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Sacred Journey, Secure Future

Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra 2026 Emerges as a Landmark Pilgrimage of Faith, Technology and Administrative Excellence

BY KING C BHARATI

JAMMU, JULY 2026: The annual Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra has once again reaffirmed its place as one of India's greatest spiritual pilgrimages, but the 2026 edition will also be remembered as a defining example of how faith, modern governance and community participation can work together to manage one of the country's largest religious gatherings. As this issue of Vitasta Herald goes to press, the 57-day pilgrimage is progressing smoothly with an overwhelming response from devotees across India and abroad, reflecting renewed public confidence in Jammu and Kashmir's improving security environment and administrative preparedness.

The pilgrimage formally



began after Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, who is also Chairman of the Shri

Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB), performed the traditional Pratham Puja at the

Holy Cave Shrine towards the end of June, invoking blessings for peace, pros-

perity and the well-being of humanity. Days later, he flagged off the first batch of 4,822 pilgrims from the Bhagwati Nagar Yatri Niwas in Jammu, marking the beginning of this year's pilgrimage amid unprecedented security and elaborate logistical arrangements. The first convoy, comprising 147 vehicles carrying devotees through both the traditional Pahalgam route and the shorter Baltal route, was warmly welcomed by local residents and civil authorities on reaching the Valley. Unlike earlier decades, when the pilgrimage often remained vulnerable to weather disruptions and security concerns, Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra 2026 has demonstrated how

(CONTD ON PG 31)

KASHMIR'S LIFELINE SECURED

Omar Abdullah's Timely Intervention Safeguards Tourism, Strengthens Amarnath Yatra, and Revives Debate on Regional Peace



By Vitasta Herald News Bureau
Srinagar, July 2026: July 2026 will be remem-

bered as a month in which Jammu and Kashmir narrowly avoided a major disruption to its tourism-driven economy through

swift political intervention and coordinated administrative action. In a series of significant developments that touched aviation, pilgrimage management and regional diplomacy, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah emerged at the centre of three parallel initiatives that collectively reinforced Kashmir's economic resilience, ensured uninterrupted connectivity during the peak tourist season, and renewed public discussion on peace and regional engagement.

At the heart of these developments was the Central Government's decision to withdraw the proposed weekly daytime closure of Srinagar International Airport, a move widely welcomed across the tourism, hospitality, transport and handicrafts sectors. The decision came after sustained intervention by the Chief Minister, who impressed upon the Union Government the potentially severe economic consequences of restricting air connectivity during the

busiest tourism season of the year. For Kashmir, where tourism contributes substantially to employment and local enterprise, uninterrupted air connectivity represents far more than transportation infrastructure-it is the lifeline of the Valley's economy. The Airports Authority of India had earlier proposed issuing a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) providing for runway main

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AHARBAL WATERFALL TRAGEDY : 20TH JULY, 1969

By Avtar Mota

"History,
will you mention us In your faded
scroll ?We do not seek rewards,
Nor do we want our pictures In the
calendar of years.
But tell our story simply
To those we shall not see,
Tell those who will replace us :
We fought courageously."
.....(Bulgarian poet Nikola
Vaptsarov)

The memorial stone outside the Department of Physics in Kashmir University has weathered. It has some graffiti on it now, but the core message is still legible: a tribute to a young student who lost his life trying to save the life of a fellow student. It reads this :

"IN MEMORY OF BRIJ KRISHEN KOUL WHO SACRIFICED HIS LIFE AT AHARBAL FALL ON JULY 20 1969 IN A VAIN EFFORT TO SAVE THE LIFE OF A FELLOW STUDENT ZAMROODA HABIB "

On July 20, 1969 at Aharbal Falls in South Kashmir, Brij Krishen Koul, a student, drowned while trying to rescue his fellow student Zamrooda Habib. Aharbal Falls is on the Veshaw River in Kulgam district and is known for strong currents, even today it's a popular but risky spot although some steel fencing and precautionary notice boards are seen now.

The Fall and the River

Aharbal is about 76 kilometres from Srinagar if you take the shorter route via Pulwama and Shopian. The other route is through Khanabal and Kulgam, roughly 95 kilometres. From Shopian town, it is another 16 kilometres to the site.

The waterfall is created by the River Veshaw, also mentioned in Sanskrit texts as Vishnupaad. The Veshaw begins at the high-altitude Kounser Nag Lake, a glacial lake that Kashmiri pilgrims have associated with Lord Vishnu for centuries. From Kungwattan, the river gathers force and drops 24.4 metres at Aharbal before continuing down to join the Jhelum, or Vitasta, at Sangam near Bijbehara Bridge.

What many visitors do not notice at once is that there are two falls. The main fall is the 24.4-metre drop that everyone photographs. About 50 metres downstream, there is a second fall, around 7 metres high. It is smaller, but in monsoon it is just as furious. The sound of both together, with the spray rising like smoke, is what people mean when they say Aharbal is "horribly beautiful". Horrible in the old sense of the word: it inspires awe and a little fear.

The geology here matters. The Veshaw cuts through soft Karewa soil and harder rock. That is why the gorge is deep and narrow, and why the water has such power. Government surveys have noted that Aharbal has a potential of about 100 MW of hydroelectric generation. For a power-starved state, that number has been discussed for decades.

A River That Did Not Inquire

On 20 July 1969, the Veshaw was in spate. Monsoon and snowmelt had turned the Aharbal fall in Kulgam, that 25-metre cataract tourists now call the "Niagara of Kashmir", into a churning throat of white water. Into that merciless pool stepped two students of the University of Kashmir. One was caught



by the current. The other went in after her. Neither came out alive. Their bodies were found a day later, downstream, where the river had finished its work.

Brij Krishen Koul was in his final year of M.Sc Physics. He lived near Magar Mal Bagh, commuted on the University buses, and was expected back in the department for research. Zamrooda Habib belonged to the Urdu Department and lived near Zaldagar in the old city. In any ledger of the time, they belonged to different columns. On that day, the Vishav erased the columns..

The Brightness We Have Misplaced

The memory refuses to age. It belongs to a Kashmir that understood itself differently. Koul was not merely a physicist. He was the heartbeat of Gandhi Bhawan. Friends still speak of him as an accomplished stage actor, singer who loved poetry, music and tidy dresses.

Habib moved in that same orbit. University life in the late 1960s did not run on departmental lines. Where Koul was, a crowd gathered: Physics, Urdu, Arts, Music. Gandhi Bhawan was neutral ground. That is where other students knew him. That was where all of them knew each other. The University sorted them by talent, by laughter, by who would turn up for rehearsal.

The Moment That Defined a Character

The details of the picnic are held closely by those who were there. What is not in doubt is the choice. Zamrooda Habib was taken by the current below the fall. Aharbal forms a recirculating boil beneath its plunge with merciless waves. Bystanders could only watch. Koul did not watch. He jumped to save a life.

A family member says today with a clarity that fifty-seven years have not dulled: "He was a Kashmiri Pandit student at the university whose courage and compassion defined his character. Known for his kindness, humility, and unwavering sense of duty, he believed deeply in humanity above all else. In a tragic moment that revealed the true strength of his heart, Brij Krishen jumped into the swirling waterfall and sacrificed his own life while trying to save a life. Though neither of

them survived, his daring act stands as a powerful testament to selflessness and human values. In those moments, the religion did not matter. There were no divisions, no differences."

There is no memorial erected at Aharbal. Since then, railings have gone up. Signs in Urdu, Hindi and English now warn visitors. Local divers from Kulgam have pulled some more from the same pool. The Tourist Department lists Aharbal as a "must-visit", and adds, quietly, "caution advised." The waterfall remains beautiful, and treacherous, and remembering.

About this tragedy, Prof Kuldeep Jamwal writes this :- "Brij Krishen Koul was a Final year student of Physics M.Sc while I was enrolled for Research in Electronics in 1969 in the same department. He lived close to my residence in Magar Mal Bagh and we commuted together in University buses. Brij was a very friendly person who took lot of interest in dramatics in the University. I still possess some of his photographs taken in Gandhi Bhawan during drama rehearsals. He had very keen academic interest in research and had decided to join the department in research programmes after obtaining Masters degree.

Alas all his bright future plans were decimated in the tragic event of July 20, 1969 while trying to save the life of Zamrooda Habib, a girl from the University's Urdu department from the fast swirling waters at Aharbal. Both bodies were recovered downstream of Veshaw river after a day. His premature departure was a big blow to his family and that of Zamrooda Habib. It was the most heart wrenching and tragic event for the University and the department. Humanity and religious beliefs did not come in the way in this heroic effort."

Why We Must Tell This Now

Kashmir in 2026 is tired. Public memory is crowded with politics of hate and division, destruction, innocent killings, and exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. Into that noise comes a story from 1969 that will not sit down. It is not a Pandit story. It is not a Muslim story. It is not even, in the narrow sense, a University story. It is a Kashmir story, told by a river. It is also a civic story. We teach our civil servants about Seva, about sacrifice, about impartiality. Koul demonstrated it all without wearing a uniform or any bureaucratic training. He was a student. Yet he walked, unhesitating, into what Kabir called, "kabira khada bazaar mein, sabki maange khair", and paid the highest price. Fifty-seven years on, the Veshaw still runs. The fall still roars every July. And some people in Kashmir still remember two of its own who proved, at the very edge of water, that the only identity that mattered was human. That was our bright past. It is not nostalgia. It is evidence.

Why Aharbal Feels Different

Kashmir has many waterfalls. But Aharbal is not tucked away like a secret. It is accessible, loud, and public. That is why families come, why students come, why young and old come. There is a Kashmiri idea that water is not just scenery. It is character. It shapes temperament. The Veshaw at Aharbal is restless. It does not meander. It breaks, it falls, it remakes itself. That is perhaps why the lines of Dina Nath Nadim feel so right here. Nadim, one of the great voices of modern Kashmiri poetry, wrote about youth, change, and responsibility. Standing at Aharbal, you understand what he meant.

**"Tse Naar Chhuk Aalaav Chhuk,
Tse Yaavnuk Jalaav Chhuk.
Tse Neir Koh Te Van Tsatith,
Toofaan Tul Toofaan Bun.
Tse Mir e Karwaan Bun,
Kashiri Paasbaan Bun."
(You are fire and fury,
You are the flame of young hearts.
You break through mountains and forests,
And carve your own path.
Bring change, and lead that change,
For you are the guide of Kashmir's caravan.
Be the protector of Kashmir too.)**

Bhuvaneshwari Devi, Village Chandpora

Chander M Bhat

Coordinates:
Lat. 34 degrees 90 minutes
, Long. 74 degrees 53 minutes

Harwan is located about 3 km beyond the famous Shalimar garden where a Bhuddhist monastery existed and a scholar, the glorious Nagarjuna, lived one hundred and fifty years after the Buddha. The place was called Sadarhadvana which stands for forest of six saints.

Harwan is a huge garden lined with flower beds and massive Chinar Trees with a beau-



Chander M Bhat

he would feed young virgins and adore them as divinities.

The hillock of Mahadev, believed to be the abode of Lord Shiva is about 20 kilometers away from the holy spring located in Chandpora. It is believed that Lord Shiva keeps a vigil on it from the Mahadev Peak.

It was during Maharaja Partap Singh's reign that a Sadhu Alakh Ram took up his abode in a hut near the spring mentioned above. The hut got destroyed in a fire. Thereafter two Dharmshallas were constructed to provide shelter to pilgrims, these structures did not stand the fury of nature for long and no trace was left of them. With the expansion in the population of the village around, the inhabitants got together and constituted a committee to look after the shrine, which they named as Bhuvaneshwari Sathapana Committee. The members of the committee in question spared no efforts in raising a

mir, Shivism, Shiva, who is the male counterpart of the Shakti, is the Supreme Being. He remains introvert and dormant, while Shakti is active and dynamic. The Shaivite philosophy is, in principle, non dualistic. In her diverse manifestations, Shakti performs manifold functions. As Saraswati, she propagates knowledge and wisdom. As Lakshmi, she distributes wealth and as Kali she destroys the demons. In Kashmir, Shakti worship is very popular and every clan of Kashmiri Pandits adores its chosen female deity as Ragyna, Sharika, Jawala, Zeshta, Uma, Sharda or Bhuvaneshwari. Being the youngest, Bhuvaneshwari, is adored as eternal Shakti.

The devotees in great bulk, including all the inhabitants of Chandpora, have deep-rooted faith in Bhuvaneshwari. It is said that when a hawan was performed propitiate the Goddess Bhuvaneshwari on the seventh day of it a beautiful snake, bearing white patches, emerged all



tiful canal flowing right through the middle. The canal is fed from a beautiful lake which lies behind the garden. There is not much clutter of fountains and other fancy things but vast big green carpeted green lawns which form an ideal spot for picnics.

Kalhana maintains in his Raj Tarangini that "there is not a piece of land, equal to a mustard seed that is not a tirtha in Kashmir". It is on this account that the Aryans visited Kashmir frequently; they stayed mostly at Buzahama and Harwan. On a hillock, linked with the name of Raja Harish Chander (known for his honesty), there still exist some ancient ruins considered sacred. At Harwan, in Chandpora, there is a small sacred spring associated with Mata Bhuvaneshwari. Kalhana has mentioned this spring in the Rajatarangini; at two of its corners, we find the idols of Mata Bhuvaneshwari installed. It is said that it was Maharaja Gulab Singh who changed the original name of the place from 'Chachaa Pora' to Chand Pora. The Maharaja's grandson Maharaja Partap Singh often visited the sacred spot and paid his obeisance to the Holy Mother; as a religious ritual,

concrete structure that served as a Dharmshalla accommodating at least 200 pilgrims. The committee in question not only renovated the spring but also got a concrete temple built up in which the image of the Mata was firmly installed. In the adjoining area of the temple, measuring 3 kanals of land, there exist six Chinar trees and a brook having pure water flows through the complex. It is said that a spring has sprouted from within the hollow of each of these Chinars. The water of the main spring at the shrine can cure diseases. The legend is there that once the only son of a woman, who had gone blind, reposing his trust in the kind heartedness of the Mother Goddess Bhuvaneshwari, washed his eyes with the water of the holy spring for seven consecutive days; he regained his vision through the grace of virgin Goddess Mata Bhuvaneshwari, whose devotees make only vegetarian offerings to her in the shape of the fruits and other edible things. Non vegetarian offerings to the Goddess are strictly forbidden.

Mata Bhuvaneshwari, is one of the seven sister-divinities and the youngest of them, the other six being Ragyna, Sharika, Jawala, Zeshta, Uma and Sharda. According to Kash-

mir, at once from the spring at Chandpora, it made seven circumambulation around the temple to the joy of devotees present there. It accepted the milk that was offered to it by the devotees, and then vanished. The devotees took it as a good augury, believing firmly that Bhuvaneshwari had blessed them.

Thus enthused and encouraged, a beautiful Murti (idol) of the Goddess carved out of the marble from Jaipur was installed in the temple on Mata's Birthday in the year 1974, falling on Vetha Truvah which is also celebrated as the birthday of the river Vitasta (Jhelum) annually. It was the late Swami Laxman Joo, renowned saint and Shavite Scholar, who took care of the installation ritual.

After the displacement of the Pandits from the Valley, the devotees of the Mata being away could no longer ensure the preservation and maintenance of the shrine. With the passage of time, due to climatic ravages the Dhramshala collapsed, though, the other concrete structures still exist. Now the Mata's hawan is being performed at the Kshir Bhawani Peeth at Janipur, Jammu to mark the birthday of Bhuvaneshwari.

Rakesh Handoo, Vijay, and the Forgotten Story of Kashmiri Pandit Defiance

Beyond Exile and Victimhood Lies a Story of Courage, Resistance and Survival That History Has Yet to Fully Acknowledge

By King C. Bharati

JAMMU, JULY 2026: For more than three decades, Kashmiri Pandits have carried not only the trauma of displacement but also the burden of a question often posed with startling ignorance: "Why didn't you resist?"

It is a question that reveals little understanding of the circumstances that prevailed in Kashmir during the winter of 1989-90. When trained militants roamed the streets with impunity, when targeted killings had become commonplace, when slogans of religious extremism echoed from mosques and public squares, and when even the State machinery appeared paralysed, what form of resistance was realistically available to an unarmed civilian minority?

Yet the narrative that Kashmiri Pandits simply fled without resistance is not only unfair-it is historically inaccurate.

The story of Rakesh Handoo and a group of courageous Kashmiri Pandit youth stands as a powerful rebuttal to this misconception.

Disillusioned by political failures and angered by the abandonment of their community, Handoo emerged as one of the young men who refused to accept silence as an option. Along with several like-minded Pandit youths, he organised protest demonstrations, torchlight marches, and public campaigns against those whom they believed had failed Kashmir and its indigenous Hindu community.

Effigies of political leaders, including Prime Minister V.P. Singh and then Union Home Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, were burnt in protest. While fear silenced many voices, Handoo and his colleagues chose confrontation over submission.

But their resistance did not end with street protests.

As the insurgency intensified, the CRPF sought local assistance to navigate Srinagar's complex neighbourhoods and identify militant hideouts hidden among civilian populations. In March 1990, Handoo and eight other brave Kashmiri Pandit youths reported to the CRPF at Bantalab and later Srinagar, volunteering for some of the most dangerous assignments imaginable.

They served as guides, scouts, intelligence gatherers, and local operatives. Armed initially with little more than courage and local knowledge, they accompanied security forces into areas where militants exercised significant influence. They identified safe houses, pointed out insurgent networks, and provided informa-

tion that enabled successful operations.

For months, many of them worked virtually unarmed, exposed to enormous risks. Only in May 1990 were they permitted to carry weapons for self-defence.

Stationed in sensitive areas such as Hawal and around Islamia College, they frequently mingled with crowds, collected intelligence, and helped security forces identify militants who otherwise would have remained hidden.

Their contribution resulted in arrests, seizures of weapons, and disruption of militant activities. Yet their names rarely appear in official accounts of the insurgency.

While some young Pandits were risking their lives alongside security forces, their families and thousands of others were enduring another battle-that of survival in exile.

The significance of Rakesh Handoo's contribution finds independent validation in Col. Yoginder Kandhari's (Retd.) acclaimed work *Kashmir Insurgency: The story of Handoo's role* is further highlighted in the companion narrative *Rakesh Handoo: The Forgotten Flame of Resistance*, which documents the experiences of civilian volunteers who assisted security forces during the most turbulent phase of the insurgency.

In a detailed review of the book, noted writer Tito Ganju describes Handoo as representative of a forgotten generation of Kashmiri Pandit youth who stepped forward when institutions faltered. Ganju notes that these young volunteers "bridged a critical intelligence gap during a period of total institutional breakdown" by assisting security forces in reconnaissance, identification of militants, and operational logistics in some of the most dangerous localities of Srinagar. Their courage, he observes, was all the more remarkable because many initially undertook these assignments without arms, relying solely on their knowledge of the terrain and their commitment to protecting lives.

Ganju further argues that one of the most important contributions of Col. Kandhari's work is its effort to restore such neglected stories to the historical record. By documenting the role of civilian volunteers like Rakesh Handoo, the book challenges the simplistic narrative that Kashmiri Pandits merely fled without resistance. Instead, it highlights how ordinary citizens, abandoned by the system and facing overwhelming odds, nevertheless chose to assist anti-insurgency operations, support relief efforts, and defend their community in whatever manner they could. As



Ganju writes, the erasure of these stories from public memory represents one of the great blind spots of contemporary Kashmir discourse, making their recovery not merely an act of remembrance but an act of historical justice.

The humanitarian crisis that followed the exodus was devastating.

Tens of thousands of displaced Kashmiri Pandits poured into Jammu and surrounding regions. Camps were established at Nagrota, Battal Ballian, Udhampur Sports Stadium, Jib Thathi, Kathua, and other locations. Many families found shelter in rented rooms, abandoned shops, cattle sheds, store-rooms, and makeshift structures.

Government assistance was painfully inadequate.

Families received a relief package consisting of five kilograms of rice and ₹500 per family, a sum grossly insufficient even by the standards of 1990. Salaries of migrant government employees were delayed for months. Until June 1990, many in-service employees reportedly survived on meagre interim payments while struggling to support their families.

As savings disappeared, families were forced to sell jewellery, household belongings, and whatever little assets they had managed to bring from Kashmir. Amidst this crisis, community volunteers once again stepped forward.

Rakesh Handoo recalls approaching Shiv Sena Punjab, which responded by arranging truckloads of food grains and relief material for displaced Kashmiri Pandits. Yet even this humanitarian effort encountered bureaucratic obstacles.

According to accounts from the period, authorities initially refused permission for these relief trucks to cross Lakhanpur, the gateway into Jammu and Kashmir. Volunteers were compelled to organise cumbersome transportation arrangements to transport the relief supplies from Lakhanpur to various migrant camps across Jammu. At a time when thousands of displaced families were struggling for basic survival, such administrative hurdles only compounded their misery.

Despite the suffering, the displaced community often encountered hostility rather than

empathy.

Many migrants recall being derisively labelled as "Loley" (cowards) by sections of society and dismissed as "beggars" surviving on government assistance. Protest demonstrations organised by Handoo and others frequently met with police action, including baton charges.

The humiliation was profound.

Yet perhaps nowhere was the neglect more visible than in the field of education.

Thousands of displaced students suddenly found themselves without schools and colleges. Initial resistance emerged even against admitting migrant children into educational institutions. Many local residents feared that accommodating displaced students might eventually affect employment opportunities for local youth.

Historical accounts suggest that Dr. Karan Singh intervened to facilitate admissions for migrant students. Even then, admission often came with limitations. Many Kashmiri Pandit students were accommodated only in afternoon shifts, forced to study during the hottest hours of the day.

