

SRINAGAR WELCOMES DELEGATES FOR WORLD CRAFT COUNCIL

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# KASHMIR CENTRAL

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**KASHMIR CENTRAL**



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# CONCERNS TO ADDRESS AS KASHMIR GEARS UP FOR WINTER TOURISM

**K**ashmir is emerging fast as an all-weather tourist destination on the world tourist map. The newly elected Jammu and Kashmir government headed by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah should urgently list his government's priorities and work towards attracting foreign tourists and sports community for joyful winter games in Kashmir.

During the last three years, Kashmir's tourism sector has boomed. The number of tourists visiting Kashmir has swelled with each passing season. The number of foreign and domestic tourists has grown. Event tourism has significantly flourished over the last three years. Away from public glare, Kashmir has played host to many national and international events, and a high number of destination weddings.

Event tourism has crafted unforgettable experiences for global participants, and their feedback to their respective nations has led to easing of travel restrictions.

Kashmir's picturesque and spectacularly beautiful valleys and meadows attract tourists from across the world. Event tourism and winter sports tourism are commercially and diplomatically a win-win deal for Kashmir, and for the nation. These are sustainable tourism activities which the government should prioritize for the benefit of the public.

Kashmir's infrastructure has seen significant improvement. Robust development of tourism-related infrastructure has majorly helped the sector. High-end tourism facilities have exponentially improved. These initiatives have been hugely welcomed by all stakeholders.

Adequate power availability is equally crucial for sustainable tourism activity during winters. Electricity remains the core concern for commercial activities. Jammu and Kashmir faces severe power shortages during winter. Serious efforts are urgently required to address the crisis.

It is hoped that the government will take both immediate and long-term measures to address these concerns. The tourism department should finalize the calendar for winter sports activities with the active participation of the stakeholders to ensure optimum benefits for all sectors.

**Bashir Assad**

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# Clear And Present Danger

@ Umar Ganie

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The current phase of Kashmir terrorism could be more encompassing and highly damaging from security perspective.

by Bashir Assad

The Himalayan region of Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing a gradual and what could be termed as a meticulously planned hike in militancy activities, heightening concerns among the security agencies and policy planners.

The theatre, as envisaged by this scribe in earlier editions of the Kashmir Central, is gradually expanding, signalling a dramatic turn of events in the foreseeable future. The surge in militant attacks in Kashmir valley since last one month and the continued assaults by highly trained terrorists in Jammu region represent a significant shift from the tactics used earlier. The frequency of terrorist strikes, involving precision and meticulous strategic planning, poses unprecedented challenges to the security managers.

### Hardcore Terrorists, Technological Sophistication

As elaborated in our earlier edition, this is completely a new phase of terrorism with two significant distinctions from the past phases. One, technological sophistication and high-tech weaponry including use of US made M4 assault rifles and steel-cased bullets. Second, highly trained hardcore terrorists.

The terrorist attacks have never been so intense and damaging. The attacks in the last one year or so in densely forested rugged terrains of Jammu region followed by same swiftness in south and north Kashmir inflicted heavy casualties on the security forces.

I have been constantly maintaining that the current



phase of Kashmir terrorism could be more encompassing and highly damaging at least from a security perspective. There is a clear pattern, militant strikes are abrupt and surprising. Strategy is not to come down to the plains but instead engage the security forces in high altitudes with difficult terrains.

The same game plan seems to be in vogue in Kashmir valley now. It is very clear now that terrorists pursue a well-thought-out strategy - occasionally come down, hit the target and move back to the forested areas. Their objective seems to be to provoke the army and security forces to chase, and then they strike back from an advantageous position. This is

what we are witnessing in the mountainous areas of Jammu region, and this is precisely how the terrorists have started operating in Kashmir division. Given the rigorous training of survival in extreme climatic conditions, it is very unlikely that the terrorists who have infiltrated and are roaming in hilly terrains both in Jammu and Kashmir regions would come down to the plains during the





Shah Junaid

## Higher Number of Foreign Terrorists

The number of terrorists has swelled much beyond what the official figures suggest. According to police sources, the number of foreign terrorists in North Kashmir's Kupwara, Baramulla and Bandipora districts alone could be more than 60 while the number of terrorists roaming in Central Kashmir's mountains could be more than 20.

South Kashmir's Shopian, Kulgam and Anantnag higher reaches serve as transit routes, and hence there is no specific information regarding the static number of terrorists in the area. Higher the number of terrorist has swelled much beyond what the official figures suggest. According to police sources, the number of

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South Kashmir's Shopian, Kulgam and Anantnag higher reaches serve as transit routes, and hence there is no specific information regarding the static number of terrorists in the area. Higher reaches of Shopian and Kulgam are used as a passage to and from Poonch, Rajouri and Reasi. Anantnag's Shangus and Kokernag forests connect Kashmir with Kishtwar, Doda and further to Kathua district bordering Pakistan. sources, these terrorists are good at indoctrinating local youths.

This new phase of terrorism is marked by technological sophistication and high-tech weaponry, and highly trained hardcore terrorists.

## Higher Number of Local Militants

Coming to the home-grown militants, the number has significantly gone up during the last two years. There are no concrete official figures regarding the exact number of the locals joining the armed militant groups.

Handlers from across the border are managing the local militants with utmost care, in order to ensure that they are not exposed or made vulnerable to detection by security forces. Online recruitment is meticulously planned using end to end encrypted

applications, making it very difficult for the security and intelligence agencies to track them down. It seems to be a part of the strategy that militants - both foreign and local recruits - have been asked to keep a low profile. The idea is to swell the number of local recruits without coming into the radar of the security and intelligence agencies.

It seems to be a part of the strategy that militants - both foreign and local recruits - have been asked to keep a low profile so that they stay below the radar of the security agencies.

## Zero Impact on Public Life

In this new phase of terrorism in Kashmir, what marks a complete shift from the past is the complete lack of impact on public life. The new phase of terrorism is missing in public discourse in Kashmir. People are busy with their day-to-day activities. The businesses, education, horticulture and host of other activities are going on uninterrupted. There is almost a disconnect from the activities of the terrorists. It is difficult to come by anybody indulging in discussions or debates about the resurgence of militancy.

This is a very huge transformation. It seems that there is a resilience among people not to get bogged down by the renewed burst of terrorism. Armed forces are vigilant and take care that there should not be any collateral damages during encounters. It is evident that public opinion does not favour resurgence of terrorism in Kashmir.





# Decoding The 'Foreign' Terrorists

There is a popular perception, particularly among the defence and strategic experts, that the terrorists who have infiltrated into Jammu and Kashmir through various points from Line of Control to International border are mostly war veterans who have returned from Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from that country.

