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KASHMIR CALLING... BEYOND POLITICS

While the G-20 event delegates took home memories of a vibrant Kashmir, there are hiccups at home and around that need to be crossed to really discover this heaven



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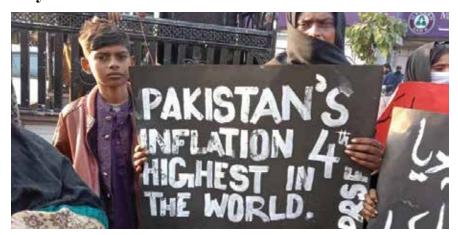
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THE CHAOS INTENSIFIES NEXT DOOR

Pakistanis are paying a huge price for maintaining a criminal silence over the unbridled powers its military enjoyed since its inception. Institutional and systemic crisis in that country could pose a potential threat to its very existence.



HOUGH Pakistan is not new to crisis, the major crisis with the very system crashing in that country is posing a sort of existential threat. This time around, the country's former Prime Minister has waged an unprecedented war against Pakistan's powerful army. Experts have warned that the political turmoil could aggravate the severe economic crisis and create an atmosphere of insecurity among people. It would appear that the nuclear-armed Pakistan is too big to fail. But the institution of army, for the first time, is facing such a large-scale civilian backlash there which could push the country towards a civil war. The army is doing every overt and covert thing to hold its grip; however, it seems only to be losing because its actions are bound to backfire. Running trials of civilians and being accused of fuelling unrest in military courts could only create hostility.

There is an opinion that this time around, Pakistanis are skeptical of the State, which could erode faith in the future. Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and his allies are hiding behind the powerful military which, in other words, would mean coup in de facto. It is now an open secret that the Pakistani army, as of now, is a divided house and that is why, the current Army Chief General Asim Munir may not opt for imposition of Martial Law; but it is clear that the army would certainly love to enjoy unbridled powers for the fact that the most unpopular government is in office. The judiciary is seen siding with Imran Khan's party. So, there is an institutional and systemic crisis which, observers fear, could pose a potential threat to the very existence of that country.

Irrespective of the net result of the current crisis, one could certainly draw a conclusion that Pakistanis are paying a huge price for maintaining a criminal silence over the unbridled powers its military enjoyed since its inception. Nonetheless, the Pakistani civil society is to be blamed for this existential threat to their country.

Bashir Assad

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THAT PARADIGM SHIFT...

by Mir Tanveer



The G-20 Tourism Working Group event concluded successfully at Srinagar. While delegates went home with beautiful memories, Kashmir has challenges to overcome to reach a space where its bounty can really be explored, beyond petty politics and selfish games.

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HE third G-20
Tourism Working
Group meeting
has just concluded
in Srinagar. The
three-day event began on May
22 (Monday).

On their arrival in Srinagar, the delegates of the G-20 Working Group were welcomed with a rousing reception.

Besides the core meetings of the event, it was hemmed in with side events on film tourism besides, of course, the delegates and the hosts enjoying a shikara ride at the Dal Lake and visiting the Nishat Gardens. In its true essence, the Srinagar Working Group event was all about showcasing the beauty of Kashmir, the mesmerising nature surrounding it and the rich cultural ethos.

ACCENTUATING THE VALLEY

This event was unique in many ways. Though the Srinagar event was the third for the Tourism Working Group, but it seemed that it wasn't just another event.

The efforts to project Kashmir in a big way showed throughout. The main event on May 23 was supposedly to discuss the Goa declaration of the Tourism Working Group but the UT administration was more vocal about bringing Kashmir into accentuated focus. There was apparently an understanding between the UT administration and the Sherpa@g20 Mr. Amitab Kant to have more about Kashmir on the table than discussing the Goa declaration. Amitab Kant and LG Manoj Sinha were on the same page throughout the event.



