

KASHMIR



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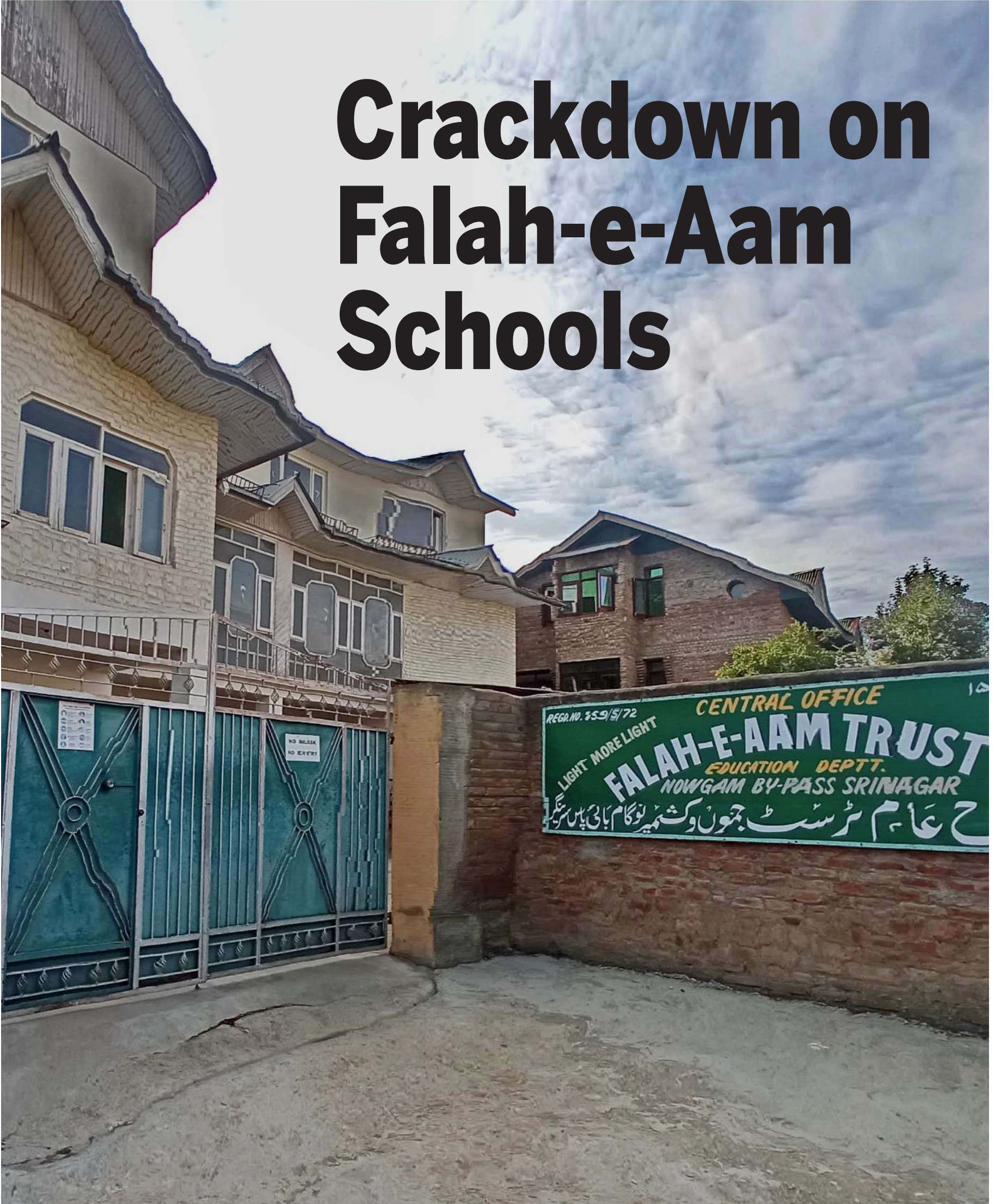
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Crackdown on Falah-e-Aam Schools



Kashmir's Deepening Economic Woes

Most people involved in businesses and commerce in Kashmir are sure that consumers are increasingly losing the power and will to spend money. There is a growing consensus that the purchasing power is long gone and most of the spending is strictly need-based.

This is a classic example of an economic recession and Kashmir appears to be at the brink of an economic crisis.

In the absence of a strong bailout, repeatedly sought by Kashmir's business community and ignored by the government, the economy is now slithering into an abyss.

Kashmir's long economic winter began in September 2014 when rains continued over Kashmir for days without a break. The streams and rivers swelled and weak embankments cracked, flooding residential neighbourhoods and economic heartlands.

For almost six months after the flood had receded, the economic activities remained at halt and the restart – again in the absence of an effective bailout process – was a slow affair. It was the first hit to an economy that, in all senses, can be described as archaic.

Then year after year – without a pause – Kashmir's economy faced a new crisis: a summer agitation in 2016; an uncertainty of another agitation in 2017; a year of law and order volatility in 2018; unprecedented communication blackout and curfew in 2019; the first wave of COVID19 pandemic in 2020 and the second wave in 2021.

In July 2020, Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industries had made a preliminary loss assessment of a colossal Rs 40,000 crore. In December 2021, the Chamber's loss estimate was Rs 50,000 crore.

By the time the calendars moved on to 2022, the economic instability and possibility of recession in Kashmir had reached a point of no return and every sector – from a small-time retailer to major investments – is now bearing the brunt.

Take for example Nazir Ahmad, a milkman from Magam town, who distributes milk to households in Srinagar and also runs a milk-and-cheese shop. His assessment is similar to those of other day-to-day businesses: people are not spending enough.

Ahmad's assessment is grim based ominously on his sales getting limited to milk, which still remains a necessity. Very few people, he observes, are purchasing cheese and curd, which appears to

have gone up on the luxury list.

This grim assessment about the daily essentials of life comes in the backdrop of dairy owners spilling milk into gutters in February and March this year when they were frustrated and shocked by the lack of demand in the market.

The decrease in the spending is now impacting every business – from a tea vendor who now sells fewer cups a day to construction businesses going slow to grocery sellers making abysmal sales. The construction boom of the past decades – which saw Srinagar's peripheries expanding deep across the borders of Baramulla, Budgam, Pulwama and Ganderbal districts – has, for sure, come to an abrupt halt, which has left thousands of migrant labourers, who enjoyed considerably good working atmosphere and comparatively better remuneration, without work for days at a stretch.

The slowdown of any one sector is now mak-

In the absence of a strong bailout, repeatedly sought by Kashmir's business community and ignored by the government, the economy is now slithering into an abyss.

ing a meltdown effect on other sectors.

The crisis is so severe that even the acts of charity and donations, which Kashmiris would do as part of a tradition, are facing a slowdown and the charity organisations – which proved to be of great importance during the time of past crises – are announcing drying up of financial resources.

Kashmir's economy is broadly divided into two segments: one based in urban areas, like in Srinagar, which is mainly service-based and a part of which is dependent on government jobs. The urban economy is non-agricultural and with the services sector facing a severe brunt during the COVID19 years, this segment of the economy is flailing.

The COVID19 years have been unprecedentedly nightmarish when the urban unemployment rate in Jammu and Kashmir, according to a report prepared by the Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, had reached 46.3 percent for the 15-29 age group. This rate is almost double than what was prevalent in the United States during the height of the Great Depression in 1933 when 24.9 percent of its total workforce was unemployed.

