

1. Introduction

The Concerned Citizens' Group (CCG) made its eleventh visit to Kashmir from October 28 to 31, 2025.

This CCG visit came in the wake of the Union Territory legislative assembly elections and Operation Sindoor which followed a terrorist attack at Pahalgam, and the havoc caused by the heavy rains, floods, landslides in Jammu division but also in Kashmir. These major significant incidents that followed one after the other have taken a huge psychological and economic toll on people and communities in both regions of Jammu-Kashmir. The visit also came at a time when the statehood promised by the Centre at an "appropriate time" still seemed a distant dream despite an elected government, albeit a non-Bhartiya Janata Party led one, in place and dyarchy continued to prevail in Jammu and Kashmir -- the chief minister still did not enjoy full powers and the Lieutenant Governor controlled much of the administrative and law and order structure.

The CCG is a voluntary group and has no official status – it has no connection with the Government of India or any political party. Its visits to J&K are self-financed by its members and no contributions are solicited from any organisation, including NGOs.

The CCG was set up as a voluntary group by its members in the wake of the protests that erupted in J&K in October 2016. The main objective of the CCG is to act as a bridge between the people of J&K and the rest of the country by assessing the mood of the people of the region and trying to make fellow citizens in India aware of their sentiment. The CCG is not an activist group and it seeks do nothing more than increasing awareness of how the citizens in J&K think.

It does not claim to do so perfectly as it is virtually impossible to meet the representatives of all groups, communities, ethnicities and interests. Often the administration itself makes it impossible for the group to meet people, such as advising them not to meet us as happened this time when the CCG members wanted to visit Shopian to meet the apple traders in the local *mandi* (wholesale market). Earlier, the group members have been confined to their hotel premises by the police, locked up at the Srinagar airport lounge and one of its members even deported to Delhi. While with the advent of a democratically elected government the group expected that its movement would not be restricted, this time around the people we were supposed to meet were told not to meet the group.

The CCG since its inception has comprised five members: Yashwant Sinha (former External Affairs Minister of India), Sushobha Barve (Executive Secretary, Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation, Delhi), Wajahat Habibullah (Former Chairman of the Minorities Commission and the first Chief Information Commissioner of India), Air Vice Marshal (Retd.) Kapil Kak and Bharat Bhushan, former editor and independent journalist.

Only four members of the group – Yashwant Sinha, Sushobha Barve, Air Vice Marshal (Retd.) Kapil Kak and Bharat Bhushan undertook this visit. Wajahat Habibullah could not join because of pressing personal reasons. One of the CCG members also visited Jammu to talk to the people there and hear their views.

During the visit, the CCG members met leaders of political parties (including former Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, current Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary of the National Conference, Mohammad Yusuf Tarigami of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Tariq Hamid Karra President of the J&K State Pradesh Congress Committee, G. A. Mir, Secretary General and Nizam Uddin Bhat, Congress MLA and chief whip from Bandipora, Kashmir's foremost religious cleric and political leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Kashmiri Pandit leader Sanjay Ticku, civil society leaders, representatives of the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry, student activists from the J&K Students' Association and journalists.

The overwhelming sense in Srinagar was that of sullen silence. During the meetings with all those we met from the civil society, we realised that the alienation had deepened, resentment and anger against the Central Government had increased but it was also partly directed now against the popularly elected Omar Abdullah government.

Different sections of Kashmiri society seemed angry over different issues. The student community was upset over the new reservation policy (which the present government had inherited) as that had reduced the general category reservation in higher educational institutions. People were also upset over the issues of the introduction of electricity meters and the non-restoration of Statehood.

When we asked whether installing electricity meters was not a good measure, a senior Kashmiri retorted, "Sure but at least give us electricity. We are paying high electricity bills without uninterrupted electricity supply. These meters were supposed to prevent interruptions. Why are we paying such high bills when we produce hydro power here and yet have long hours of power cuts."

This anger against the Abdullah government at times seemed misplaced. In the last six months the local government has faced the war that caused casualties in the border areas and destruction of nearly 850 houses in Poonch district alone. Then there were unprecedented natural calamities. The Chief Minister was seen in the media visiting every disaster hit area within hours, inspecting the damage caused, giving instructions to the local civil authorities for steps to be taken to rescue victims to safer places, and providing shelter and compensation and meeting victims.

This year's natural calamity, a result of climate change and possibly a recurring feature in the near future, is much discussed in both the regions of the UT. The road widening projects, reckless cutting down of trees and blasting of mountainsides was blamed for the landslides, mudslides and roads being washed away in Jammu region. There are, however, no signs yet of this emerging public concern converting itself into sustained civil society MOVEMENT pushing for government action for mitigation of climate change impact.