It was more than evident that New Delhi was very keenly monitoring the developments and one could observe that the central government was fully backing the UT administration and Sherpa @g20 to steal the show. It was Kashmir and Kashmir alone for two obvious reasons: one, to strengthen the narrative of peace; and two, to promote Kashmir as a worldclass tourist destination. These two are obviously intertwined. That is the reason why the **Tourism Working Group** meeting was Kashmir-centric. Even as Pakistan went all out to





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mobilise support of its friends among G-20 member states, convincing them not to be a part of the Srinagar event, the administration put everything at stake to make the event a grand success. Though China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia chose to stay away from the Srinagar event, the administration from Srinagar to Delhi downplayed their absence and meticulously brought the discourse of peaceful Kashmir on the table. Union Minister Jitendra Singh, while talking to media persons on the sidelines of the Tourism Working Group meeting, went one step ahead on China boycotting the Srinagar event. He said that it was China's loss, not India's.

ADVERSE TRAVEL ADVISORIES, STILL A CHALLENGE

Meanwhile, the delegates of the G-20 member states were engaged in indoor and outdoor activities in a way that they left with loving and fond memories of a hospitable Kashmir. That said, it remains to be seen whether the Jammu and Kashmir administration has achieved something as far as promoting Kashmir as a peaceful tourism destination, or not. Though LG Manoj Sinha, in his inaugural address to the Working Group meeting said, that J&K would soon find a place among the top 50 destinations in the world and on the travel bucket-list of global travellers, it was not immediately known whether or not the G-20 member states agreed to lift the adverse travel advisories and encourage their respective citizens to visit Jammu and Kashmir. It merits a mention here that Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing a swelling record of tourists since last couple of years. However, the number of foreign tourists visiting Kashmir, is dismal, owing to adverse travel advisories



of some western countries. Internally, the government has somehow pushed Pakistan's Kashmir narrative to the margins but it remains to be seen whether the Working Group meeting in Kashmir could help dispel the wrong notions internationally. As of now, it can safely be argued that the Tourism Working Group meeting in Srinagar was historic and the government had at least checkmated Pakistan strategically. Whatever the final recommendation of the Working Group to the G-20 ministerial group, New Delhi has achieved what it was out to achieve. It however, needs a lot of follow-up efforts to attract foreign tourists.

The new film policy of the UT administration has certainly set the ball rolling. Add to that, the modern infrastructure and ease of doing business,



and these would certainly help promoted Kashmir as favourite destination for shooting films and could attract high-end tourists. Tourism, as envisaged by LG Manoj Sinha, is embarking on an exciting journey here and could be an appropriate response to terrorism.

DOWN WITH THE DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN

The hiccups to Kashmir picking up on the tourism

graph as soon as desired, however, are beyond the geographical jurisdiction of the UT administration. There is a concerted consistent disinformation campaign about Kashmir unleashed by Pakistan globally. Manoj Sinha, or for that matter his successor, can only burn midnight oil to promote and project Kashmir as a peaceful tourist destination; but the disinformation campaign about Kashmir has to be countered with the same spirit and intensity on the foreign soil. The problem however,

has other dimensions too. There is a section of people within the country who have a different opinion. According to them, China and Turkey boycotting the Srinagar G-20 event is a "diplomatic disaster". For them G-20 was reduced to "G-18", thanks to the decision of holding the meeting in Srinagar. Then there are political commentators who describe the Srinagar G-20 meeting as providing a veneer of support to the facade of normalcy. Their narrative is based on the premise of prolonged



suspension of electoral democracy particularly. The inherent drawback of a democratic society, to my limited understanding, is the blame game that people indulge in for selfish interests, not realising the consequences. And to be honest, it is not just about one political party. The entire political class - on the right, left or centre -indulges in such games to score proxy points. There are a few sensitive, and more senseless ones across the political divide. The politics of the political class aside, a seasoned and a mature filmstar, Ram Charan, encapsulated the whole theme beautifully. Ram Charan said,



"It took 95 years for the Indian film industry to get recognition internationally and it will take 100 years to explore Kashmir which still remains untapped". Let some good sense prevail upon thinkers and politicians and let them help in exploring Kashmir. Politics can wait.