The second segment of Kashmir economy is based in rural areas and revolves around the trika of agriculture, horticulture and livestock farming. This segment has, however, also come under tremendous strain due to adverse climatic conditions which are having a ravaging effect.

NITI Aayog, an advisory body which replaced India's Planning Commission, states that the low productivity in agriculture and allied sectors – which supports livelihood of 80 percent of the population – has impeded employment and income generation in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Aayog had suggested that Jammu and Kashmir should shift its agriculture development strategy from food security mode to the value addition mode. Instead, the situation has worsened for farmers who were advised earlier this year to avoid planting paddy due to non-availability of the irrigation water in the face of unrelenting heat waves.

In such a troubling scenario, the burden of heavy tax regimes has further dampened the possibility of the economic recovery. The tax collection during 2021-22 was exceptionally high as the government collected Rs 15,179.42 crore of indirect taxes like GST, excise duty, stamps, and tax on motor spirits, compared to 12,105.95 crore during previous financial year.

While the cost of living is growing exponentially and the rupee is losing its purchasing power, the economy of Kashmir needs a well-planned and effective bailout programme and tax exemptions.

The region is on the cusp of an imminent economic crash and the telltale signs are all over. The administration should realize that the region's economy is gasping for help. The money coming from the tourism sector is not enough and that sector itself is still making up for its own deficit of the past decade, instead of allowing the money into the economic cycle.

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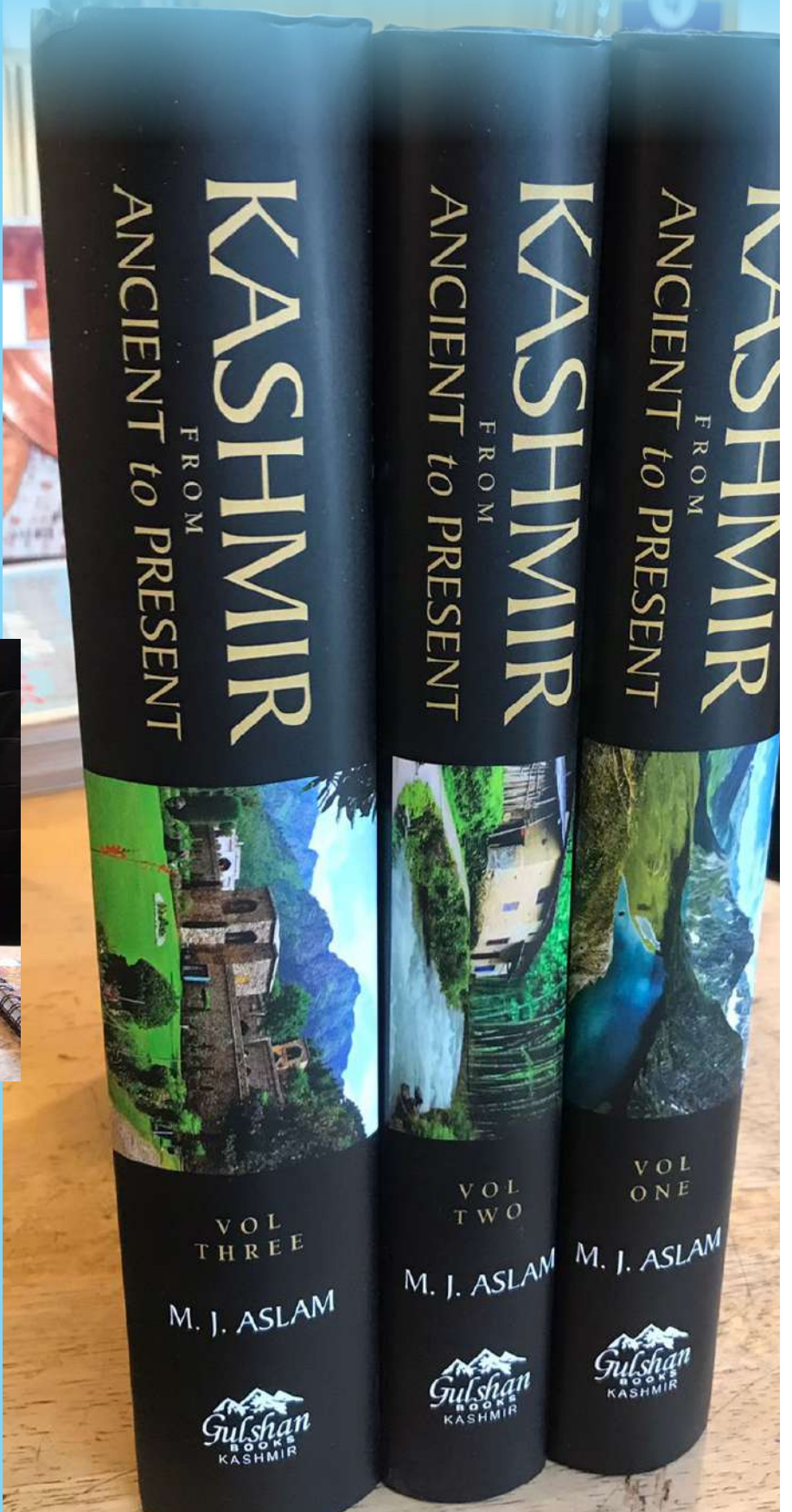
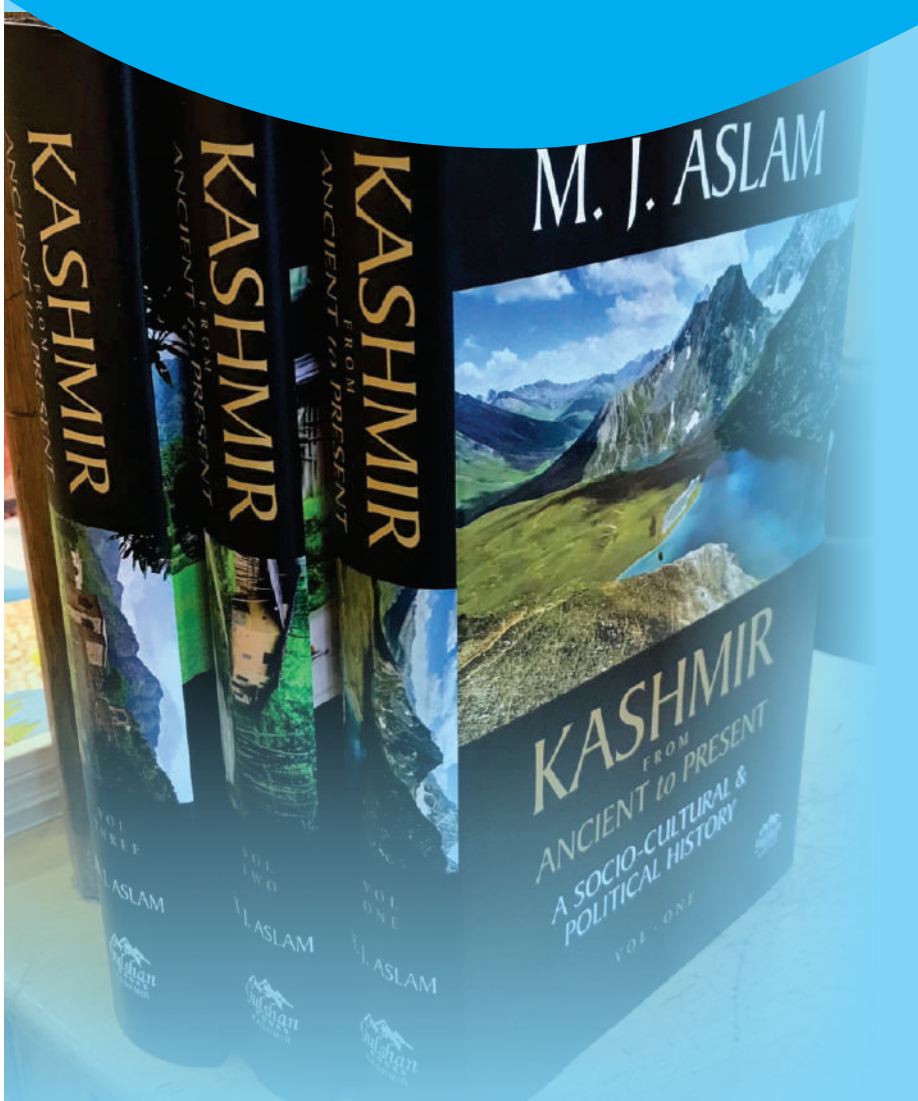