There is a pervading fear of voicing any dissenting views or opinions by civil society members. Repression by the police on this front is real that does not spare public intellectuals, media persons and others.

Meanwhile, anti-India sentiment is spreading widely. Public sentiment that had largely turned away from Pakistan has shifted since Operation Sindoor, we were told. While militancy remains at a slow burn, a churning among youth seems to be motivating them to enter spaces of greater radicalisation, possibly supported by forces across the Line of Control.

“We have been silenced”, said a prominent doctor of Srinagar, “But the eerie silence does not mean all is hunky-dory.” The volcano of suppressed anger and frustration bordering on hatred could erupt any time, he felt as “all it needs is a trigger.”

A retired professor claimed that there was “no protection for Kashmiri identity today” and on top that there was a sense of economic disempowerment. Another prominent civil society member claimed, “We Kashmiris are rebuked and abused at every occasion. The national media plays dirty and projects all Kashmiris as villains.” He also objected to the concert of Bollywood singer Sonu Nigam, which was only attended “by security personnel and their families” as ordinary Kashmiris boycotted it. “He reportedly has problems with the call for prayer, Azaan. He was sponsored by a corporate TV channel close to the government and people saw it as cultural invasion. We have our own cultural traditions. We don’t need people like him.”

The dominant civil society view was that India was moving towards majoritarian rule under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). “We oppose the BJP because of what it is doing to the Constitution of India. We are dedicated to the Constitution because it gives us our rights as citizens of India. Our loyalty is to the Constitution and not to any political party,” a prominent civil society leader said.

Another public intellectual, a prominent academic, recalled that “Sheikh Abdullah agreed to join Nehru’s India but wondered quite often what might happen if Hindu majoritarianism came to power in India” suggesting that that scenario had come true. This was not the India, Sheikh Abdullah and the Kashmiris had joined, “As a Muslim in India today I am denigrated by those with a Hindu majoritarian mindset,” he claimed.

He went on to say, “nobody here talks of India’s need to engage with Pakistan. That is for the Indian state to figure out. Nor are we in a position to say what kind of dialogue should be held with those Kashmiris who are in jail. But we had an identity as Kashmiris. That was a protection against Pakistan’s designs on Kashmir. And now even that has been taken away.”

People were apprehensive about the constant anti-Pakistan statements by the senior ministers of the Modi Government and repeated visits of senior Army officers to the border areas.

Others told us that the lack of jobs, uncertainty about the future, general societal anger and alienation were producing two types of negative reactions in some of the youth: they are either turning to drugs or, increasingly, towards radicalisation. Both these trends worry the Kashmiris who feel that they are destructive for the Kashmiri society. However, they also feel helpless over how to address these negative trends.

A senior editor said, “This silence of the Kashmiri society is unsustainable. It has to explode and we cannot say anything about its timing. But when it does, it would be dangerous.”

A political leader sensing the mood at Ground Zero warned us, “*Kuch bada hone wala hai* (something ‘big’ is going to happen)”. One had heard the same apprehension in August. Was it a foreboding of the horrific terrorist attack of November 10 that took place after our Group returned and smothered 11 innocent lives? One does not know.

2. Overall political situation

A year after THE National Conference led alliance won AN overwhelming majority in THE Assembly elections and Omar Abdullah Government was sworn in, the government is struggling. The Public is unhappy that the promises made to the electorate are not being fulfilled fast enough.

However, Omar Abdullah also presides over a powerless government. He is not able to take any major decisions, as most of the decision-making powers are with the Lieutenant Governor, including appointments of civil servants and police officers. All this is only adding to the people’s frustrations. People are resentful that hardly any Kashmiri Officers are posted as administrative heads at the districts and are effectively sidelined. The officers from outside the UT, they claim, neither understand the language nor the local situation, resulting in a gap in public connect.

The internal strain within the National Conference and disagreement between the Chief Minister and the party’s very popular Lok Sabha member from Budgam are played out publicly. This is having its negative fallout as both sides have hardened their respective stands over issues which has now turned into personal battle. As a result of this, there was public perception that National Conference would lose the by-election in Budgam constituency, which was vacated by Omar Abdullah. (The NC lost the election and PDP won it, giving the latter much needed boost).

There is speculation in a section of the public that the National Conference’s Budgam MP is being instigated to weaken the National Conference and eventually destabilize Omar Abdullah government. However, there seems TO BE no evidence to support such a claim.