KNONA GOOD THING While Srinagar hosted the G-20 meet with great passion and purpose, our paids how and according to the state of the st

by Mian Tufail

While Srinagar hosted the G-20 meet with great passion and purpose, our neighbours and some of the mainstream parties missed the boat and failed to embrace the summit. KASHMIR CENTRAL | 21 MAY 2023



NDIA holds the pride of a year-long G-20 presidency after taking the baton from Indonesia • on December 1, 2022. And indeed, it's an opportune moment for the nation to showcase its policies and leadership roles to the rest of the world. This is India's opportunity to change the discourse of international affairs and align its national priorities with global aspirations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has termed this presidency as a proud moment for the 125 crore Indians by way of which it has assured the South Asian countries that India will remain their voice on the global arena.

The G-20 presidency has helped India to upgrade its think-tanks, infrastructure and social capital. It's a rare occasion which will see the country host 250 meetings across its length and breadth.

Srinagar, the summer capital of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, was chosen as the host city for the G-20 working group meeting on tourism. This city, hemmed in by the massive Himalayas, beautiful lakes, a serene and pleasant climate, with a huge potential in tourism, saw this as an opportunity to showcase its beauty to the whole world. Lieutenant Governor Manoi Sinha and his administration took up massive infrastructural work before the commencement of the meeting on May 22. And indeed, Srinagar wore a festive look with all the roads leading to the venue adorning modern

engineering designs and marvels.

But while Srinagar enjoyed hosting this event, there are some that have been reeling in apparent unhappiness over this moment of glory.

NEIGHBOUR'S ENVY?

It's no news that spoilsport
Pakistan tried hard to stop the
countries it is friendly with,
from visiting Srinagar, by
evoking the same old rhetoric
of dispute and human rights
violation. But this powerful
group of 20 countries, including
the European Union, without
really caring, thronged to the
Valley and enjoyed the three
days of the event with great

Meanwhile the people in J&K saw G-20 as an opportune moment to build the world class image of Jammu and Kashmir.

But there are those that did not participate with the same positivity and missed the boat.

MAINSTREAM PARTIES & THEIR LOST CHANCE

fervour.

Some of the mainstream political parties of Jammu and Kashmir didn't embrace the G-20 meeting as they should have. Most heads of the leading local parties criticised the LG administration and the Government of India for projecting the meeting as a sign of normalcy. While the event



was being prepared for and held, the spokespersons of these local parties remained busy in their studios, targeting & criticising the central government, the LG administration and the Smart City administration. Without acknowledging the benefits of hosting such a meeting, they indulged in politics by publishing pictures depicting security forces placed behind the posters of G-20.

Pertinently, after the abrogation of Article 370, no major tragedy has taken place in Jammu and Kashmir and nearly after four decades, an international event has taken place in the heart of Srinagar.

But look at those who projected an opposing view. Umesh Talashi, additional spokesperson, National Conference, blamed the government for portraying as if all were hunky dory in J&K which, as per him, is



new Congress government for their swearing-in ceremony.

Meanwhile, the Apni Party leader Altaf Bukhari, in a statement, welcomed the G-20 leaders and maintained that the event would help Kashmir to etch a pride of place on the global tourism map.

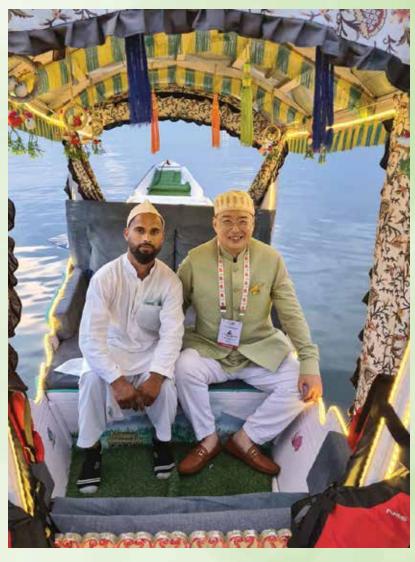
On the other hand, the sister of Omar Abdullah posted a picture on Twitter where a group of CRPF personnel could be seen hiding behind the poster of G-20. She wrote: "How to give an air of normality? Hide the forces behind screens".