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KASHMIR FROM ANCIENT TO PRESENT

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India Needs to Have a Clear Kashmir Policy

New Delhi shouldn't shy away from talks.



SHOME BASU

Since the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A – the laws which gave autonomy and special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir – on 5th of August 2019, Kashmir valley, unexpectedly, hasn't seen any major public uproar.

The valley was locked down for nearly 18 months which also included the COVID lockdown. For a major part of the lockdown, mobile phones, internet and landline communication services, schools, offices and all economic activities, barring some emergency services, were suspended while people stayed mostly indoors amid unprecedented crackdown on civilian movement.

The regular protests and pelting of stones on the security forces was heavily curbed while any potential of disturbance was contained by pre-emptive arrests, detentions and imposition of PSA. Nearly 4000 civilians, many of them young men, were arrested under PSA post-August 5, 2019.

The recent targeted killing of Kashmiri Pandits, however, is raising a new alarm. The killings began last year and have continued intermittently since then despite multiple crackdowns on the militant modules and an overwhelming footprint of security forces across the length and breadth of the valley.

While these targeted killings have invoked fear among the minuscule community of Kashmiri Pandits, most of whom lived in guarded encampments and many of whom fled to the safety of Jammu's plains, it's not for the first time that this community has become a target.

In the early years of militancy, security forces had little inroads into the alleys of valley and nearby hinterlands and Kashmiri youth were seen on the streets wielding their Kalashnikov rifles. The year was 1989 when the political killings first took place and among the first victims was a retired judge N K Ganjoo. JKLF took the responsibility for the killing of Ganjoo, who had previously convicted Maqbool Bhat, the founder of JKLF for the killing of CID officer Amar Chand.

Ganjoo's killing was followed by more assassinations as local Kashmiri Pandits, as well as Muslims, were targeted on allegations of their affiliations with political parties and security agencies. Police could do little as they lacked will, training and sophisticated arms compared to the militants and cases emerged of cops bolting the police stations while young militants roamed the villages and towns. A police-militant nexus too wasn't an oddity back in the day.

The killings and violent chaos generated a fear psychosis among Kashmiri Pandits who started fleeing the valley in droves.

Years passed by when the consecutive Indian governments beefed up the presence of central armed forces which included BSF, CRPF and others along with Army units. As of today, several lac



New Delhi has a long way to go to bring about durable piece in the valley.
Pic: Shome Basu

armed security personnel are stationed in Kashmir to tackle an unrelenting insurgency and a population of little more than twelve-million.

The friction between the two communities dates back decades when the Maharaja - who was a Dogra Rajput from Jammu region - ran the administration which had a strong presence of Kashmiri Pandits as the Muslim population was kept out of the statecraft. The rise of Reading room, Round Room (from the Dastagir Sahib shrine) and Jamia Masjid in the downtown Srinagar, however, ruled the streets of Kashmir since 1931.

The partition took its own course of communal violence but Kashmir, which was still an independent principedom with a standstill agreement signed between the governments of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan while negotiations were underway with India, remained away from those fires.

Fast forward 75 years, Kashmir still remains in a quagmire. While public protests have been sternly curbed by the government after the abrogation of the autonomy laws, the guerilla techniques are back with targeted killing by gunmen who are now referred to as 'hybrid terrorists' by the agencies.

State police and other agencies blame cadres of Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hizbul Mujahideen for killings, again shaking the amity and peace in the valley. In cer-

tain cases, militant organizations have also claimed the responsibility.

Besides the security forces, the gunmen killed around 14 Hindus including Kashmiri Pandits since August 2019 till May 2022. Notably, the number of Muslims killed by them is much higher.

This 'hybrid terrorist' is now on a prowl to kill selected people, which will either polarize the valley further or create an atmosphere of fear among the minority, new migrants, tourists and many other citizens.

If compared to what happened in the 1990s, the current threat levels are minimal. Many of the Hindus I have spoken to in the Valley rejected the threat levels because they feel the old days of militancy were more dreaded.

Although in the recent past, many Kashmiri Pandits again migrated but they feel a sense of betrayal by the Indian government as they haven't been given protection as promised. The minority community members feel that the union government must provide more physical security.

The Centre had, on April 6, informed the parliament that the killing of those from the minority community in the Kashmir valley peaked in 2021. The killings were reported from Anantnag, Srinagar, Pulwama and Kulgam districts in the Valley. From Rajni Bala, a school teacher, to Bihari labourers and govern-

ment employees, an array of victims has been the target of such killings.

The most startling of them all has been M L Bindroo's killing who used to run a famous chemist shop in the heart of Srinagar.

Bindroo's killing was seen as a warning to the community and the government on what was yet to unfold.

With the new domicile law in place and the new constituencies redrawn, New Delhi must junk the muscular politics now and embrace Kashmiris, who are ghettoed by high presence of security forces.

Government of India needs to have a concrete and clear plan to ensure instilling confidence among the people of Kashmir, instead of showing off high numbers in tourism sector which matter little in the gambit of larger law and order scenario.

As Pakistan is a neighbor and neighbours can't be changed, India shouldn't shy away from talks. Maybe India can set some conditions, but an open communication channel with Pakistan and the Kashmiri leadership is imperative for any headway towards peace. A robust Kashmir policy is needed for the well-being of the people and larger political needs of both India and Pakistan.

Shome Basu is a Delhi-based senior journalist.

Notes of Resurrection



DR. SANTOSH BAKAYA

It is 3 A.M., and for nyctophiles like me, the perfect time for doing so many things: allowing my mind to go on flights of fancy, indulging in a little bit of self-introspection, or listening to the sounds of silence. But what does one do when even the sounds of silence appear very loquacious- to the point of being ear-callousing?

Or maybe try to read meaning in the hoots of the two amiable owls which have always been a part of the nightscape?

But, today, they are in the midst of some sort of nocturnal adventure, misadventure probably. Both trying to out-hoot each other in a maniacal frenzy. What are they discussing? The devious ways of human beings?

What man has made of man? How a virus has gone berserk?

Was Edgar Allen Poe's 'stately *Raven of the saintly days of yore*' about to make a cameo appearance, with its screeches of 'Never More!' My mind was abuzz with scary thoughts. Maybe, I should get up and scribble something.

