naming Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani, who was killed in a clash with government forces in 2016, Srinagar, India



Protest in front of Jamia Masjid Mosque, held against local elections (below); in the shrine of Bulbul Shah. The Uyghur Sufi introduced Islam to the region in the 14th century; police officers ward off demonstrators in front of Jamia Masjid Mosque; during a curfew, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India (left, from top to bottom)



Sixteen-year-old Farzan Sheikh lost his eyesight after repeated pellet shots (below); funeral of Rayees Kachru, a Hizbul Mujahideen who was killed by government forces; boys playing cricket; fathers take their daughters to a healer to treat their trauma, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India (right, from top to bottom)





Entrance of the Makhdoom Sahib shrine, which is dedicated to Sufi saint Sheikh Hamza, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India



Hay harvesting in the Chipursan Valley, which leads to Afghanistan (below); Malaysian tourists in front of a tunnel built by China on the Karakorum Highway in the Hunza Valley; scene from a Shiite Muharram procession; at Attabad Lake along the Karakorum Highway, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan (left, from top to bottom)





A police officer's slingshot, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India; 90-year-old Khair Diti poses at the entrance to her house; 16-year-old Aqsa Ashgar sits next to a prosthetic leg, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan; a man injured by a glass marble, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, India (clockwise from top, above); Muhammad Adeel was shot by a sniper. He lost sight in his left eye and suffered a broken jaw, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan (left)



Mohammad Dagga's relatives gather around his body. He was killed by stones thrown by protesters after Indian security forces forced him to transport ballot boxes in his van on election day in Srinagar

CÉDRIC GERBEHAYE

The documentary photographer and film maker was born in Brussels in 1977, where he studied journalism. He has received numerous awards for his work, including the World Press Photo Award and the Olivier Rebbot Award from the Overseas Press Club of America among others. *Kashmir. Wait & See*, his latest book, was presented at the Visa pour l'image festival in September 2025.

Since 2017, and as part of his long-term project, *Kashmir. Wait & See*, Cédric Gerbehaye has repeatedly immersed himself in this region in the northern foothills of the Himalayas, with the support of the National Geographic Society. The area is widely recognised for its breathtaking high mountain nature, and for its rich cultural history with diverse religious sites and handicrafts such as wood carvings; but in many places around the world it is often associated exclusively with the production of the light, natural fibre produced from the cashmere goat, which is used for carpets, shawls and, above all, the coveted Kashmir knitwear. However, the burdens of everyday life for people in the region and mainly in Indian-administered Kashmir are far from soft and pleasant and are anything but comfortable to bear.

Agriculture is the most important form of livelihood. At the same time, everyday life is strongly influenced by the Kashmir conflict and the resulting militarisation. Ongoing tensions, regular escalations and sporadic military clashes, as well as human rights violations, are the order of the day and have been so for almost eight decades now. British colonial rule in India came to an end in 1947, at which point the country was divided into two nations based on religious affiliations: India (Hindus) and Pakistan (Muslims). The border, which was politically enforced by the United Nations, also split the region of Kashmir in the far north of the Himalayas, which in turn is divided between three countries.

The area is of strategic and religious importance and is one of the most disputed mountainous regions on the planet. The nuclear powers that are India, Pakistan and China, all make territorial demands: India sees the whole of Kashmir as part of its state. Pakistan demands that the region be part of its own territory and, as an important factor in its political

stance, has the support of the Kashmir Muslim population who are hoping for independence or accession to Pakistan. China is also active in the region, especially in Aksai Chin, an area in the east of Kashmir which it conquered from India after a border war in 1962. This long, on-going conflict has deep historic roots and is determined by various political, religious and geostrategic interests which directly or indirectly also affect the everyday lives of the inhabitants and produce serious humanitarian consequences. Over the decades, thousands of people have died, and many more are directly affected by the fighting, violence and displacement. In particular, the region's civilian population has suffered as a result of the military presence and the battles at the border. For decades, the people of Kashmir have been hoping for the referendum that was promised to them by India, Pakistan and the United Nations – a referendum in which they themselves would decide whether they want to join one of the two countries or establish an independent state.

“Along with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this is the oldest, unresolved international conflict since the creation of the United Nations. The difference is that this one receives the least media coverage,” Gerbehaye clarifies. As a photographer, he delved into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2002, making the situation there the subject of the final thesis for his Journalism studies at the Institut des Hautes Études des Communications Sociales in Brussels, which focussed on the politically failed Oslo Peace Process. He then worked in Africa and South America for National Geographic and on a long feature documentary film titled *La Peine* on a prison in Belgium.

In more recent years, Gerbehaye turned his attention to Kashmir. “I began researching the subject in 2016, reading whatever I could find in the press, a few books and university dissertations. I made several visits between 2017 and 2024. It was mainly through meeting local journalists

and photographers, some of whom were very young, that I was able to gain a better understanding of the reality and the issues at stake,” the photographer says, describing the beginnings of the series which has been published in his most recent book in September 2025. Even though this issue of LFI exclusively features classic reportage photographs, Gerbehaye presents his project *Kashmir. Wait & See* as a visual essay, enriched with reproductions of objects and memorabilia he found, such as historical family photographs, documents and magazine pages.

It takes some effort to travel to Pakistan. How did he manage to get to those places? “With time, commitment, sincerity and a little luck, as a documentary photographer you can get a little closer to what is happening in the regions that move you. Interest and love for people do the rest.” Using atmospherically charged images rich in contrast, Gerbehaye takes highlights from the everyday lives of the Kashmiri people who, since 1947, have been suffering in many different ways as a result of the separation caused by the so-called Line of Control (LoC). Indian-administered Kashmir is one of the most militarised territories of the world. This is due to the presence of an army that is considered an occupying force. There does not appear to be an end to the crisis in any foreseeable future. With the publication of the book, the photographer now considers that the project is complete. However, the conflicts in the region continue. And what might we wish for the people living there? The photographer's answer is brief but to the point: “the promised referendum”.

CARLA SUSANNE ERDMANN

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EQUIPMENT: Leica Q with Summilux 28 f/1.7 Asph; Leica SL2, Summilux-SL 50 f/1.4 Asph

CÉDRIC GERBEHAYE, *KASHMIR. WAIT & SEE*: 200 pages, 130 black and white images, 21 × 27.5 cm, French/English, Le Bec en l'air

Photos: © Cédric Gerbehaye, with the support of the National Geographic Society