Experts argue that from the use of highly sophisticated weapons like US made M4 assault rifle and steel-cased bullets by the terrorists in recent attacks on security forces particularly in Jammu region, it is clear that terrorists who have infiltrated are Afghan war veterans. Security agencies

also claim that there are regular Pakistan army personnel fighting alongside the foreign terrorists. However, there is one more category of foreign terrorists. These are children of Kashmiris who had gone to Pakistan during the years of high militancy and settled down in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK).

Let us examine the numbers of foreign militants who were killed in Kashmir in the last few weeks.

Seven militants including five foreigners were killed in the first week of November in Kashmir valley. Two militants were killed in the Sopore encounter. Two local militants were killed in Shangus, Anantnag. A foreign LeT terrorist

commander was killed in Srinagar's Khanyar area, and a foreign terrorist was killed in Bandipora forests. Another foreign terrorist was killed during an encounter in Lolab forest.

The terrorists killed in any shootout are designated as foreign terrorists if the police and security agencies cannot ascertain their identity locally. According to a senior police officer, "foreigners" does not essentially mean that they have come from Afghanistan or other nations. "We usually use the word "foreigner" for all those who have infiltrated from Pakistan through LoC or the internal border to our side," said the police officer.





## Second Generation Terrorists Being Pushed Into Kashmir

The senior cop said that we ignore the fact that in the 1990s, a large number of men from Poonch, Rajouri, Kupwara, Bandipora and other places in Jammu and Kashmir went to the other side of Kashmir, which is occupied by Pakistan. These men were either active militants and exfiltrated to escape the Indian security forces or were militant sympathisers and went for arms training. Most of them did not return. They married local girls and settled in POK and have families now.

All those who have settled in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir or came to Pakistan from any of the

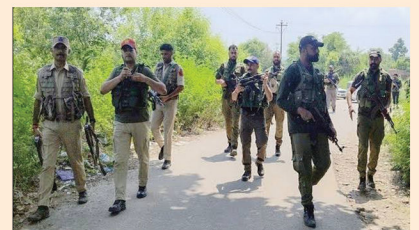
neighbouring countries are categorized as refugees. They don't have citizenship rights and could not get a Pakistani passport.

Many Pakistanis who want to build a good life migrate to the Gulf and other countries for livelihood. But the children of refugees cannot travel because they do not possess valid travel and citizenship documents.

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has a refugee management division. Because the refugee families are financially weak and don't have resources, they desperately try to send their wards to the Gulf and other countries. They approach the refugee management division and strike a deal with the agency.

If somebody has three or four children, he volunteers to hand over one of the children to the refugee management division so that he can get passports for his other children. These volunteers are then handed over to Jaish e Muhammad seminaries for very rigorous jungle warfare training which continues for years.

According to the police officer, foreigners who have infiltrated in Kashmir in recent years are second-generation hardcore Jaish terrorists.





### **Presence of Terrorists Trained In Warfare**

One more important observation is that at least four or five middle-aged men in their late 40s or 50s have been eliminated either while attempting to infiltrate or in the hinterland during anti-insurgency operations. A terrorist who was recently killed in Bandipora area was identified as Bilal, who was in his 50s. He had gone to Pakistan in 1990.

Another such incident took place in Reasi last year where a middle-aged exfiltrated militant was killed in an operation. Similarly, there were intelligence inputs last year

that a couple of second-generation terrorists whose father hailed from a particular area of Anantnag district were spotted in some hilly area. Likewise, the two militants killed in Shangus encounter in South Kashmir's Anantnag district are believed to be second-generation terrorists of Kashmiri origin.

Presence of Afghanistan war veterans in Kashmir cannot be ruled out. However, there is evidence regarding the presence of a significant number of second-generation terrorists who have infiltrated in the last couple of years.

The foreigners roaming in dense forest areas of Poonch and Rajouri districts can be second-generation terrorists. Genetically, men hailing from Poonch and the Rajwadis are good fighters, no less than the Afghans. However, there could be more than meets the eye. The terrorists who have been involved in recent operations exhibited a high degree of precision and coordination. This has led security forces to believe that men of Pakistan Army could be operating alongside the second-generation terrorists.

# The Surge of Terrorism In Kashmir

## What Explains It?

The emerging phase of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is highly dangerous, posing greater challenges to the security managers than ever before. There are many theories floated by strategic and defence experts for the spurt in terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir.

According to one section of defence experts, the revival of terrorism south of Pir Panjal owes to the reduction of troops in the region following Indo-China border skirmishes on eastern border in Ladakh and their redeployment along Indo-China border.

Many others argue that the operational space of terrorists was significantly reduced in Kashmir region because of the high concentration of the army and paramilitary troops. They reason that consequently, terrorists were forced to flee to the treacherous and densely forested terrains of Jammu region.

Some strategists and keen Kashmir watchers have recently observed that Kashmir does not provide safe haven for terrorists any more because the nexus between politicians and terrorists has been broken. I beg to differ

with each one of these theories. My understanding is that there are many contributing factors, and the listed ones just have peripheral significance. In this article we try to analyse how, when and why the terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing such a huge surge.

### **The Security Dilemma – The 'Offensive Defence' Tactics of India and Pakistan**

It is a universal phenomenon that immaterial of any explanations of action or retaliation, a state has



right to adopt security strategies to ensure its territorial sovereignty. The security endeavours by a state may imply that the security of its neighbours is not guaranteed.

To compensate for its compromised security, the adversary neighbouring state may feel threatened and may decide to adopt some corresponding security strategies. These counter-strategies may in turn challenge or compromise the security concerns of the first state. Both sides then enter a "security dilemma".

We are witnessing this kind of 'security dilemma' in the Indian sub-continent. Both India and Pakistan are inconspicuously using the "offensive defence"

tactics, which inevitably undermine the security of the respective nation-states. India has been dealing with the terrorism pushed in by Pakistan for more than three decades

Many unpleasant events unfolded due to Pakistan's involvement in high profile terrorist attacks in India during the last 30 years. After a series of attacks by Pakistan-based terror forces on India's security installations and armed forces, the doctrine of offensive defence was invoked.

Now Pakistan is levelling allegations on India for aiding and abetting terrorism in Pakistan, fomenting public mobilization in Baluchistan and targeting the

members of proscribed terrorist organizations inside Pakistan. The mistrust between the two countries has led to a volley of accusations and counter-accusations about each other's intentions and actions. This in turn has amplified the persisting insecurities.

Pakistan's perception of insecurity seems to stem from the size, security strength (economic and military) and the stature of the Indian state.

India's concerns stem from a proven history of jihad and jingoism emanating from Pakistan, in addition to its jealousy and its stated doctrine of 'bleeding India by a thousand cuts'.