I could sense a whining, buzzing wail of fury coming right at me. The night does that, you know. It has its own code of conduct, its own etiquette. It also has a panache for creating sounds - weird, surreal, bizarre.

I could hear a motorcyclist hitting the gas and making a lightning-quick jaggging move that seemed to bring him right next to my window. I shuddered.

What did he want?

Picking up pieces of my shattered courage, I tip-toed to the window, there was no motorcyclist there. Nothing stirred. No leaf rustled.

I was bewitched to see the tree fronting the window, flaunting the posture of a ballerina. Would it break into dance?

The cicadas burst into staccato bursts of chirping. What was the source of their excitement? Was there a snake slithering around in the dark, chased by a mongoose?

Many such thoughts ricocheted in my head, flaunting grotesque dance steps of a maladroit dancer, as I headed back towards my bed.

No sooner had I thrown myself on the bed than I heard the pitter-patter of rain outside.

One more sound plonk plonk plonk was added to the nocturnal orchestra.

This catapulted me to moments, buried under the palimpsest of time, to find myself as an eight-year-old, gawky girl, dancing in the rain, precariously perched on a slippery boulder in Pahalgam, near the River Lidder.

An absolutely ancient, *pheran*-clad man, probably a goatherd, stood a little distance away, watching my antics. He smiled at me in avuncular warmth and then shouted in Kashmiri: "That rock is very slippery, go back to your cottage, little one."

When I kept dancing, undeterred by his warnings, he scooped me up in his arms, hoisted me on his shoulders, and deposited me on the patio of the green thatched cottage, where mom and dad were having *Kehwa*.

"*Shukriya*, Basheer, come and have *kehwa* with us. She is an incorrigible brat. Always does her own thing..."

It was a ritual for us to visit Kashmir from Jaipur, every summer vacation and spend at least a fortnight in Pahalgam. Those moments form a soothing collage of memories, nestling close to my heart.

I recalled being asked to change into dry clothes, which I did grumpily, while the rain pitter-pattered outside and Basheer had *kehwa* sitting on the patio, discussing sundry things with dad.

And time passed.

Now, it is time for the dark night to slowly gather up the hems of its long, dark skirts and disappear, making place for another new morn.

But my ears are still pricked to the ripples of River Lidder, back home.

I can hear the musical notes of resurrection in them.

Dr. Santosh Bakaya is an award-winning poet, novelist, short story writer, biographer, TEDx Speaker, essayist, creative writing mentor, internationally acclaimed for her poetic biography of Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi, Ballad of Babu,

Frivolous Cases: Nip the Evil in the Bud

MUSTAFA AHMAD

The High Court of J&K and Ladakh in one of its pronouncements recently expressed concern over the frivolous litigation. In its observations, the court sent a strong reproach to parties resorting to a frivolous litigation. The court vented its displeasure in strong words over filing such cases as it pushes genuine cases into niches where they stay for prolonged periods without coming up for hearing.

Though the frivolous litigations, by and large, eventually end up in dismissal, but not before impacting the genuine ones adversely as they keep gathering the dust. It won't be an overstatement to say that a frivolous litigation makes a genuine one lose its relevance.

When a frivolous litigation remains pending for a long period, the genuine cases cannot be taken up for hearings and the litigants generally give up in this procrastinated process for financial reasons or the fatigue they suffer.

For a frivolous litigation, the High Court had directed Director National Institute of Technology (NIT) Srinagar to pay Rs 5 lakh in equal share to two candidates as compensation for denying them appointment for nearly two years as junior engineers in the Institute. Allowing a plea by the two candidates, who were selected as junior engineers in NIT Srinagar, the bench also dismissed a separate application filed by two persons who are working on these two posts on contractual basis and imposed Rs 2 lakh fine on them.

In the judgment, Justice Sanjeev Kumar has held the application of the two contractual persons for impleadment as "misconceived" in view of the fact that they had filed a few litigations before the High Court as well as Civil Court to "perpetuate" their stay at the cost of the petitioners who were duly selected in the selection process.

Justice Kumar directed them to pay the costs of Rs 2 lakh in equal share before the court's Registry within a period of four weeks from the date of announcement of the judgment.

The seriousness of the court over the frivolous litigation can be gauged from the strong remarks it used against such litigation and the direction to NIT Srinagar to pay Rs 5 lakh in equal share to two candidates as compensation for denying them appointment as junior engineers in the Institute.

The no-nonsense manner in which the court has made light of the frivolous litigants is worth contemplation. Of course, the frivolous litigations give an undue advantage to the litigants over genuine litigants obviously at the expense of substantial pleas which remain unheard.

A questions arises as to why frivolous litigations course through years and waste the time of the court .

In the initial stage after few hearings, the courts can be unburdened of this frivolous pendency. At the embryonic stage, a frivolous litigation can save a litigant from financial loss for pursuing a litigation which is bound to fetch him no gains. The sooner the courts start discouraging the filing of such litigations, the better it will be for both the courts and the litigants. The courts will not see frightening heaps of useless files and the litigants will not be clinging to a false hope.

The Court's observation that "the time has come to stay firm on frivolous litigation lest it prevents the Courts from taking up

When a frivolous litigation remains pending for a long period, the genuine cases cannot be taken up for hearings and the litigants generally give up in this procrastinated process for financial reasons or the fatigue they suffer.

good causes involving adjudication of vital constitutional and statutory rights of the citizens" makes great sense.

We can't deny the fact that a frivolous litigation mars rights of others as the courts are not in a position to decide cases related to constitutional and other statutory rights of the citizens on time.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that a major portion of Court time is wasted in hearing and weeding out frivolous litigations.

The Court is absolutely justified in observing that to serve the cause of justice, it was imperative to act tough and discourage the tendency of some litigants to misuse the process of law.

The imposition of costs on persons filing frivolous litigations will send an unmistakable message to people that they need to refrain from such attempts or be ready to face serious consequences. Besides, the courts are also saddled with a huge responsibility to do away with the frivolous litigation at the very threshold.

It will save courts precious time and the litigants will be forced to shun such practices.

Stay Away from Meme coins

There are more chances of an investor losing all or most of the money invested.



SAJJAD BAZAZ

Gullible investors, youngsters in particular, are fast falling prey to online scamsters and are mostly duped through purportedly lucrative investment opportunities in cryptocurrencies. In cryptocurrency segment, it's the meme coins that have grabbed the attention of the young for the sterling returns offered by these virtual coins.

Above all, the endorsement by prominent celebrities of these meme coins as an exciting investment opportunity lured the investors, especially the rookies, to park their hard earned money in them.

However, after getting millions of gullible investors on board, most of the meme coins lost the steam and the investors' wealth vanished in a jiffy.

Let me share an interesting anecdote. Last year, one of my acquaintances proudly stated that his son, who was pursuing an engineering course, was an investment expert. His son had invested in SQUID meme coin and during the period of his investment, the coin was breaking all records of price appreciation. Though I warned him of the dangers of investing in cryptocurrencies, especially the meme coins, he continued to encourage his son to stay invested in the virtual currency market for sterling returns on investment.

However, the investment in SQUID meme coin hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons. The meme coin proved to be a fraud. In a bizarre movement, the price of SQUID meme coin, launched on October 26, 2021 rose over 23,000,000% in a week before falling to nothing on November 02, 2021 according to data from CoinMarketCap. It peaked at around \$2,862 before falling to a fraction of a cent in a matter of minutes. Known as a rug-pull type of scam, the anonymous founders of the coin suddenly pulled out, taking about \$3.4 million of investors' money with them.