The Government established camp schools at various locations, but conditions were frequently deplorable.

One such account comes from Vijay, who studied at a camp school in Roop Nagar, Jammu.

According to Vijay, the school lacked even basic amenities such as drinking water and sanitation facilities. Every morning, students had to erect tents before classes could begin. The nearest source of drinking water was a neglected tank located nearly one and a half kilometres away. Students would walk long distances under the scorching summer sun simply to quench their thirst, only to return exhausted and dehydrated.

The daily hardships endured by these young students became a defining memory of exile. For Vijay and many others, these experiences transformed frustration into activism. Students and volunteers organised themselves to erect tents, arrange drinking water, and support fellow classmates in the absence of adequate institutional support. In many ways, these camp schools became training grounds for resilience, leadership, and community solidarity. Meanwhile, Handoo's group continued exploring ways to contribute to counter-insurgency efforts.

At one stage, plans reportedly emerged for a high-risk infiltration mission

aimed at penetrating militant networks and gathering intelligence from within. The volunteers were prepared. The groundwork had been laid.

Then came the assassination of Mirwaiz Maulvi Farooq on 21 May 1990 and the political upheaval that followed. Governor Jagmohan was removed, uncertainty deepened, and morale among many volunteers collapsed.

Rakesh Handoo would later recall this period with deep disappointment. He believed that those willing to risk their lives in service of the nation were once again left without support. The removal of Jagmohan, whom many displaced Pandits viewed as one of the few administrators willing to acknowledge their plight, dealt a severe blow to the confidence of the volunteer network.

One by one, members of the group withdrew. Families, terrified for the safety of their sons, urged them to abandon dangerous assignments. Eventually, even Rakesh Handoo was persuaded by his parents to step away from active operations.

The chapter closed without recognition.

No medals were awarded. No official honours followed. The State utilised their services when needed and largely forgot them thereafter.

Yet their story remains important because it challenges a deeply entrenched myth.

The history of Kashmiri Pandits is not merely a history of victimhood. It is also a history of resistance.

Resistance took many forms: confronting militants, assisting security forces, organising relief, educating children in refugee camps, arranging food for starving families, protesting governmental indifference, and preserving dignity amid humiliation.

Rakesh Handoo, Vijay, and countless unnamed Kashmiri Pandit volunteers represent a generation that refused to surrender completely, even when the odds were overwhelmingly against them. Today, when discussions about Kashmir often revolve around geopolitics, security, and diplomacy, the human stories of courage and sacrifice risk being forgotten. Yet history is not shaped only by governments and armies. It is also shaped by ordinary individuals who choose duty over fear, service over silence, and conviction over convenience. The next time someone asks, "Why didn't Kashmiri Pandits resist?" perhaps the answer should be simple: They did. History simply chose not to remember them.

Historic Heritage Tour and Global Conclave Mark Kashmiri Pandits' Largest Community-Led Engagement in the Valley After 36 Years

By King C Bharati

SRINAGAR, July 2026:

In a landmark initiative that blended heritage, memory, culture and dialogue, the Global Kashmiri Pandit Heritage Tour and Conclave - "Pragaash" (First Light) concluded in Srinagar after bringing together members of the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community from India and across the world for what organisers described as the first major community-led engagement in the Kashmir Valley in nearly thirty-six years.

Held from June 6 to June 14, 2026, the nine-day programme sought to reconnect displaced Kashmiri Pandits-particularly the younger generation-with their ancestral homeland, sacred sites, cultural traditions and shared civilisational legacy. Combining a heritage tour across Kashmir with a two-day international conclave at the Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC), the initiative was widely viewed as an important milestone in the community's continuing journey towards cultural revival and meaningful engagement with its roots.

The programme was jointly organised by the Global Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora (GKPD), Jammu Kashmir Vichar Manch (JKVM), Kashmiri Overseas Association-USA (KOA), Youth All India Kashmiri Samaj (YAIKS), Kashmiri Pandits' Association Mumbai (KPA-Mumbai), Sanjeevani Sharda Kendra (SSK) and the All Minority Employees Association of Kashmir (AMEAK).

During the week-long heritage tour, delegates from India and several countries visited temples, shrines, sacred springs and heritage sites spread across South, Central and North Kashmir. Among the prominent destinations were the Martand Sun Temple in Anantnag and the revered Mata Kheer Bhawani Temple at Tulmulla in Ganderbal, besides several lesser-known sites that continue to preserve the spiritual

and cultural legacy of Kashmir.

For many elderly participants, the visit marked their first return to the Valley since the turbulent events of 1990. For the younger generation born in exile, the tour offered an emotional opportunity to experience the land,

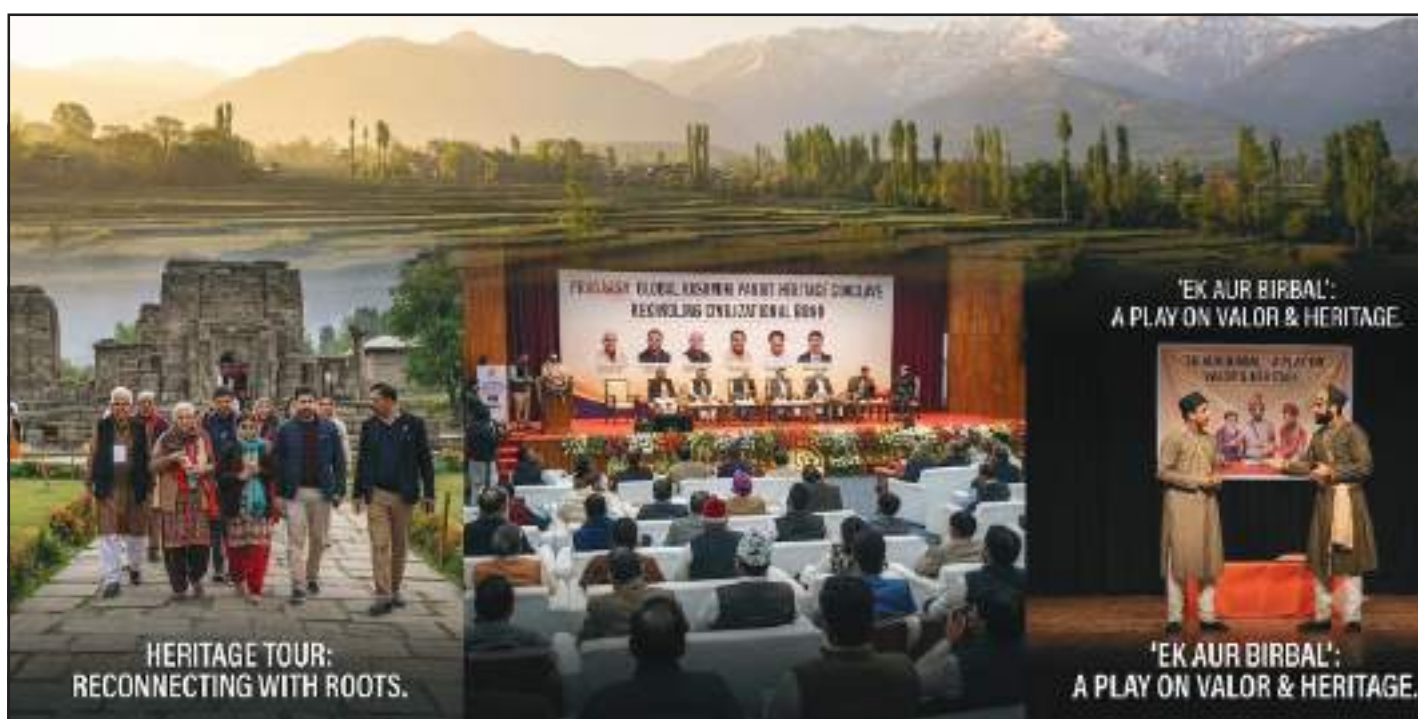
'Pragaash' Rekindles a Civilisational Bond with Kashmir

of a Commission of Inquiry, establishment of a Kashmiri Pandit Welfare Board, and improved security, housing and service conditions for

arts and collective memory.

An important feature of the conclave was its extensive global outreach through digital platforms. Rohit

such as Panun Kashmir expressed their own perspectives regarding rehabilitation, security and constitu-



temples and traditions that had previously existed only in family memories and stories passed down through generations.

The heritage tour culminated in a two-day international conclave at SKICC, Srinagar, where scholars, professionals, social activists, youth representatives and members of the global Kashmiri Pandit diaspora deliberated on issues relating to rehabilitation, cultural preservation, political engagement and the future of the displaced community.

The conclave unanimously adopted the "Pragaash Resolution", a comprehensive document outlining the community's aspirations and policy recommendations. Among its major demands were concrete measures for the safe, dignified and sustainable return of displaced Kashmiri Pandits, development of secure residential townships in traditional localities such as Rainawari, formal recognition of the 1989-90 exodus as genocide, constitution

employees serving in the Valley under the Prime Minister's Special Package.

The event also emphasised the preservation of the Kashmiri language, religious heritage, ancient temples, cultural traditions and historical memory as essential pillars of the community's future.

Adding a vibrant cultural dimension to the conclave, several literary, artistic and theatrical programmes were organised during the event. A major attraction was the staging of the Hindi play "Ek Aur Birbal," which received an enthusiastic response from delegates. Senior journalist, playwright and social activist King C. Bharati portrayed one of the principal characters in the production, highlighting the continuing contribution of theatre in preserving Kashmiri Pandit cultural expression and identity.

The cultural segment reflected the organisers' belief that the revival of a displaced civilisation depends not only upon political dialogue and rehabilitation but also upon the preservation of its literature, performing

Raman Bhat served as the overall coordinator for the cultural programmes and supervised the live broadcasting of the entire event on The Right News (TRN) digital platform, enabling members of the Kashmiri Pandit diaspora across the world to participate virtually in the proceedings. The live coverage significantly expanded the reach of the conclave and connected thousands of viewers who were unable to attend in person.

Participants repeatedly described the initiative as an "odyssey of rediscovery," observing that it had transformed inherited memories into lived experiences. Walking through ancestral villages, offering prayers at ancient temples and interacting with local communities gave many delegates a renewed sense of belonging and strengthened their emotional connection with Kashmir.

At the same time, the initiative also generated healthy debate within sections of the Kashmiri Pandit community. Organisations

tional safeguards, reflecting the diversity of opinion that continues to exist on the future roadmap for the displaced community. Despite these differences, the broad objective of preserving the community's heritage and ensuring its dignified future received widespread support.

More than a heritage tour, Pragaash emerged as a powerful affirmation of identity, resilience and civilisational continuity. It demonstrated that while displacement may separate a community from its homeland, it cannot erase its cultural memory or weaken its emotional bond with the land of its ancestors.

As delegates returned to different parts of India and the world, they carried with them renewed hope that the "First Light" of Pragaash would illuminate the path towards reconciliation, cultural renaissance and a dignified future for the Kashmiri Pandit community, while strengthening efforts to preserve one of Kashmir's oldest living civilisations for generations to come.

Beyond Homecoming: Can the Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora Conclave Pave the Way for Lasting Return?

Dialogue, Trust and Practical Action Must Shape the Next Chapter of Kashmir's Reconciliation



By Omkar Dattaray

JAMMU, JULY 2026: The Kashmiri Pandit community occupies a unique and significant place in the history, culture, and civilisational heritage of Kashmir. For centuries, Kashmiri Pandits made invaluable contributions to the Valley's intellectual, literary, administrative, and spiritual life. Their traditions, language, scholarship, and customs became an integral part of Kashmir's composite culture, often described as Kashmiriyat—a philosophy that symbolised coexistence, mutual respect, and communal harmony.

The eruption of militancy and terrorism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, marked one of the darkest chapters in modern Indian history. It forced a large section of the Kashmiri Pandit community to abandon their ancestral homes and seek refuge across different parts of India. More than three decades later, the question of their dignified and sustainable return remains among the most sensitive and unresolved issues confronting Jammu and Kashmir.

The recent Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora Conclave held in Srinagar has once again brought this issue into national focus. The conclave provided a platform for members of the displaced community, policymakers, scholars, civil society representatives, and government officials to deliberate on the future of the community and explore realistic pathways for its return to the Valley. More than a symbolic gathering, it represented a renewed attempt to bridge emotional distances, rebuild trust, and foster an atmosphere conducive to reconciliation and reintegration.

For many Kashmiri Pandits, returning to Kashmir is not simply a matter of physical relocation. It is deeply intertwined with identity, memory, heritage, and belonging. The homes, temples, schools, orchards, and neighbourhoods left behind are far more than physical assets—they are repositories of personal histories and collective memory. Consequently, every discussion on return evokes emotions shaped by displacement, loss, trauma, and resilience experienced over the past three decades.

The conclave also reflected the changing realities of Jammu and Kashmir. Improvements in the security environment, expanding infrastructure, growing tourism, and increasing economic activity have encouraged many stakeholders to revisit the possibility of return. Although challenges remain, these developments have reopened conversations that had long remained suspended because of security concerns.

One of the strongest messages to emerge from the conclave was that any return must be dignified, voluntary, and sustainable, rather than symbolic or politically expedient. Community members stressed that rehabilitation must address practical concerns such as secure housing, employment opportunities, quality education, healthcare, and effective security arrangements. True rehabilitation extends beyond infrastructure; it requires creating an environment in which returning families feel respected, protected, and socially integrated. Confidence can only be restored when there is assurance that the tragedies of the past will not recur.

Economic rehabilitation emerged as another critical pillar of any meaningful return policy. Over the past three decades, many dis-

placed Kashmiri Pandits have established successful careers, businesses, and professional lives across India and abroad. Encouraging permanent resettlement would therefore require not only emotional appeals but also attractive economic opportunities, investment incentives, entrepreneurship support, and meaningful employment prospects. The Valley's expanding tourism sector, educational institutions, information technology initiatives, and infrastructure projects could potentially provide such opportunities, provided they are supported by sound policy implementation.

Equally important is the preservation and restoration of the community's religious and cultural heritage. Temples, shrines, sacred sites, and cultural landmarks associated with the Kashmiri Pandit community represent an invaluable part of Kashmir's civilisational legacy. Their restoration is not merely a community demand but a cultural necessity for preserving the Valley's pluralistic identity. Reviving festivals, language, customs, and traditional practices can further strengthen the emotional connection of displaced families with their homeland.

An encouraging aspect of the conclave was the participation of voices from different sections of Kashmiri society expressing support for the return of Pandits. Many acknowledged that the departure of the community created an irreplaceable void in Kashmir's social and cultural fabric. Such expressions of solidarity underline the importance of rebuilding trust through sustained dialogue, empathy, and mutual respect. Genuine reconciliation cannot be imposed administratively; it must emerge through societal engagement and shared commitment to preserving Kashmir's pluralistic ethos. Nevertheless, formidable challenges remain.

Security continues to be a primary concern. While the overall situation has improved considerably, sporadic incidents of targeted violence in recent

years have reinforced apprehensions within sections of the displaced community. Confidence-building measures, effective policing, robust intelligence, and long-term security guarantees will therefore remain essential prerequisites for any meaningful rehabilitation process.

Property-related disputes constitute another major hurdle. Over the decades, numerous displaced families have faced encroachments, illegal occupation, deterioration, or distress sale of their ancestral properties. Addressing these concerns will require transparent legal mechanisms, efficient administrative processes, and dedicated institutional support. Without resolving property disputes, any large-scale rehabilitation programme is unlikely to inspire widespread confidence.

The diversity within the Kashmiri Pandit diaspora further complicates the issue. Older generations often retain deep emotional attachments to their homeland and may actively aspire to return. Younger generations, many of whom were born and raised outside Kashmir, frequently have limited direct memories of the Valley and understandably prioritise educational, professional, and economic opportunities elsewhere. Policymakers must therefore recognise that there can be no uniform model of return. Flexible approaches that accommodate varying aspirations and circumstances will be essential.

There is also continuing debate regarding the model of rehabilitation. Some experts advocate secure residential clusters equipped with essential services, while others argue that reintegration should occur within traditional neighbourhoods to encourage social cohesion and prevent segregation. Both perspectives merit careful consideration, but ultimately the preferences of the displaced community itself must remain central.

Any rehabilitation framework must uphold the principles of dignity, choice, security, and inclusiveness. The role of government remains pivotal. Successive administrations have announced rehabilitation packages, employment schemes, housing initiatives, and financial incentives aimed at facilitating return. While these measures have yielded some positive outcomes, many participants at the conclave emphasised the need for better coordination, effective implementation, and sustained engagement with community representatives. Policy announcements alone cannot achieve rehabilitation unless supported by political commitment, administrative efficiency, and consistent follow-through.

The Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora Conclave in Srinagar therefore represents far more than another conference. It symbolises hope, dialogue, and a renewed willingness to address one of independent India's longest unresolved humanitarian and political challenges. It provides an opportunity to move beyond rhetoric and focus on practical, consensus-based solutions that can strengthen reconciliation and coexistence.

The return of Kashmiri Pandits is not solely the concern of one displaced community. It is intrinsically linked to the larger vision of a peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous Jammu and Kashmir. The road ahead may remain difficult, but the conclave has demonstrated that meaningful dialogue is possible. If supported by sincere efforts from governments, civil society, local communities, and the diaspora itself, the aspiration of restoring Kashmir's pluralistic character can gradually move closer to reality.

The homecoming of Kashmiri Pandits would signify much more than the return of a displaced people. It would represent the restoration of a shared civilisational legacy and reaffirm the enduring values of coexistence that have historically defined the Valley.

A Towering Pillar of the Kashmiri Pandit Community

Remembering the Timeless Legacy of Amar Nath Vaishnavi



By Dr. Daleep Pandita

There are few personalities whose lives become larger than the institutions they serve. Pandit Amar Nath Vaishnavi Ji was one such towering figure whose unwavering resilience, exceptional statesmanship,

Kashmiri Pandits who witnessed his invaluable contribution during the difficult years following their displacement from the Kashmir Valley in 1990.

Born on 24 August 1925 at Mastgarh, Jammu, and affectionately known as Lala Ji, he was a firm believer in Sanatan Dharma and a committed nationalist. From an early age, he displayed a deep sense of social responsibility and an unwavering commitment to public service. His natural leadership qualities, coupled with remarkable humility and moderation, gradually established him as one of the

anticipated in nation-building activities even before India's Independence.

The mass displacement of Kashmiri Hindus in 1990 marked a defining chapter in his public life. Recognising the enormous humanitarian crisis confronting the community, he founded the Kashmir Sahayata Samiti later that year to coordinate relief, rehabilitation and support for displaced Kashmiri Hindus. He subsequently headed the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference (ASKPC) and the Shree Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Sabha (SSDYS), both of which worked tirelessly for the welfare, rehabilitation and settlement of Kashmiri migrants across the country.

Amar Nath Vaishnavi Ji was

lending periods in the community's history, he stood firmly in defence of the identity, cultural heritage, religious traditions and legitimate aspirations of displaced Kashmiri Pandits. His wise counsel inspired confidence, while his steadfast leadership strengthened the community's resolve to seek a safe, dignified and honourable future.

One of his most significant contributions lay in his relentless engagement with the country's political leadership. Through sustained efforts and persuasive dialogue, he successfully approached several national leaders, including the then

Equally important was his support for establishing makeshift schools, ensuring that the education of migrant children continued despite extraordinary adversity.

For countless displaced families, Amar Nath Vaishnavi Ji became much more than an organisational leader. He was a source of hope, strength and reassurance during a period of immense uncertainty. Many regarded him as a mentor, guide and philosopher whose calm leadership helped preserve the community's morale during its darkest years. It is therefore not surprising that many within the Kashmiri Pandit community respectfully remember him as the "Father of the Community." Organisations such as the All State Kashmiri Pandit Conference (ASKPC) and the Shree Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Sabha (SSDYS) continue to acknowledge with gratitude his immense contribution towards the welfare and upliftment of displaced Kashmiri Hindus.

Although Amar Nath Vaishnavi Ji left this mortal world on 1 July 2012, his ideals, values and extraordinary legacy continue to inspire successive generations. His life remains a shining example of selfless service, principled leadership and unwavering commitment to humanity. Great souls never truly depart. They continue to live through the institutions they build, the values they uphold, and the countless lives they touch. Pandit Amar Nath Vaishnavi Ji will forever remain etched in the hearts of Kashmiri Hindus with profound reverence, gratitude and affection, remembered always as one of the greatest sons of Bharat Mata and an enduring symbol of courage, compassion and service.