## Expansion Of Theatre Of Violence

The current phase of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is deeply linked with the amplified insecurities of the Pakistani state in the aftermath of the application of “offensive defence” doctrine by the Indian state. This indicates that the security dilemma between the two neighbouring states would intensify. The offensive by either side further deepens the mistrust, and hence the security dilemma.

The expansion of theatre beyond the valley of Kashmir up to the Kathua seems to be guided by the fear of the offensive defence doctrine. The supposed reduction

of troops in Jammu region or the concentration of troops in Kashmir valley does not seem to be the factor here. The spurt in terrorism, I insist, only reflects the fear and anxieties that the Pakistan state has been reeling under since the last five or six years.

The current impasse is remotely related to the historical events which had been at the centre of strained relationship between India and Pakistan since the birth of the two independent nation-states. It is strongly linked to the corresponding security measures. The narrative remains the same as it was, but the spirit is altogether different – and hence the spiralling security dilemma.

## Misplaced priorities of J&K Admn post Abrogation of Article 370

As a keen observer, I have been arguing with whatever resources at my command that majority people in Jammu and Kashmir – especially in Kashmir valley – have shunned the path of violence not essentially because of the



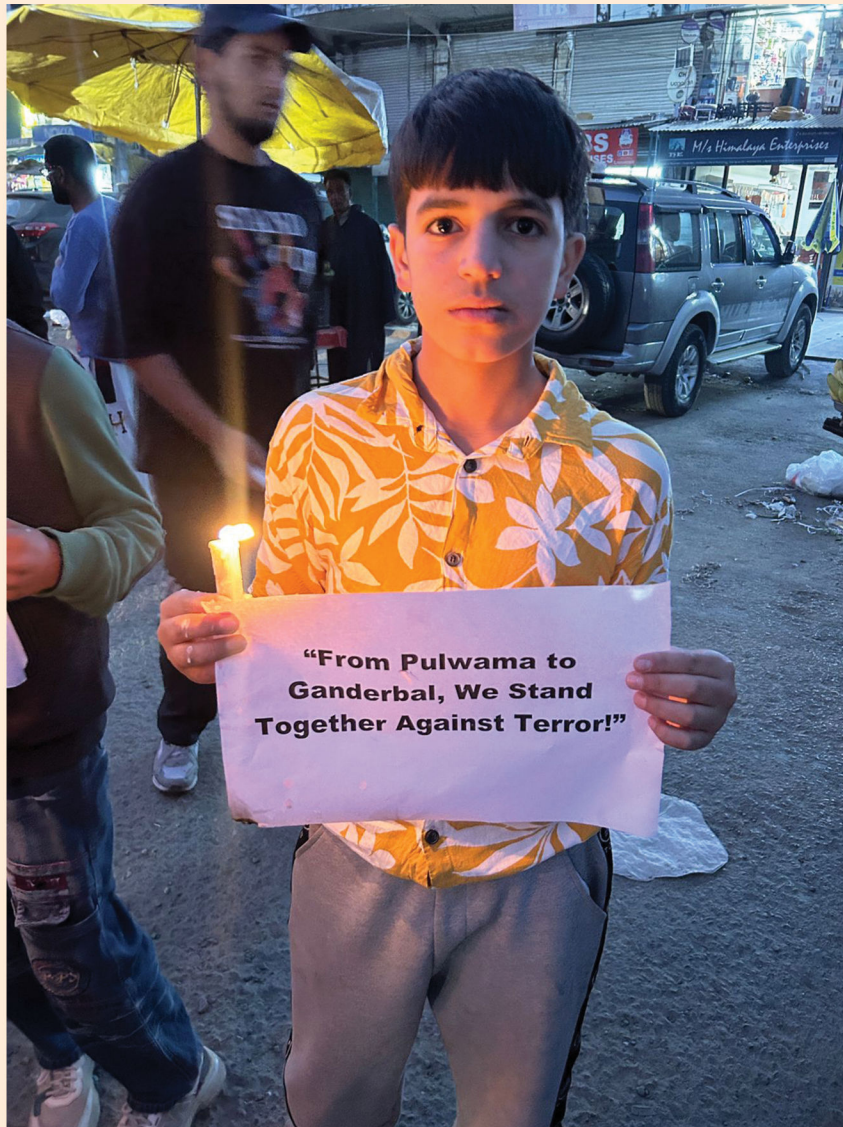
abrogation of Article 370. They have stayed away from violence because there is the realization of the futility of self-inflicting street protests, agitations and the unending cycle of hartals.

There is no denying that post the abrogation of Article 370, the Jammu and Kashmir government tightened the noose around the terror ecosystem and blocked the channels of hawala funding. However, no one could deny the fact that the people had already changed their minds much earlier.

The 2016 agitation which engulfed the nook and corner of Kashmir valley in the aftermath of the killing of Burhan Wani, the poster boy of Kashmir militancy, was the turning point in Kashmir's violent history. At the end of that violent agitation which consumed hundreds of Kashmiri youths and injured thousands more, people started realising the futility and fatality of violence.

There was this strong undercurrent that violence was self-damaging. It had brought death and destruction along the length and breadth of Kashmir valley without any net results or gains. From here started the downfall of the hawkish separatist leader Sayed Ali Geelani and disenchantment towards separatism was increasingly evident.

I have been arguing that it was not because of the stringent security measures alone that Kashmir remained calm post abrogation of Article 370. There were even more stringent and massive security measures put in place during the violent protests of 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012. Despite those measures, youths challenged the security grid, came out in large numbers and engaged in deadly



street battles with the security forces.

After 2010, elaborate security measures helped the state enormously, but the instrumental factor which ensured peace was the self-realization of the futility of the violence. Based on this understanding, I keep arguing that Kashmir shall never ever go back to violent protests.

Many analysts in the UT Administration and also in J&K Police did not read these dynamics in terms of the huge shift in people's attitudes. They attributed the calmness in the streets of Kashmir to the "coercive" law and

**The abrogation of Article 370 or Article 35 A had very little or no meaning at all for the common masses. They did not celebrate the abrogation, but they did not mourn it either**

order measures post abrogation of Article 370





### **Collective Punishment' Breeding Resentment**

It may be argued that the coercion aggrieved the larger majority of Kashmiris. This could be the subject of an extensive and deep analysis. I strongly believe that the abrogation of Article 370 and the reorganization of the erstwhile state into two union territories on August 5, 2019, was less annoying for the people of Kashmir valley as compared to the policies of what is being termed as “collective punishment” post abrogation.

For a section of the bureaucracy, the abrogation of Article 370 meant complete suspension of civil liberties and democratic rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. For these bureaucrats, every single person was guilty unless proven otherwise. This may be regarded as a strong statement but was true for a section of officers.

Let us now view the August 5, 2019, events from the commoner’s perspective. The

abrogation of Article 370 or Article 35 A had very little or no meaning at all for the common masses.

