

THE YOUTH CENTRE WILL BE THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THE REGION AIMED AT INFUSING A CORPORATE CULTURE AND CONTRIBUTING EFFECTIVELY TO NATION-BUILDING.

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KASHMIR CENTRAL

Shine on, Our tomorrow

The Roshan Mustaqbil Youth Centre, an initiative of the Indian Army unit Zangli, Kupwara, is a clear step towards nurturing dreams and aspirations of the local youth. We take a look at the centre, ahead of its inauguration.



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KASHMIR CENTRAL



Editor -in -Chief

Bashir Ahmad Bhat
(Bashir Assad)

Editor

Ms. Balpreet

Roving Editor

Ms. Mareaya

Consulting Editor

Mr. Waheed Jeelani

Legal Advisor

Advocate G M Wani

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Email:

editor@kashmircentralin

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comments and
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THE MOVE TOWARDS THE NORMAL

The Government of India, for the first time, confirms that elections to the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly would be held before September 30 this year. Home Minister Amit Shah's recent statements stamp the return to normalcy and peace.



FOR the first time, the Government of India, in unambiguous terms, confirms that elections to the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly would be held before September 30 this year – a deadline set by the Supreme Court in its verdict on abrogation of Article 370 in December last year.

The assurance comes from the horse's mouth. Home Minister Amit Shah, in his first interview to a Jammu and Kashmir based local news channel, has given clear indications of the phased withdrawal of troops and AFSPA from Kashmir after this year's elections. He has made it clear that the Assembly elections in J&K would be held before September 2024. Shah has also reiterated in context of the removal of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) that, in contrast to the past when the Army and the central paramilitary forces were playing the lead role, the J&K police is now a trusted and competent organisation as it has been at the forefront of fighting terrorism.

He has asserted that terrorism is in its end stage and the authorities are now dismantling its ecosystem in Kashmir. While asserting that retrieving the PoJK was an agenda of his government and the same was a commitment and obligation of the Centre as per the Parliamentary resolution of 1994, Shah has said that the territories under Pakistan's occupation belong to India and the people of PoJK are "our brothers".

Bashir Assad

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Lighting our Path

by **Mian Tufail**

The Roshan Mustaqbil Youth Centre, an initiative of the Indian Army unit Zangli, Kupwara, promises to be a tall testament of empowerment and progress for the youth. We take a look at the centre, ahead of its inauguration.

IN the heart of Kupwara, a border district of Kashmir, there's a beacon of hope, shining bright for the region's youth.

Full of promise, there stands the Roshan Mustaqbil Youth Centre, an initiative of the Indian Army unit Zangli, Kupwara, a tall testament to empowerment and progress. This not a mere youth centre; it's a sanctuary that promises to be a space where dreams will find wings and aspirations will soar.

Founded with a noble objective to empower the youth, infuse corporate culture, and provide modern amenities, the Roshan Mustaqbil Youth Centre is more than just a physical space; it's a promise for a brighter future. Boasting a plethora of facilities - ranging from a library stocked with diverse books to spaces for studying, group discussions, and career counselling, this centre is designed to cater to every possible need of the



young minds it means to serve.

The inauguration of the youth centre will most probably take place on April 4, 2024 with the Core Commander of the Indian Army doing the honours. And following that,

the registration process will start with a minimal fee of Rs. 50. To put a foolproof security system in place, the registered youth will be issued ID cards to ensure marked entry and exit.

An official tells Kashmir Central that the centre would remain exclusive for the youth of the region and is in fact for the youth, of the youth, and by the youth. He further elucidates, "The youth centre will be the first of its kind in the region and will empower the youth to fulfill their dreams. The objective is to infuse in our youth a corporate culture with its modern amenities that should eventually contribute effectively to building the nation".

Embellished and neat with concrete cement walls and white window panes, the centre lends





an aesthetic view. The workers working on the entrance path are toiling hard to lend it an inviting look well in time for the inauguration. Inside the youth club, there is a registration desk adorned with famous titles of Bollywood movies. The ground floor houses an ICT lab, study hall, library, discussion set, and recording room. Walking through the corridors, one can feel the vibrant energy that already permeates every corner. The literary committee, with its shelves adorned with classics and contemporary works, promises to foster a love for reading and writing. It's a space where imagination can soar and words can weave magic.