Author:

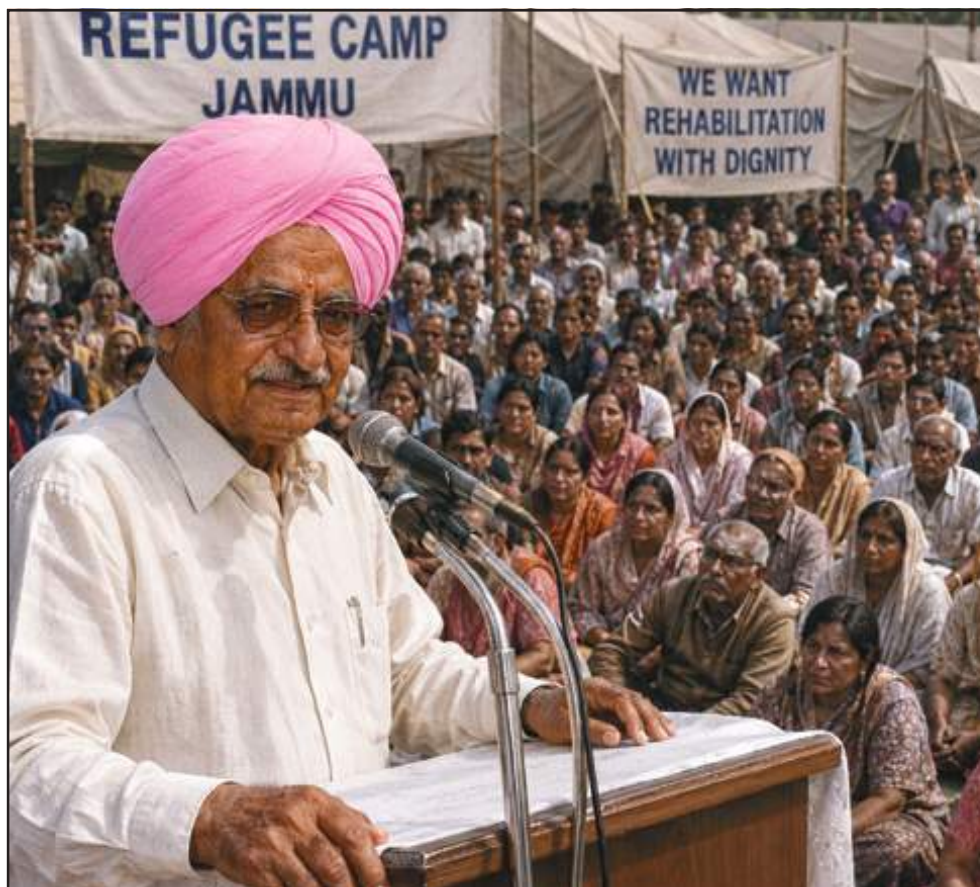
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visionary humanitarian outlook, rare wisdom, and moral courage earned him a place of honour in the collective memory of the Kashmiri Pandit community.

A leader par excellence, he devoted his entire life to the service of society. Blessed with an innate spirit of compassion, honesty, humility, and selfless dedication, Amar Nath Vaishnavi Ji requires little introduction, particularly among

most respected social reformers of his time.

A teacher by profession, Amar Nath Vaishnavi Ji was a dedicated ideologue of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). His deep patriotism and organisational abilities eventually led him to become the RSS In-charge for the Kashmir and Ladakh regions, where he actively par-

far more than a social worker. He emerged as a guiding force for an uprooted community struggling to rebuild its life with dignity. Throughout his public life, he remained a symbol of integrity, compassion and communal harmony. His balanced approach, moral authority and unwavering commitment earned him respect not only among Kashmiri Hindus but also across different sections of society.

During one of the most chal-

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Balasaheb Thackeray, to secure reservations in educational institutions for the children of displaced Kashmiri Pandits. He also consistently advocated improved living conditions for migrant families and played a key role in transforming temporary relief camps into one-room and two-room accommodation for thousands of displaced families.

A Chargesheet After Decades

Will Sarla Bhat's Wounded Soul Finally Receive Justice?



By Rahul Kilam

THE FILING of a chargesheet by the State Investigation Agency (SIA) in the killing of nurse Sarla Bhat marks a significant milestone in Kashmir's long and painful journey towards justice. For her family, and for the wider Kashmiri Pandit community that has carried the burden of loss, displacement and unanswered questions for more than three decades, this development represents far more than a procedural legal step. It symbolises the hope that the criminal justice system—and the Ministry of Home Affairs under Union Home Minister Amit Shah—is determined to revisit long-pending cases that remained unresolved for decades.

Justice delayed carries consequences that extend far beyond an individual case. It weakens public confidence in institutions, prolongs the suffering of victims' families and leaves lasting scars on society. Every unresolved case reinforces the perception that justice is either selective or indefinitely postponed. The filing of a chargesheet, therefore, should not be viewed as the conclusion of the process but as the beginning of a serious, impartial and time-bound judicial examination of the facts.

According to the investigating agency, the chargesheet relates to the killing of Sarla Bhat during the period of terrorism that devastated Kashmir in the early 1990s. The allegations will ultimately be tested in

a court of law, where every accused is entitled to due process and a fair trial. That principle remains fundamental to every constitutional democracy. Equally, victims and their families deserve the assurance that crimes of this nature will not remain buried under decades of procedural delay.

For the Kashmiri Pandit community, the issue extends far beyond a single case. The forced exodus from the Valley remains one of independent India's most painful chapters. Thousands of families lost not only their homes but also their sense of security, livelihoods and centuries-old

announced rehabilitation packages, employment schemes and housing initiatives for displaced Kashmiri Pandits. However, physical infrastructure alone cannot restore confidence. People cannot reasonably be expected to return to places where unresolved crimes continue to cast a long shadow over the past. Accountability is not an obstacle to reconciliation; it is the very foundation upon which genuine return, rehabilitation and lasting peace must rest.

This is why every case involving targeted killings during the years of terrorism deserves an impartial

cence must be determined by courts of law on the basis of evidence—not by political narratives, media campaigns or public sentiment.

Equally important is the need for an honest historical reckoning. Several countries emerging from prolonged periods of terrorism or internal conflict have established truth commissions and independent documentation bodies to preserve historical records, hear victims' testimonies and recommend institutional reforms. India may similarly benefit from examining whether an independent and credible



criminal trials, it could complement them by creating an authoritative historical record that future generations cannot ignore.

Justice should never be viewed through either a communal or political lens. The life of every innocent victim carries equal value. Every family that has lost a loved one deserves the assurance that the rule of law will prevail irrespective of the identity of either the victim or the accused. That principle alone strengthens democracy and reinforces public faith in constitutional institutions.

Whether the Sarla Bhat case ultimately results in conviction or acquittal is a matter for the courts to determine solely on the basis of evidence and the rule of law. Yet the filing of the chargesheet carries significance beyond the courtroom. It demonstrates that the passage of time need not extinguish the pursuit of justice and that accountability for serious crimes remains an enduring constitutional obligation. For the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community, the demand has never been for vengeance. It has always been for acknowledgement, accountability and closure. Kashmir's future cannot rest upon forgotten victims or unresolved crimes. It must be built upon truth, justice, constitutional values and equal dignity for every citizen. Only then can reconciliation acquire real meaning and lasting peace become more than a political aspiration. Pull Quote

"Justice delayed cannot become justice denied. Even after decades, accountability remains the cornerstone of reconciliation."



connection with their ancestral land. Many continue to await justice for targeted killings, disappearances, destruction of property and the alleged illegal occupation of homes, temples and other community assets.

Many members of the Kashmiri Pandit community describe the targeted campaign against them as genocide and continue to seek greater legal and historical recognition of their suffering. Irrespective of the legal terminology eventually adopted, there can be little dispute that the community endured targeted terrorist violence, displacement and immense human suffering that deserve both accountability and historical acknowledgement.

Rehabilitation cannot succeed without justice. Successive governments have

investigation and expeditious adjudication. Justice should neither be denied nor sacrificed at the altar of endless procedural delays. While due process and legal safeguards must always be respected, courts should endeavour to ensure that such long-pending matters are heard efficiently so that victims, accused persons and society receive legal certainty within a reasonable timeframe.

Public discourse surrounding terrorism-related cases also requires maturity and restraint. In a democracy, individuals and political parties enjoy the constitutional right to express opinions and advocate their positions. However, public debate must remain respectful towards victims and should never undermine ongoing judicial proceedings. Ultimately, guilt or inno-

mechanism could comprehensively document the experiences of all victims of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, including the Kashmiri Pandit community as well as others who suffered violence. Such an initiative should focus on establishing facts, preserving historical memory and recommending measures relating to justice, reparations, institutional reform and guarantees of non-recurrence.

Such an independent mechanism could also examine unresolved issues relating to displacement, targeted killings, alleged sexual violence, destruction of religious and cultural heritage, and disputes concerning residential and community properties arising from the years of terrorist violence. While such a body would not replace

Koshur Foundation, MMAA Host Theatre Conclave to Strengthen Kashmir-Rajasthan Cultural Ties

Interactive Session Brings Together Eminent Theatre Personalities, Writers and Artists to Promote Cultural Exchange and Revitalise Theatre Movement

By Gulfam Barji



SRINAGAR, JULY 2026: In a significant initiative aimed at promoting cultural exchange and

Shri Ramesh Borana, an eminent theatre practitioner, cultural scholar, former Chairman of the Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi and former State Minister, and Mrs. Binaca Jesh Maloo, a renowned theatre personality, actress, broadcaster, cultural administrator, film producer and former Chairperson of the Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi.

The programme commenced with a traditional Kashmiri welcome under the chairmanship of Mr. Manzoor Ahmad Mir, Director of the Koshur Foundation and President of Manzoor Mir's Academy of Arts. As a mark of respect and appreciation, the guests were felicitated with traditional Kashmiri shawls. Veteran theatre artist

Arif, Syed Humayun Qaiser, Sheikh Hanief, Shafiq Qureshi, Mir Khurshid Ahmad, Shehzad Shabir, Asif, Gulshan Badrani, Majid Majazi, Sahil Shafi, Ashiq Hussain, Hasan Javed, Shabir Badpuri, Saleem Yousuf, Bashir Ahmad Bhagat, Raees Wathoori (Bismillah Khan Awardee), Shehnaz Bhat, Bilal Bhagat, Mudassar Khan, Mehraj-ud-Din Bhat, Gulzar Ahmad Dar, Mir Wajahat, Meh Jineen Inksari, Sabiha Mahajan and renowned actress Farhat Siddiqi, besides a large number of theatre enthusiasts.

During the session, participants deliberated on the present state of theatre in Kashmir and emphasised the need to strengthen cultural exchange between different regions

institutional support, artistic collaborations, audience development and cultural networking in strengthening theatre movements across India.

The participating artists, writers and directors also shared their experiences and perspectives on the future of theatre in Kashmir, expressing a collective commitment to preserving and promoting the region's rich theatrical traditions while encouraging greater interaction with theatre groups from across the country.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Manzoor Ahmad Mir stressed the importance of sustained dialogue, cultural exchange and collaborative initiatives for the growth of



strengthening theatrical collaboration between Kashmir and Rajasthan, the Koshur Foundation, in collaboration with Manzoor Mir's Academy of Arts (MMAA), Pattan, organised an enriching and thought-provoking interactive session with theatre artists at the Conference Hall of the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (JKAACL), Lal Mandi, Srinagar.

The event featured two distinguished guests from Rajasthan-

Mohammad Amin Bhat honoured Mrs. Binaca Jesh Maloo, while noted theatre personality Bashir Bhawani Yaser felicitated Shri Ramesh Borana.

The interactive session witnessed the participation of prominent theatre artists, writers, directors, cultural activists and traditional Bhand Pather performers from across Kashmir. Those present included Mohammad Amin Bhat, Mushtaq Ali Ahmad Khan, Bashir Bhawani Yaser, Dr. Ayash

of the country. Discussions focused on the challenges confronting theatre practitioners, the preservation of traditional performing arts, and measures required to revitalise the theatre movement in Jammu and Kashmir.

Addressing the gathering, Shri Ramesh Borana and Mrs. Binaca Jesh Maloo shared valuable insights drawn from their extensive experience in theatre, cultural administration and public service. They underlined the importance of

theatre and the performing arts. He expressed confidence that such interactions would create meaningful opportunities for artists from Kashmir and other parts of India to collaborate, exchange ideas and learn from one another.

The programme concluded with a formal vote of thanks and a renewed commitment to strengthening artistic and cultural ties between Kashmir and Rajasthan through future collaborations, workshops, performances and cultural exchanges.

When Every Voice Seeks to Lead

Why the Kashmiri Pandit Community Needs Unity More Than a Multiplicity of Leaders

By Avtar Mota

JAMMU, July 2026: The Kashmiri Pandit community today finds itself confronting a paradox that has quietly weakened its collective voice over the past three decades. While its concerns remain genuine and unresolved, its leadership has become increasingly fragmented. Every issue generates multiple spokespersons, multiple organisations, and multiple narratives. The result is not greater representation but diminished influence.

A community where everyone aspires to lead often ends up without effective leadership.

The late sociologist Max Weber argued that societies require legitimate authority to function cohesively. In its absence, competing centres of influence emerge, creating uncertainty and institutional paralysis. The Kashmiri Pandit community appears to be experiencing precisely such a crisis. Instead of presenting a united platform before governments and policymakers, it often speaks through numerous organisations pursuing similar objectives independently. The consequence is predictable: the message becomes diluted, responsibility becomes diffused, and decision-makers find no single representative voice with whom they can meaningfully engage.

Political philosopher Hannah Arendt described such situations as the "banality of misrule"—a condition where disorder becomes normal not because of malice, but because accountability disappears. When responsibility belongs to everyone, it effectively belongs to no one.

History repeatedly demonstrates that divided communities struggle to achieve common objectives.

The challenge is not the existence of multiple organisations. Diversity of opinion is natural and healthy in any democracy.

The problem arises when institutional ego replaces collective purpose. Frequent press conferences, media debates, seminars, public lectures, and social media campaigns may create visibility, but visibility alone should never be mistaken for influence.

Real leadership is measured by outcomes rather than appearances.

French philosopher

it easier to project leadership than to practise it. Neil Postman warned decades ago that societies risk becoming consumed by performance instead of purpose. The observation appears increasingly relevant in an age where image frequently precedes achievement.

True leadership demands intellectual clarity combined with moral courage.

The first comprises event managers, who often mistake ceremonial functions, political proximity, and official photographs for meaningful advocacy. The second consists of press-release activists, who equate media visibility with tangible progress.

Meanwhile, many of the community's most pressing concerns remain unresolved. These include dig-

Without seeking publicity or political patronage, they established educational institutions, organised relief, documented historical experiences, preserved the Sharda script, sustained community publications, promoted Kashmiri language and literature, restored temples, supported vulnerable families, and maintained cultural continuity under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

Their work represents what may be called the community's most enduring form of leadership—leadership rooted in Nishkaam Seva, or selfless service.

These individuals rarely occupy television studios or political platforms. Yet their contributions have preserved the civilisational continuity of a dispersed community far more effectively than rhetorical declarations alone.

The lesson is both simple and urgent.

Communities facing prolonged displacement cannot afford endless institutional fragmentation. Differences of opinion are inevitable, but they must ultimately converge around shared objectives. Unity does not require uniformity; it requires a willingness to subordinate personal ambition to collective purpose.

The Kashmiri Pandit community possesses intellectual resources, professional excellence, cultural resilience, and a rich civilisational legacy. What it now requires is a leadership culture capable of transforming these strengths into coherent public action.

History remembers communities not merely for the suffering they endured but for the wisdom with which they responded to it.

The future of the Kashmiri Pandit cause will depend less on the number of voices speaking and more on whether those voices can eventually speak together.



Michel Foucault observed that fragmented societies become easier to influence because competing power centres weaken internal cohesion. Where there is no unified authority, external forces inevitably shape the discourse. Communities without institutional coherence often find themselves reacting to events rather than shaping them.

Leadership itself cannot be manufactured overnight. It must emerge through years of service, sacrifice, credibility, and public trust. British historian Arnold Toynbee argued that civilisations progress through the successful response of creative minorities to historical challenges. Leaders are not created by publicity; they are tested by adversity.

Unfortunately, contemporary public life increasingly rewards visibility over substance. Social media, television debates, and digital platforms have made

Plato's vision of the philosopher-king was not merely about wisdom but about ethical responsibility. Similarly, leadership scholar James MacGregor Burns viewed leadership as a moral undertaking rooted in service rather than personal ambition. Great leaders willingly absorb criticism while distributing credit to others. They accept responsibility even when success remains uncertain.

History offers numerous examples—from Cincinnatus in ancient Rome to Dag Hammarskjöld in the twentieth century—of individuals who exercised authority with humility rather than self-interest. Such examples remind us that genuine leadership is rarely loud; it is often quiet, consistent, and selfless.

Within the Kashmiri Pandit community today, however, the leadership landscape has increasingly narrowed into two visible categories.

nified and secure rehabilitation, sustainable employment for displaced youth, restoration of temples and religious institutions, recovery of encroached residential properties, justice for families affected by terrorism, meaningful political representation, preservation of cultural identity, and a coherent response to revisionist narratives surrounding the community's displacement.

More than thirty-six years after the exodus, many of these objectives remain substantially unfulfilled.

Yet the story of the Kashmiri Pandit community is not solely one of political disappointment.

Its greatest strength has perhaps emerged outside formal politics.

Throughout the years of exile, countless volunteers, educators, scholars, social workers, doctors, journalists, writers, and cultural activists quietly ensured the community's survival.

Sharp Sight Eye Hospital, People's Hut Foundation Join Hands to Expand Community Eye Care

MoU Aims to Deliver Free Screening Camps, Vision Care and Affordable Treatment Across Jammu & Kashmir

By Vitasta Herald
Correspondent

Jammu, July 2026: In a major initiative to strengthen community healthcare and improve access to quality eye care, Sharp Sight Eye Hospital and the People's Hut Foundation have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to jointly promote preventive eye healthcare and provide affordable treatment to underserved sections of society.

The agreement marks the beginning of a collaborative effort that seeks to combine advanced ophthalmic expertise with grassroots community outreach to combat preventable blindness and improve vision care across Jammu and Kashmir.

The Memorandum of Understanding was formally signed at the Sharp Sight Eye Hospital by Mr. Chetan Sharma, Centre Head, Sharp Sight Eye Hospital, and Dr. Rohit Koul, Director and CEO, People's Hut Foundation, reaffirming



the shared commitment of both organisations towards inclusive and accessible healthcare. The signing ceremony was attended by senior representatives from both organisations. Representing Sharp Sight Eye Hospital were Mr. Deepak Sharma, Deputy Manager (Marketing), Mr. Sahil

Sharma, Assistant Manager (Marketing), and Mr. Rahul Kumar, Senior Marketing Executive, who are expected to play an important role in implementing joint awareness campaigns and community outreach programmes.

The People's Hut Foundation delegation also included Dr. Ritu Koul, Director and

Chief Operating Officer, and Mr. Vikas Koul, Chief Advisor, reflecting the foundation's commitment to integrating specialised eye care into its ongoing health, education and social welfare initiatives. As part of the partnership, both organisations will organise free eye screening camps, community diag-

nostic drives, awareness programmes and subsidised treatment initiatives for economically weaker sections of society. The collaboration aims to ensure that quality vision care reaches remote and underserved communities that often lack access to specialised ophthalmic services. Speaking on the occasion, representatives of both organisations expressed confidence that the partnership would significantly strengthen community-based healthcare by combining Sharp Sight Eye Hospital's modern ophthalmic infrastructure with the People's Hut Foundation's extensive grassroots network.

The initiative is expected to benefit thousands of people through early diagnosis, timely treatment and increased public awareness about eye health, thereby contributing to the prevention of avoidable blindness and the promotion of healthier communities across the region.

Yogi Welcomes First Batch of Amarnath Pilgrims

Apni Party Leader Appreciates LG Administration's Arrangements, Calls Yatra a Symbol of Peace and Communal Harmony



By Vitasta Herald
Correspondent

Jammu, July 2026: Senior Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party leader and In-charge Shangus Constituency M.K. Yogi welcomed the first batch of Shri Amarnath Ji pilgrims after they were flagged off by

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha from the Bhagwati Nagar Yatri Niwas in Jammu, expressing confidence that this year's pilgrimage would witness record participation from devotees across India and abroad.

In a statement, Yogi ap-

preciated the elaborate arrangements made by the Lieutenant Governor-led administration for the smooth conduct of the annual pilgrimage. He said comprehensive facilities and security measures had been put in place from Lakhanpur to the Holy

Cave Shrine, ensuring the safety and convenience of the pilgrims throughout the Yatra route.

Describing the Amarnath Yatra as a spiritual journey that strengthens national unity, Yogi also lauded the contribution of the local people, who, he said, have been playing a vital role in facilitating the pilgrimage for decades through their hospitality and dedicated services.

Yogi and his team received the first batch of pilgrims at the Nunwan Base Camp, where they greeted the devotees with flower garlands and extended their best wishes for a safe and spiritually fulfilling pilgrimage. A traditional Pooja Archana was also performed at Gouri Mandir to mark the commencement of the Yatra.

Appealing to devotees across the country to undertake the sacred pilgrimage in large numbers, Yogi expressed hope that the 2026 Yatra would further strengthen communal harmony, brotherhood and national integration while contributing to peace and prosperity in Jammu and Kashmir. He also urged the Lieutenant Governor and the Union Territory administration to continue making every possible effort to ensure the smooth, safe and successful conduct of the pilgrimage.

Among those who accompanied Yogi during the welcome programme were Mohd Yousuf Sofi, Kulvinder Singh Bali, Mohmad Naved Shah, and several other party workers and supporters.

Floodlights and Firsts: Srinagar's TRC Ground and the Historic Asian Games Camp Headline J&K's Sports Season



Sushma Kumari

Vitasta Herald News Bureau

SRINAGAR, JULY 2026: The sports landscape of Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed a historic transition this month, marked by the roaring conclusion of the territory's largest football extravaganza and an unprecedented national recognition of its athletic infrastructure. From the high-energy, floodlit arenas of the Kashmir Valley to the elite preparation tracks for international competitions, July 2026 stands out as a watershed moment for the Union Territory's sporting renaissance.

The headline event of the month was the grand finale of the inaugural Kashmir Champions Football League (KCFL) 2026. Organised by the Jammu & Kashmir Sports Council, the multi-week, first-of-its-kind tournament brought together district-level talent from every corner of the Valley under a structured professional league format. The tournament reached an electric crescendo at the TRC Synthetic Turf Football Ground in Srinagar, where thousands of passionate football lovers gathered under the floodlights for the knockout rounds. In a fiercely contested championship clash, the Baramulla Strikers defeated Srinagar United to lift the maiden KCFL title, solidifying the tournament's legacy and establishing a permanent grassroots ecosystem for competitive football in the Union Territory.