There are innumerable instances in

our region where gullible people have fallen into the meme coin trap which is considered as gambling, not investment, by *bona fide* market experts,

This type of investment has proved to be a double-edged sword as stories of people getting hurt sooner than later are emerging continuously.

Notably, a meme coin is a cryptocurrency product. It serves no real world purpose right now and cannot be used as a medium of exchange at merchant establishments or in any other financial transaction. The purpose of most of these coins is to carve out a way to make quick bucks.

Dogecoin is said to be the original meme coin created in 2013. Remarkably, Elon Musk's tweeting about it created enthusiasm among the retail investors and they started buying the coins in massive numbers. Since then developers have released a slew of meme coins, many of them spinoffs of Dogecoin. Today, according to CoinMarketCap, there are more than 5,000 meme coins in existence.

Some of these coins have gained popularity because influential celebrities have been talking about them in public. While retail investors are wooed to invest in these coins, they push their prices up by promoting them heavily online. To be precise, meme coins have no real utility at the moment.

Meanwhile, experts are of the opinion that rather than fundamentals, communities who believe in these meme tokens are fueling the rally. "There are no fundamentals driving the prices, as these are just community tokens. These are pump and dump coins, which don't have any use cases."

Market experts who have a keen eye on the price movement of meme coins are continuously warning that it's unlikely these coins will still be around in a few years or decades. Once investors move on to a new stock or cryptocurren-

cy, meme coins will likely see their prices plummet. This type of investment is dubbed as very risky and is considered another form of gambling. Recent SQUID meme coin scam should serve as an eye opener for the investors. There are more chances that an investor will lose all or most of the money invested in meme coins.

Precisely, in the backdrop of expert opinions, retail investors shouldn't get these meme coins. Investment in these coins or tokens is highly volatile and speculative. Better is not to join the rat race and, instead, invest in sound projects with strong fundamentals.

In this sparkling online environment of investment matters, the appetite of youngsters, including a huge number of teenagers, has been growing exponentially. Most of these new-age investors with herd mentality are unaware about the huge risks loaded in their investments, especially when they invest in virtual financial markets through cryptocurrencies and meme coins.

With easy online access to investment opportunities available in the capital market and the virtual financial markets, the approach of local retail investors has been bullish where they have been parking their money in various stocks and other virtual financial products to make quick bucks through trading. Most of these gullible investors, who don't want to miss the opportunity of making money, have actually turned these markets into a gambling den. The situation here at our place (J&K) is alarming as compulsive online traders are overwhelmingly young and are big risk-takers. They don't even hesitate to trade heavily on margin (using money borrowed from their brokerage) and also take loans from banks to stay afloat in trading.

While discussing the dangers in online trading, I don't mean everyone in

the market is unfit to invest and make money in trading. Of course, many investors could fit that profile. Buying and selling of shares or investing in virtual financial products doesn't necessarily mean an investor has a problem. One of the legitimate ways to carve out a living in the stock market is day trading, even if it's inappropriate for most people. But it's converted into a problem only when people are unable to stop themselves from day trading even when they are consistently losing their hard earned money.

There are certain tests which you as an investor can put yourself through to ascertain the type of investor or trader you are. If you are trading stocks online, no matter how much money you have lost, be sure you are a case of stock trading addiction. This addiction is similar to drug addiction, which can cause extensive damage to your health as well as wealth. Precisely, the experts call this an illness.

Based on the continuous interaction with some of the best brains in investment matters, let me share their thoughtful observations so that you know yourself well as to what type of investor you are. In order to ensure you're not a trading addict, you should ask yourself a few questions.

Do you enjoy the challenge of trading even more than making money? Are you a big risk-taker? Are you willing to put large sums of money on a few stocks, depending on margins and on other credit lines for investing? Do you resort to bigger risks to erase your losses? Is it that the first thing you do when you get up and last thing before you go to sleep is check the position of your stocks? Do you bet large portions of your investment portfolio on a few stocks?

In the words of investment experts if your answer to these questions is affirmative, then you are a victim of online trading addiction.

I haven't seen people talking about this kind of affliction, but the addicts suffering from uncontrollable online stock trading are no less serious than what ails the gambler who can't stay away from gambling. While talking in the local context, I have seen online traders here who do nothing else but remain busy in trading stocks and their tendencies are typical of a compulsive gambler.

Sajjad Bazaz heads internal communication & Knowledge Management Department of Jammu & Kashmir Bank Limited.

There are innumerable instances in our region where gullible people have fallen into the meme coin trap which is considered as gambling, not investment, by *bona fide* market experts

Teachers' Future Grim as State Seals Jamaat-Affiliated Schools

The directive to shut down the schools came on 14 June 2022

MIR AIYAZ

Zameer Ahmad is worried that the two-storey Islamia Model School in Diver, a faraway village in the picturesque Lolab valley of north Kashmir, stands desolate and locked since last month.

The fate of once-vibrant school, which provided education to rural children - many of them downtrodden - is now sealed as the state administration ordered a closure of nearly a dozen schools associated with Falah-e-Aam Trust (FAT). The trust was set-up by Jamaat-e-Islami in 1972.

The closure has left many teachers like Ahmad, who taught for 15 years at Diver's Islamia Model School, in agony about their future and family.

Ahmad is 37 and has already crossed the age-limit criteria for a government job. The anguish is visible on his face and in his words.

"Most of us were earning a decent living by teaching in these community-welfare schools," says Ahmad with a distressful body language. "But now, we have been rendered roofless. There's no support in sight for my ousted tribe."

In remote places like Lolab, where private sector and industrial progress never began, there are fewer career options and Ahmad, while teaching at the FAT-affiliated school, had been simultaneously attempting for a government job without success. The source of income now shut, age-limit has also ended other hopes for him.

"What options do I have now?" Ahmad, a humanities graduate who always wanted to be a teacher, asked. "The administration should have absorbed us in the government schools just like they adjusted students from FAT schools. But the thrust is clearly on punitive rather than welfare measures."

THE BAN

The directive to shut down FAT schools came on 14 June 2022 when the administration ordered cessation of academic activities in these schools.

The order was issued by the Additional Secretary of School Education Department on the directions of the J&K government and it directed all the students studying in these banned institutions to admit themselves at government schools for the current session.

"No new admissions will be taken in these banned FAT institutions, and no further registration of these institutions will be done," the order said.

The government said that FAT ran dozens of schools from primary to higher secondary level in Kashmir where hundreds of students are enrolled and Chief Education Officers were asked to seal these schools within 15 days in consultation with the district administration.

The Trust has had a troubled relationship with the administration in the past after it was founded by the Jamaat-e-Islami in 1972 when the organization was a part of the electoral politics. Soon, the Trust had several hundred schools set up across Kashmir valley.

The Trust was first banned in 1979. The trouble, however, mounted for the FAT in the aftermath of the eruption of militancy in Kashmir in 1990 amid

Jamaat-e-Islami's tacit endorsement of the Hizbul Mujahideen militant group even as the socio-political group later publicly disavowed this affiliation.

The latest closure order, however, drew immediate condemnation from politicians in the region with former Chief Minister and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti terming it as "another form of atrocity."

"Move to ban FAT affiliated schools is another form of atrocity inflicted upon the people of J&K to sabotage their future," she said. "After land ownership, resources and jobs, the last target is education. I am sure Kashmiris will overcome this and not let their children suffer."