The first floor offers a breathtaking ambience with

Khushwara Cafeteria and Gaming Zone. One corner of the cafeteria is meant to offer space to musicians and enthrall its audience. On the right of the snooker table, there is a four-level transition of Kashmir graphics depicting ancient lifestyle to the contemporary infrastructural development and evolution.

THE VISION: DECODING THE INTENT

The centre is a fierce endeavour to effect a change of mood, a sense of culture and an overall empowerment to the youth who encounter its essence. Here's decoding the force behind the vision of the centre:

Empowering the youth:

The primary objective of the Roshan Mustaqbil Youth Centre is to empower the youth of Kupwara by providing them with opportunities for holistic development. As per officials, the youth is the exclusive stakeholder of this initiative.

Infusing a corporate culture: With a focus on instilling corporate culture among the youth, the centre aims to equip them with the skills and mindset necessary for success in the professional world. The J&K youth lack avenues to excel in the corporate world, and this youth centre will cater to that space.

Modern amenities: The centre boasts modern amenities designed to cater to the diverse needs and interests of the



youth, ensuring a conducive environment for growth and learning.

Library: A treasure trove of knowledge awaits within the walls of the centre's library, housing a vast collection of books spanning various genres and subjects. From sufism to history, from competition-oriented books from the UPSC, NDA, JEE, NEET to fiction – students will find books on all kinds of subjects waiting for them, free of cost.

Study spaces: Dedicated areas for studying provide students with a quiet and conducive environment to focus on their academic pursuits. The Kupwara district, which doesn't exactly offer students a safe place to study and deliberate, will see that the wait has finally ended.

Cafeteria: A vibrant cafeteria offers a space for socialising and rejuvenation, where youth can unwind and connect over a cup of coffee or a quick snack. While reporting,

we witnessed that all the logistics and groceries have already been set up and the warm insides of the cafeteria are waiting to host the youth of Kupwara.

Group discussion areas: Spaces for group discussions encourage collaborative learning and idea exchange among peers. So such areas in the centre will provide space for the youth from diverse backgrounds to deliberate and discuss.

A career counselling room: Guidance and support for career choices are readily available at the centre's career counselling room aiming to help youth chart their paths towards a bright future. An official tells KC said that qualifiers from various backgrounds will be roped in to guide the youth here.

Montage of professions: An inspiring montage showcasing various professions serves as a reminder of the myriad opportunities awaiting the



ambitious youth of Kupwara. It will serve as the guiding light to the youth of Kupwara to cheer for their dreams.

An ICT lab: The state-of-the-art ICT Lab provides access to technology and digital resources, facilitating skill development in the digital age. It will also provide courses in software programming and advanced courses certified by NIELIT and NDSC. In the age of technology, the ICT Lab and the Software Computer Training Centre serve as hubs of innovation. Here, young minds are introduced to the wonders



of technology, coding, design, and digital skills that will shape the future.

Recording room: Aspiring musicians, content creators, influencers, and artists can unleash their creativity in the centre's recording room, fostering a vibrant culture of expression and talent. Those who struggle to purchase material from the market can use the recording room to nurture their skills.

Gaming zone and play station: And it's not all work and no play at Roshan Mustaqbil. The gaming zone



and play station provide moments of relaxation and camaraderie, fostering friendships that transcend boundaries.

YOUTH-LED GOVERNANCE

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The Roshan Mustaqbil Youth Centre operates on a unique model wherein the youth themselves take charge of its management and operations, with the Indian Army looking over. This youth-led approach ensures that the centre remains dynamic, responsive, and reflective of the needs and aspirations of its primary stakeholders.

Committees at the forefront: Here's how the committees mean to function:

Literary Committee: This committee will be responsible for organising literary events, book clubs, and writing workshops, fostering a love for literature and language among the youth.

Fine Arts Committee: From painting sessions to art exhibitions, this committee will nurture creativity and artistic expression among the youth, providing them with a platform to showcase their talent.

Outreach Committee: Charged with community engagement and outreach activities, this committee strives to create a positive impact beyond the walls of the centre, promoting social responsibility and civic engagement among the youth.





with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to pursue their dreams and aspirations. As the centre is on the verge of evolving and expanding its reach, it holds the promise of a brighter and more prosperous future for the youth of the region, laying the foundation for a generation of leaders, innovators, and change makers.