The Rajya Sabha elections for the four J&K seats that took place just before CCG’s visit, showed how skilfully the BJP managed to get the four extra votes, above its number of MLAs, in the Legislative Assembly. These elections have also widened the fissures between the governing alliance partners – the National Conference and the Congress. Each side holds the other responsible for this.

Mehbooba Mufti is slowly growing in strength politically. She is raising issues that are of people’s concerns, holding demonstrations on different issues that are agitating the public. Recently she had filed a PIL in J&K High Court regarding those held for several years without trial in jails in different parts of the country, demanding that they be shifted to local jails as most families were unable to visit them due to lack of financial resources. She was herself present in the court for the hearing. This has

struck a positive chord with the public as this has been a major issue of concern among the Kashmiris since 2019.

This issue of young people in prisons as well AS political leaders who are imprisoned since 2019, was also raised by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq during his meeting with our group. He told us that many parents come to him pleading that something be done to have their sons released from jails.

The Mirwaiz also told us about the kind of intimidation and surveillance he faces. Sometimes he is allowed to give Friday sermons and then suddenly prevented from going to Jama Masjid for weeks without any reason. He is asked to show written text of his Friday sermons the night before for scrutiny. He is also asked to show his appointments for conducting marriages and even the *Nikah Namas* to the police.

The government, however, did allow him to go to Delhi to depose before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Waqf Bill. During the visit he met people in Delhi and had hoped that some political process would be initiated. He is a strong advocate of dialogue between Delhi and Srinagar and also feels that the tensions between India-Pakistan can be addressed through dialogue as lack of diplomatic relations was having a negative impact on the ground. He told us he was willing to play his part in this process, as he had done earlier.

One of the promises that were fulfilled by the Abdullah government was the Darbar Move for six months to Jammu. On November 1, government offices shifted to Jammu. This was in response to the demands of the Jammu public to bring the government closer to them, as well as bring the Kashmiris and Jammuites closer and allow greater economic interaction between the small traders and businessmen of the two regions. However, this alone was unlikely to overcome the sentiments of the Hindus of Jammu. Since the Assembly elections polarization has increased in Jammu plains against Muslims of Kashmir Valley. There are isolated incidents of social boycott of Muslims in the outskirts of Jammu city and in rural pockets. For the first time Jammu city saw war come close to them during Op Sindoor. Many Hindus migrated from Jammu city during the short war to neighbouring Himachal or Delhi. Some have even bought properties there. One public intellectual said, "We in Jammu also feel like an occupied colony. We are nowhere in the scheme of things. Only Kashmir is talked about". Anger and alienation against New Delhi seem to be building up AMONGST Jammu's Hindus too.

3. Statehood denial and its implications

Resentment on the non- restoration of statehood continues to be massive and overwhelming. Our Group witnessed at first hand the anger, frustration and disillusionment on this issue during our interactions with members of civil society, trade and industry representatives, businessmen, educationists, media-persons and Kashmiri Pandit leaders among others. While statehood is a significant and serious issue in the Valley, our Group learned that the Jammu region also continues to nurse anger over the loss of statehood and many related issues impacting them post-2019.

A senior political leader indicated the "root-cause" of the statehood denial to J&K saying, "Elections happened but the results were not to the expectations of the BJP

government at the Centre. They could not get a BJP-led or a BJP-dependent government in Srinagar. It has been a year since the popular protest mandate given to Omar Abdullah. But the Centre has not been able to digest it.”

At our meeting with Farooq Abdullah, President of the ruling National Conference (NC), Chief Minister (CM) Omar Abdullah, Deputy CM Surinder Choudhary, Lok Sabha MP Gurvinder Singh ‘Shammi’ Oberoi and Political Advisor to CM Nasir Wani were present among others. The double whammy of denial of statehood and existential diarchy and its consequential impact came out in bold relief during the discussions.

Terming himself as “half a CM”, despite having an overwhelming public mandate (41 out of 47 seats in the Valley and absolute majority in the J&K UT Assembly), Omar Abdullah lamented that in the prevalent diarchy—a sharp democratic regress—the Lt Governor exercises meaningful and effective power while he and his elected government are helpless in meeting peoples’ needs, address their grievances and strive to fulfil their aspirations. The existential structure of governance, it is useful to recall, resembles the colonial-type diarchy of 1919-1920 under which the British denied political power to elected governments of states in India by implementing strict repressive measures.

A young professional averred: Kashmir is a colony of the Viceroy; the elected government is seen as completely toothless. It is the civil bureaucracy that exercises vast untrammelled power on behalf of the LG. In such a scenario people gravitate towards civil servants for their needs and grievances in effect bypassing the Cabinet Ministers they elected.