They did not celebrate the abrogation, but they did not mourn it either. In fact, the average Kashmiri was happy that the political elites on both sides of the ideological divide would no longer be in a position to exploit or blackmail the poor. I also believe that had the entire bureaucracy worked towards taking the people on board through transparent, efficient and accountable governance, the situation would have been far better than it is.

There are two important turning points in recent Kashmir history. One is the transition from violence to non-violence post Burhan Wani agitation. The second shift came after the abrogation of Article 370. People regarded the abrogation of Article 370 as *fait accompli* – something that has happened and cannot be changed. But people felt highly insecure after a brief period of acceptance of the decision of

abrogation of Article 370.

There was a degree of what could be termed as manageable cynicism. What followed, however, was annoying for the common masses. The perception of collective punishment among the public, particularly the aggrieved section of the youth, turned the situation upside down. As of now, the government seems to have no idea about the numbers of the local youths who have joined militant groups in recent times. But aggrieved by what they regarded as the policy of “collective punishment”, it looks like significant number of local youths are back in militant ranks.





## Security Management Must invest in Political Narrative

In the 35 years history of violent terrorism in Kashmir, it is fair to say that the political system would formulate action plans on inputs received from the security agencies. We have seen the political establishment defending the actions of the armed forces and building a narrative based on the policy inputs from the security and intelligence agencies. However, since the last five or six years, it looks like the security managers are more into propagating the political narrative. The reversal of roles, I am afraid, has to some

extent defocussed the security paradigm. The security management should focus on advising the government on crucial matters of territorial sovereignty, defence mechanism, warfare and much more.

We have been witnessing a strange churning in Jammu and Kashmir. Over the last two or three years, a section of the officialdom has been promoting and propagating a political narrative in what could be termed as dereliction of its duties. These officers devoted themselves to managing the politics in Jammu and Kashmir. The result is that human int has dried up and people are not

ready to volunteer, as they used to in the past. It was only because of the cooperation of the locals that the security forces were able to gain the upper hand over terrorism. Among security forces, Jammu and Kashmir Police was the biggest stakeholder not only because of its manpower but essentially because it could generate information from the public not through coercive measures but by being people friendly.

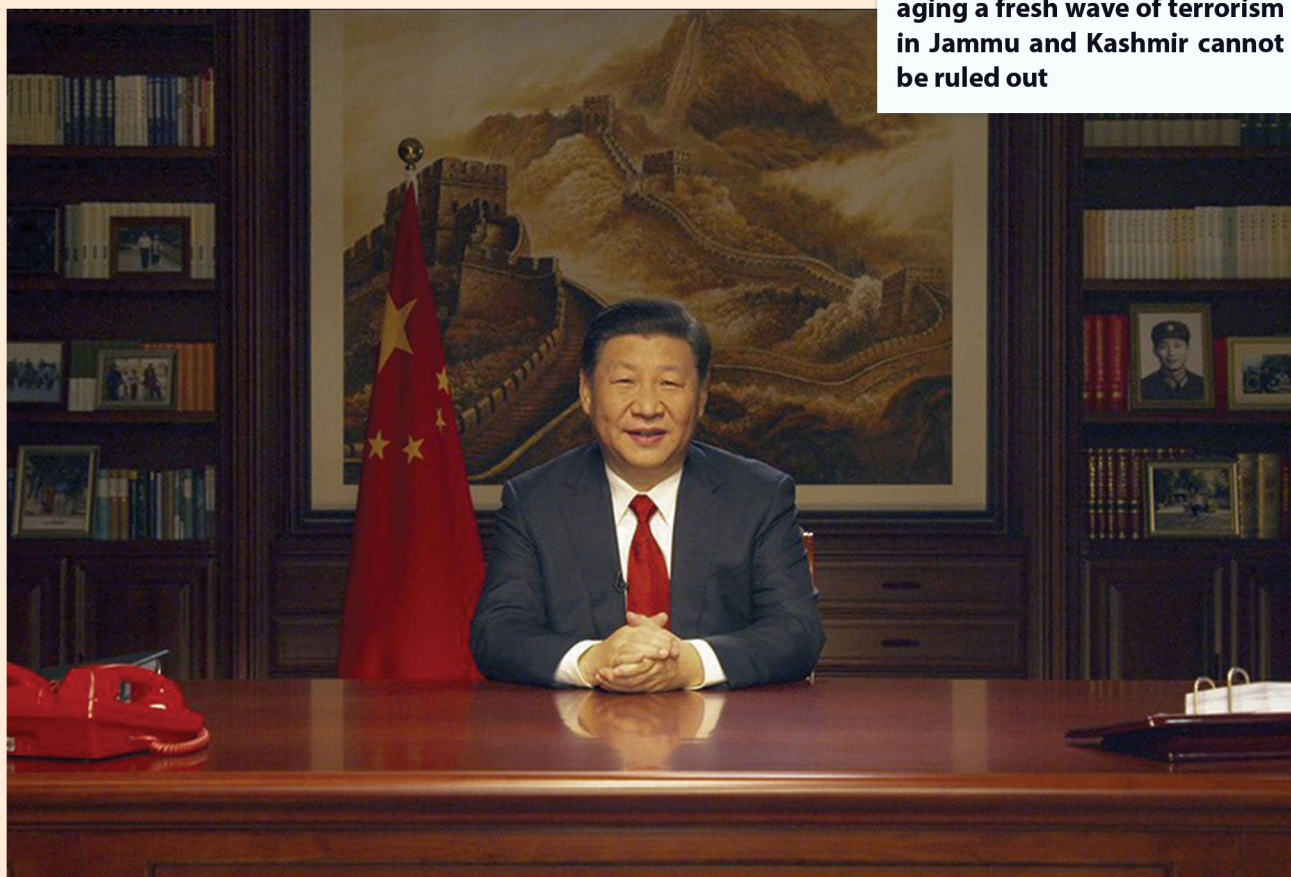
But this synergy seems to be lost now. Suddenly we are in a situation now where the recurrence of the hydra headed monster of terrorism falsifies the claims of peace and normalcy.



Shah Junaid

# China's Policy Shift Attempts To Be A Stakeholder

China's involvement in encouraging a fresh wave of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir cannot be ruled out



China's position on the Kashmir conflict has been a subject of debate for the last many years. Arguably China has moved from neutrality to making attempts for the position of a stakeholder. Over the last one decade, China has gradually moved from being a neutral neighbour to one showing interest in mediation between India and Pakistan on Kashmir. It seems that China has developed military and economic stakes in the Kashmir conflict.

Historically, China is in possession

of parts of the erstwhile region of Jammu and Kashmir, but it never muddled into the affairs as brazenly as it has since the last one decade or so. The change in China's stand on Kashmir is attributed to the growing mutual interests of Pakistan and China. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, launched in 2015, has significantly changed the nature of China's involvement in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir.