As we witness the sun set beyond the mountains, casting a golden hue across the Valley, the Roshan Mustaqbil Youth Centre feels ablaze with the final touches in the run-up to the inauguration. This centre is ready to be recognised as a testament to the resilience and spirit of the youth, who refuse to be defined by circumstances and choose, instead, to carve their own path.

In a world fraught with challenges and uncertainties, Roshan Mustaqbil stands as a



beacon of hope, illuminating the path towards a brighter tomorrow. As we said earlier, this is not just a youth centre; it's a symbol of possibility, empowerment, and the undying spirit of youth. And as long as its doors remain open, the flame of hope will continue to burn bright in the hearts of the youth of Kupwara.

Career Enhancement

Committee: With a focus on professional development and skill-building, this committee is tasked to organise workshops, seminars, and networking events to equip youth with the tools and knowledge necessary for success in their chosen careers.

IMPACT & FUTURE PROSPECTS

The Roshan Mustaqbil Youth Centre is sure to make strides in empowering the youth of Kupwara, equipping them



Blocking X: Did suppression ever help?

The Pakistan authorities have blocked X in Balochistan, curtailing the freedom of the press and the voice of dissent. Human rights organisations have called upon the authorities to reverse the decision. It's now to be seen what choice the authorities make, heavily influencing the future of democracy and human rights in the country.

by **Bashir Assad**

▼
In a move that threatens press freedom and stifles the voice of dissent, Pakistan authorities have blocked X (formally as X) in the restive province of Balochistan. The decision has sparked widespread condemnation from journalists, human rights activists, and international observers, who decry the suppression of free speech in the region.

The blockage of X comes as part of a broader pattern of repressive measures aimed at curbing journalists' ability to report freely and independently. Balochistan, Pakistan's largest but least populous province, has long been a hotbed of insurgency and unrest, with allegations of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Pakistani military.

The autocratic history of the Pakistan army in curbing social media in Balochistan dates back

to several years. The province has often been subject to internet shutdowns and censorship, with authorities citing national security concerns. However, critics argue that such measures are primarily aimed at silencing dissent and preventing the dissemination of information about human rights violations committed by the Pakistani military.

The decision to block X in Balochistan has drawn comparisons to similar actions taken by authoritarian regimes around the world to suppress dissent and control the flow of information. It reflects a worrying trend towards greater censorship and restrictions on freedom of expression in Pakistan, particularly in regions like Balochistan where the government control is tenuous.

The situation in Balochistan is compounded by the lack of

transparency and accountability within the Pakistani military. The army has a long history of involvement in politics and governance, often at the expense of democratic institutions and civil liberties. Its heavy-handed approach in dealing with dissent in Balochistan has only exacerbated tensions and fuelled grievances among the local population.

Human rights organisations have called on Pakistan authorities to immediately reverse the decision to block X in Balochistan and uphold the principles of press freedom and freedom of expression. They argue that such measures not only violate international human rights standards but also undermine efforts to address the root causes of conflict and instability in the region.

The decision to block X in Balochistan is not an isolated



incident but rather part of a broader crackdown on freedom of expression in Pakistan. According to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), there were over 1,000 instances of internet shutdowns in the country between 2012 and 2023. These shutdowns often coincided with political protests, military operations, or other events deemed sensitive by the authorities.

In Balochistan specifically, the internet shutdowns have been particularly frequent and prolonged. According to data from Access Now, an international advocacy group, Balochistan experienced over 100 internet shutdowns in 2023 alone, lasting a total of more than 500 days. These shutdowns not only disrupt communication and access to information but also have severe economic consequences for the region, which already faces high levels of poverty and underdevelopment.

The targeting of social media platforms like X is especially concerning given their role as a lifeline for journalists and activists operating in regions with limited media freedom. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Pakistan ranks among the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, with at least 32 journalists killed in targeted attacks since 2010. The blocking of X further restricts the ability of journalists to report on sensitive issues and hold those in power, accountable.

Moreover, the decision to block X in Balochistan



exacerbates existing inequalities in access to information and digital rights. According to the Digital Rights Foundation, an advocacy group based in Pakistan, internet penetration

in Balochistan is significantly lower than the national average, with only 12% of the population having access to the internet. By depriving the people of Balochistan of access





profound implications for the future of democracy and human rights in the country.