Sajjad Lone of Peoples Conference, who has had political differences with the Jamaat-e-Islami in the past, termed the ban on FAT schools as a regressive and discriminatory step. "Doesn't a Kashmiri child have the right to study where he wants? The government of the day needs to understand societal sensitivities."

Altaf Bukhari, the founder of Apni Party, while expressing his dismay, said, "It will not only dislodge the students but will also create joblessness."

In the aftermath of the ban, an open letter was written by 200 former students of FAT schools who urged the government to revoke the order.

"We feel compelled to write to the Government of India and the Government of Jammu and Kashmir via media that Falah-e-Aam Trust (FAT) is a registered trust (Govt. Regd. vide no. 159/s; dated 31 July 1972) that runs as per the constitution duly submitted to the State. The objectives of the FAT as stated in Article 3 of its constitution include providing assistance to poor and needy without discrimination of religion, colour and creed; help in the education of the poor and needy students; open education institutions to educate all without any discrimination; and to assist other organizations in their humanitarian efforts."

FAT, reiterated the alumni, is non-political in nature and is dedicated to education and service in Jammu and Kashmir, as reflects the Article 4 of the FAT constitution.

"After Sheikh Abdullah in 1971 banned any political party to run the schools, these schools were detached from the Jamaat-e-Islami organization so as to remain apolitical, charitable and social welfare organization under FAT," it said.

"It is lethal for a government to ban institutions for a political agenda. Education must not be made casualty for political vendetta. Earlier, Governor Jagmohan Singh banned and closed down all the schools run by FAT in 1990 and it was the Honourable Supreme Court of India that rejected the ban as illegal and unfounded. Any ban on FAT schools, by the Government today, would not only be illegal but would have immense ramifications on the thoughts and minds of millions in the state. If the government is failing to deal with Kashmir politically, it must not ban schools in anger and desperation."

Even as the ban remained in effect, the Jammu

The Falah-e-Aam trust was established by Jamaat-e-Islami in 1972 when it was a part of the electoral politics.
Pic: Qazi Irshad



Gov't schools

June 2022.

and Kashmir government clarified that Jamaat-e-Islamic affiliated schools, mosques and orphanages had been kept outside the purview of the ban on the organization which was imposed on it in 2019 for a period of five years.

MANY VERSIONS

The ban on the dozen schools linked to FAT came in the backdrop of a probe conducted by the State Investigation Agency (SIA) of Jammu and Kashmir Police which alleged gross illegalities, outright frauds and mass-scale encroachment of government lands by the trust.

The officials of SIA alleged that JeI mostly draws its sustenance from the vast network of FAT schools, seminaries, orphanages, pulpits of mosques and other charities and added that such institutions played a destructive role in large-scale unrest of 2008, 2010 and 2016.

"These Jamaat campuses were long on radar for their ideological bent," a senior police officer told Kashmir Newsline. "The recent crackdown is part of a larger exercise to control a certain narrative fanning trouble in the region."

However, a senior IAS officer, who like the police officer quoted above requested anonymity, said the action against the FAT schools has to do with the state lands.

"Most of them were operating illegally on the state land," the officer said. "If notices can be served to former ministers for their illegal occupancy of the state properties, then everyone is supposed to conduct their affairs in a legal manner."

However, locals of Lolab's Diver aren't buying the state land theory. "The school building is built on private land bought with public donations," said a FAT teacher. "Even if it is a state land, why can't it be used for education purposes if the same can be allocated for other activities?"

In its latest ban order, the administration has referred to the May 1990 ban order, followed by two court observations made in May 2005 and December 2021 to claim that the FAT has been running the schools illegally after the ban under the pretext of a High Court order.

However, majority of the schools ended their affiliations with the FAT after 1990, thus leaving only 18 schools still affiliated with it, said the FAT chairman Ghulam Mohammad

Bhat. "It has been, time and again, made amply clear that the FAT is an independent, government-recognised and registered non-political entity having no affiliation with any political or religious organisation," he said.

"Yet, these false allegations are leveled against the trust to defame it and thereby cause irreparable loss to its reputation as an excellent educational institution meant for the imparting of knowledge to all according to modern trends," Bhat said.

At Diver, the teachers without campus and job believe the intent is to penalize a particular shade of opinion. "But they should at least spare teachers of the torment," says Imtiyaz Bhat, a FAT teacher. "If we are the nation-builders, then we don't deserve this deprivation."

In his mid-forties, Mohammad Amin says even private schools are not entertaining their job applications now. "These schools have welcomed FAT students because they can charge hefty fees from them in the next session," says the anguished FAT teacher. "But in all this madness, we are at the receiving end."

Amin said the FAT teachers were greatly respected for their student-friendly works. Their thrust, he said, was to impart regular and moral education. "For students from financially weaker sections, such schools were light at the end of a tunnel," Amin said. "Many orphans and poor students were either studying free of cost or at a nominal fee."

Another FAT teacher said he was paying Rs 1100 monthly fees excluding transport fee for his child studying in LKG. "Whereas, a class LKG student in FAT run schools would pay nearly 300 rupees a month."

In the face of this crisis, these teachers believe that blacklisting of the FAT schools is a violation of the Indian constitution, which under Article 30(1), gives all minorities right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

"Earlier we were part of the knowledge campaign in Kashmir," Amin said, "but now, we've become campaigners of our own deprived class."

Tauseef Ahmad, an FAT teacher who also lost his job after the recent ban said the order defied logic. "The national anthem was a part of our morning assemblies. This ban is beyond comprehension," he said.



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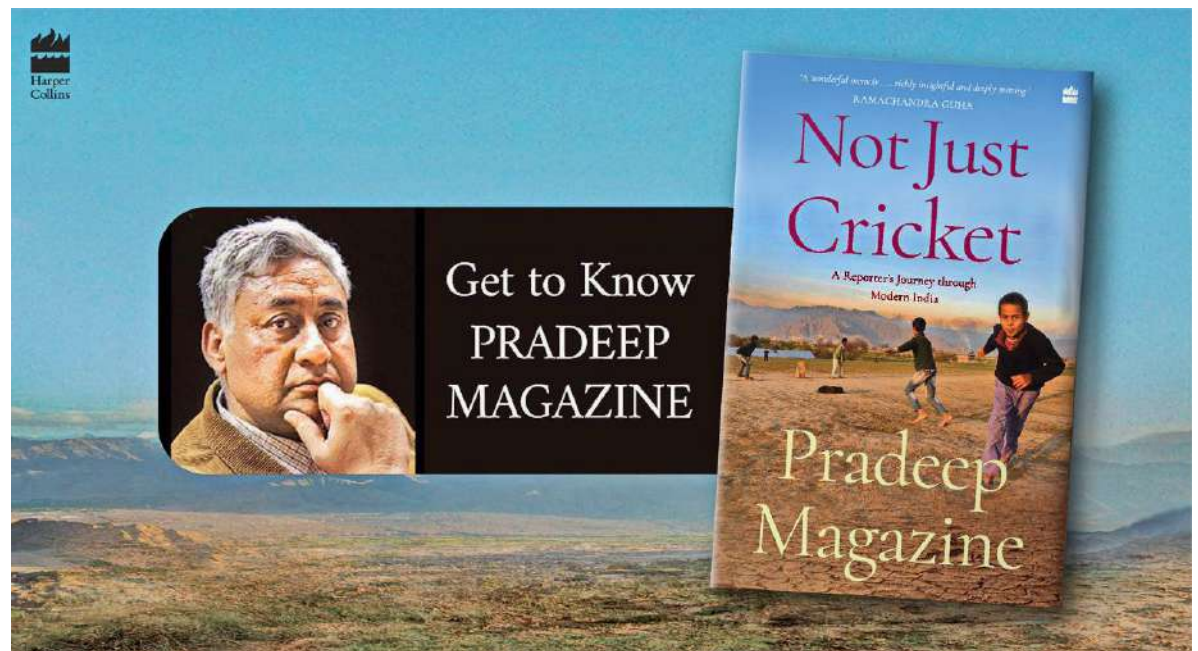
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Pakistan Visits and the Kashmir Issue - I

Series of excerpts from Not Just Cricket by Pradeep Magazine.