Parallel to the football fever, J&K is set to make history on the national

stage by hosting the first-ever National Coaching Camp for the Indian Soft Tennis Teams. Sanctioned in active collaboration with the Amateur Soft Tennis Federation of India, the high-profile training camp will be held at the Gindun Sports Stadium in Rajbagh, Srinagar, running from July 10 to August 13, 2026. This marks the first time in the history of the Union Territory that a national-level preparatory camp for the prestigious Asian Games is being conducted on J&K soil. Local sports authorities highlighted the move as a profound testament of confidence from the Government of India in the region's expanding, world-class athletic facilities, offering local players a golden opportunity to train alongside the country's finest elite athletes.

To protect this thriving momentum, the J&K Sports Council also issued a comprehensive statutory clarification regarding its transparent Sports Quota recruitment rules. Addressing recent public queries, the Council reaffirmed its legal and merit-based framework for hiring outstanding sportspersons, while formally reiterating the official central government recognition of emerging disciplines such as Pencak Silat, Netball, and specialized events in Kayaking & Canoeing. By fortifying administrative transparency, introducing premier league culture, and attracting elite national training programs, Jammu and Kashmir's sports ecosystem has firmly moved away from the periphery to become a frontrunner in the national arena.

Development, Heritage and Security Shape Duggar's Changing Landscape

While Cultural Initiatives Strengthen National Integration, Delayed Tourism Projects Raise Questions Over Regional Priorities

Kamakhshya Dogra

JAMMU, JULY 2026: Jammu province witnessed a month of contrasting developments during July, with significant administrative action, successful cultural initiatives, renewed security preparedness and growing public concern over the slow pace of regional tourism projects. Together, these developments reflect both the opportunities and challenges confronting the Duggar region as it seeks balanced growth while preserving its distinct cultural identity.

One of the most significant administrative developments during the month was the decision of the Lieutenant Governor-led administration to suspend eight government officials following the discovery of allegedly pro-separatist content in a publication titled *Personalities and Legends of J&K*, which had been procured for government libraries. The administration has also blacklisted the publishers and authors associated with the publication and ordered a 30-day inquiry to determine how the material entered the official procurement process.

The action has been viewed as a strong message regarding accountability within government institutions, particularly in matters relating to educational and cultural publications. Officials have indicated that the inquiry will examine the entire procurement process and recommend measures to prevent similar lapses in future.

While the administration acted swiftly in this matter, concerns continue to grow over the prolonged delay in another important initiative—the proposed Duggar Dhani tourism project in Samba.

Announced nearly two years ago as an ambitious cultural tourism destination showcasing the rich heritage of the Dogra region, the project has yet to move beyond the planning stage. Land had already been identified near the historic Chichi Mata Temple, and the project was expected to become a major attraction promoting Dogra architecture, cuisine, handicrafts, folklore and performing arts.

However, despite repeated announcements and considerable public expectations, little visible progress has been made.

The continuing delay has disappointed cultural organisations, tourism stakeholders and residents, many of whom believe that Duggar Dhani has the potential to become one of Jammu's flagship tourism destinations. Apart

restructuring across various government departments. These measures are expected to improve administrative efficiency and streamline personnel management within the civil administration.

On the cultural front, Jammu recorded a positive milestone with the successful completion of the Somnath Swabhiman Yatra-2026.

Pilgrims who participated

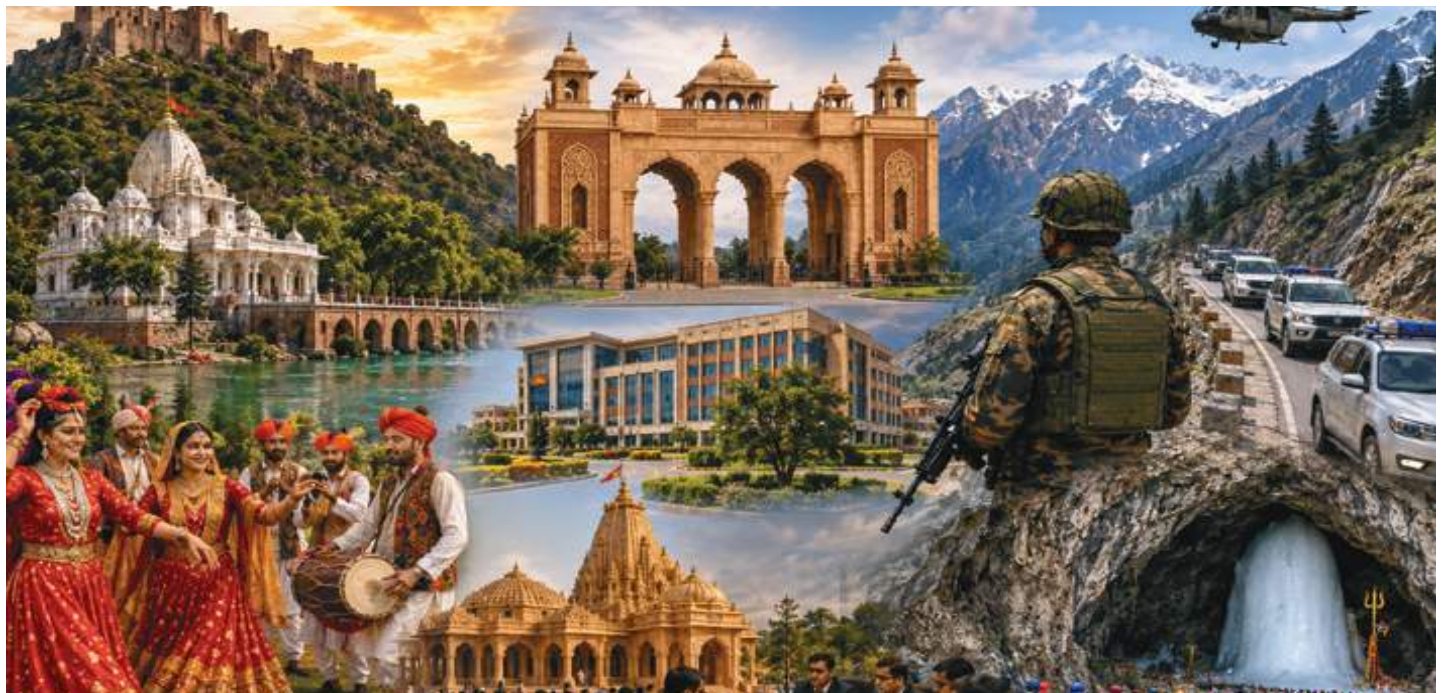
Many heritage experts believe that if properly developed, Duggar Dhani could become a living cultural village showcasing the traditions, history and hospitality of the Dogra region, thereby complementing national cultural initiatives with a strong regional identity.

Meanwhile, security continued to remain a priority across Jammu and Kashmir.

motorists and tourists to strictly follow the revised traffic regulations and cooperate with law enforcement agencies to facilitate the successful conduct of the Yatra.

Taken together, these developments reflect the evolving priorities of the Duggar region.

While decisive administrative action and successful cultural initiatives have demon-



from attracting visitors, such a project could generate employment for local artisans, craftsmen, folk performers, entrepreneurs and small businesses while preserving the region's unique cultural traditions.

Observers argue that while Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed significant investment in tourism infrastructure elsewhere, projects dedicated to preserving Dogra identity and heritage deserve similar priority. They believe the successful implementation of Duggar Dhani would strengthen cultural tourism and contribute substantially to the local economy.

Alongside these developments, the administration also issued several important governance-related orders, including the finalisation of the seniority list of the Jammu and Kashmir Secretariat Gazetted Service-I (Under Secretaries Cadre) and the constitution of committees to examine budget-neutral cadre

in the six-day pilgrimage returned safely to Jammu Tawi Railway Station after visiting the historic Somnath Temple in Gujarat. Organised jointly by the Department of Culture, Government of Jammu and Kashmir, and the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (JKAACL), the pilgrimage formed part of the national integration initiative "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat."

Participants described the journey as spiritually enriching while also strengthening cultural understanding between different regions of the country. Such initiatives, cultural experts believe, help reinforce the idea of national unity while enabling participants to appreciate India's shared civilisational heritage.

Ironically, the success of programmes like the Somnath Swabhiman Yatra has also highlighted the urgent need to develop similar cultural tourism infrastructure within Jammu itself.

Security forces maintained intensive counter-insurgency operations in Shopian district, where search operations continued to trace two local Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorists reportedly hiding in dense orchard areas. Although the operation remained confined to Kashmir, authorities maintained heightened vigilance across the Union Territory.

Preparations also intensified for the annual Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra-2026.

The Jammu and Kashmir Traffic Police issued a revised traffic advisory effective from July 2 to August 28, outlining convoy timings, traffic regulations and movement restrictions for pilgrims, tourists and commercial vehicles travelling along the Yatra routes. The advisory aims to ensure the safe and smooth movement of thousands of pilgrims expected to undertake the annual pilgrimage during the coming weeks.

Officials have appealed to

strated the government's commitment in several sectors, the continuing delay in implementing landmark regional projects such as Duggar Dhani raises legitimate questions about development priorities.

For many residents of Jammu, preserving Dogra heritage is not merely a matter of cultural pride; it is an investment in the region's economic future.

As Jammu continues to position itself as an important cultural and tourism destination, stakeholders believe that initiatives promoting local identity should progress alongside broader developmental programmes. Completing projects like Duggar Dhani would not only celebrate the rich legacy of Duggar Desh but also create sustainable employment, strengthen cultural tourism and ensure that future generations remain connected with one of North India's oldest and most vibrant cultural traditions.

Delhi's Railway Future Must Move Beyond the Capital's Traditional Stations

Why Narela and Ghevra Deserve a Place in the Next Phase of Railway Development

By Dr. Princy P. B. Pandit

JAMMU, July 2026: India is witnessing an unprecedented transformation of its railway infrastructure. From Vande Bharat trains to station redevelopment, dedicated freight corridors and digital technologies, Indian Railways is steadily redefining public transportation. Yet, amid this impressive modernisation, one equally important question deserves urgent attention: Are we distributing railway infrastructure equitably across our growing cities? Development cannot be called inclusive if it remains concentrated in a handful of privileged locations while vast residential regions continue to depend upon overstretched facilities. As Delhi expands geographically and demographically, railway planning must evolve beyond the traditional focus on New Delhi Railway Station, Old Delhi Railway Station and Hazrat Nizamuddin Railway Station.

Every day these stations witness enormous passenger volumes. The resulting congestion extends far beyond crowded platforms. It manifests itself in traffic bottlenecks, long waiting hours, security concerns, difficulty in crowd management and increased incidents of petty crime such as pick-pocketing. Railway authorities deserve appreciation for managing this pressure, but good administration should not become a substitute for better planning. In my view, Delhi has now reached a stage where decentralisation of railway traffic is no longer merely desirable—it is essential.

The strongest opportunity lies in developing Narela Railway Station into a full-fledged major railway terminal for North Delhi and North-West Delhi. The North-West District alone covers nearly 442 square kilometres, making it one of the largest districts of the National Capital Territory. It also serves adjoining areas of North Delhi and neighbouring regions. Yet, despite its geographical size

and growing population, it continues to receive disproportionately limited railway attention.

This imbalance becomes even more striking when compared with several smaller districts that already enjoy significantly better connectivity. The South-West District covers approximately 420 square kilometres, South Delhi around 250 square kilometres, North Delhi nearly 60 square kilometres, and the Central District only about 25 square kilometres. Despite serving one of Delhi's largest geographical regions, North-West Delhi continues to depend largely on railway infrastructure concentrated many kilometres away.

One naturally asks whether such an imbalance is justified. The issue is not merely one of geography but of planning philosophy. Why should the overwhelming share of investment continue to flow towards already well-developed stations located within relatively smaller urban pockets when viable railway stations and railway lines already exist in areas capable of serving much larger populations?

Rather than forcing millions of passengers to converge upon the same stations, Indian Railways can distribute passenger traffic more intelligently by strengthening infrastructure where it already exists.

A practical and immediately implementable step would be to provide scheduled halts for all major north-bound premium and express trains at Narela Railway Station. Such a proposal does not necessarily increase travel time. Existing halt durations at New Delhi, Old Delhi or Hazrat Nizamuddin can simply be rationalised. If a train presently halts for twenty minutes at one station, that duration could be shared between the existing station and Narela, allowing passengers from northern Delhi to board comfortably while easing pressure on central terminals.

Likewise, Ghevra Railway Station possesses enormous potential to become a major boarding point for passengers travelling towards western and southern India. The infrastructure already exists. What remains is a policy decision to utilise it effectively.

This approach is also economically prudent. Instead of

investing enormous sums in continually expanding already saturated railway sta-

Mata Vaishno Devi Katra invariably halt at Jammu Railway Station, despite the rela-

much more than improved connectivity. It would symbolise balanced regional



tions, Indian Railways can achieve significant operational benefits by upgrading existing but underutilised stations. Such investments would be both cost-effective and socially beneficial.

More importantly, decentralisation would substantially improve the daily lives of lakhs of commuters. Residents of North-West Delhi currently spend considerable time and money merely reaching railway stations located in central Delhi before beginning their actual rail journey. Bringing railway services closer to residential clusters would reduce travel costs, save valuable time, decrease vehicular congestion, lower pollution levels and improve the overall passenger experience.

Fortunately, India already offers successful examples of such decentralised planning.

In Goa, long-distance trains originating from Vasco da Gama or Madgaon routinely halt at Thivim Railway Station, located approximately fifty to sixty kilometres away, enabling passengers from northern Goa to board conveniently without travelling unnecessarily to the originating station.

Similarly, in Jammu and Kashmir, trains originating from or terminating at Shri

tively short distance of around fifty kilometres between the two stations. This simple operational arrangement has made rail travel considerably more convenient for thousands of passengers.

These examples demonstrate that passenger-centric railway planning is neither difficult nor unprecedented. They simply reflect a willingness to align infrastructure with population realities rather than administrative habit.

The larger debate extends beyond railway stations. It concerns the broader philosophy of urban development in India's capital city.

Development should never remain confined to a few high-profile areas simply because they have historically enjoyed greater visibility. Every part of the National Capital deserves equitable infrastructure investment. A modern capital city should be measured not merely by the grandeur of its central districts but by the quality of services available to citizens living on its expanding periphery.

Indian Railways proudly calls itself the lifeline of the nation. A lifeline, however, must reach every limb of the body—not merely its centre.

The development of Narela and Ghevra into major railway hubs would represent

planning, equitable public investment and genuinely citizen-centric governance. It would also help create a more resilient railway network capable of accommodating Delhi's future growth without overwhelming its traditional stations. As Delhi prepares for the next phase of urban expansion, the opportunity before policymakers is clear. We can continue concentrating passengers into a handful of overcrowded terminals, or we can embrace a decentralised model that distributes opportunity, infrastructure and convenience more fairly across the city. The question is not whether this transformation is technically possible. The railway network already exists. The stations already exist. The population certainly exists. The only remaining question is whether we possess the vision to allow Delhi's railway future to grow beyond the boundaries of its traditional stations.

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The Voice That Isn't Real

By Rohit Kachroo



ful and also so concerning.

The technology works by studying the unique patterns of human speech. AI systems analyze tone, pitch, pronunciation, rhythm and other details that make every voice different. Once the system understands these patterns, it can create new sentences in that voice even if the person never actually said those words. There are positive uses of this technology. It can help

to create panic and pressure. When emotions are high, people may react quickly without verifying the situation. Imagine receiving a call from a voice that sounds exactly like your son saying he has met with an accident and needs money immediately. Imagine your manager's voice asking you to transfer funds for an urgent business matter. Imagine a relative calling from an unknown number saying they

tial information or urgent action, take a moment before responding. Call the person back using a number you already know. If feasible send a message through another platform. Ask a question that only the real person would know. A few extra seconds/minutes can prevent a major mistake. Families can also create a simple family code word or private phrase that only close members know. For example, parents and

cate. The important thing is learning how to use new tools responsibly while understanding the risks they bring. Awareness is becoming one of the most important skills of the digital age. Technology companies, educators and policymakers also have a role to play. As AI voice cloning becomes more advanced, stronger safety measures and public awareness will be needed to protect people from misuse.

HOW AI voice cloning is changing the way we think about trust and identity. Your phone rings. You answer it and hear a voice you know very well. It could be your child, a family member, a close friend or even your boss. The person sounds worried and asks for urgent help. They need money, information or immediate action. The voice feels completely real. You recognize the way they speak, their tone and their emotions. Without thinking twice, you trust what you hear but what if that person never made the call? What if the voice was created by Artificial Intelligence?

Just a few years ago, this would have seemed impossible. Today, it is becoming a reality. Artificial Intelligence (AI) voice cloning has developed so quickly that a computer can now recreate a person's voice with surprising accuracy. A short audio sample is often enough for advanced systems to learn how someone sounds and generate speech that closely resembles the original speaker. It is one of the most fascinating technological developments of our time. At the same time, it raises a serious question. If a voice can be copied, how do we know who is truly speaking? For generations, a person's voice has been one of the strongest signs of identity. We recognize people not only by their face but also by the way they speak. A voice carries emotions, memories and personal connections. It can make us feel safe, comforted and understood. That is what makes AI voice cloning so power-



people who have lost their ability to speak and create new possibilities in communication and accessibility.

However, for everyday people, the bigger concern is not how AI voice cloning is used in laboratories or special projects. The bigger concern is how it can be misused. Most of us naturally trust familiar voices. When we hear someone we know, we usually do not stop to question whether it is really them. This trust is a beautiful part of human relationships but it can also become a weakness when technology can create realistic copies.

Around the world, AI-generated voices are being used in scams and fraud attempts. Criminals can imitate family members, colleagues or business leaders

are stuck somewhere and need financial help. These situations feel believable because they are designed to trigger emotions before logic. What makes this issue more serious is that it does not affect only famous people or public figures. It can affect anyone. Every day, people share voice recordings through social media videos, voice messages, online meetings, podcasts and public content. These recordings become part of our digital presence. While technology helps us stay connected, it also creates new risks that we need to understand.

So how can we protect ourselves? The first step is simple, verify before trusting. If someone contacts you asking for money, confiden-

children can decide on a word to use only during emergencies. If someone calls claiming to be a family member after an accident or asking for urgent financial help, asking for that code or a personal question only they know can help confirm their identity. Simple steps like these may feel unnecessary today but they can become extremely valuable as technology continues to improve. Businesses should also create stronger verification methods instead of depending only on voice instructions for important decisions. A familiar voice should be a starting point for confirmation, not the final proof of identity. This does not mean we should fear technology. Innovation has always changed the way people live and communi-

The discussion around AI voice cloning is not only about artificial intelligence. It is about trust, identity and the way we understand reality in a changing world.

For generations, hearing someone's voice was enough to believe we knew who was speaking. Today, that certainty is changing.

The future will bring many benefits from AI but it will also require us to become more careful, aware and responsible. Machines may learn to imitate our voices but human judgment will remain our strongest protection. Because the real challenge is not that technology can sound like us. The real challenge is learning to look beyond the voice and understand who is truly speaking.



Vitasta Herald

EDITORIAL

Safeguarding
Young Minds from
Academic Subversion

The recent discovery of "pro-separatist" content in books procured for government school libraries in Jammu and Kashmir is not merely an administrative lapse; it is a grave assault on the sanctity of our educational system.

The two books, Personalities and Legends of J&K and Great Personalities of Jammu and Kashmir, brazenly glorified militants and separatist figures, portraying them as heroes while utilizing inflammatory terminology like "Indian Occupied Kashmir".

Labeling this infiltration of school libraries as "academic jihad," critics rightly point out the danger of injecting separatist ideology into the impressionable minds of our youth. While the J&K administration has acted decisively by suspending eight officials, black-listing the authors and publishers, and initiating a 30-day inquiry, this incident exposes a catastrophic failure in due diligence. It is unfathomable how such content bypassed expert sub-committees tasked with curriculum selection.

This was not a mistake; it was a deliberate subversion of history.

The dissemination of narratives that challenge India's sovereignty in government schools is an unforgivable betrayal of public trust. Beyond mere suspension, the inquiry must unearth the depth of this conspiracy. If found guilty of orchestrating this attempt to radicalize the future generation, the perpetrators-including authors, publishers, and

negligent officials-must face severe punitive measures, including criminal prosecution. Anything less would be a disservice to the nation and a failure to protect the integrity of our educational institutions.



King C Bharati

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13 July: A Black Day in the
History of Kashmir

Why 13 July 1931 Continues to Remain One of the Most Contested Chapters in Kashmir's Past

By Ajay Bharati

13 July is not a day of martyrdom. It remains, for many, a Black Day in the history of Kashmir.

The events of 13 July 1931 were not merely an episode of political unrest. They

State and disrupted Kashmir's centuries-old social harmony.

On 13 July 1931, the premises of the Central Jail, Srinagar, came under attack, placing judges, government officials and law enforcement personnel at

Every victim of communal violence deserves recognition, and historical events must be examined in their full context and on the basis of credible evidence.

One important source for understanding these



marked the beginning of organised communal mobilisation against Maharaja Hari Singh Ji and the Hindu minority in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir. What is often portrayed as a democratic movement was, according to this perspective, the culmination of sustained British colonial intrigue, implemented on the ground through communal mobilisation led by the Muslim Conference.

The British had long sought to undermine the sovereignty of the princely State of Jammu and Kashmir following the Treaty of Amritsar (1846). Driven by their strategic interest in controlling India's northern frontiers and pursuing their policy of divide and rule, they encouraged forces that weakened the authority of the

risk. The violence soon spread across the city, resulting in loss of life and widespread disorder. Hindu-owned properties, particularly in Vichar Nag and Maharaj Ganj, were reportedly looted and targeted, revealing what the author describes as the communal nature of the disturbances.