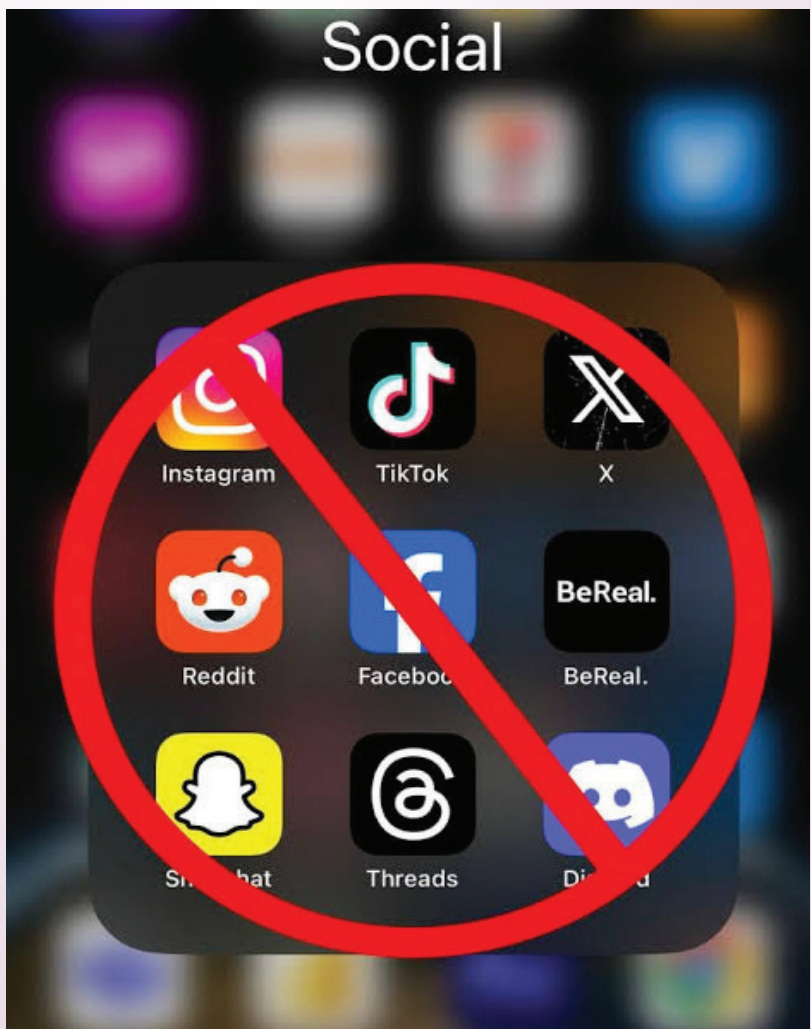
As the world watches, the fate of press freedom in Balochistan hangs in the balance. Pakistan authorities must heed to the calls for accountability and transparency, and take

immediate steps to restore access to X and other social media platforms in the region. Failure to do so will not only jeopardise the rights of journalists and activists but also risk fuelling further unrest and instability in this volatile region.

to social media platforms like X, the authorities are further marginalising the already marginalised communities and stifling their voices.

In the light of these statistics and the broader context of repression in Balochistan, the decision to block X appears to be a blatant attempt by the authorities to silence dissent and control the flow of information. It not only violates the rights of journalists and activists but also undermines efforts to address the root causes of conflict and instability in the region.

As pressure mounts on Pakistan to reverse this repressive measure, the fate of press freedom in Balochistan hangs in the balance, with



That time of choice

The administration of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir gears up for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Huge voter turnout is expected even as political parties mobilise support. We sit upon that crucial time of choice.

by **Waheed Jeelani**

THE Union Territory (UT) of Jammu & Kashmir is once again at the centre stage of political activity as the administration braces itself for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. With expectations of a massive voter turnout and political parties gearing up for an intense



electoral battle, the political landscape of the region is abuzz with anticipation and fervour. We delve into the preparations being made by the administration, the aspirations of the electorate, and the strategies adopted by various political entities vying for power in this crucial region.

THE ADMINISTRATION PREPARES

In the wake of the upcoming elections, the administration of Jammu & Kashmir UT has embarked upon a comprehensive plan to ensure smooth conduct and maximum participation. From bolstering security arrangements to enhancing infrastructure for polling stations, the administration is leaving no stone unturned to facilitate a fair and transparent electoral process. A special emphasis is being laid on areas that have historically witnessed low voter turnout, with initiatives such as voter awareness campaigns



and facilitation drives being undertaken to encourage participation.