Ridiculing and calling her tweet 'out of context', Mayor of

completely opposite from the reality. Said he, "If the G-20 event can happen in Kashmir, what obstructs the government from conducting elections in the UT? Actually the central government is aware that the people of the Union Territory aren't happy with the decision of downgrading of the state into a UT and that is why they fear defeat in both the regions".

Well, these local mainstream politicians need to understand that such an international event has no bearing on the local elections. By shying away from embracing the G-20 delegates, they placed themselves in a questionable stand and have missed an opportunity to do their bit for the welfare of the UT.

People's Democratic Party leaders too remained tightlipped while their leader was on a visit to Karnataka as a guest following an invitation by the



Srinagar Junaid Azim Mattoo turned the pages of history wherein the former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had invited singer Zubin Mehta for a concert in the city after the vicious bloodshed of 2010. Junaid said, "Apparently people are fishing for pictures of security pickets, mocking why they are aesthetically covered. Remember the Zubin Mehta concert at Shalimar? The civilian killing? Putting entire Srinagar under siege for a private opera for your friends and family? What hypocrisy".

A FEATHER IN SRINAGAR'S CAP

Pertinently, G-20 is a huge success in Srinagar and the administration made all the arrangements to make the event successful.



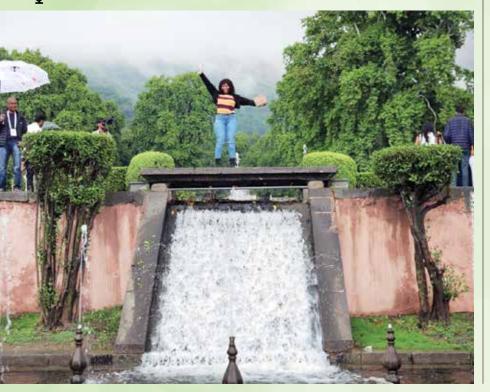
LG Manoj Sinha said, on the occasion: "J&K will soon find a place among the top 50 destinations in the world and on the travel bucket-list of global travellers. I would like to tell our guests that whenever they come to Kashmir next time, we would

like to host them and take them to Gulmarg".

Let it be mentioned here that the visit of the G-20 delegates to Gulmarg was cancelled due to logistic support and restricted time.

After the insurgency of the 1990s, tourism in Kashmir had witnessed a sharp dent and the place remained confined to the domestic tourists alone. The G-20 countries which form 60% of the global population, will help the region regain its lost glory and a new dawn of tourism and peace waits to rise in the Valley.

Nasir Ali Khan, chairman, Kashmir Road Safety Foundation, says: "J&K is exhibiting its market prospects, eco-tourism ventures and cultural assets to the leading global nations. There should be a positive impact on the tourism industry and trade sectors of the region".



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UPSC CODE CRACKERS: SMART WORK AND CONSISTENCY

by Mareaya Fayaz

It's celebration time for the Valley, thanks to the 16 candidates who've made it to the prestigious UPSC exam 2023. We talk to some of the achievers and also those who've yet to make it. There are precious lessons from both groups.



Manan Bhat, Srinagar

N a moment of pride and achievement, 16 candidates from Jammu and Kashmir have made their mark in the prestigious Union Public Service Commission Examination 2023.

The results, declared a few days back, brought joy and celebration to the region. It is good to see that so many youngsters from Jammu and Kashmir are opting for Centrebased exams. In the past few years, we have witnessed students moving to Delhi with the intention of joining coaching institutes to qualify these exams. What is even more heartening is that it's not just the young men, but young women too are getting out of their comfort zones to achieve more.

Wasim Ahmad Bhat from Dooru in Anantnag, Parsanjeet Kour from Poonch and Nittin Singh from Kathua have secured 7th, 11th and 32nd ranks, respectively.