Having spent my early years living on cordial terms with Kashmiri Muslims, and as a child receiving a lot of love from individuals of the Muslim faith, I was keen to visit Pakistan someday. Cricket writing provided me with that opportunity. My first visit to Pakistan was in 1997, when I was the sports editor of *The Pioneer*. Even in the best of times, India's cricketing relationship with Pakistan has been frosty. By the time I started covering the sport more regularly, India had stopped touring Pakistan. India's tour to Pakistan in 1984 had been abandoned midway due to Indira Gandhi's assassination. After one more series in 1989, it took eight years for the relationship between the two countries to again be cordial enough for India to agree to play a three-match One-Day series in Pakistan. From the early eighties, India was blighted by terrorism, riots and social unrest; we witnessed the beasts of prejudice, xenophobia, hatred and bigotry on the rise, which threatened the very survival of India as a democratic nation. By 1997, despite an unstable coalition government in power, relative peace had returned. After a period of economic reforms under the minority government led by Congress's P.V. Narasimha Rao, which lasted its full term of five years from 1991, the 1996 general elections again saw no single party winning a majority. The BJP formed a government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, but they lasted no more than a fortnight, failing to find sufficient allies to reach the majority figure in Parliament. V.P. Singh was offered the post of PM but he refused. Eventually, H.D. Deve Gowda—a former Karnataka chief minister from V.P. Singh's Janata Dal—became Prime Minister, leading a United Front government. He remained in the hot seat for 324 days before another leader from the same party by the name of Inder Kumar Gujral took charge. Gujral was a migrant from Pakistan, and he worked towards a peaceful relationship with the neighbours during his 332-day tenure as Prime Minister. In May 1997, the Pakistani team visited India to play in a One-Day series celebrating fifty years of Independence. The Pakistani Board wanted India to reciprocate and participate in their celebratory matches in the autumn of that year. The Indian government approved the tour. I was among the half-a-dozen journalists who were assigned to cover the tour by their respective media organizations. Apprehension and excitement were the two contrasting emotions that gripped me as I applied for a visa at the Pakistani high commission at Delhi's Chanakyapuri. During the process, I came to understand that 'Kashmiris' were categorized as being different from Indians in the eyes of the Pakistani government. After effusively welcoming me into his room with a warm smile, the visa officer's face changed to a frown as he flipped through the pages of my passport. 'Sorry, you can't get a visa,' he said, pointing at the page that mentioned my place of birth as Srinagar. He said that they were not authorized to issue visas to Kashmiris; special permission would need to be sought from Islamabad to issue a visa to me. However, they could not complete that process in time for me to depart on schedule for the tour. I pleaded with him, and though he expressed helplessness, he said he would try. Fortune smiled on me and I was finally granted a visa. I was to realize later that my place of birth was a problem even with the Indian authorities. Renewal of my passport became a tedious process each time its validity expired. Apparently, there was a strict protocol in place for the passports of all Kashmiris born in the Valley, Hindu or Muslim, even those like me who had been living outside the state for decades. Before clearance, their residential address and antecedents in the state had to be verified by the local police, and this led to delays each time. I remember the unease a few of us journalists felt as we landed at Karachi airport, not sure of the reception



we would get. However, we got a shock of the pleasant kind when the cab driver who drove us from the airport to our hotel started to play the song *Made in India* by Alisha Chinai, an Indian pop star. The cab driver, on finding I spoke his mother tongue of Punjabi, became even more friendly. My fears and doubts disappeared and I felt like I was at home, among my own people. Officially, alcohol is banned in Pakistan for the Muslim population. Only non-Muslims with a permit could buy liquor. However, liquor shops in Karachi were owned by a powerful politician, so that was not strictly applied. The first thing I focused on after reaching our hotel was to figure out how I could sustain my drinking habit on the tour. However, getting a drink proved elusive on that first night. The next morning, I was joined by Ajay Shankar of *The Indian Express* in my search for a liquor store. We found one quite easily, and we were not even asked our religion or for a permit. Having ensured a supply of our lifeblood, it was time to think about the cricket: the three-match One-Day series we were there to cover. The first match was to be held at Hyderabad, Sindh, a five-hour drive from Karachi. I needed to provide a photograph to make the entry pass, but unlike my other colleagues, I hadn't brought any with me. Thus, I was forced to search for a shop that could provide instant photo prints. What I didn't know was that this quest would lead me to a moving experience of the traumatic history of Partition and the intense longing for 'home'. Winding stairs took me to the first floor of a building where a photographer's shop was located. When the woman behind the counter understood that I was from India, she immediately shouted, 'Abu, neeche aa jao, India se aye hain (Father, come down, someone has come from India).' The girl's excitement and the sparkle in her eyes suggested that she was thrilled by this fact. An old man descended from the second floor. When I confirmed that I had indeed come from India, he hugged me, tears streaming down his cheeks. He had a poignant story to tell: of being uprooted from his moorings in a false hope that had ended in despair. Originally from Uttar Pradesh, he was working as a tailor in Bombay in 1947. Like many Muslims in India, insecurity and the continuous threat of violence had instilled fear in him. When Partition came about, he was also lured by the dream of living in a country that was being created for those of his own religion, a 'pure land': Pakistan. He joined the Muslims migrating to the new country. It took him just a few months to realize that he had made a terrible mistake. 'This was not my country, not my home, not my

people,' he lamented. He wanted to go back but could not, as the Indian government refused visas to all those who had migrated to Pakistan from India. 'Like a bird in a cage I yearned to return home, but all doors were closed.' Even after having accepted his new Pakistani citizenship, he still felt like an outsider in his land of adoption. He is part of an Urdu-speaking Indian community of migrants to Sindh called 'Muhajirs' by the natives. Simmering tension between the migrants and the locals has often spilled into violence. This chance encounter remains one of the most enduring images of all my travels, during which I have been witness to the yearning for roots, with all its tragic and positive dimensions, among the Indian diaspora in different cricket-playing nations. During my visits to Pakistan in 1997, 2004 and 2006, I had many similar interactions that showed how deep the bonds go between the people of the two countries. They are ties that can transcend the hate brewed by the divisive politics of their governments. The cricketing rivalry between the two nations is bitter, intense, competitive and engaging, but it is just a subtext to the larger human need for peace and bonding that can override the divisive baggage of history.