The communal politics unleashed in 1931 did not end there. According to this interpretation, they sowed the seeds of separatism and religious radicalisation that, over the following decades, culminated in the targeted killings, persecution and mass exodus of the Kashmiri Hindu community from their ancestral homeland during 1989-90.

History cannot be understood through selective remembrance or politically constructed narratives.

events is the Barjor Dalal Report of the Srinagar Riot Enquiry Committee (1931). Its compilation by the late Prof. Shailender Singh Jamwal of the University of Jammu, together with the original report available in the public domain, provides valuable material for scholars and readers seeking to examine this important chapter of Kashmir's history.

No amount of political reinterpretation, the author argues, can erase the enduring shadow that 13 July 1931 cast over Kashmir's history. A truthful, balanced and evidence-based understanding of the past remains essential for justice, reconciliation and the building of a peaceful future.

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The Man from Pandrethan

Mir Sarwar's Journey from Kashmir's By-lanes to the Big Screen

By King C. Bharati

Jammu, July 2026: In an industry obsessed with overnight success, glamorous launches, and carefully crafted publicity campaigns, the journey of Mir Sarwar stands apart. It is a story not of privilege but perseverance; not of instant fame but years of disciplined preparation. More importantly, it is the story of a Kashmiri who carried the spirit of his homeland into the heart of Indian cinema without ever severing his connection with the Valley that shaped him.

Born on February 19, 1977, in Pandrethan, Srinagar, Mir Sarwar's path to Bollywood was anything but conventional. Long before cameras began following him, he was pursuing a very different dream. As a young man growing up in Kashmir, Sarwar immersed himself in sports and martial arts. He trained rigorously in Kickboxing, Wushu, and Muay Thai, eventually becoming a national medallist. The discipline, endurance, and focus demanded by these sports would later become the foundation of his acting career.

Yet another passion quietly developed alongside athletics-photography.

Long before he faced the camera, he was behind it, capturing the changing moods of Kashmir. His talent earned him recognition from the Jammu and Kashmir Government, and photography became his first serious engagement with visual storytelling. Looking back, one can see the seeds of the actor and filmmaker already taking root.

His entry into the entertainment world came through modelling. In 1999, he moved to New Delhi and began working professionally as a model. But unlike many who treat modelling as a destination, Sarwar viewed it as a stepping stone. He understood that real longevity in the performing arts required craft.

That realization led him to theatre.

Working under stalwarts such as M.K. Raina and Bapi Bose, Sarwar immersed himself in stage performances and formal training. Participation in three workshops at the National School of Drama (NSD) re-

finned his understanding of character, voice, movement, and performance. Theatre became his laboratory, where he learned to inhabit characters rather than merely portray them.

For years, he worked quietly, away from the spotlight.

Then came Mumbai.

When Sarwar shifted permanently to the city in 2014, fortune finally met preparation. Within a short span, he landed roles in two major productions-Kabir Khan's *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* and *Phantom*.

Although his role in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* was relatively brief, audiences remember him as Rauf, the father of the mute Pakistani girl Shahida (Munni). It was a performance marked by restraint and emotional depth. In a film dominated by Salman Khan's star power, Sarwar managed to leave a lasting impression. The industry had taken notice.

What followed was a remarkable run of appearances across some of Indian cinema's biggest produc-



tions. From *Jolly LLB 2*, *Dishoom*, *Kesari*, *Kedarnath*, *Panipat*, and *Shershaah* to Mani Ratnam's acclaimed Tamil film *Kaatru Veliyidai*, Sarwar steadily built a reputation as an actor capable of bringing authenticity to every role, regardless of screen time.

Unlike many actors who become trapped in a single image, Sarwar demonstrated remarkable versatility. He portrayed police officers, military men, terrorists, fathers, politicians, and historical figures with equal conviction. Directors discovered in him an actor who could bring credibility to complex and often emotionally demanding roles.



Yet mainstream success never distanced him from Kashmir. If anything, it strengthened his determination to contribute to the region's cultural landscape.

At a time when Kashmiri cinema struggled for visibility, Sarwar chose to invest his time, energy, and resources in local filmmaking. Through his banner Safdar Arts, he became a driving force behind projects that sought to tell

performances.

As a filmmaker, Sarwar has shown equal courage.

His directorial venture *Bed No. 17*, shot in Srinagar, travelled to several national and international film festivals, earning recognition for its independent spirit and powerful narrative. He has also directed music videos and socially relevant visual projects that reflect the emotional and cultural re-

memory, displacement, resilience, and hope. In many ways, his career mirrors the journey of contemporary Kashmir itself—marked by struggle, reinvention, and an unwavering desire to tell its own stories. Today, whether appearing in a Bollywood blockbuster, a regional independent film, an OTT series, or a festival project, Mir Sarwar remains guided by the same principles that



Kashmiri stories with honesty and artistic integrity.

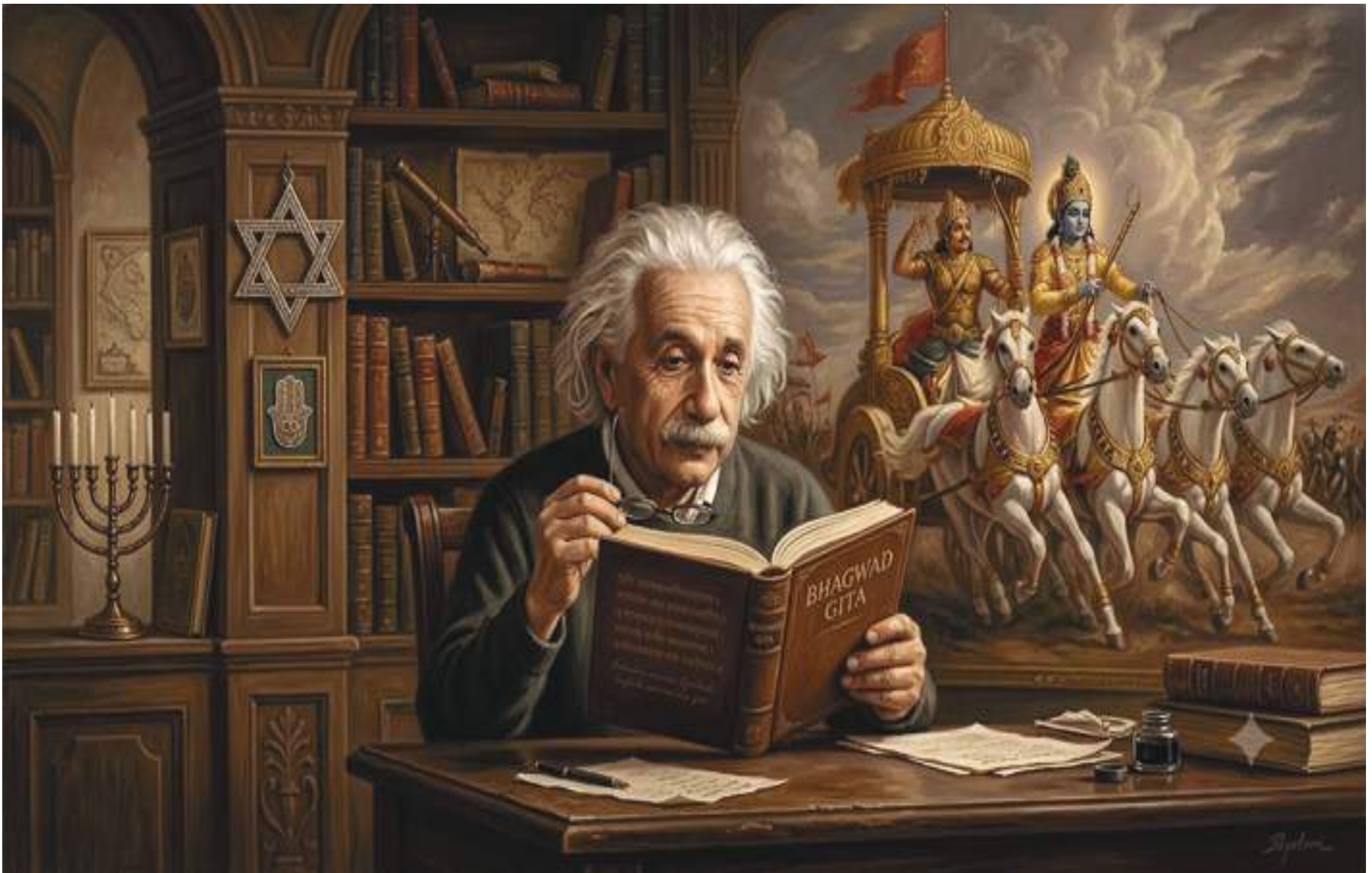
His involvement in *Kashmir Daily* represented more than a film project—it was a statement of intent. Produced against considerable odds, the film sought to revive serious filmmaking in the Valley. Sarwar not only played a leading role but also contributed to the production process, demonstrating his commitment to building a sustainable cinematic ecosystem for future generations. Similarly, his acclaimed film *Half Widow* explored the human consequences of conflict in Kashmir, earning appreciation for its sensitive storytelling and nuanced

alities of Kashmir. Perhaps what distinguishes Mir Sarwar most is his willingness to give back. Unlike many successful actors who move away from their roots, Sarwar frequently works on Kashmiri projects without charging fees, helping emerging filmmakers overcome financial limitations. For him, cinema is not merely a profession; it is a vehicle for cultural preservation and social engagement. This commitment reflects a broader philosophy.

Sarwar belongs to a generation of Kashmiri artists who have experienced both the beauty and turbulence of the Valley. Their work carries the weight of

shaped him in his early years: discipline, authenticity, and dedication to craft. His filmography may continue to grow, but his greatest achievement perhaps lies elsewhere. At a time when Kashmir is often spoken about rather than heard, Mir Sarwar has helped create space for Kashmiri voices within Indian cinema. From the quiet lanes of Pandrethan to the bright lights of Mumbai, his journey is not merely the story of an actor. It is the story of a storyteller who never forgot where he came from. And in an industry where reinvention is constant, that rootedness may well be his greatest role.

Einstein and the Bhagavad Gita



By Avtar Mota

In a 1950 letter to Robert Marcus, Albert Einstein wrote:

"Our experience of being separate from the universe is an optical illusion of consciousness..." Earlier, in his 1930 New York Times essay Religion and Science, he described a "cosmic religious feeling" that transcended dogma, organised religion, and the concept of a personal God. These ideas bear a striking philosophical resemblance to Vedanta and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita.

Albert Einstein, though firmly rooted in the traditions of Western science, maintained a deep intellectual and spiritual interest in the Bhagavad Gita. It is often stated that he received a copy of the Gita in 1929 and kept it on his desk until

his death in 1955. He is widely quoted as saying:

"When I read the Bhagavad-Gita and reflect about how God created this universe, everything else seems so superfluous."

This sentiment resonates with the Gita's vision of an eternal and unmanifest reality that exists beyond the world of appearances, as described in Chapter 8, Verse 20.

Einstein is also believed to have been influenced by the Gita's teachings on Karma Yoga. Chapter 2, Verse 47 states:

"You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but not to the fruits of action."

Many biographers and commentators have associated this principle with Einstein's approach to scientific inquiry, suggesting that he worked without excessive attachment to outcomes, allowing discoveries to emerge through patient exploration rather than forced effort.

Similarly, Chapter 3, Verse 27 declares:

"All actions are performed by the modes of material nature, but one deluded by ego thinks, 'I am the doer.'"

This idea finds an interesting parallel in Einstein's scientific worldview, where no observer occupies a privileged position outside the universal framework. Knowledge, in this sense, appears not as a personal possession but as a revelation arising through the process of inquiry.

Another verse often associated with Einstein's outlook is Chapter 2, Verse 14, which advises individuals to endure pleasure and pain, success and failure, as temporary experiences that come and go like changing seasons. Such a philosophy may help explain Einstein's resilience during years of criticism and his lifelong, though ultimately unfinished,

search for a unified field theory.

It must be acknowledged, however, that direct documentary evidence linking Einstein's scientific theories to the Bhagavad Gita remains limited. Scholars caution that several quotations attributed to him are anecdotal and do not always appear in his collected writings. Nevertheless, his documented interest in Vedanta, Eastern philosophy, and what he described as "Spinoza's God" suggests a genuine engagement with ideas that resonate strongly with the Gita.

Whether or not the Bhagavad Gita directly influenced Einstein's equations is difficult to establish. What appears more certain is that he found in its teachings a philosophical framework for understanding action, detachment, humility, and humanity's place in the cosmos. For Einstein, the Gita was not a scientific textbook; it was a guide to reflection, discipline, and the search for deeper truths.

One quotation, frequently associated with him, captures this enduring connection:

"When I read the Bhagavad-Gita and reflect about how God created this universe, everything else seems so superfluous."

In several essays and accounts, Einstein is also reported to have remarked:

"I have made the Bhagavad-Gita the main source of my inspiration and guide for the purpose of scientific investigations and the formation of my theories."

Whether historically verifiable in every detail or not, the association between Einstein and the Bhagavad Gita continues to fascinate readers because it highlights a timeless meeting point between science and spirituality—two paths seeking, in their own ways, to understand the mysteries of existence.

The Subversion of Student Anguish

“Has the Jantar Mantar Protest Drifted Beyond Its Original Purpose?”



Vitasta Herald News Bureau

NEW DELHI, July 2026: What began as a gathering of students and parents seeking transparency and accountability over alleged examination irregularities appears, in the opinion of many critics, to have evolved into a much broader political platform at Delhi's historic Jantar Mantar. Originally centred on student welfare and examination reforms, the protest has increasingly attracted political activists, civil society groups and organisations with agendas extending beyond education policy.

“From Examination Reform to Political Messaging” In its initial phase, the protest focused on demands for greater transparency in the examination system, institutional accountability and reforms aimed at safeguarding the interests of students. However, as participation widened, the public discourse at the venue also broadened. Critics argue that the central concerns of students have gradually been overshadowed by wider political narratives. “Several speakers and activists associated with different ideological groups have used the platform to criticise the Central Government and its policies. Those who question this development believe that the original purpose of the protest has been diluted, with political messaging increasingly dominating discussions that were initially centred on educational reforms.” “Concerns Over the Changing Nature of the Protest” Observers who have followed the demonstrations closely contend that speeches delivered at the venue often extend beyond issues re-

lating to examinations and education. According to these critics, the platform has increasingly become a space for broader political mobilisation rather than remaining exclusively focused on students' concerns. “Some commentators also argue that debates touching upon ideological, cultural and governance issues have shifted public attention away from the practical reforms that students and parents originally sought. They fear that the growing politicisation of the movement risks weakening its credibility and reducing public support for legitimate educational demands.” “The Debate Over Political Participation” The presence of student organisations, political activists and civil society groups at public protests is not unusual in a democracy. Nevertheless, critics argue that when broader ideological campaigns begin to dominate an issue-specific movement, the interests of the original stakeholders may receive less attention. “In the case of the Jantar Mantar demonstrations, some analysts believe that the focus has gradually expanded from examination reforms to wider debates concerning governance, public policy and national politics. They argue that such a shift risks diverting attention from the immediate concerns of students who sought timely reforms and institutional accountability.” “Preserving the Integrity of Student Movements” India's democratic framework guarantees the right to

peaceful protest and freedom of expression. At the same time, many believe that issue-based movements derive their strength from remaining focused on their stated objectives. “If a campaign initiated to secure examination reforms becomes identified primarily with broader political contestation, critics argue that its effectiveness may diminish. Student concerns could become secondary to ideological differences, making it more difficult to achieve practical policy outcomes.” “Keeping Students at the Centre” The debate surrounding the Jantar Mantar protest illustrates a broader challenge facing contemporary public discourse. Public demonstrations frequently evolve as different groups seek to associate themselves with high-profile issues. Whether this strengthens democratic participation or dilutes the original objective remains a matter of public debate. “What should remain beyond dispute is that the concerns of students deserve careful attention, institutional transparency and timely resolution. Genuine educational reform requires effective administration, independent investigation where necessary, judicial oversight, and constructive engagement among all stakeholders.” “Ultimately, the success of any student movement should be measured not by the intensity of its political rhetoric but by its ability to secure meaningful reforms for those whose future depends upon the integrity of the nation's educational system.”

Shammi Dhamir: The Unsung Craftsman of Duggar Theatre

A Life Dedicated to Stage, Screen and the Art of Transformation

By Ishu Bharati Pandit



In the world of theatre and cinema, the spotlight usually shines on actors standing centre stage. Rarely does it illuminate those who work tirelessly behind the curtains, transforming ordinary performers into unforgettable characters. Yet some individuals manage to excel both on stage and behind it. One such multi-



faceted artist is Shammi Dhamir, also known as Manoj Dhamir—a veteran stage actor, award-winning makeup artist, television performer, and cultural worker whose journey mirrors the resilience and creativity of the Duggar region itself.

Born in Jammu, Shammi Dhamir's roots trace back to families displaced from Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK). His family's story is one of repeated migration and survival. From their ancestral homeland in PoJK, they moved to Kashmir, then to Kolkata, later to Jalandhar, followed by the refugee camp at Yol in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, before finally settling in Jammu.

These experiences of displacement and rebuilding life from scratch became an integral part of his personality, teaching him adaptability, perseverance, and a deep appreciation for cul-

tural identity.

His formal education began in Jammu, where he studied at institutions including Ashoka Academy, Shakti Academy, and later Government Boys Higher Secondary School, Bakshi Nagar. He continued his studies at Ranvir Higher Secondary School and S.P. Rajput Commerce College. However, it was not conventional academics that ultimately defined his future.

Drawn towards creativity from a young age, Dhamir enrolled in Industrial Training Institute (ITI), where he studied Art and General Engineering. The course exposed him to painting, design, and professional makeup techniques. Simultaneously, he actively participated in NCC camps, including specialised train-



ing programmes in water skiing and snow skiing, developing discipline and confidence that would later serve him well in the performing arts.

The turning point came in 1987, when he joined Kumar Bharati's Natraj Natya Kunj, one of Jammu's respected theatre institutions. What began as curiosity soon evolved into a lifelong passion.

Over the following decades, Dhamir worked with numerous theatre directors across Jammu and Kashmir, gradually establishing himself as a dependable and versatile artist. His commitment to theatre deepened further in 1993, when he participated in a prestigious 40-day National School of Drama (NSD) workshop conducted by eminent theatre personality M.K. Raina, with the support of Nat Rang, led by



peasants, and historical characters.

Yet makeup remained only one dimension of his artistic personality.

As an actor, he continued

performing in theatre productions, television serials, and films, earning appreciation for his dedication and versatility. His contributions extend to feature films such as Sanjour, where he worked as an assistant while also contributing creatively to the production process. He later worked in films like Lakeer, where he performed both as an actor and makeup artist, demonstrating his ability to balance multiple responsibilities.

His cinematic journey also includes Doli, directed by Surinder Minhas, and the recently discussed Dogri film Shah Shahni, produced under the JK Media banner. These projects highlight his enduring commitment to promoting regional cinema and Dogri cultural expression.

Beyond films, Dhamir has remained closely associated with television. Over the years, he has worked with Doordarshan Jammu, DD Kashir, DD Bharati, DD Urdu, Kisan Channel, and several other platforms. He has appeared both as an artist and makeup professional in numerous television productions and cultural programmes.

His work also extends to social and awareness-oriented films, including the environmental film Rahat

Environment, which sought to promote ecological consciousness through visual storytelling.

Today, Shammi Dhamir continues to be associated with JK Media, while maintaining his deep connection with theatre. Even after decades of work, he remains actively engaged in the cultural landscape of Jammu and Kashmir, mentoring younger artists and contributing his expertise wherever required.

What makes his story particularly inspiring is that it reflects the often-overlooked reality of regional artists. Unlike mainstream celebrities who enjoy widespread recognition, cultural workers like Shammi Dhamir build institutions, support productions, preserve traditions, and nurture future talent with little expectation of fame.

His career is not merely a list of performances or



awards. It is a testament to dedication, craftsmanship, and an unwavering love for the performing arts.

In an era dominated by instant fame and social media visibility, Shammi Dhamir represents something increasingly rare—an artist who has spent nearly four decades serving his craft with humility, discipline, and quiet excellence.

For Duggar theatre, regional cinema, and television, his journey remains an enduring reminder that behind every memorable performance stands not just talent, but years of unseen labour, sacrifice, and passion.

And in that respect, Shammi Dhamir is not merely an artist. He is one of the silent pillars upon which the cultural heritage of Duggar Desh continues to stand.

Jammu Rises As A Global Cinema Destination

Fifth Jammu Film Festival Draws 180 Entries from 35 Countries; Three-Tier International Jury Announced as Jammu Strengthens Its Place on the Global Film Map



By Vitasta Herald Correspondent

JAMMU, JULY 2026:

Jammu's emergence as a significant destination for international cinema has gained further momentum with the 5th Jammu Film Festival (JFF-2026) receiving an overwhelming 180 film entries from 35 countries, reaffirming the festival's growing stature among independent filmmakers worldwide. What began in 2019 as a regional initiative to bridge Jammu with the global film fraternity has, within five editions, evolved into one of North India's most respected international film festivals, placing the region firmly on the international cultural map.

Scheduled to be held on September 28-29, 2026, the festival is jointly organised by Vomedh and Koshurwood Studio. The organisers believe that the unprecedented international response reflects the increasing recognition of Jammu as a destination for meaningful cinema, artistic collaboration and cultural dialogue.