In its first sitting in October 2024, the newly elected Assembly had passed a resolution for speedy restoration of statehood. But even after over a year there has been no progress. A degree of political engagement by the Centre of people across multi-dimensional vectors would have calmed matters somewhat. The need for restoration of statehood on an urgent basis was also conveyed to us during our meetings with Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Hurriyat leader and Kashmir Valley’s Chief Cleric, Tariq Hameed Karra, President J&K Congress and its Secretary General GA Mir and Chief Whip Nizamuddin Bhat, NC’s Lok Sabha MP Syed Ruhullah, CPI (M) leader MY Tarigami and others. It hardly merits emphasis that non-restoration of statehood means the Human Rights Commission, Consumer Commission and appellate authorities—that routinely operate in a state—cannot function in a UT, leading to denial of redressal mechanisms to people in J&K who are already indignant and feel disempowered and alienated.

During our many conversations with cross sections of society, A deep sense of loss felt by people of Kashmir—of identity, sub-identity, dignity and honour—found repeated mention. Exasperation and estrangement emanating from the humiliating nullification of Article 370, Article 35A and bifurcation of J&K into two UTs still persist. These hurt sentiments, sections of political leadership and civil society told our group, have compounded distrust towards the Centre with the non-restoration of statehood fanning the bitterness and feeling of political neglect even more. Omar Abdullah was forthright and categorical: no political entity, not least leaders of non-

BJP parties in the rest of India have any sympathy and concern for the people of J&K. As to the ruling dispensation—aside from not fulfilling the promise of restoration of statehood made repeatedly by the Prime Minister and the Home Minister over the last seven years—when did it last convene an All-Party meeting on the situation in J&K?

During discussions, a view was expressed that the J&K Reorganisation Act (2019) provided the BJP ideology an opportunity to leverage the UT status of J&K not only to impose repressive policies but also initiate attempts to cobble together a BJP-led government. In such a situation, restoration of statehood would have found greater traction at the Centre. But with the Assembly elections putting paid to such a prospect, chances of early restoration are remote. A leading politician also ascribed the delay to the huge disconnect between Kashmir and its understanding in the rest of India.

It would be useful to recall that in the Supreme Court's verdict on Article 370 petitions, the Bench said it would not adjudicate on the issue (of demoting and bifurcating an existing state into two UTs) because the Solicitor General had assured it that statehood would be restored. Significantly, in a separate note attached to the SC's 370 judgement, Justice Sanjiv Khanna (who later became the Chief Justice of India) had stated that the demotion of a state to two UTs was "unconstitutional and should be summarily reversed." It is this assertion that has sought to reinforce the views of the many we met that the reversal must happen without further delay.

When some petitioners that included Air Vice Marshal Kapil Kak (retd) a member of our Group moved the Supreme Court again for fulfilment of the promise of restoration of statehood to J&K, the Court made oral observations that what happened in Pahalgam (April 22, 2025 terror attack) cannot be ignored. The alleged Red Fort terrorist attack of November 10 (after our Group returned from Kashmir) may serve to further dissuade the Supreme Court. But it must render justice on the issue strictly on legal merits and not allow Pahalgam and now Red Fort terror attacks overshadow the urgent need for restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

4. Reservations time-bomb

The youngsters of Kashmir are upset with the reservations policy in the UT and they are demanding 'rationalisation' of the policy – reservation according to a community's share in the population. What seems to have upset them most is that the additional 10% reservation given to the Pahari community by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at the Centre which cuts into the share of the general category.

Overall reservations in J&K have, therefore, gone up to nearly 60%, the highest in the country when the broad Constitutional limit is 50%.

The formal reservation structure in J&K is as follows: Open Merit 50%; Scheduled castes 8%; Scheduled Tribes 20% (used to be 10% but Paharis have been given 10% ST reservation as well); Socially and economically backward classes 22%

(residents of backward areas 10%; residents of areas adjoining Line of Actual Control/international border 4%, other OBCs 8%); horizontal reservations 6% (Children of defence personnel 3%, children of paramilitary and police personnel 1%, candidates possessing outstanding proficiency in sports 2% 0; and economically weaker sections (EWS) 10%.

However, since the horizontal reservations (defence, police, paramilitary and sports quota) and the EWS quota are from the Open Merit category, the effective reservation in that Open Merit category goes down.

The J&K Students' Association which has been spearheading the demand that reservations be rationalised argues, "Reservations should be based on population ratios. According to the 2011 census, 69% of the Jammu and Kashmir population falls under the general category, yet the opportunities for open merit have been shrinking." Therefore nearly 70% of the population competes for less than 40% of the job opportunities because of the expanded reservation quotas.