In the wake of the decision of abrogation of Article 370 of the

Constitution and the reorganization of the state of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019 by the Indian Parliament, China's Kashmir policy further drifted away from its traditional line. References to the United Nations Security Council resolutions on Kashmir re-emerged in China's public statements. Beijing took diplomatic actions to support Pakistan's bid to internationalize the Kashmir issue. As a result, China's Kashmir policy has been turning into a serious source



of friction in Sino-Indian relations. Pakistan, rather than looking towards the West, has strategically opted for China. Without going into the details of the history and historical events that shaped the strategic partnership of China and

Pakistan, or China's intention of monopolization of South and South-West Asia, China is presently much into the game of Kashmir. Border skirmishes and in certain cases aggressions for altering the eastern borders are strategic

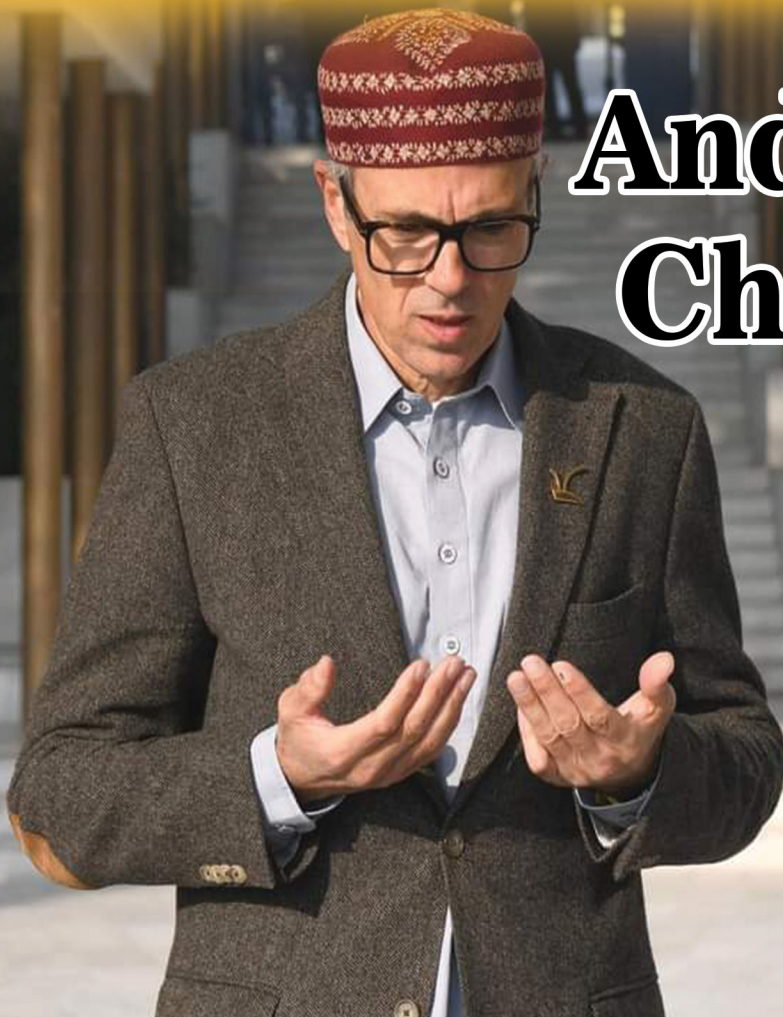
moves by China to bolster its claims of being an equal stakeholder on Kashmir. Therefore, China's involvement in encouraging a fresh wave of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir cannot be ruled out.





# The Three Front Power Dynamics of J&K

## And Omar's Challenges



by Mian Tufail

**A** democratic set up has taken charge in Jammu and Kashmir after a gap of almost 10 years with National Conference leader Omar Abdullah heading a coalition government supported by congress party from outside. Omar, however, faces enormous challenges as Chief Minister of a Union Territory. The reorganization of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in 2019, has changed the power dynamics. Omar Abdullah faces enormous challenges on three fronts.

Omar's current stint as CM is totally different from his first innings from 2008-2014. In his first tenure, Omar headed a stable coalition government for 6 years and enjoyed unbridled powers whatsoever as head of the government of one of the first states of independent India. Jammu and Kashmir had a unique constitutional position within the Union of India under the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which is no longer the case.

Today Jammu and Kashmir is a Union Territory, and the newly elected government has limited legislative and financial powers. The institution of Lieutenant Governor which reports directly to the Home Minister of the country has emerged as a strong power centre.

### **Ambiguities Loom Large**

Several amendments made to the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act 2019 vested more powers with the Lieutenant Governor. As the Union Home Ministry is yet to formulate business rules for many departments, ambiguity looms large over the functioning of the newly elected government.



With or without the business rules in place, the future of the Omar Abdullah government remains uncertain. The first challenge, therefore, remains how Omar Abdullah manages to navigate through this uncertainty particularly when the office of Lieutenant Governor holds enormous powers. Omar, certainly, has only two choices under the given circumstances.

Opting for the Kejriwal model of politics of reaction and revolt could be one choice for Omar Abdullah. To stay politically relevant, friction with the Government of India could be part of this option for Omar.

Over decades, Indian democracy has gone through many intellectual, structural and institutional transitions. Some feel that the very spirit of the democratic system has been reduced to elections, and emphasis on governance has deteriorated. The aspirations are slowly and gradually being replaced by emotions.

In any aspirational society the rulers are somehow forced to work towards fulfilling the genuine socio-economic and political aspirations and strengthen the social fabric. However, any structural, institutional and

intellectual deviation from the culture and spirit of the aspirational society in as a strong power centre.

**The people of Jammu and Kashmir paid a huge cost for the perceived trust deficit between the Centre and the state in the past**

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In any aspirational society the rulers are somehow forced to work towards fulfilling the genuine socio-economic and political aspirations and strengthen the social fabric. However, any structural, institutional and intellectual deviation from the culture and spirit of the aspirational society in a democracy has the potential to dismantle the foundations of the democratic culture.

### The Options With Omar

Jammu and Kashmir region is going through a very crucial phase in its chequered history of centre-state relationship. Omar Abdullah stands at a crossroads. Though the doctrine of National Conference since 1971 emphasises, "to be on the right side of the political dispensation at Centre", the challenges Omar



currently faces are very unique. Omar just saw how his political rival Mehbooba Mufti faced the humiliating defeat in the elections for just one "sin" of aligning with the BJP.

The second option with Omar Abdullah is to work towards building a cordial relationship based on trust and mutual respect in the larger interest of both people of Jammu and Kashmir and the Indian nation. The people of Jammu and Kashmir paid a huge cost for the perceived trust deficit between the Centre and the state in the past. As we stand at a very crucial juncture, Omar has to be a mature and astute politician to navigate through.