Moreover, stringent measures are being implemented to maintain law and order, ensuring the safety of voters and candidates alike. With the deployment of security personnel and a heightened surveillance, the administration aims to create a conducive environment for democratic expression, free from any external coercion or intimidation.

ANTICIPATING HUGE TURNOUT

One of the most significant aspects of the upcoming elections in Jammu & Kashmir UT is the anticipation of a massive voter turnout. Despite the challenges posed by the region's complex geopolitical dynamics, there is a palpable sense of enthusiasm among the electorate. The desire to shape the future trajectory of the region through the democratic



process has reignited hope and optimism among the people.

Several factors contribute to the expectation of a high voter turnout. The recent restoration of statehood status, coupled with promises of development and empowerment, has galvanised public interest in the electoral process. Additionally, the widespread dissemination of information and awareness campaigns has empowered citizens to exercise their franchise responsibly, recognising its significance in shaping their destinies.

Furthermore, the disenchantment with past governance and aspirations



for a better future have fuelled a sense of civic duty among the populace, transcending barriers of region, religion, and ethnicity. This collective yearning for change and

progress is likely to translate into a robust turnout on the polling day, underscoring the resilience of democratic ideals in the face of adversity.



POLITICAL PARTIES ON ROLL

As the electoral battleground heats up, political parties in Jammu & Kashmir UT are intensifying their efforts to woo voters and secure electoral victories. From grassroots mobilisation to high-profile rallies, parties across the ideological spectrum are leaving no stone unturned to garner support and consolidate their voter base.

The mainstream political parties, including the National Conference (NC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP),



Jammu & Kashmir Apni Party (JKAP), Democratic Azad Party, Congress and other parties are striving to reclaim their political relevance after a period of tumult and uncertainty. Each party is articulating its vision for the region, emphasising issues such as development, peace, and autonomy, to resonate with the aspirations of the electorate.

Simultaneously, new entrants and independent candidates are seeking to challenge the traditional political hegemony, promising fresh perspectives and alternative governance models. The proliferation of social media platforms has emerged as a crucial tool for political outreach, enabling parties to engage with voters directly and amplify their campaign messages.

Amidst this electoral fervour, ideological fault lines and regional dynamics continue to shape the political discourse.

The fault lines between the Jammu and Kashmir regions, as well as the diverse ethnic and religious communities, add layers of complexity to the electoral landscape. Parties are strategically aligning themselves with specific constituencies and issues, leveraging identity politics and local grievances to mobilise support.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

While the anticipation of a massive voter turnout bodes well for the democratic process in Jammu & Kashmir UT, it also presents unique challenges for the administration and political stakeholders. Ensuring the security and integrity of the electoral process amidst heightened tensions and security threats, remains of paramount concern. Moreover, addressing the aspirations and grievances of diverse



POLL SEAS



THE CARD

communities while fostering inclusivity and reconciliation, is essential for long-term stability and progress.

However, amidst these challenges lie immense opportunities for transformative change and democratic

consolidation. The forthcoming elections offer a platform for the people of Jammu & Kashmir to assert their agency and shape the course of their collective future. By participating actively in the electoral process, citizens can reaffirm their commitment

to democratic principles and pave the way for a more inclusive and prosperous society.

As Jammu & Kashmir UT braces itself for upcoming elections, the convergence of administrative preparedness,



PERSON IS ON S IN J&K



public enthusiasm, and political mobilisation heralds a new chapter in the region's political landscape. With expectations of a massive voter turnout and political parties on the roll, the stage is set for a

vibrant and fiercely contested electoral battle. The outcome of these elections will not only determine the composition of the legislative assembly but also shape the trajectory of governance and development

in the region for years to come. In this crucible of democracy, the aspirations of the people of Jammu & Kashmir will find expression, reaffirming the resilience of democratic ideals in the face of adversity.

IT'S BLOOM TIME

With the Tulip Garden being thrown open, it's time for the tourism season to pick in Kashmir. Here's glimpsing the ever-increasing options in tourism here and how they can really boost the economic status of our people besides bringing us a happy change from the lives we have lead across the last few decades.

by **Sheikh Abid**

“Wande cxali, sheen gali, beyi yii bahaar”...

(Winter will flee, snow will melt... Spring shall return again).

▼
With the ending of harsh chilly winters in Kashmir, Spring has, yet again, knocked at the doors of the misty aired Valley, bringing us a new hope and an aura of blissful beginnings.