Others who have qualified the UPSC are Naved Ashan Bhat from Sopore (84th rank), Ambika Raina (164th rank), Namneet Singh from R S Pura (191), Manan Bhat of Soura in Srinagar (231), Arjun Gupta from Trikuta Nagar, Jammu (228), Manil Bejotra from Bishnah in Jammu (314), Mohd Irfan from Thathar Bantalab in Jammu (476), Dwarka Gaadhi from Bishnah in Jammu (505), Anjeet Singh of Bhalesa in Doda (565), Abhinandan Singh from Nardi Bala, Akhnoor (749), Nivranshu Hans (811) Dr Iram Choudhary from Rajouri (852)



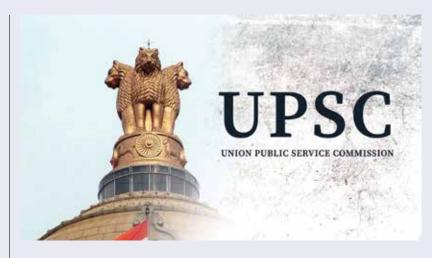
and Aadesh Basnotra (888).

Talking to KC, one of the qualifiers - Manan Bhat says: "It takes hard work and perseverance to prepare for this exam. I qualified the KAS (Kashmir Administrative Service) recently, but I did not get the desired field. So this time, I have not only qualified the IAS but I am sure to also get my desired field". He adds that preparing for this exam has not been an easy task. "I have been studying for the last four years and during the preparation, I have faced so many hardships. Also, I would be constantly inundated with negative thoughts but what I have realised is that consistent focus is the key. One has to keep one's sight on the goal and keep working. Consistency is the key".

Prasanjeet Kaur, who has secured the 11th rank in the exam, says that she too had secured the 34th rank in the recent Kashmir Administrative Service Exam but since she could not get an administrative post, so she decided to take the IAS to improve her rank. She didn't expect such a good rank though. She did not take any coaching. "I studied from books and online material. I would study for at least 8 to 10 hours every day, consistently. I have studied in Poonch all my life. I used to send my brother and father to Jammu to get me the material for preparation but I never took any coaching". What is her advice to those preparing for the exam? She hands out: "Work smart. Don't read too many books for one subject. Just take one good book of one particular subject and read it again and again till you clarify all the doubts. Read the syllabus, understand what it demands, check previous question papers and see what kind of questions

are asked in the examination, what do those questions demand and how to go about it. I will reiterate that if you are studying for UPSC, work with consistency".

Along with the success stories, are stories of those who have been preparing for the last four-five years, but haven't made it to the Civils and yet haven't given up hope. One such candidate is Jaasirah from Srinagar who is currently preparing for the IAS: "I took my coaching from Delhi. I have been preparing for this exam for the last three years and I am still working. This exam is tough and does take a lot of hard work and it sometimes takes a toll on your health too. Earlier, a candidate from Jammu and Kashmir could appear in the Civil Service Examination till the age of 37 but now the age limit is 32, which is very discouraging. Also, the UT's Civil Service Exam has a hectic recruitment



process which takes more than a year and a half. This too is very discouraging; these exams should be time bound".

Irfan Rahim from Pulwama has been preparing for this exam for the last five years. He says: "This is my last chance to appear in this exam. I am quite discouraged as I don't know if I will be able to crack it though I know I have studied well and worked hard. But sometimes you get in and sometimes you just don't. My advice to students preparing for civil

services is - work hard, but if you don't qualify, don't be hard on yourselves as there are many other career options one can choose from. One has to learn to persevere".

Also, this year, a history was created with the Union Public Service Commission. This year, the highest number of women ever was selected in the Indian Civil Services! Moreover, the top four ranks this year have been claimed by women. That's certainly heartening!



THAT PARADIGM

by Mir Tanveer

The community mobilisation programme in the government education system can be called a 'paradigm shift' in the educational policy! N any nation or country, the role of educational institutions in imparting knowledge among students is of prime importance and is instrumental in transforming the society.