Addressing a press conference in Jammu, Jury Chairman Kapil Mattoo announced that the festival had already received 180 submissions from 35 countries, with additional entries expected before the

closing date of July 31, 2026.

The submissions comprise 130 short films, 35 documentaries and 17 feature films, representing a wide spectrum of cultures, languages and cinematic traditions from across the globe.

"The response from filmmakers across the world has been truly overwhelming. The Jammu Film Festival continues its remarkable journey of connecting Jammu with the international film community and has now emerged as one of North India's leading international film festivals," Mattoo said.

He observed that the quality, diversity and geographical spread of the submissions reflected the festival's growing credibility within the global independent cinema movement.

According to the organisers, delegates from several countries, including the United States, have already expressed interest in participating in the festival, while discussions are underway with cultural performers from Singapore, who are expected to add an international dimension to the cultural evenings during the festival.

Festival Director Rakesh Roshan Bhat said the remarkable response validates the vision with which the festival was

launched.

"When we conceived the Jammu Film Festival in 2019, our dream was to place Jammu on the global



map of cinema. Today, filmmakers from 35 countries are not merely noticing Jammu—they are choosing Jammu as a platform to showcase their work."

He said the festival has steadily evolved into a vibrant cultural institution that connects local talent with internationally acclaimed filmmakers while promoting meaningful storytelling.

Co-Festival Director Rohit Bhat said the organisers remain committed to creating opportunities for emerging filmmakers from Jammu and Kashmir to compete confidently on international platforms.

One of the major highlights of this year's edition is the institution of the ₹1 lakh Best Local Production Award, an initiative aimed at encouraging regional filmmakers to produce high-quality cinema rooted in the social, cultural and historical realities of Jammu and Kashmir.

"The objective is to encourage filmmakers from Jammu and Kashmir to tell their own stories with confidence and create work capable of competing globally," Rohit Bhat said.

Representing Koshurwood Studio, Sanjeev Kak described the festival as an important cultural bridge connecting Jammu with the international filmmaking fraternity.

He said the steady growth of the festival over the past five editions reflects the dedication of its organisers and the increasing appetite for meaningful cinema and cultural engagement within the region.

"Koshurwood Studio is proud to partner with a festival that has grown into a significant platform where filmmakers, artists and audiences from different countries come together through the universal language of cinema," he said.

Beyond film screenings, the two-day festival will offer a comprehensive programme of masterclasses, panel discussions, networking sessions and curated cultural performances, providing young filmmakers with opportunities to interact with established professionals from India and abroad.

The organisers said the festival has gradually evolved into an ecosystem that promotes learning, collaboration and artistic excellence while showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Jammu and Kashmir before an international audience.

Adding another major institutional development, the organising committee announced a three-tier jury system for the 2026 edition to ensure a transparent, objective and merit-based evaluation process.

The Screening Committee comprises Rakesh Roshan Bhat, Rohit Bhat, Kamal Razdan, Suman Pandita, Ifra

Kak and Manzoor Mir, who will conduct the preliminary assessment of all entries.

The Review Committee includes Rahul Sharma, Kusum Tickoo, Rani Bhan, J.R. Sagar, Dr. Kuldeep Raina Sudeshi and Shadab Khan, who will shortlist films for the final competition.

The Final Jury will be headed by noted filmmaker Kapil Mattoo, with acclaimed actors Vipin Sharma, Ashwath Bhatt and Tanvir Dar serving as jury members to select the award-winning films.

Over the past four editions, the Jammu Film Festival has hosted several distinguished personalities from Indian cinema, including M.K. Raina, Rahul Roy, Yashpal Sharma and Mir Sarwar, whose participation has significantly enhanced the festival's national reputation while inspiring aspiring filmmakers from Jammu and Kashmir.

The press conference announcing the latest developments was attended by Kapil Mattoo, Rohit Bhat, Kusum Tickoo, King C. Bharati, Bharati Kaul, Rani Bhan and Suman Bhat, among other prominent members of the organising team and cultural fraternity.

With film submissions remaining open until July 31, the organisers have invited filmmakers from India and abroad to submit their works through the FilmFreeway platform and become part of what is expected to be the biggest and most internationally connected edition of the Jammu Film Festival so far.

More than just a cinematic event, the Jammu Film Festival has steadily grown into a cultural movement that celebrates creativity, dialogue and artistic excellence. As Jammu strengthens its position on the international cultural landscape, the festival stands as a compelling example of how a visionary regional initiative can successfully connect local aspirations with global recognition, making the city an emerging destination on the world's independent film circuit.

People's Padma Winners: A Book That Reimagines India Through Its Unsung Heroes

Grin Books Partners with Veteran Journalist Padmaja Joshi for Landmark Narrative Non-Fiction

By Lakshmi Kaul



forgotten communities, educated generations without fanfare, and devoted their lives to service far from public attention.

People's Padma Winners captures this transformation with remarkable sensitivity.

The book traces the evolution of the P a d m a

Awards from their institution alongside the Bharat Ratna in 1954 to what many now regard as one of the most inclusive phases in their history. It documents how India's highest civilian honours have expanded beyond traditional public figures to celebrate environmentalists, tribal leaders, grassroots innovators, social reformers, folk artists, doctors serving remote communities, Paralympians, educators, and countless ordinary citizens whose extraordinary contributions remained invisible for decades.

What distinguishes this work is its narrative approach.

Rather than presenting a catalogue of awardees, Padmaja Joshi constructs rich, immersive profiles that allow readers to journey alongside the individuals whose perseverance transformed lives and communities. Each chapter unfolds with the depth of literary journalism, combining meticulous reporting with compelling storytelling.

The book opens with Jadav "Molai" Payeng, the celebrated "Forest Man of India," whose solitary efforts over four decades transformed a barren sandbar into a thriving forest spanning more than 1,300 acres. It then moves through equally remark-

able lives, including Murlikant Petkar, India's first Paralympic gold medalist, whose sporting triumph came after decades of limited recognition, and Manjamma Jogati, the acclaimed transgender folk artist who rose from adversity to become the first transgender President of the Karnataka Janapada Academy.

These stories are not merely biographies. They collectively form a portrait of contemporary India-an India that is diverse, resilient, compassionate, and constantly reinventing itself.

As someone who has worked closely with the publishing of this project, I have been continually impressed by Padmaja Joshi's journalistic integrity and her ability to discover the emotional core of every story she tells. She brings together the discipline of an investigative reporter, the sensitivity of a literary writer, and the curiosity of a historian. More importantly, she approaches every subject with deep respect, allowing their voices to emerge without embellishment or sensationalism.

This is precisely the kind of publishing Grin Books seeks to champion.

At Grin Books, we believe literature should not simply entertain; it should expand understanding. It should preserve overlooked histories, amplify unheard voices, and encourage readers to engage more deeply with the society around them. People's Padma Winners embodies that philosophy.

The book also arrives at an important moment in India's cultural journey. In an era dominated by instant information and fleeting digital attention, long-form narrative non-fiction offers something increasingly valuable: context, reflection, and empathy. It reminds us that the making of



a nation is not solely the work of governments or institutions but also of countless individuals whose quiet acts of service often escape public notice.

Padmaja herself reflects this sentiment beautifully when she writes that she began the project as a journalist who remained sceptical of official recognition but concluded it convinced that something meaningful had changed in how India recognises its own people. That transformation, she believes, deserves to be documented and shared.

I wholeheartedly agree. The stories contained in this volume challenge conventional ideas of success and recognition. They remind us that heroism often exists far from television studios and newspaper headlines. They encourage younger generations to see achievement not merely through wealth or celebrity but through commitment, compassion, innovation, and public service.

People's Padma Winners is therefore much more than a book about awards.

It is a celebration of the democratic spirit that increasingly defines those awards. It is an invitation to rediscover India

through the lives of people who quietly transformed it. And above all, it is a tribute to the extraordinary possibilities that emerge when ordinary individuals dedicate themselves to a larger purpose.

As Grin Books prepares to bring this work to readers across South Asia and beyond, we remain committed to publishing books that preserve stories worth remembering and voices worth hearing. Because every nation is ultimately defined not only by its monuments or institutions, but by the lives of the people who quietly build it every single day.

About the Author

Laxmi Kaul is the Chief Executive Officer of Grin Books (Grin Media Private Limited). She is a media and communications professional with extensive experience in strategic communications, publishing, journalism, and public affairs. Through Grin Books, she is committed to nurturing original narrative non-fiction and literary works that document India's evolving social, cultural, and democratic landscape.

Amar Katha in Every Step

Where Shiva Whispered the Secret of Immortality and Kashmir Still Walks the Story

By Bharti Kaul

THE annual Amarnath Yatra is far more than a pilgrimage to a sacred cave. It is a timeless journey through sacred tradition, history, ecology, faith and human resilience. Every step retraces the path that Lord Shiva is believed to have taken to reveal the Amar Katha—the secret of immortality—to Goddess Parvati. At the same time, the Yatra sustains thousands of livelihoods across Kashmir, reminding us that spirituality and society often walk hand in hand.

"Om Namah Shivaya."

The chant begins long before the first glimpse of the Holy Cave.

At Nunwan, near Pahalgam, it is barely three in the morning. The Lidder River flows like a dark ribbon beneath the sleeping mountains. Pilgrims wrapped in woollen shawls and rain jackets stand silently in long queues, their breath turning into mist in the cold Himalayan air. Somewhere a sadhu strikes his damru. The rhythmic beat travels through the valley like an ancient heartbeat.

Soon another sound rises.

"Bum Bum Bhole!"

The cry rolls through the mountains, echoing from ridge to ridge until the Himalayas themselves appear to answer.

The journey has not yet begun, yet something within every pilgrim has already started moving.

That is the mystery of Amarnath.

Unlike many pilgrimages where the destination alone holds significance, Amarnath transforms every step into an act of devotion. Every mountain, every stream, every glacier and every halt carries a story believed to have unfolded when Lord Shiva chose this remote cave to reveal the greatest secret of existence to Goddess Parvati—the Amar Katha, the story of immortality.

According to the Amarnath Mahatmya, Parvati once asked Shiva a simple yet profound question:

"O Mahadev, You are beyond birth and death. Tell me the secret of immortality."

Shiva knew such knowledge could not be spoken where birds, beasts, gods or even the winds might overhear it.

He therefore searched for a place where only silence existed.

Leaving Mount Kailash,



Shiva began a journey through the Himalayas, discarding every attachment along the way so that nothing living could witness the sacred discourse.

The pilgrimage that millions undertake today symbolically retraces that very journey.

A Journey Rooted in Sacred Tradition

Pahalgam, many believe, derives its spiritual significance from this divine departure. Here Shiva is said to have left behind Nandi, his faithful bull.

The symbolism remains striking even today.

Modern pilgrims also begin leaving things behind from the moment they arrive. Mobile phone signals disappear. Office deadlines lose meaning. Social status becomes irrelevant. The mountains quietly insist that everyone climb with the same humility.

The trail towards Chandanwari winds through pine forests, rocky slopes and glacial streams.

Sacred tradition holds that Shiva left behind the crescent moon adorning his matted locks at this point.

As dawn breaks over the mountains, the first rays of sunlight touch the snow-covered peaks with a soft golden glow.

Watching the sunrise here, one understands why ancient sages described light as a divine gift rather than merely a physical phenomenon.

Beyond Chandanwari lies Sheshnag, where sacred tradition says Shiva released the serpents that adorned his body.

The emerald lake, resting beneath towering cliffs, possesses an almost unreal stillness.

Pilgrims pause instinctively. Some fold their hands.

Others sit quietly on the rocks.

Few places in the Himalayas evoke contemplation as naturally as Sheshnag.

Its calm waters seem to mirror not merely the mountains but the pilgrim's own inner journey.

The climb towards Mahagunas Top, rising above 14,500 feet, tests every traveler.

The air grows thinner.

Breathing becomes slower.

Each step demands determination.

According to sacred tradition, this is where Lord Shiva left behind Lord Ganesha before continuing towards the cave.

Modern pilgrims often discover that Mahagunas asks them to leave something behind as well—not possessions, but fear, impatience, ego and self-doubt.

The final halt before the Holy Cave is Panchtarni, where five streams emerge from the mountain.

According to sacred tradition, these five streams are associated with the Pancha Mahabhutas—earth, water, fire, air and ether—the five fundamental elements of creation that Lord Shiva is believed to have relinquished before narrating the Amar Katha.

Only after abandoning every worldly identity did He enter the cave.

It is a powerful reminder that the search for eternal truth begins only after the burdens of the material world are laid

aside.

The Holy Cave

Standing at an altitude of approximately 3,888 metres, the Amarnath Cave appears almost hidden within the vastness of the Himalayas.

There is little architectural grandeur here.

Nature itself has shaped the shrine.

Water droplets falling from the cave's roof gradually freeze, forming the naturally occurring Ice Shivaling, revered by devotees as Swayambhu-self-manifested.

No sculptor creates it.

No human hand preserves it.

It grows and recedes with the rhythms of nature.

To devotees, this itself becomes a profound spiritual lesson.

Everything that takes form must one day dissolve.

Only the Eternal remains.

Scientists explain the phenomenon through the cave's unique microclimate and freezing temperatures.

Devotees see the hand of Shiva.

Neither explanation diminishes the other.

Faith and science simply illuminate different dimensions of the same wonder.

The Immortal Witnesses

The most cherished sacred narrative associated with Amarnath concerns two pigeons.

The Amarnath Mahatmya narrates that before revealing the Amar Katha, Shiva created a fire so intense that every living being in the vicinity would perish.

No witness was meant to survive.

Yet hidden beneath a rocky ledge lay two eggs.

As Shiva narrated the secret of immortality, the eggs hatched.

The young pigeons listened silently to every word.

Having heard the Amar Katha, they themselves became immortal.

Even today, many pilgrims believe they glimpse a pair of pigeons perched upon the rocky ledges inside or near the cave.

formed the management of the Yatra over the past decade.

What appears effortless to pilgrims is, in reality, the result of meticulous planning involving thousands of dedicated personnel working under difficult conditions.

Faith Must Walk with Responsibility

Every pilgrimage leaves footprints.

The challenge before modern society is ensuring that those footprints do not become scars upon the mountains.

The fragile Himalayan ecosystem demands extraordinary care.

Plastic waste, pollution of mountain streams and increasing pressure upon alpine meadows have emerged as genuine concerns in recent years.

nt systems, regulated carrying capacities and strict environmental protocols.

Pilgrims, too, have a sacred responsibility.

The scriptures teach that dharma is not confined to ritual worship.

Protecting rivers, forests, glaciers and mountains is equally an act of devotion.

The Lidder, Sindh and Amravati are not merely water bodies; they are part of the sacred geography through which the Amar Katha continues to flow.

A pilgrim who returns home carrying memories but leaves behind plastic has not fully understood the spirit of the Yatra.

The Himalayas demand reverence, not exploitation.

Lessons Beyond Religion

The Amarnath Yatra is often described as a Hindu pilgrimage.

It certainly is.

Yet it also reveals something profoundly universal.

On the mountain, distinctions that dominate everyday life gradually disappear.

A businessman from

(CONTD ON 24)

FROM PAGE 23**Amar Katha in**

...

Mumbai waits patiently behind a farmer from Bihar.

A professor from Bengaluru accepts tea from a shepherd in Kashmir.

An elderly woman from Gujarat receives assistance from a young volunteer from Srinagar.

No one asks about caste.

No one enquires about wealth.

No one measures social status. The mountains reduce everyone to the same human condition-breathing carefully, walking slowly and depending upon one another.

Perhaps that is one of the hidden meanings of the Amar Katha.

Immortality is not merely freedom from death.

It is freedom from ego.

When History Interrupted Faith

The Amarnath Yatra has also witnessed moments of political turbulence.

The 2008 land transfer con-

troversy transformed what had traditionally remained a spiritual issue into a deeply polarising political debate. Decisions regarding land for temporary facilities led to widespread protests in Kashmir and counter protests in Jammu, popularly known as Bam Bam Bholey Agitation, revealing how easily faith can become entangled with politics.

Yet the pilgrimage itself endured.

The cave remained unchanged.

The mountains remained silent.

Pilgrims continued to arrive.

The lesson remains relevant even today.

Religious faith flourishes best when protected from political appropriation.

The Amar Katha belongs to devotion, not division.

An Eternal Conversation

As pilgrims finally stand before the naturally formed Ice Lingam, many discover something unexpected.

Most arrive carrying wishes.

Very few leave remember-

ing them.

The cave possesses an extraordinary ability to silence desire.

Instead of asking, people simply fold their hands.

Perhaps because, standing before nature's own cathedral of ice, one realises that the greatest gift is not the fulfilment of prayer but the opportunity to undertake the journey itself.

Outside, sunlight slowly spreads across the glacier.

The descent begins.

Yet the Yatra does not end at the cave.

It walks back with every pilgrim.

It travels into villages where pony owners return to their fields.

It enters classrooms funded by seasonal earnings.

It reaches markets where traders reopen shuttered shops after a successful pilgrimage season.

It lives in stories narrated to grandchildren.

It survives in faith renewed every summer.

And somewhere high above the cave, if fortune permits, two pigeons still watch quietly from the rocks.

They neither preach nor perform miracles.

They simply remain.

Like the mountains.

Like the story.

Like faith itself.

The Amar Katha Never Ends Every year, the Ice Lingam forms.

Every year, it melts.

Yet the Amar Katha survives because it has never truly belonged to ice.

It lives in memory.

It lives in pilgrimage.

It lives in the countless hands that serve strangers on dangerous mountain paths.

It lives in the prayers whispered at dawn and the gratitude carried home long after the tents have disappeared.

Above all, it lives in Kashmir itself.

For the Valley has always been more than a landscape.

It is a meeting place of sacred tradition, spirituality, culture, ecology and humanity..

When the first cry of "Bum Bum Bhole" once again echoes through the Himalayas next summer, remember that it is not merely announcing the beginning of another pilgrimage.

It is continuing a conversa-

tion that began, according to tradition, when Parvati asked a question and Shiva answered with silence, wisdom and eternity.

The ice may melt.

The pilgrims may return home.

The mountains may fall silent.

But the Amar Katha continues to walk-through every pilgrim, every village, every prayer, and every generation.

Har Har Mahadev.

FACT FILE

Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra at a Glance

" Location : Anantnag District, Jammu & Kashmir

" Altitude: Approximately 3,888 metres (12,756 ft)

" Main Routes: Pahalgam (traditional route) and Baltal (shorter route)

" Presiding Deity: Lord Shiva (Swayambhu Ice Lingam)

" Pilgrimage Period: Annual, during the Hindu month of Shravan

" Managed by: Shri Amarnath Ji Shrine Board (SASB)

Community Mourns the Loss of Stalwart Leader, Smt. Neena Kher

By Vitasta Herald Correspondent |

July 2026 MUMBAI - The Kashmiri Pandit community is in deep mourning following the passing of Smt. Neena Kher, the esteemed Vice President of the Kashmiri Pandit Association (KPA), who departed for her heavenly abode on 5th July 2026.

Smt. Kher was a beacon of selfless service, having dedicated her life to the upliftment of the community with unwavering commitment and compassion. Her gentle leadership and tireless efforts were instrumental in strengthening social bonds, particularly within the greater Mumbai area.

Recognized for her profound impact, Smt. Kher

was a recipient of the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award from KPA Mumbai. Her legacy of integrity and social devotion was further acknowledged by various institutions, including the Kashmiri Hindu Sabha in Pune, for her significant contributions to community welfare.

Her mortal remains were laid to rest on 5th July 2026, with the cremation held at 1:00 PM at the Santacruz Hindu Crematorium, Dattatray Road, Mumbai.

The void left by her passing will be deeply felt by all those who had the privilege of working alongside her. The Vitasta Herald extends its deepest condolences to her family, friends, and loved ones. May her soul find eternal peace.



“Planet Under Pressure” Record Wildfires and Emerging Super El Niño Push Global Climate Crisis to Dangerous New Levels

BY VITASTA HERALD NEWS BUREAU

“GENEVA, JULY 2026: The world is witnessing one of the most alarming phases of the global climate crisis as record-breaking wildfires, rising temperatures and the rapid emergence of a powerful Super El Niño threaten ecosystems,

the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) have confirmed that ocean temperatures are significantly above normal, creating weather conditions that are amplifying droughts, heatwaves and wildfire risks across many regions of the world. “Scientists explain that El Niño is a natu-

Laos and Thailand, where prolonged dry weather and high temperatures have transformed routine agricultural burning into rapidly spreading forest fires. Environmental experts note that landscapes already weakened by prolonged heat have become highly susceptible to even small ignition

placing additional pressure on already stretched healthcare systems. “The environmental cost is equally severe. Some of the world’s most valuable biodiversity reserves have suffered extensive damage. In South America, extreme heat and wildfires have affected Argentina’s Los Alerces National Park,

have urged governments to adopt anticipatory measures rather than waiting for humanitarian crises to fully unfold. Experts argue that investing in early warning systems, climate-resilient agriculture, water conservation and disaster preparedness can save both lives and financial resources. “Climate specialists also emphasise that today’s environmental disasters are increasingly interconnected. Severe droughts in one region are occurring alongside devastating floods, storms and heatwaves elsewhere, illustrating how climate risks are becoming more complex and difficult to manage. This pattern of multiple overlapping hazards is reshaping disaster management strategies worldwide. “Recent international climate discussions have reflected growing concern that several environmental changes originally projected for the middle of the century are already unfolding decades earlier than expected. Policymakers are now increasingly focusing on adaptation strategies alongside efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. “The current wildfire season has reinforced the scientific consensus that climate change is no longer an abstract environmental issue but a challenge affecting economies, public health, food production and global security. Environmental experts stress that reducing emissions remains essential, but equally important is strengthening resilience against climate-related disasters that are becoming more frequent and more intense.”