A Spring and without tulips here? Impossible! Particularly, when we are a proud host to Asia's largest Tulip garden. Situated in the lap of tall standing Zabarwan range on one side and majestic Dal Lake on the other, the Indira Gandhi

Memorial Tulip Garden and Siraj Bagh was thrown open to the public last Saturday.

And with the garden being open now, there is a hope that we are set to witness yet another record breaking tourist inflow to our breathtaking valley, as we witnessed in 2023. According to official figures, Jammu & Kashmir while surpassing all previous records since independence, saw more than 2.11 crore tourists come in, marking a significant milestone in its tourism trajectory.

Well as per officials, the garden this year will see 17 lakh varied varieties of tulips bloom with five new red, yellow and pink flower varieties with alternate early and late blooming flower bulbs giving an extra blooming time benefit to tourists coming to garden.

TAPPING THE POTENTIAL

▼
Indeed the administration's efforts in context of tourism have accelerated manifold over the last few years. The government has been operating a new tourism policy which has indeed yielded results as is evident from the numbers. The Department Of Tourism has identified around 300 new unexplored tourist sites in Jammu and Kashmir among which 75 new sufi/religious sites, 75 new cultural and heritage sites and 75 new tracks are included. Moreover, focus on improving the existing tourist infrastructure and creating infrastructure at 75 new tourist destinations is also being executed along the plan.



Having said that, a lot needs to be done to explore the full tourism potential of the Valley. There still are a number of amazing places yet undiscovered and unexplored. We watched happily when authorities lifted the ban on border tourism and opened the ways to areas like Keran, Teetwal, Uri, Gurez etc. And indeed, a huge influx of tourists, ranging from local to national to international, thronged these places in lakhs. Keran alone witnessed more than 1 lakh tourists visiting in 2023, the highest ever in history. Similarly, Gurez saw over 35,000 adventure lovers last year. Along these, other places like Lolab, Tanghdar, Machil and Bangus valley, which had been silently hidden and unexplored for years, are now coming into the limelight fast.

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that





Kashmir has a tourist spot hidden every here and there. Almost all the districts of the Valley nestle a number of unexplored jewels. It is high time for us to shift our focus from Gulmarg and Pahalgam and start exploring and enjoying new places. Places like Warwan valley, Naranag, Tosamaidan, Gogaldara, Yousmarg, Nilnag deserve to be known and appreciated. Then there are adventurous trekking sites like Badi Bahek, D K Marg, Tarsar Marsar, Gangbal, Vishnugar, Krishnagar, Gadsar etc... all these need to be brought into focus.

Among the attempts to

uphold tourism in such far-flung areas, recently, the district administration of Ganderbal has circulated a public notice asking the general public about the unexplored and unseen places in their district which as per them have a potential for tourism. Residents from a particular area can easily pitch their ideas to the district administration about places with tourist potential, which can eventually pave way for creating a source of employment for the local population. A similar idea can be replicated across all districts.

An official from the district administration of Ganderbal shares with KC: "The idea was to explore new potentially rich tourist destinations in Ganderbal and surprisingly, we have received a good response from people. We are now filtering and inspecting the places and soon you will see some new tourist places in the district".

EXPLORING THE OPTIONS

The tourism in J&K offers a wide array of options. The delightful backwaters, hill stations and the landscape make J&K a beautiful tourist destination. Historical monuments, forts, places of religious importance, hill resorts, etc. add to the grandeur of the UT as it attract tourists from all over the world.

We have a huge potential in various tourism beats be it cultural tourism, religious tourism, adventure tourism

or medical tourism. All these areas could be fully explored. We are one of the rarest places with such an amazing historical cross-cultural and ethnic synchronisation and a lesson in religious tolerance and co-existence. Our history is rich and diversified. We have witnessed Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam along different phases of our times. You would witness a Buddhist site where the 4th Buddhist Council was held and a Hindu Sun temple of Lord Vishnu, and a Catholic church along with a number of Islamic Sufi shrines spread across lengths and breadths of the Valley. This peaceful co-existence is testimony to our secular peace-loving historical records which, despite witnessing the deadliest blow of conflict laden bloodshed, still stand tall and intact.

As a part of a strategic move to diversify its tourism offerings, the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) government is setting its sights on unlocking the untapped potential of cultural and eco-tourism.