Having an understanding with the centre has dual meaning. One, enjoy the power, protocol, perks and privileges and two; safeguard the interests of the people of Jammu and Kashmir politically and constitutionally. Much depends on how Omar has evolved ever since his first stint as Chief Minister in 2008.

The Jammu and Kashmir society more than ever before is divided deeply by caste, religion and race, ethnicity and class. There are

always sections of society not willing to accept political formation on one pretext or the other. Before the events of 2019 which changed the power and political dynamics, a very vocal section of Kashmiri separatists would delegitimize the government.

Of late, the division between Jammu and Kashmir seems to have deepened to the levels beyond redemption. Omar certainly faces the toughest challenge of his life in rebuilding the confidence of the people of Jammu region into the system which is numerically Kashmir dominated. And the travesty of the times is that Omar's father and former Chief Minister Dr. Farooq Abdullah was perhaps the only leader enjoying confidence across regions and religions. Over the last one decade or so, Farooq's popularity in the Jammu region has suffered a severe blow owing to the hardening of political narratives in both the regions.



**The division between Jammu and Kashmir seems to have deepened to levels beyond redemption**



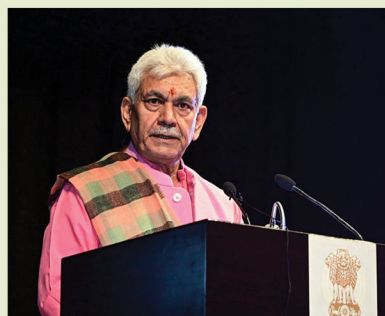
## Challenges, Himalayan Expectations

And lastly the people of Jammu and Kashmir have Himalayan expectations from the new government essentially because there was a growing sense of alienation among the masses across the regions in absence of a democratic setup. There was some kind of suffocation as there was none to listen to the people and address their grievances.

It has been emphasised that a democratically elected setup, however corrupt that be, is much better than a bureaucratic system where you don't have access to the corridors of power. During the last four or five years certain positive things have happened which the people could not have imagined in a democratic system.



However, what matters for the common masses, at the end of the day, is the connection and access to the power corridors. And there is no denying the fact that the already powerful bureaucracy had become arrogant. For them the abrogation of Article 370 and reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir mean complete suspension of civil liberties and fundamental rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.



And for the first time in the history of Jammu and Kashmir people across the regions, religions and ethnicities were equally aggrieved and disempowered because of the egoistic and arrogant bureaucracy. As the new government has completed almost two months in office, people's expectations are all time high. And symbolic gestures like

public durbars by the ministers could not help. There has to be a serious effort in providing a transparent administration to the people. The government should literally be the eyes and ears of the citizens.

Unemployment rate is highest in Jammu and Kashmir compared to other states and Omar Abdullah government could not simply wish it away by closing its eyes. Avenues and opportunities for employment of huge armies of educated youth must be explored.





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# The Tumultuous Return of the J&K Legislative Assembly

by Mian Tufail





**On November 4, 2024,** the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly convened for the first time in six years following the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A in August 2019.

Expectations were high among the people of J&K, who hoped this session would address pressing issues such as hefty electricity bills, unemployment, governance deficit and educational reforms. However, what unfolded on the Assembly's inaugural day was a spectacle of chaos, discord and political theatrics.

The first day began with heightened tensions as PDP legislator Waheed Rehman Parra unilaterally introduced a resolution calling for the restoration of Article 370 without prior consultation with the government, the Speaker, or other Assembly members. This move, widely regarded as a political stunt aimed at garnering media attention, sparked uproar among legislators. The session devolved into pandemonium as sloganeering, heckling and even physical altercations ensued, forcing marshals to intervene and remove unruly members from the chamber.

Two days later, on November 6, Deputy Chief Minister and National Conference legislator Surendra Kumar Choudhary introduced another contentious resolution. This resolution emphasized the constitutional safeguards previously afforded to J&K under its special status and expressed concern over their removal. The resolution, which was intended to resonate with sentiments tied to J&K's identity and rights, was met with vehement opposition from BJP legislators who rejected any discussion related to Article 370. The Assembly witnessed more chaos, with members jumping onto tables, storming the well and engaging in confrontational exchanges, further undermining the session's purpose.



**The disconnect between political priorities and public expectations has created frustration among the electorate. Voters are increasingly demanding transparency, accountability and tangible outcomes over rhetorical debates**

### **Deep Politicization of Assembly Proceedings**

The public's anticipation of meaningful discussions on grassroots issues was swiftly dashed. Instead of focusing on governance and development, legislators seemed more intent on leveraging the Assembly as a platform for political posturing. The NC's resolution for special status restoration lacked pragmatic foresight. Talking to Kashmir Central, Professor Gull Mohammad Wani, a political commentator said, "This resolution has no constitutional or legal grounds to compel the Government of India to reverse its decision. It is a political tactic to keep the issue alive in public discourse."

While the resolution is aimed to reaffirm the significance of J&K's special status, its timing and execution underscored the deep polarization among political parties. Rather than building consensus or addressing the immediate needs of the populace, the Assembly devolved into a battleground for scoring political points.

### **Article 370: Legacy, Politics and Public Perception**

The abrogation of Article 370 remains a deeply divisive issue. For decades, it served as a cornerstone of regional politics, with parties like the PDP and National Conference pledging its preservation while BJP pursued its abrogation as a key agenda. In 2019, the BJP succeeded in nullifying the article, citing its impediments to development and integration.

Since then, the region has witnessed notable developmental strides, including infrastructure projects such as new highways, bridges, transparency and accountability, sports infrastructural development and economic gestures than action policies.

**The disconnect between political priorities and public expectations has created frustration among the electorate. Voters are increasingly demanding transparency, accountability and tangible outcomes over rhetorical debates**



## Development Versus Political Gimmicks

In the past five years, J&K has undergone significant infrastructural and socio-economic changes. Improved roads, expanded connectivity, and new opportunities have marked a positive trajectory. Despite this, unresolved issues such as electricity shortages, unemployment, and educational and health reforms remain pressing concerns for the common people.

Unfortunately, these issues were overshadowed in the Assembly by political grandstanding. Both ruling and opposition parties seemed more focused on consolidating their voter bases than addressing the grievances of the people. While commenting on the Motion of thanks to the Lieutenant Governor's address, the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah himself expressed disappointment on the theatrics played in Assembly and stated, "I was not expecting the Assembly to start this way."

The disconnect between political priorities and public expectations has created frustration among the electorate. Voters are increasingly demanding transparency, accountability and tangible outcomes over rhetorical debates. The era of political gimmicks appears to be losing its appeal as citizens grow more discerning and critical of their representatives.