Another surprise awaited us when we travelled to Hyderabad before the first match. The hotel that had been recommended to us had no rooms available. There was no vacancy anywhere as an India-Pakistan match had come to town. Seeing us stranded in the hotel lobby, a few locals approached us and offered to let us stay with them. Among them was an old man who had been to India. He left with a promise to check for rooms in his company's guest house, but returned with disappointing news. However, he did bring back a large bowl of kheer (rice pudding) from his home. While the kheer was delicious, I found pieces of chicken in it. I did not have the heart to tell my vegetarian colleague Ashish Shukla, who was gobbling up his share with relish. Finally, the hotel owner allowed us to sleep in the storeroom for that night. The match at the dusty, breezy Niaz stadium was a disappointing outing for India, a low-scoring affair in which Pakistan overtook India's total of 170 in the 45th over. I can hardly recall an interesting moment from the actual cricket, but I vividly remember the Indian team being loudly cheered by local fans waving at the team bus. Contrary to what we had expected, there was a lot of warmth for the Indian team, and a complete absence of hostility.

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Is Kohli Crisis Just a Phase?

Indian cricket's most iconic figure is facing an unusually protracted lean patch.



BILAL AHSAN DAR

If Virat Kohli were to retire right now in the middle of this terrible form that has plagued his batting over the last couple of years, he would still go down in the history of the game as an all-time great. Kohli has been there, done that! He has left behind a blazing trail that won't be easy to follow for the generations of batsmen to come.

There is hardly a cricket award that Kohli hasn't bagged. Time magazine named him as one of the 100 most influential people in the world.

All these years since his international debut, he has hogged the headlines for his match winning feats. This time too, he remains in the headlines more than any other Indian cricketer. Albeit, sadly, for wrong reasons: a terrible slump in his form. Runs have dried up across formats and he isn't anywhere close to the Kohli we know. Those hundreds that he would hit at will aren't coming anymore. Even though, of late, he has shown some glimpses of his greatness but the moments have been very short. Kohli seems to have lost his mojo – the authority that gave him the X-factor and made him stand head and shoulders above his contemporaries.

The reason for this dip in his form is a mystery. Many former players and experts have their point of view, but there is no consensus on one particular reason. Mohammad Asif, the former Pakistani fast bowler, theorized a technical glitch in the bottom-hand grip of the batsman. Notably, in one of his videos, he brought it up before the slump in Kohli's form. Once Kohli has a lean patch, said Asif,

it would be difficult for him to regain his form. Kohli has now been really finding it difficult to come out of this long lean patch. But Asif's bottom-hand theory may not have many takers because there are and have been so many bottom-hand batters who lost their form but made a comeback without any particular problem that could validate Asif's claim.

For many experts, it's the overdose of cricket that players around the world in general and Indian players in particular play that is taking a toll on Kohli. Some recent events in the international cricket point towards this. For example, Ben Stokes' sudden retirement from ODIs at mere 31 and in the pink of his health. In his statement, Stokes made it clear that he did not feel able to give his best across all three formats of the game. He conceded that his body was letting him down. Earlier in 2012, another England great, Kevin Peterson, raised similar concerns and retired from white ball format sooner than expected at just 32. He referred to the round-the-year itinerary as "horrendous."

Two years of COVID and playing cricket in a secure bubble has added to the complications and exhausted the players mentally.

In such a scenario it shouldn't be surprising if Kohli also retires from one of the formats, most probably T20Is - maybe soon or just after the T20I world cup.

A general perception of the players and experts, though, is that it is a part of a player's career - ebbs and flows.

It has happened to almost all the greats of the game. Sachin Tendulkar had a lean patch in 2003-2006, Brian Lara in 1996, Ricky Ponting in 2000-01. Therefore most of them see Kohli's poor run as a phase.

Now when the T20I world cup is just around the corner - less than three months away - a big debate has raged in the cricket world.

There's a school of thought that says Kohli doesn't merit a place in the World Cup squad. Kapil Dev, the former Indian captain, was the first to raise his voice: "If the world no. 2 bowler Ashwin can be dropped from Test matches,

why not Kohli from T20Is?" His views were echoed by former pacer, Venkatesh Prasad who tweeted: "There was a time when you were out of form, you would be dropped irrespective of reputation. Sourav, Sehwag, Yuvraj, Zaheer, Bhajji all have been dropped when not in form. They went back to domestic cricket, scored runs and staged a comeback. The yardsticks seem to have changed drastically now, where there is rest for being out of form. This is no way for progress. There is so much talent in the country and one cannot play on reputation. One of India's greatest match-winners, Anil Kumble, sat out on so many occasions, need action for the larger good."

However, Kohli also finds a lot of solidarity from his team mates, board and players around the world. Rohit Sharma, the Indian captain, dismissed the entire debate and called it an external noise. "It's not difficult at all for us because we don't listen to outside noise. Also, I don't know who these experts are and why they're called experts. I don't get that," Rohit said when asked about his thoughts on how the team is looking at Kohli's form. BCCI president Sourav Ganguly remarked: "Look at the numbers he has got in international cricket. That doesn't happen without ability & quality. Yes, he has had a tough time & he knows that." Aussie opener Usman Khawaja took a sharp dig at Kapil Dev's comments. The ICC on its Instagram page shared a graphic of Kapil's quotes, to which Khawaja posted a cheeky reply accompanied by a couple of laugh emojis: "Averages 50 at almost 140. Good call. Australia Agrees."

Nonetheless, there have been some developments that reflect Kohli's place in the world cup squad may be under scrutiny. He has been rested for the West Indies tour, but, most likely, should return for the Asia cup. A lot will depend upon the comeback he makes in the Asia cup.

Still the competition in the team is so much that Kohli may find it tough to find his spot in the T20 world cup. However his past record and experience in the Australian conditions is a plus for him.

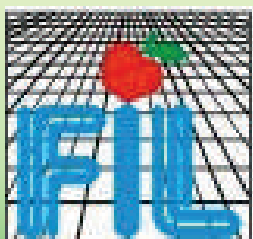
Indian team is blessed with tremendous batting potentials, especially in the T20I format. Players like Deepak Hooda, Surya Kumar Yadav, who are in the form of their life, can't be left out. Indian selectors may also be tempted to go with the ruthless Australian formula, which believes in team first and not the reputation. India won the T20 world cup 2007 by this formula, leaving out Tendulkar and Ganguly and backing the youngsters.

An added challenge to Virat Kohli will be adjusting to the team's new template for the T20I matches. As was evident from the recent matches against South Africa and England, the new template is to go bang-bang from the word go. It doesn't give players the time to use a few balls for acclimatization with the conditions and the pitch. The captain himself is taking the charge from ball one, probably believing that it is better to score a 12 ball 30 than a 45 balls 50. Lower middle-order players like Pant, Pandya and Karthik are all capable of keeping the momentum going. Virat Kohli, on the other hand, is someone who likes to take his time in the middle before he cuts loose. Therefore he will have to adapt to the new template of going all out from ball one to keep his place in the side, which will not be easy considering his form. It will be difficult for the management and the skipper to keep backing Kohli just on the basis of his pedigree and reputation if he doesn't adjust to the current trends of T20I format.

The fact is that the alarm bells have started ringing for Kohli, particularly in T20I format of the game. It will be interesting to see how he responds to this pressure as he finds himself in an unfamiliar territory he has never been before.

That apart, Kohli is known to thrive in pressure cooker situations and is temperamentally suited to take up challenges. Not just is he physically one of the fittest athletes going around, his mental toughness is second to none. For now let's stick to the old adage that form is temporary but class is permanent and hope it is just a matter of time when we see him back with a bang.

Bilal Ahsan Dar is a blogger and cricket buff.



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