The government's latest vision document outlines a comprehensive plan to develop new types of tourism experiences, including adventure tourism, heritage tourism, and cultural tourism.

According to the report, the focus is on providing personalised services, creating unique destination experiences, exploring unusual venues, developing new products, promoting eco-

friendly destinations, offering economical services, and leveraging online marketing strategies.

Moreover, this plays a key role in fostering cross-cultural exchanges between different societies. It facilitates the learning of different languages, lifestyles, and traditions, providing opportunities to adopt and appreciate the qualities of different cultures.

According to the estimates from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in 2011, tourism generates around 270.7 million jobs globally and

accounts for over 10% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It also plays key role in cross-cultural exchange of the two cultures.

Therefore in a place like Kashmir that has witnessed an indefinite era of bloodshed and terrorism, tourism can offer a healing touch to the bruised wounds of its people. We have seen enough of the purposeless hartaals and stilling of the public systems, results of which are evident to all of us. Now we deserve a sigh of relief, we deserve to live a happy and peaceful life like the rest of the

people across the globe. We have known enough restless nights and economic distress. Now we too want to earn good money and feed well our families. Nature has gifted us enormous amounts of natural resources along with breathtaking beauty. A sustainable and environment friendly tourism can be a game changer. Let us hope that our fortunes will favour us this time too and we would witness an ever increasing footfall of both national and international tourists this year that we can host with love and warmth.



A SESSION TO SUIT

27

KASHMIR CENTRAL | 1 APRIL 2024

Though there has been attempted a uniform academic calendar in the schools in Kashmir and Jammu divisions this year, things have not been so uncomplicated. We analyse the issue.

by Mareaya Fayaz



THE academic session of schools in the Kashmir division and winter zone areas of Jammu division were altered and run as per the uniform calendar this year. And this has met a mixed response, triggering a debate if there should be a uniform calendar or should there be March or November sessions as per the weather conditions in particular areas.

Notably, Jammu and Kashmir had conducted the March session until 1974-75. The practice was altered after 1975.

Undoubtedly, ensuring consistency in the academic calendar is imperative, considering the diverse facets of education; however, there exist additional dimensions to this matter that are not extensively discussed.

A significant number of scholars had initially expressed their disagreement with the government's choice to move the session to March, while other vested parties supported this decision. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the group of students, who constitute the primary stakeholders of the School Education Department (SED), were not consulted. Consequently, the adjustment in the session timeline may lead to practical challenges that could hinder the seamless execution of the March examination session in J&K.

In the historical context, it has been observed that the winter season may extend until

the conclusion of March or even April due to unexpected snowfall occurrences, leading to frequent delays in conducting examinations by the JK Board in Kashmir and the winter regions of Jammu. Conversely, the summer regions of Jammu do not face similar uncertainties related to weather conditions. The coordination of a uniform examination schedule for the summer regions of Jammu and Kashmir presents a notable challenge, as the likelihood of exam postponements due to adverse weather conditions in Kashmir remains unpredictable, in contrast to the more stable conditions in Jammu. This issue raises significant concerns among students hailing from Kashmir.

In addition to the administration of exams, concerns exist regarding the possibility that moving the

academic session to March could lead to a decrease in the number of school days due to the extended winter period experienced in the Valley. The region of Kashmir frequently encounters an early arrival of winter, which persists until the conclusion of March. Consequently, under such climatic circumstances, the school days in the Valley may diminish, consequently impacting the amount of time available for the introduction of new educational content.

The March timetable provides students with approximately one month to ready themselves for entrance assessments. NEET occurs in May, while the initial JEE takes place in February. Consequently, students must decide between forgoing the first JEE and participating (if eligible) in the competitive evaluation while engrossed in exam





preparation. It is indisputable that students in other regions encounter challenges, albeit within a distinct context. The March timetable has been established there since the beginning, allowing students to strategise accordingly. Conversely, the November timetable affords ample time, particularly during the colder months. In addition to gearing up for competitive assessments,

students have the opportunity to engage in educational excursions, an integral component of the academic curriculum.