## The Path Ahead

The events of the Assembly's opening session underscore the challenges of transitioning from political theatrics to constructive governance. While the restoration of Article 370 remains an issue for many, the real test for legislators lies in addressing the immediate and practical needs of the people.

The J&K Assembly must serve as a platform for meaningful dialogue and problem-solving rather than a stage for performative politics. Issues facing by the people of Jammu and Kashmir require urgent attention and collaborative efforts across party lines. The government, too, must ensure that the aspirations of the people are met with action and not drowned out by partisan squabbles.

The chaos witnessed during the Assembly's first session highlights the pressing need for a shift in political culture in J&K. The people of the region, having endured years of uncertainty and upheaval, deserve a legislature that prioritizes their welfare over political maneuvering. Whether the Assembly can rise to this challenge remains to be seen, but one thing is clear: the electorate will no longer settle for anything less than accountability, transparency and tangible progress.



# Srinagar Welcomes Delegates for World Craft Council 60<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Celebration

by Mareaya Fayaz



**S**rinagar, the cultural and artistic heart of Jammu and Kashmir, has once again taken center stage on the global map. Hosting the prestigious 60th Jubilee Celebration Extension Program of the World Craft Council (WCC), Srinagar has become the meeting ground for artisans, policymakers and cultural connoisseurs from around the world. The event, which ran from November 25 to November 28, marked a significant milestone as it followed the primary celebrations held in New Delhi from November 21 to November 24.

The program attracted 15 delegates from as many countries, including Kuwait, Australia, France, UK, Ireland and Central Asia, among others. These delegates came together with artisans from across the globe to celebrate a shared passion for craftsmanship. Organized by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, the event highlighted Srinagar's unique role as a custodian of centuries-old crafts while also cementing its place as an emerging hub for global cultural and diplomatic events.



## Srinagar's Artisanal Heritage on Display

Srinagar's selection as the host city for the WCC's Jubilee Celebration is no coincidence. The city is renowned for its unparalleled contributions to the world of crafts, from the intricate Paper Mâché and Walnut Wood Carving to the luxurious Pashmina shawls, Sozni embroidery and handwoven carpets. These crafts are more than just beautiful artifacts; they represent a rich tapestry of history, tradition and cultural identity that has been carefully preserved through generations.



**These efforts are part of a broader vision to integrate Jammu and Kashmir into the global economy while preserving its unique identity.**

## Tremendous Potential of Handloom and Handicrafts Sector

Such events serve as a platform for these artisans to showcase their work to an international audience, fostering cultural exchange and opening avenues for global trade. The Government of Jammu and Kashmir has made significant efforts to ensure that these crafts receive the recognition they deserve, with initiatives aimed at preserving traditional techniques while encouraging innovation.

The event was inaugurated and addressed by Lieutenant Governor Jammu and Kashmir, Manoj Sinha. Speaking on the occasion, he extended his felicitations to all the delegates and artisans. He commended the efforts of the Ministry of Textiles, Ministry of External Affairs, Department of Industries & Commerce J&K, World Crafts Council (WCC) to celebrate the rich traditions of handicrafts, handloom and to bring together distinguished artisans, designers, creative leaders and other stakeholders from across the globe.

The Lieutenant Governor highlighted the significant steps taken by the government to unlock the tremendous potential of Handloom and Handicrafts sector in the UT of J&K.



“My dream is to make “Made in Jammu Kashmir” creative products famous and integral part of the households across the world. Our aim is to also focus on global cooperation and improve people’s connect for these priceless artistic and cultural heritage of India,” the Lieutenant Governor said.

Speaking on the occasion, Sa’ad Hani Al-Qaddumi, President World Crafts Council International, said the World Crafts Council is embarking on a journey to position Srinagar as a global hub for crafts through several upcoming initiatives. The event also witnessed the launch of “Seal of Authenticity of the Craft” aimed at maintaining the beauty and ingenuity of creative products.

### Srinagar: A Recognized Craft City

In 2021, Srinagar joined the prestigious UNESCO Creative Cities Network under the category of Crafts and Folk Arts, affirming its status as a global hub for artisanal excellence. More recently, it became the fourth Indian city to be recognized as a World Craft City by the World Craft Council, joining Jaipur, Mysore, and Malappuram in this elite group.

The World Craft City program launched by the WCC in 2014, acknowledges cities that have made outstanding contributions to the promotion and development of crafts. This recognition not only enhances the city’s global reputation but also provides a significant boost to local artisans by connecting them with international markets and audiences.

**For the artisans of Kashmir, this event is a validation of their work and a gateway to new**



### Srinagar: An Emerging Hub for Global Events

In addition to its craft heritage, Srinagar is rapidly becoming a preferred destination for hosting international events. The World Craft Council Jubilee Celebration is the latest in a series of high-profile events held in the city, following the highly successful G20 Tourism Working Group meeting last year.

The G20 meeting, which brought together representatives from the world’s leading economies, was a landmark event that showcased Srinagar’s potential as a venue for global diplomacy and cultural exchange. The success of these events has established Srinagar as a hub for international gatherings, reflecting its strategic importance, improved infrastructure and unique blend of natural beauty and cultural richness.



### Impact on Tourism and Employment

The influx of international delegates and the global attention garnered by these events have provided a significant boost to Srinagar’s tourism sector. Visitors are not only exploring the city’s cultural heritage but also contributing to its economy by supporting local businesses, hotels and artisans.



This surge in tourism has a ripple effect on employment, creating opportunities in sectors ranging from hospitality and transportation to craft production and event management. For the youth of Srinagar, these developments represent a chance to engage with the global market, acquire new skills and build sustainable livelihoods.



## Setting Benchmarks for Infrastructural Development

The increasing frequency of high profile events in Srinagar has also set a benchmark for infrastructural development in the region. To cater to the needs of international delegates and growing tourist footfall, the government has undertaken numerous initiatives to improve connectivity but will need to further enhance avenues to explore the potential very well.

Projects such as upgraded airport facilities, improved road networks and the development of modern transport facilities and hotels are transforming Srinagar into a city that can rival the world's leading event destinations. These developments not only benefit the events industry but also contribute to the overall quality of life for the city's residents.

## A Cultural and Economic Renaissance

The World Craft Council Jubilee Celebration is more than just a cultural event; it is a symbol of Srinagar's cultural and economic renaissance. By bringing global attention to its artisanal heritage and positioning itself as a hub for international events, Srinagar is writing a new chapter in its history—one that is defined by creativity, collaboration and global connectivity.

The Government of India has played a pivotal role in facilitating this transformation. By promoting events like the WCC Jubilee Celebration and the G20 meeting, the government has demonstrated its commitment to positioning the Union Territory as a global cultural and economic powerhouse. These efforts are part of a broader vision to integrate Jammu and Kashmir into the global economy while preserving its unique identity.