As for our educational system, we need to build up efforts in

revolutionising the system so that the future students are well-armed with working knowledge necessary for the upcoming challenges in the academic field. Presently, our system of governance needs to focus on the educational system of our schools and connect it with other sectors. Education forms the bedrock of a society's development and transformation. That's what sets the future discourse of development in different fields of life. Without education, it would be impossible generate development and intelligence in

the society.

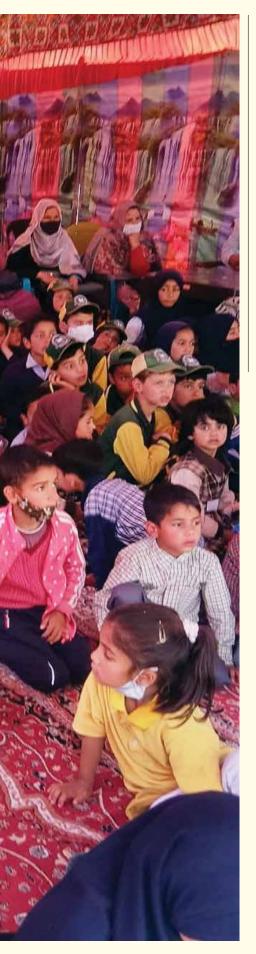
In the Kashmir valley, the administrative machinery has taken up the initiative -Samiksha Samigra Abhiyan -wherein government-run educational institutions have started a series of programmes regarding community mobilisation to bring awareness on education and its role in shaping the future of our children. As per this scheme, government-run educational institutions are organising different events at different institutions from primary to secondary level

in the education system to reach out to the community whose children are enrolled in these institutions. In all these institutions, students and parents are connected with these institutions' working and the parents participate in a well-coordinated and cooperative manner.

Community mobilisation is a process through which action is stimulated by a community itself or by others, and is planned, carried out and evaluated by a community or individual groups and organised on a participatory







and sustained basis to improve the health, hygiene and education level so as to enhance the growth of education and community mobilisation. It comprises activities like door-to-door outreach, public meetings, health fairs, participatory cultural programmes and activities. In all these efforts, the community comes closer as it works on varied common issues and also participates in the institution and its working.

Speaking in context of the programme, Zonal Educational Officer, MAGAM, Budgam zone says: "In this programme of community mobilisation in educational institutions of the Valley, the three essential components are of students, teachers and parents who need to work together in a collaborative way so that better results can be yielded from the targeted programme. All the three stakeholders are active partnership leaders in making the transformative change in the educational working of the schools at grassroots levels. The teachers selected as resource persons for the programmes need to work hard for effective programme management and research methodology so that the students can find all these initiatives worthy of attending".

Another education head says that all these initiatives are actually taken in order to bring about upliftment of educational institutions and of their role in imparting knowledge to students. He adds that teachers' role is of prime

importance as mass mobilisers and nation builders. "They need to work hard, need to be dedicated and committed to their profession and to teaching students at different levels of education. Their contribution in grooming and shaping the talents of students is of prime importance. Meanwhile, the students too need to show interest in different programmes and events organised by educational institutions in their academic working. They need to work dedicatedly on assignments given to them," he adds.

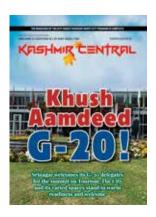
Parents and the civil society also need to offer a cooperative hand towards educational institutions and their working programmes so that the overall face of the educational system in the Valley can be brought on track. While interacting with parents whose children are enrolled with government institutions, this is what we heard them say: "These kind of initiatives bridge gaps between teachers and parents as these programmes provide us a chance to meet them as a community. Also, we are able to convey our grievances and problems about the institutions to the higher authorities. Since a majority of the parents whose children are enrolled, belong to the marginalised communities who don't have much interest in monitoring children's education on a regular basis, this programme provides them a chance to show interest in their children's education".

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