By implementing a Uniform Academic Calendar, the current focus should be directed towards enhancing the academic environment in all government schools. This initiative has the potential to positively impact a large number of students, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds. Many parents opt to enrol their children in private schools due to concerns about the quality of education and facilities in government schools. However, in the recent years, government schools have made significant progress in rebuilding their reputation by improving school infrastructure, such as renovating buildings, constructing boundary walls, and ensuring electrification. Consequently, these schools have seen a rise in student achievement, with many students making notable contributions in various areas of the society. It is imperative

that teachers in government schools continue to work with the same level of dedication and passion. Their efforts are crucial in bringing about a substantial transformation in the education sector. The invaluable role of teachers in uplifting the educational system cannot be underestimated. They serve as guiding lights, steering the next generation towards a brighter future and ultimately contributing to the development of a strong nation. The acceptance and support for the Uniform Academic Calendar reflect the positive mindset of those who are instrumental in shaping the nation's future. A heartening sight observed in schools is teachers offering treats and encouragement to new students in March. Therefore, the public should view this initiative not as an added burden on students but as a remedy that offers numerous advantages. As builders of the nation, teachers have previously demonstrated their ability to inspire and lead their students towards the right path.

Considering all the advantages and disadvantages of implementing a strict March session and establishing a standardised academic calendar, it is imperative to ensure that the primary goal of both stakeholders and the government, which is to provide every student with an equal chance to strive for a brighter future, is not overlooked. It is crucial to recognise that while a standardised academic calendar unites all regions, it may also



result in the isolation of students residing in remote areas that are disconnected from the main regions for approximately six months due to severe winter conditions. The schools in Kashmir were scheduled to commence classes on March 1; however, this was postponed to March 4 due to adverse weather conditions. It is common to observe that examinations are frequently delayed in Kashmir and certain areas of the Jammu division due to inclement weather.

WHAT SAY THE STUDENTS & TEACHERS

Consequently, there is a significant demand from both students and faculty members for greater flexibility in the March session.

Abroo, a student from Baderwah, says that “owing to severe winter conditions leading to extensive snowfall and disruptions in traffic flow on the highways, various regions experience isolation during harsh winters. The academic calendar in the Jammu region aligns with the national schedule, unlike Kashmir, which adopts a distinct calendar mainly due to the extreme winter conditions. In Kashmir, students undertake their final examinations in October, commencing the new academic session in November, followed by a lengthy winter break spanning three months. Subsequently, schools reopen in

February or sometimes in April, while educational institutions in remote areas such as Gurez, Machil, Tanghdar, and Keran resume activities in May. These mountainous terrains in Kashmir encounter isolation for approximately half a year due to heavy snowfall. Additionally, Baderwah witnesses substantial snowfall, accompanied by harsh cold temperatures, prompting individuals to relocate to Jammu for educational purposes and coaching during the coldest months. However, this practice is no longer feasible. It is evident that students residing in frontier regions express discontent towards the revised academic calendar, attributing their dissatisfaction to the challenging climatic and topographical conditions. Moreover, certain areas in the higher altitudes of Pir-Panchal continue to experience precipitation until mid-April”.

Tariq, a teacher from Sopore says: “The change in the academic calendar is a welcome step towards bringing unity among students and gives them

enough time to prepare for the exams at home. The winter break can be fully utilised by the students to prepare for the upcoming exams and they can prepare well since people hardly leave home during the three coldest months. This time should be utilised by students in a good way and the March session will help in that”.

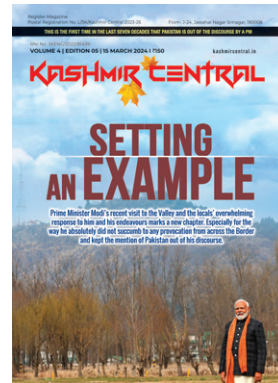
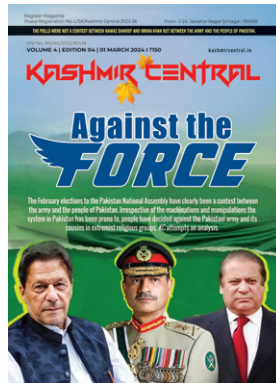
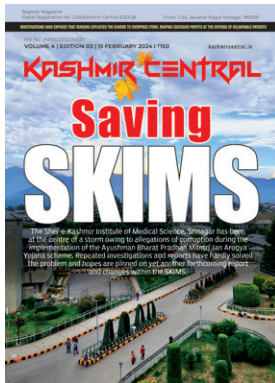
Another teacher, Fazil Mushtaq, says: “Teachers and students will definitely take some time to get used to the change in the academic calendar but we should consider that the goal is to make things better for our students. So a little flexibility might be the way to go”.



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