Initiatives aimed at supporting artisans, promoting tourism and developing infrastructure are central to this vision, ensuring that the region's rich heritage is not only preserved but also leveraged for sustainable growth.

For the artisans of Kashmir, this event is a validation of their work and a gateway to new opportunities. For the city's residents, it is a source of pride and a glimpse into a future where valley stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the world's great cities. And for the global community, it is an invitation to explore the beauty, creativity and resilience that define Kashmir and its people.

This is a moment of celebration, reflection and hope—a moment that belongs not just to Jammu and Kashmir, but to the world.

# SOME GLIMPSES FROM WORLD CRAFT COUNCIL'S 60th JUBILEE CELEBRATION HELD IN SRINAGAR

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# Youths of Jammu & Kashmir Shine Bright in IPL Auction 2

by Shahid Bhat



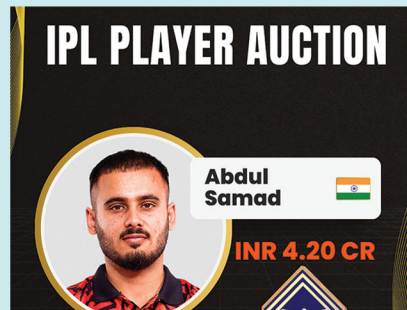
The 2024 Indian Premier League (IPL) auction, held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, turned out to be landmark event for Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Four exceptionally talented players from the region—Rasik Salaam Dar, Abdul Samad, Umran Malik, and Yudhvir Singh—were selected by prominent IPL franchises. This marks a new chapter in the sporting history of J&K, signaling a breakthrough for the region's cricketing talent on the global stage.

## The Stars from Jammu & Kashmir



**Rasik Salaam Dar**

Hailing from Kulgam, Rasik Salaam was the highlight of the auction as Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) secured him for a whopping Rs, 6 crore. Having previously played for Delhi Capitals and Mumbai Indians, Rasik's all-round skills and consistent performances have made him a valuable asset for any team.



**Abdul Samad**

Known for his power-hitting abilities, Abdul Samad, who earlier represented Sunrisers Hyderabad, was acquired by Lucknow Super Giants for Rs, 4.2 crore. The young middle-order batsman from Rajouri has been a standout performer in domestic cricket, showcasing his ability to anchor innings and finish games under pressure.



**Umran Malik**

Nicknamed the "Pacer Sensation," Umran Malik's lightning-fast deliveries, clocking over 150 kmph, have made headlines since his IPL debut. The Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) picked him up for Rs, 75 lakh, recognizing his potential as one of the fastest bowlers in the world.



**Yudhvir Singh**

An all-rounder with promising skills, Yudhvir Singh was also signed by RCB for Rs,35 lakh. His ability to contribute with both bat and ball adds depth to any team he represents.



**Promoting sports as a career option can help address unemployment by providing jobs in coaching, management and related fields.**



## Improving Sports Infrastructure in J&K

The rise of these players is not coincidental. It reflects the progress made in sports infrastructure, talent identification and selection transparency in J&K over recent years. Earlier, players from the region found rare takers in IPL auctions. However, focused government initiatives, the development of cricket academies

and district-level tournaments have created platforms for young talents to shine. The establishment of cricket grounds in remote areas, better coaching facilities and the involvement of former international players in nurturing talent have played pivotal roles. Furthermore, accountability and transparency in selections at the district and state levels have ensured that deserving players get opportunities based on merit.

The IPL provides these young players a platform to interact with and learn from world-class cricketers. They will gain exposure to international standards of cricket, strengthen their skills and imbibe the professionalism needed to excel at the highest levels. Beyond the game, this exposure has the potential to transform their lives, offering them lucrative earnings and a chance to inspire countless others back home.

## The Need for a Sports Revolution

While the IPL success stories of these four players are commendable, they also underline the need to harness the untapped potential of J&K's youth. The government must take concrete steps to promote sports as an integral part of education and development:

**The establishment of cricket grounds in remote areas, better coaching facilities and the involvement of former international players in nurturing talent have played pivotal roles**

it is now imperative for the government, sports bodies and the community to build on this momentum. By creating a vibrant sports ecosystem, J&K can unlock the vast potential of its youth, ensuring that many more success stories emerge in the years to come.

The journey of these four cricketers is proof that with the right support and infrastructure, the youth of J&K can not only compete with the best but also bring laurels to their homeland. It's time for J&K to shine brighter on the global sporting map.



A dedicated sports university in J&K would serve as a hub for nurturing talent, providing advanced training, and facilitating sports education alongside academics.

## Emphasis on Sports

Introducing sports as a compulsory part of school curricula can help inculcate discipline, teamwork and fitness among students from a young age.

Comprehensive sports infrastructure, including grounds, indoor facilities and coaching academies, must be developed at the district level to provide equal opportunities to rural and urban youth.

Promoting sports as a career option can help address unemployment by providing jobs in coaching, management and related fields.

## Transforming Conflict into Opportunity

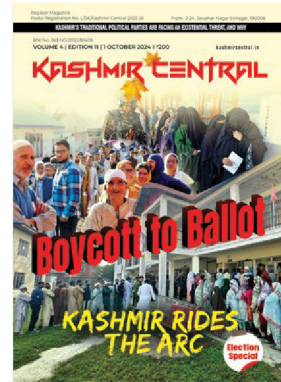
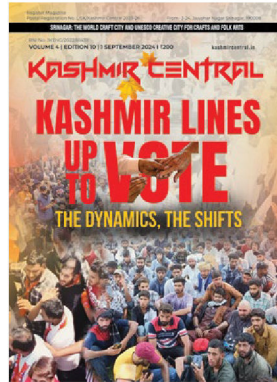
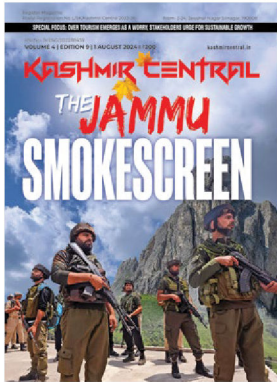
Jammu and Kashmir, a region long plagued by conflict and unrest has immense potential in sports. Channelizing the energy of its youth towards constructive pursuits like cricket can help pull them away from turmoil and integrate them into the mainstream. Sports offer not just a livelihood but also a sense of identity, pride and belonging.

The success of Rasik Salaam, Abdul Samad, Umran Malik, and Yudhvir Singh is not just a personal achievement but a beacon of hope for the youth of J&K. Their stories highlight the power of resilience, hard work and opportunity. The IPL selections have infused a renewed sense of enthusiasm and determination among aspiring cricketers in J&K

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