As the world enters the second half of 2026, governments face mounting pressure to translate climate commitments into concrete action. The unprecedented scale of wildfires and the arrival of a powerful Super El Niño serve as a stark reminder that the climate emergency is no longer a warning about the future—it is the defining global challenge of the present.



public health and food security across continents. Scientists warn that climate change is no longer a distant concern but a present-day emergency demanding coordinated global action. “According to the latest assessment by the World Weather Attribution (WWA) group, more than 150 million hectares of land were consumed by wildfires during the opening months of 2026, making it the highest recorded figure for this period. The unprecedented destruction has affected forests, agricultural land, biodiversity hotspots and human settlements on an extraordinary scale. “Climate experts say the crisis has been intensified by the rapid development of a Super El Niño in the Equatorial Pacific. Both the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and

rally occurring climate phenomenon, but when combined with long-term global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions, its impacts become considerably more severe. The current episode is expected to alter rainfall patterns, intensify extreme weather events and prolong dry conditions in several vulnerable regions. “Africa has emerged as the worst-affected continent during the first half of the year. Nearly 85 million hectares have reportedly burned across large parts of the continent, stretching from West Africa to Sudan and South Sudan. Researchers describe the scale of destruction as unprecedented in recent decades. “Asia has also experienced widespread wildfire outbreaks. Large fires have been reported from parts of India, China,

sources. “Beyond the immediate destruction of forests, the crisis is rapidly evolving into a major public health emergency. Dense smoke generated by prolonged wildfires has spread across national borders, significantly reducing air quality over vast regions. Health agencies have reported increasing cases of respiratory illnesses, asthma attacks and cardiovascular complications, particularly among children, the elderly and people with pre-existing medical conditions. “Medical professionals warn that prolonged exposure to particulate matter released during wildfires poses serious long-term health risks. Hospitals in several affected countries have reported rising admissions linked to smoke inhalation and heat-related illnesses,

a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its ancient forests containing trees that are thousands of years old. Conservationists fear that damage to such ecosystems could take centuries to recover. “International humanitarian organisations are also warning of a growing food security crisis. With drought conditions expected to persist under the influence of Super El Niño, agricultural production in several parts of sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia may decline significantly during the coming growing seasons. Reduced crop yields, combined with existing supply chain pressures, could increase food prices and deepen hunger in vulnerable communities. “The United Nations and several international relief agencies

Maharaj Krishen Kaw - An Apostle of Humanity

Remembering a Visionary Administrator, Author and Champion of the Kashmiri Pandit Community

By **Rajinder Premi**

Some people are born with extraordinary abilities, exceptional creativity and a rare sense of purpose. Through their vision, intel-



lect and dedication, they leave an indelible mark on society and inspire generations. Though they may appear to lead ordinary lives, their accomplishments elevate them to extraordinary heights. Their legacy continues to guide people long after they are gone. Maharaj Krishen Kaw was one such remarkable personality.

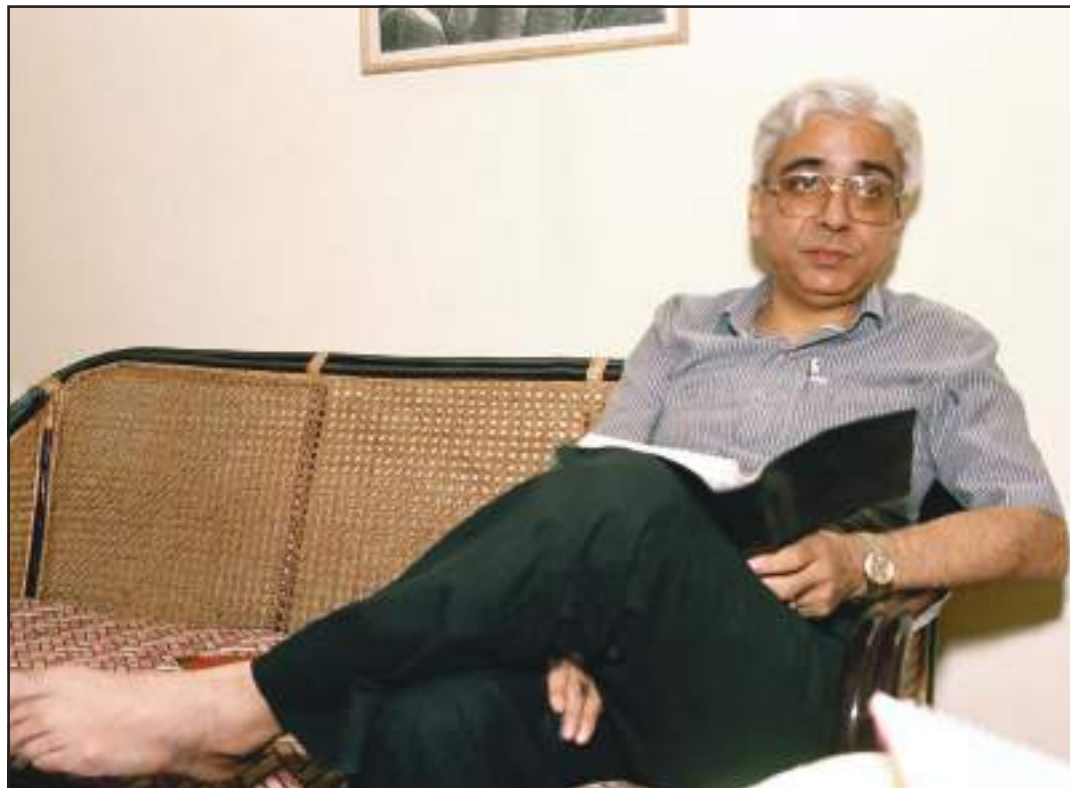
The past few months have been particularly painful for the Kashmiri Pandit community, which has lost several distinguished scholars, leaders and public figures, including Dr. M. K. Teng, A. N. Kaul 'Sahib', Dr. T. N. Ganjoo, A. K. Kaul, C. L. Chrunghoo, M. K. Kaw and A. K. Diwani. I offer my heartfelt tribute to all of them. This article, however, is dedicated to the memory of Maharaj Krishen Kaw, a towering intellectual and humanitarian with whom I had the privilege of working closely for nearly two decades. I also had the honour of serving as Secretary of the All India Kashmiri Samaj (AIKS) during his two consecutive terms as President from March 2003 to March 2009.

Born on 10 November 1941 in Srinagar, Maharaj Krishen Kaw displayed exceptional academic brilliance from an early age. He passed his matriculation examination at the remarkably young age of ten and joined the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in 1964. He was allotted to the Himachal Pradesh cadre, where he held several important positions, including Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, Education Secretary and Finance

Secretary.

During his fifteen-year tenure with the Government of India, he served in several prestigious assignments, including Member-Secretary of the Fifth Central Pay Commission, Secretary in the Ministry of Civil Aviation, and Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development. After an illustrious administrative career spanning nearly four decades, he retired from the IAS in 2001.

Retirement did not diminish his public spirit. Instead, it marked the beginning of another meaningful chapter devoted to education, governance and social service. He served as Dean of the Sri Sathya Sai International Centre for Human Values, Chairman of the Board of Governors of NIT Srinagar, Chairman of the Committee on the Reorganisation of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), and was also associated with the Centre



for Governance.

A Lifelong Commitment to the Community

Maharaj Krishen Kaw's deep affection for the Kashmiri Pandit community was reflected in every

sphere of his public life. He remained passionately committed to preserving Kashmiri language, literature, culture and heritage. He served as President of the Kashmir Education, Culture and Science Society (KECSS) on two occasions and later led the All India Kashmiri Samaj (AIKS), the apex organisation representing Kashmiri Pandits across the country.

A gifted writer and thinker, Kaw was much more than an accomplished administrator. He was a poet, novelist, playwright, columnist, author, social activist and public intellectual. His literary works reflected his deep understanding of governance, spirituality, human values and society.

His most celebrated work, *Bureaucracy Gets Crazier: IAS Unmasked*, published in 1993, became an instant bestseller and has since attained the status of a classic. The book offered an honest and insightful account of the Indian Administrative Service and was later translated into Hindi and Punjabi. A revised edition published in 2012 also received wide acclaim.

Among his other notable works are his autobiography, *An Outsider Everywhere* (2012), and *Kaw Caw: Silly Point* (2014). He also wrote two popular monthly

columns- "Kaw Caw" for Naad, the journal of AIKS, and "Silly Point" for G-Files, a respected journal on governance.

I cherish the signed copies of these books that he personally gifted to me over the years. My final meeting with him was at his residence on 15 September 2019, only a few days before his passing.

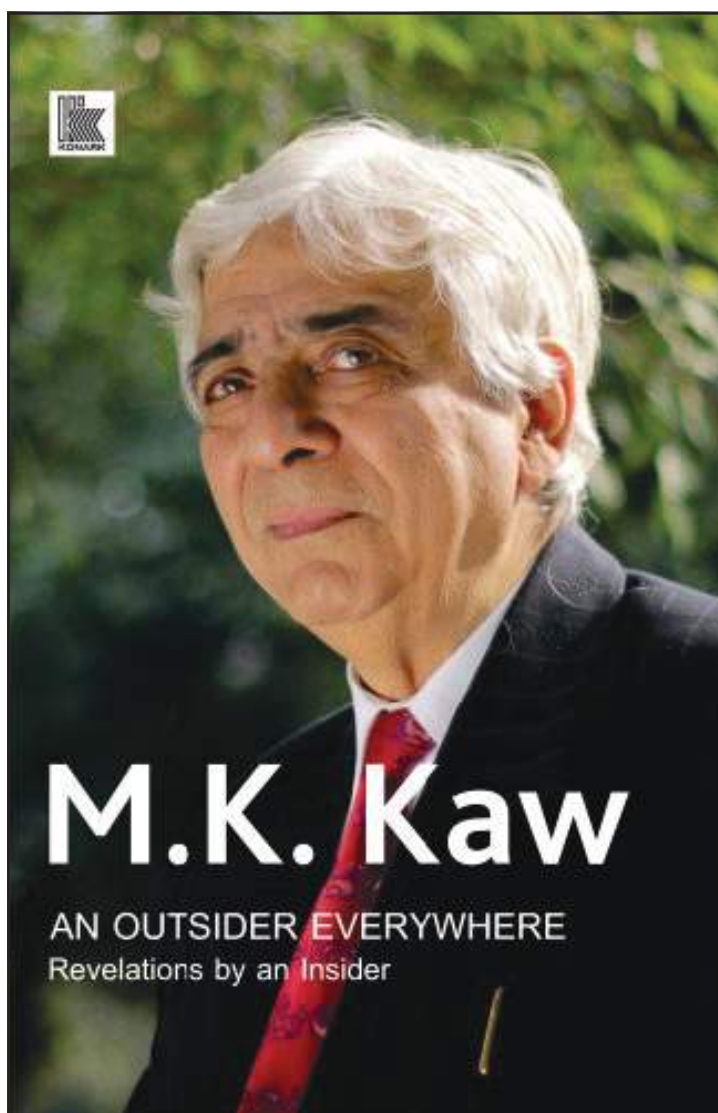
Transforming AIKS

The period from 2003 to 2009, when Maharaj Krishen Kaw served as President of AIKS, is widely regarded as one of the organisation's most productive and visionary phases.

One of his earliest initiatives was the adoption of a comprehensive new Constitution for AIKS, which strengthened the organisation institutionally and provided a clear framework for its future functioning.

Under his leadership, AIKS formulated a comprehensive National Policy on Kashmir, based firmly on the resolution passed by the Parliament of India affirming that the entire erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India. The policy also outlined measures for effectively addressing terrorism and restoring lasting peace in the region.

Another landmark
(CONTD ON 27)



FROM PAGE 26

Maharaj Krishen ...

initiative was the preparation of

a detailed Strategy Paper on the Return of Kashmiri Pandits to the Valley. Drafted after extensive consultations with affiliated organisations and senior community leaders, the document laid down the essential preconditions for a safe, dignified and sustainable return. Both policy documents were submitted to the Prime Minister, the Union Home Minister and other senior functionaries of the Government of India.

Our delegation's meeting with the Prime Minister in September 2004 resulted in the constitution of an Inter-Ministerial Committee under the chairmanship of Smt. Sushma Chaudhary. The committee submitted twenty-four recommendations, eighteen of which were subsequently approved by the Prime Minister in May 2005. These recommendations eventually paved the way for the construction of 5,242 transit accommodation flats for displaced Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Nagrota.

One of the most significant decisions taken during this period was the filing of a writ petition before the Supreme Court of India in October 2006 by AIKS and the All India Kashmiri Pandit Conference. The petition was admitted, and notices were issued to both the Central and State Governments. Many believe that this legal intervention significantly influenced the announcement of the Prime Minister's Rehabilitation Package in May 2008, under which 15,000 employment opportunities were created for displaced Kashmiri youth, with thousands eventually joining government service in the Valley. During Kaw's presidency, AIKS was also formally recognised as the apex representative organisation of Kashmiri Pandits and was invited to participate in the Prime Minister's Round Table Conference in 2005.

Preserving Culture and Identity

Maharaj Krishen Kaw believed that political rehabilitation alone was not enough. Cultural revival was equally essential for preserving the identity of the displaced community.

AIKS published an important booklet advocating much-needed social reforms within the community. It also strongly pursued the establishment of a Kashmiri Academy in Delhi and consistently advocated the recognition of Devanagari as an additional script for the Kashmiri language.

To strengthen community bonds, AIKS introduced a free matrimonial service through its journal Naad, helping Kashmiri Pandit families connect across the country.

Another milestone was the launch of 'Vaakh', the first quarterly literary magazine in Kashmiri using the Devanagari script. Introduced in October 2005, the magazine became an important platform for promoting Kashmiri literature and language. AIKS also initiated efforts to bring Kashmiri Pandit temples and shrines under proper institutional management through the proposed Temples and Shrines Bill. The original draft prepared by AIKS was later adopted by the National Conference and introduced as a Private Member's Bill in the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly in February 2007 by Abdul Rahim Rather. Although the legislation has yet to become law, it generated significant public support.

Recognising the importance of economic empowerment, AIKS organised a Corporate Conclave in March 2005 and launched an employment helpline through Naad, publishing job opportunities and details of job seekers free of cost.

In October 2008, AIKS entered into an agreement with Koshur Samachar regarding the management of two plots at Shakti Nagar, Delhi. A Bhoomi Pujan was performed, and the building plans for the first phase of a proposed girls' hostel received approval from the Municipal Corporation. AIKS bore the entire cost of obtaining the approval. Education: His Greatest Gift

Among Maharaj Krishen Kaw's many contributions, perhaps none has had a greater long-

term impact than his commitment to education.

As Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, he initiated the reservation of supernumerary seats for displaced Kashmiri Pandit students in engineering, management, pharmacy and other professional institutions across the country. These seats were created over and above the regular intake, ensuring that thousands of deserving students were able to pursue higher education despite the trauma of displacement. For countless young members of the community, this initiative transformed lives and opened doors that would otherwise have remained closed. A Legacy That Endures

Maharaj Krishen Kaw will always be remembered as an outstanding civil servant, visionary thinker, accomplished author and compassionate community leader. His life was defined by integrity, scholarship, humility and selfless service. Rather than mourning his passing, we should celebrate a life dedicated to duty, knowledge and humanity. He truly embodied the ideals of a Karma Yogi, placing the welfare of society above personal gain. His writings continue to enlighten readers. His administrative reforms continue to inspire public servants. His educational initiatives continue to empower generations of Kashmiri Pandit students. Above all, his unwavering commitment to his community remains a shining example for future generations. May his noble soul attain eternal peace, and may his legacy continue to inspire all those who strive to serve society with honesty, compassion and dedication.

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Statehood Demand Moves to the National Capital'' J&K's Ruling Alliance Launches Coordinated Agitation as Pressure Mounts on Centre

By Vitasta Herald

Political Bureau
S R I N A G A R / N E W
DELHI, July 2026: Jammu and Kashmir's political discourse entered a decisive phase this month as the demand for the restoration of full statehood moved from the Assembly and public platforms to the national capital. The ruling National Conference (NC), supported by its alliance partner, the Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC), announced a coordinated series of protests aimed at pressing the Union Government to fulfil its commitment to restore statehood to the Union Territory. "The political mobilisation culminated in a major 'Delhi Chalo' campaign, with National Conference legislators, Members of Parliament and senior party leaders assembling in New Delhi to stage a sit-in at Jantar Mantar during the opening of Parliament's Monsoon Session. The pro-

test marked one of the largest organised political demonstrations by the ruling alliance since the formation of the elected government in Jammu and Kashmir. "Chief Minister Omar Abdullah described the campaign as a constitutional and democratic effort to remind the Centre of repeated assurances regarding the restoration of statehood. Addressing a public gathering in Jammu before the protest, he asserted that the people of Jammu and Kashmir had waited patiently for the fulfilment of promises made after the reorganisation of the erstwhile state in 2019. "Our patience should not be mistaken for weakness," the Chief Minister said, reiterating that the demand for statehood transcended party politics and reflected the aspirations of the people. "The demonstrations came amid renewed political debate over the

constitutional future of Jammu and Kashmir. While the Centre has repeatedly stated that statehood will be restored at an appropriate time, regional political parties argue that the process should no longer be delayed following the successful conduct of Assembly elections and the establishment of an elected government. "Adding further intensity to the political climate, the Jammu and Kashmir unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) served a ₹100 crore defamation notice on Omar Abdullah over his public allegations that attempts had been made to induce legislators to switch political allegiance. The Chief Minister dismissed the legal notice, maintaining that he stood by his statements and describing the development as part of the larger political contest between the ruling alliance and the opposition. "Parallel to the

National Conference's mobilisation in Delhi, the Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee organised demonstrations in Jammu, directing party workers, former legislators and district leaders to participate in a march towards Raj Bhawan. The Congress also submitted a memorandum urging the President of India to facilitate the early restoration of statehood and strengthen democratic institutions in the Union Territory. "The political campaign unfolded despite organisational challenges, including the recent demise of senior National Conference leader Dr Mustafa Kamal and procedural issues relating to permissions for public demonstrations in the national capital. Nevertheless, the ruling alliance maintained its programme, projecting the agitation as a peaceful democratic exercise intended to keep the issue at

the forefront of national political discourse. "Political observers believe the campaign reflects a broader effort by regional parties to consolidate public opinion around constitutional and governance issues rather than electoral politics alone. With Parliament in session and national attention focused on developments in Jammu and Kashmir, the statehood question has once again emerged as one of the most significant political issues facing the Union Territory. "As discussions continue between the Centre and regional stakeholders, the demand for restoring full statehood is likely to remain central to Jammu and Kashmir's political agenda in the months ahead, with the ruling alliance signalling that it will continue pursuing the issue through constitutional and democratic means.

Iran Bids Farewell to Khamenei as West Asia Enters a New Strategic Phase

Week-long Funeral Ceremonies Draw Millions Amid Leadership Transition and Intensifying Regional Diplomacy

By Vitasta Herald
News Bureau

TEHRAN, JULY 2026: Iran has entered one of the most defining periods in its contemporary history as millions of mourners gather

the funeral processions before the late leader is laid to rest in Mashhad, making it one of the largest state funerals in the country's history.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who led Iran for more than

political leaders have attended the ceremonies, projecting institutional unity at a time of significant transition.

One of the most closely watched aspects of the unfolding developments is the

that ongoing discussions involving Iran, the United States and regional stakeholders have been influenced by the leadership transition. Questions surrounding Iran's nuclear programme, regional secu-

Analysts believe the coming months will prove critical for Iran's domestic politics and foreign policy. The transition from one of the country's longest-serving leaders comes at a time of economic challenges, regional instability and ongoing international sanctions. The ability of the new leadership to consolidate authority while managing both domestic expectations and external pressures will significantly influence the future trajectory of the Islamic Republic.

The developments have also intensified consultations among major global powers. Diplomatic engagements involving Washington, European capitals and Middle Eastern governments are expected to shape future negotiations concerning regional security, maritime stability in the Persian Gulf and Iran's nuclear programme. Reports have also suggested high-level discussions between former U.S. President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as the region adapts to the post-Khamenei political landscape.

Beyond its immediate political implications, the funeral has underscored Iran's enduring influence in regional affairs. For supporters of the Islamic Republic, the ceremonies symbolise continuity and resistance despite external challenges. For observers abroad, they represent the beginning of a new and uncertain chapter in Middle Eastern geopolitics.

As the mourning period continues, the world watches closely. The decisions taken by Iran's emerging leadership in the weeks ahead are likely to influence not only the country's internal stability but also the broader strategic balance across West Asia for years to come.



across the country to pay their final respects to former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, whose death earlier this year has fundamentally altered the political and strategic landscape of West Asia. The week-long state funeral, which commenced on July 3, has evolved into both a national mourning ceremony and a powerful political demonstration of continuity by the Islamic Republic.

The principal ceremonies began at Tehran's Grand Mosalla, where Khamenei's body was received amid unprecedented security arrangements and large public gatherings. Iranian authorities expect millions of citizens to participate in

three decades, was killed during a joint United States-Israel military operation earlier this year, an event that dramatically escalated tensions across the Middle East and ushered in a period of political uncertainty within the Islamic Republic. His death has not only reshaped Iran's internal power structure but also intensified geopolitical competition involving the United States, Israel and regional powers.

While the funeral ceremonies are deeply religious in character, they have also become a symbol of national resilience for Iran's leadership. Senior government officials, commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and

succession process. Considerable attention has centred on Mojtaba Khamenei, son of the late Supreme Leader, who has been designated as Iran's new Supreme Leader but has remained largely absent from public view following reports that he sustained injuries during the same attack that killed his father. His prolonged absence has fuelled international speculation regarding the future direction of Iran's leadership and the evolving balance of power within the country's political and military establishment.

The funeral has also become the backdrop for intense diplomatic activity. Several reports indicate

security architecture and future engagement with Western powers continue to dominate international diplomatic efforts.

International participation in the funeral ceremonies has itself become a subject of geopolitical attention. Reports suggest that diplomatic pressure from the United States prompted several countries to scale down or withdraw their official representation, highlighting the continuing polarisation surrounding Iran's regional role. At the same time, numerous governments from Asia, Africa and the Middle East have maintained varying levels of participation, reflecting the complexity of contemporary diplomatic alignments.

Global Developments: From AI Governance to the US Semiquincentennial

By Vitasta Herald
Correspondent

As the world moves through the summer of 2026, the international landscape is being shaped by two monumental events: a critical drive toward ethical artificial intelligence and a historic milestone in American history.

A New Frontier: The Global AI Governance Summit
On July 6, 2026, the United Nations convened a major summit in Geneva, Switzerland, to address the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence. The Global Dialogue on AI Governance has brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including government officials, lead-

ers from major technology corporations, and prominent academic experts.

The primary objective of this high-level forum is to establish a framework for the responsible develop-

cerns mounting over the potential for "catastrophic harm" from unchecked advancement, participants are tasked with the challenge of drafting universally accepted guardrails.

AI can offer in medicine, climate science, and productivity, this summit represents a coordinated global effort to ensure that innovation does not outpace the human need for security, ethics, and accountability.

America 250: A Milestone Celebration

While Geneva focuses on the future, the United States has been immersed in celebrating its past. July 4, 2026, marked the Semiquincentennial, or the 250th anniversary, of American independence. This landmark occasion was observed with nationwide festivi-

ties that spanned the entire country.

From Philadelphia-the site of the signing of the Declaration of Independence-to Washington D.C., New York, and Boston, the atmosphere was defined by massive parades, immersive historical reenactments, and record-breaking fireworks displays. Beyond the pageantry, the event provided a moment for the nation to reflect on its history and evolution over two and a half centuries. The "America 250" commemorations serve as a bridge between the country's foundational principles and its current social and political trajectory as it enters its next era.



ment and deployment of AI technologies. With con-

While proponents highlight the immense benefits

West Asia on Edge U.S.

Iran Hostilities Intensify as Ceasefire Unravels, Raising Fears of Wider Regional Conflict

By Vitasta Herald
News Bureau

Tehran/Washington, July 2026: West Asia has entered another period of heightened uncertainty following the collapse of the June ceasefire between the United States and Iran. Renewed military operations by both sides have sharply escalated tensions, raising concerns over regional stability, maritime security and the global energy supply. "The latest phase of the conflict has witnessed sustained U.S. military operations targeting strategic infrastructure inside Iran. According to official statements released by U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), precision strikes have focused on transport and military-linked facilities, including installations in and around the strategic port of Chabahar on the Gulf of Oman." "The renewed confrontation follows the breakdown of the June Memorandum of Understanding, which had temporarily halted hostilities after months of military exchanges. The truce reportedly unravelled amid growing disputes over maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's busiest energy corridors. Tensions escalated further

after commercial shipping in the region came under attack, prompting Washington to strengthen its naval presence and enforce tighter security measures along vital sea routes. "In response, Iran has launched retaliatory strikes against

against a U.S. military installation in Jordan, while additional attacks reportedly targeted strategic infrastructure in neighbouring Gulf states. The exchanges have significantly heightened fears

over global energy markets. With the Strait of Hormuz remaining under heavy military surveillance, analysts warn that any prolonged disruption to shipping could affect international oil supplies and

Gulf may have serious implications for worldwide energy security. "Inside Iran, the conflict has added to mounting economic pressures. Reports indicate rising inflation, shortages of essential commodities and disruptions in communications, further increasing hardships for ordinary citizens already facing prolonged economic challenges. "Diplomatic efforts continue despite the worsening military situation. Several countries, including China and Pakistan, have appealed for restraint and urged both sides to return to dialogue. International observers have warned that without renewed diplomatic engagement, the conflict could evolve into a prolonged war of attrition with far-reaching geopolitical and economic consequences. "As military operations continue and tensions remain high, the crisis has emerged as one of the most significant security challenges facing the international community. The coming weeks are expected to determine whether diplomacy can regain momentum or whether West Asia will witness an even deeper cycle of confrontation with consequences extending well beyond the region.



American military assets and allied facilities in the region. Iranian authorities stated that ballistic missiles and drones were used

of a wider regional conflict involving multiple countries. "The deteriorating security situation has also intensified concerns

trigger fresh volatility in global energy prices. The International Energy Agency has cautioned that continued instability in the

Dr Amar Malmohi (Prof. Amarnath Bhat): A Life Dedicated to Kashmir, Its Language, Its Civilisation and Its Homeland

By Vithal Chowdhary

Some lives transcend the measure of years. They become bridges between generations, preserving an entire civilisation through knowledge, courage and an unwavering sense of duty. Dr Amar Malmohi, born Prof. Amarnath Bhat, was one such extraordinary son of Kashmir.

His passing marks not merely the loss of an eminent scholar, playwright, novelist, educationist and literary icon, but also the departure of one of the last living custodians of a civilisation that has endured exile, suffering and relentless attempts at erasure. His life stood as a testament to the enduring strength of the Kashmiri Hindu spirit—a spirit that refuses to surrender its memory, identity or rightful claim to its homeland.

Dr Malmohi's contribution to Kashmiri literature occupies a distinguished place in the intellectual history of the community. Through his novels, radio plays, translations and scholarly works, he gave voice to the emotions, struggles and aspirations of generations of Kashmiris. His celebrated works, including Tarsh Te Tarpan, Kuchle Phool and Zafran Zaar, enriched both Kashmiri and Urdu literature, while his Sahitya Akademi Award-winning translation of the Kathasaritsagara into Kashmiri reaffirmed the inseparable bond between Kashmir's ancient Sanskrit heritage and its living linguistic tradition.

His writings were never merely literary achievements; they were acts of cultural preservation. At a time when displacement threatened not only the physical existence of Kashmiri Hindus but also the continuity of their language and traditions, Dr Malmohi ensured that their stories, memories and civilisational consciousness would survive for future generations.

Yet to remember Dr Amar Malmohi only as a literary giant would be to overlook the profound moral courage that defined his life. He understood, perhaps more deeply than many, that literature cannot exist in isolation from the people who create it. A language loses its soul when its speakers are uprooted, and a civilisation cannot flourish when its sacred geography is severed from those who have nurtured it for millennia.

For him, the struggle of Kashmiri Hindus was never confined to questions of relief or rehabilitation. It was fundamentally a struggle for justice, dignity, historical truth and the restoration of an ancient civilisation to its rightful homeland.

It was, therefore, only natural that Dr Malmohi stood firmly with the Panun Kashmir movement. His support did not arise from political expediency, nor was it born of momentary emotion. It emerged from decades of scholarship, historical understanding and lived experience.

He recognised that the Margdarshan Resolution of 1991 articulated not merely a political demand but the only just and durable framework through which the indigenous Hindu community of Kashmir could hope to secure a future of safety, dignity and permanence.

His association with the movement carried immense moral authority because he belonged to a generation that had witnessed Kashmir before its tragedy, endured the pain of forced exile and refused to accept the rewriting of history.

Dr Malmohi consistently reminded society that the genocide and forced displacement of Kashmiri Hindus could never be normalised, trivialised or forgotten. He understood that the destruction of temples, the desecration of sacred sites, the silencing of an ancient community and the forced abandonment of an entire civilisation were not isolated events but interconnected assaults on the very identity of Kashmir.

Throughout his public life, he remained steadfast in asserting that truth could never be sacrificed at the altar of political convenience and that genuine reconciliation would remain impossible without justice.

For the members of Youth 4 Panun Kashmir, Dr Amar Malmohi was much more than an acclaimed author or a respected intellectual. He was a mentor, a guide and a source of moral inspiration.

At a time when many young Kashmiri Hindus were searching for direction in carrying forward the unfinished struggle of their displaced community, Dr Malmohi stood beside them with warmth, conviction and unwavering faith. His participation in programmes organised by Youth 4 Panun Kashmir, including the protest against attempts to alter the identity of the sacred Shankaracharya Hill, demonstrated his belief that the younger generation must never inherit silence.

Addressing young Homelanders, he spoke not with bitterness but with remarkable clarity. He reminded them that their struggle was rooted in truth, that the genocide of their people must never be forgotten, and that the dream of returning to their homeland with honour, security and dignity must never be abandoned.

His association with Youth 4 Panun Kashmir represented something far deeper than public support. It symbolised the passing of a sacred responsibility from one generation to the next. In Dr Malmohi, the youth found not merely a respected elder but a living embodiment of the values they seek to preserve—intellectual integrity, cultural rootedness, historical honesty and an unwavering commitment to the cause of Panun Kashmir.

His confidence in the younger generation strengthened their resolve and reaffirmed that the struggle for the Homeland is not the aspiration of a single organisation or generation, but the collective duty of an entire civilisation.

There was remarkable grace in Dr Malmohi's personality. Despite witnessing unimaginable loss and spending decades away from the land that had shaped every fibre of his being, he never allowed bitterness to overshadow scholarship or hatred to replace wisdom.

He believed that preserving language was resistance, recording history was resistance, educating future generations was resistance, and standing firmly for truth was the highest form of service to one's people.

His life reminds us that civilisations are not preserved merely through political victories. They survive because individuals dedicate themselves to safeguarding memory, culture and identity, even under the most adverse circumstances.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of his life was that a man who devoted himself to preserving Kashmir's language, heritage and civilisational consciousness was himself denied the opportunity to spend his final years in the homeland he loved beyond measure.

Like countless other Kashmiri Hindus, he carried Kashmir not in geography but in memory, language and faith. Exile became his physical reality, but it never became his emotional acceptance. His heart remained rooted in the valleys, rivers, temples and traditions of the land from which his community had been driven.

As we bid farewell to Dr Amar Malmohi, we do so with profound sorrow but also with immense gratitude. We are grateful that our generation had the privilege of witnessing a scholar whose intellect enriched our literature, whose

integrity elevated public discourse and whose unwavering commitment strengthened the cause of Panun Kashmir.

We are grateful that he chose to stand with the youth when their voices needed the reassurance of elders who had themselves lived through history.

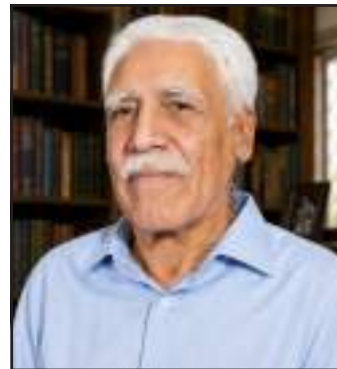
Above all, we are grateful that he never allowed despair to extinguish hope or exile to diminish belonging. The most meaningful tribute we can offer Dr Amar Malmohi is not confined to remembrance alone. It lies in continuing the mission to which he devoted his life—to preserve our language, protect our heritage, speak fearlessly about the genocide of Kashmiri Hindus, uphold the Margdarshan Resolution of 1991, and work tirelessly until the dream of a secure, dignified and permanent Homeland for Kashmiri Hindus becomes a reality.

That alone would be a tribute worthy of a man who dedicated his intellect, his voice and his entire life to the service of his people.

On behalf of Youth 4 Panun Kashmir (Regd.), we offer our deepest shradhanjali to Dr Amar Malmohi. We mourn the loss of a towering scholar, a distinguished litterateur, an uncompromising guardian of Kashmiri civilisation and a steadfast supporter of the Homeland movement.

Though his physical presence is no longer with us, his words, values and example will continue to inspire generations of Homelanders. His legacy will endure wherever the Kashmiri language is spoken, wherever the truth of our history is defended, and wherever the dream of Panun Kashmir continues to inspire hearts that refuse to surrender.

May his noble soul attain the eternal abode of Bhagwan. May his memory remain an enduring source of strength for every Kashmiri Hindu. And may we prove worthy of the faith he placed in our generation by carrying forward his mission with the same dignity, conviction and courage that defined his remarkable life.



Sacred Journey, Secure Future

coordinated planning can transform a complex Himalayan pilgrimage into a highly organised spiritual movement.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this year's Yatra has been the extraordinary response from pilgrims. Within the opening days itself, tens of thousands of devotees had already offered prayers at the Holy Cave Shrine, with daily pilgrim numbers surpassing those recorded during the corresponding period last year. The enthusiastic participation prompted the Lieutenant Governor to appeal to intending pilgrims to undertake the Yatra only according to their allotted registration dates, after an unusually large number of unregistered devotees reached Jammu hoping to join the pilgrimage immediately.

Addressing devotees during the inaugural ceremonies, the Lieutenant Governor described the Yatra as "a sacred path where devotion meets spiritual awakening," expressing hope that every pilgrim would return home with divine blessings and inner peace.

The administration's approach this year has been marked by an emphasis on discipline rather than mere crowd control.

Reviewing arrangements personally at the Nunwan Base Camp and other locations, Manoj Sinha repeatedly stressed that strict adherence to the registration schedule was essential not only for maintaining order but also for ensuring the safety, security and convenience of every pilgrim. He noted that while public enthusiasm was heartening, uncontrolled arrivals without valid permits could create avoidable hardships for both pilgrims and administrators.

The 2026 pilgrimage has also become a showcase of technological integration.

Security agencies have deployed a comprehensive multi-layered security architecture combining high-resolution CCTV surveillance, RFID-based pilgrim tracking, facial-recognition systems at sensitive locations, aerial monitoring, Quick Response Teams, weather surveillance, specialised disaster management units and strengthened communication networks across both pilgrimage routes. Medical infrastructure has also been expanded through oxygen facilities, emergency response centres and mobile healthcare units positioned strategically along the mountain tracks.

These arrangements are backed by one of the largest coordinated deployments of civil administration, Jammu and Kashmir Police, Central Armed Police Forces, the Indian Army, disaster response agencies, healthcare professionals, volunteers and service providers.

The result has been a remarkable demonstration of institutional synergy rarely witnessed on such a scale.

Speaking after performing the Pratham Puja, the Lieutenant Governor observed that the administration, Shrine Board, Army, Police, security forces, local communities, service providers and volunteers were working "in complete synergy" to ensure that every devotee experienced a safe, smooth and memorable pilgrimage.

That spirit of cooperation extends well beyond official institutions.

Every year, thousands of local residents earn their livelihoods through the pilgrimage as pony operators, pithuwalas, taxi drivers, shopkeepers, hoteliers, tent operators, artisans and seasonal workers. Voluntary organisations from across India continue the long-standing tradition of establishing free community kitchens (langars), medical camps and resting facilities, reinforcing the Yatra's reputation as one of the country's finest examples of community service inspired by faith.

Equally significant has been the visible improvement in infrastructure.

Road widening, improved traffic management, better accommodation facilities, enhanced sanitation systems, strengthened disaster preparedness, regulated convoy movement and real-time weather monitoring have collectively improved the pilgrimage experience while reducing risks associated with one of India's most demanding mountain pilgrimages. Earlier this year, Union Home Minister Amit Shah chaired a high-level review meeting to assess preparations, emphasising comprehensive arrangements for pilgrim registration, healthcare, disaster management and security.

Beyond its religious significance, the Yatra continues to serve as a powerful symbol of Jammu and Kashmir's resilience.

Each successful pilgrimage strengthens confidence

among visitors, supports the local economy, generates seasonal employment across multiple sectors and reinforces the image of the Union Territory as a destination capable of hosting large national events with professionalism and efficiency.

For decades, the annual pilgrimage has embodied India's civilisational continuity. Today, it also represents the successful convergence of tradition and technology.

As devotees continue their ascent towards the naturally formed ice Shivling of Baba Barfani, the 2026 Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra stands as more than a religious event. It has evolved into a model of coordinated governance, disciplined public participation and collective national commitment.

When the final pilgrim returns home at the conclusion of this year's Yatra, the memories carried back will extend beyond the sacred cave. They will include the warmth of local hospitality, the dedication of thousands of unseen workers, the efficiency of modern public administration and the enduring spiritual message that has drawn millions to the Himalayas for generations.

In that sense, Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra 2026 has become not merely another annual pilgrimage, but one of the strongest affirmations yet that faith, security, public service and social harmony can walk together on the same sacred path.

Omar Abdullah's Timely Intervention Safeguards Tourism,

tenance that would have resulted in the suspension of flight operations every Monday and Tuesday between July and September, besides an earlier proposal for a complete closure during part of October. The announcement immediately triggered concern throughout the travel industry, with several tour operators reporting cancellations and widespread uncertainty among prospective visitors.

Recognising the seriousness of the situation, Omar Abdullah personally raised the issue with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and Union Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu, arguing that the proposed restrictions threatened to undermine months of recovery achieved by Jammu and Kashmir's tourism sector.

His intervention produced immediate results.

Following consultations between the Centre, the Airports Authority of India and defence authorities, the proposed daytime runway closures were withdrawn. Instead, airport authorities opted to continue essential maintenance during night hours, ensuring that commercial flight operations would continue throughout the tourism season without significant disruption. Airport authorities subsequently confirmed that there would be no full runway closure during the year, while airlines were advised to continue normal operations within revised operational timings.

Expressing gratitude after the decision, the Chief Minister observed that uninterrupted air connectivity was indispensable for Jammu and Kashmir's economy, particularly during the peak tourism season, when thousands of visitors arrive every week.

He also proposed a longer-term solution should future daytime maintenance become unavoidable. During discussions with Union ministers, he suggested that Awantipora Air Force Station be explored as an alternative civil aviation facility during any future runway rehabilitation programme, thereby ensuring continuity of commercial operations without affecting tourism or public convenience.

The decision has been widely viewed as a major relief not only for airlines and travellers but also for hotels, houseboats, transport operators, artisans, restaurants, tour guides, photographers and thousands of families whose livelihoods depend directly or indirectly upon tourism.

The airport decision coincided with another major responsibility before the elected government—the smooth conduct of the Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra 2026.

With lakhs of pilgrims undertaking the annual pilgrimage to the Holy Cave Shrine of Baba Barfani, the Chief Minister repeatedly emphasised that while security arrangements remained under the supervision of central agencies, the civil administration had completed all logistical preparations relating to accommodation, sanitation, healthcare, transport, emergency response and public services.

He expressed confidence that the pilgrimage would

witness record participation while reaffirming that the administration's foremost responsibility remained ensuring that every pilgrim returned home safely after completing the sacred journey.

Officials across multiple departments worked in coordination with the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board, police, health authorities, disaster management agencies and local volunteers to facilitate one of the largest annual religious gatherings in the Himalayas.

The successful management of the pilgrimage has further strengthened confidence in Jammu and Kashmir's improving administrative capacity and its ability to host major national events safely and efficiently.

Yet it was perhaps Omar Abdullah's remarks on regional peace that generated the widest political discussion during the month.

Supporting a joint open appeal signed by more than one hundred prominent citizens from India and Pakistan calling for the resumption of dialogue between the two neighbouring countries, the Chief Minister reiterated his long-held belief that sustainable peace remained essential for the long-term prosperity of Jammu and Kashmir.

Quoting former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's celebrated observation that "friends may change, but neighbours cannot", Abdullah defended the need for continued engagement between the two countries.

He also questioned why similar appeals for dialogue often attracted criticism when voiced by mainstream political leaders in Jammu and Kashmir, while comparable observations made by senior national figures were generally received without controversy.

His remarks reopened a debate that has shaped the politics of Jammu and Kashmir for decades.

Supporters argued that peace and dialogue were indispensable for attracting investment, strengthening tourism, expanding trade and ensuring lasting stability in border regions. Critics, however, maintained that engagement should proceed only after addressing cross-border security concerns.

Regardless of differing political opinions, few disputed that stability remains fundamental to Jammu and Kashmir's economic future.

The events of July also highlighted the increasingly collaborative relationship between the Union Territory administration and the Central Government.

The airport issue demonstrated how constructive engagement between Srinagar and New Delhi could produce practical solutions to pressing regional concerns without prolonged confrontation.

Similarly, the coordinated management of the Amarnath Yatra illustrated the effectiveness of institutional cooperation among civil administration, security agencies and the Shrine Board in delivering large-scale public services under challenging conditions.

For ordinary citizens, these developments carried significance extending beyond politics.

They reinforced confidence that governance can directly influence livelihoods, whether by protecting tourism, facilitating pilgrimage or improving connectivity.

For investors and entrepreneurs, uninterrupted air services signalled policy responsiveness and administrative flexibility.

For pilgrims and visitors, efficient management enhanced confidence in travelling to Jammu and Kashmir.

And for thousands of families whose income depends upon tourism, hospitality, transport and handicrafts, the withdrawal of the proposed runway closures represented not merely an administrative decision but the preservation of an entire economic season.

As July draws to a close, Jammu and Kashmir finds itself entering the second half of the year with renewed optimism.

Tourism continues to record encouraging momentum, the Amarnath pilgrimage has progressed successfully under extensive administrative coordination, and air connectivity—arguably the Valley's most critical economic artery—has remained uninterrupted.

Together, these developments have underlined a larger reality: for a region whose economy is deeply intertwined with mobility, spirituality and public confidence, timely governance can prove as valuable as infrastructure itself.

In safeguarding Kashmir's air connectivity at a critical moment, supporting one of India's largest annual pilgrimages, and continuing to advocate regional engagement, July 2026 has become a defining month in the evolving governance narrative of Jammu and Kashmir.



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