The immediate provocation for the students' demand for rationalisation of reservations is the 10% ST reservation given to the Pahari speaking people of Jammu. While they clarify that they have got nothing against the Pahari community, they are against ST status being given for the first time in India on linguistic basis to Pahari speakers. "It was an appeasement measure. The BJP hoped that the Pahari community would vote for it if it were given ST reservation but that did not happen in the assembly election," a student leader said.

The student leaders said that the ST reservation was given to the Pahari community by an Act of Parliament. "However, we are making a demand on the state government to rationalise the reservation issues which are in their domain. For example, looking at the definition of creamy layer, regional distribution of reservations, making EWS reservations J&K specific, and re-examining whether Reservation for Backward Areas makes any sense or needs to be scrapped when all the areas of J&K are well connected through road and other infrastructure."

The students feel that an overwhelming majority of the reservations have gone to Jammu and "Kashmir is proportionately discriminated against." According to figures provided by the state's minister for revenue in the UT assembly on October 27, in the last two years, of the reservation certificates issued Jammu residents received 99% of the SC, 87% of the ST, 57% of OBC, 88% of EWS, 32% of Resident of Backward Area (RBA), 85% of resident of Actual Line of Control and 100% of "other" category certificates.

Except in the case of RBA category, Jammu seems to have been the overwhelming beneficiary of reservation certificates issued in the last two years, underlining the deep regional imbalance that is emerging. This data is bound to reignite the debate on the new reservation policy and further fuel the anger of the students. The issue is already being agitated in the J&K High Court and the students have as yet put forward their demands peacefully without taking to the streets.

The J&K government did set up a three-member House Committee to look into the reservations issue and its report, accepted by the government, is now laying with the

Lt. Governor's office. The students are not happy with the Committee which apparently did not organise stakeholder consultations before finalising its report and has only members from the ST community. "So, how can we expect any justice from it?" asked a student leader. However, the details of the report are not as yet in the public domain and therefore its recommendations are purely in the domain of speculation as of now.

The students, meanwhile, demand that, among other things, the government rationalise EWS eligibility to reflect ground realities and make it less urban-centric, re-classify backward area designation, periodic review of the reservations policy every five years, eliminate 'politically motivated' and arbitrary inclusion in reservation lists, create a unified Backward Classes Commission for J&K, and protect the rights of the Open Merit (general) category.

However, Kashmiri students are not the only ones agitated about the reservations issue.

The 1947-48 Hindu refugees of Poonch districts now settled in Jammu are not included in the Pahari reservation although they are Pahari and Pahari-speaking. This group has a grievance that they have been arbitrarily excluded. Similarly, the Pahari-speakers of Ramban district have been excluded while reservation applies to the adjoining Poonch and Rajouri districts.

N.B.: The Gujjars who were angry and protested when Pahari reservation was announced have now calmed down as their 10% reservation is intact and not affected by the new reserved category. However, there is anger among them as the Indian Administrative Service and Kashmir Administrative Service Gujjar officers have allegedly been sidelined completely and are not in positions of decision making, not dissimilar to many Kashmiri officers. A Gujjar public intellectual said that one would not find any Gujjar even as SHO in the 10 districts of Jammu division. According to him, this is not just creating disquiet but also building up anger in the community. Gujjars point out that as Indian nationalists they have played a significant role in defending border areas. But are now sidelined. They feel alienated and this will have an impact on the security situation.

5. Media continues to be under threat

Contrary to expectations, despite the UT assembly elections of 2024, there has been no meaningful restoration of media autonomy. Ongoing censorship, surveillance and intimidation of media practitioners continues, restricting media freedom severely.

Although internet shutdown is now infrequent, harassment of journalists, revocation of press credentials and pressure to publish administration friendly narratives continue. Operation Sindoor placed severe restrictions on media reportage and most Kashmiri journalists were not able to report about the developments on the ground. Some were summoned by the police about their attempts to report. Reports that had been filed were pulled down under pressure because it went against the

government's narrative. Things, however, seem to have eased a bit in the last three months, journalists claim.

The head of Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) has been given additional charge in the Raj Bhavan (Lt. Governor's residence) and he sits there. This, journalists claim, shifts the media control to the Lt. Governor's office, which already has a media adviser, who has gained notoriety for capricious decisions about giving out government ads to selected news platforms and denying it to others. Media accreditation has been denied to prominent national publications like the Times of India, Economic Times, NDTV and The Hindu. The media accreditation of the Economic Times was inexplicably revoked.

Journalists are denied press passes even for covering the legislative assembly proceedings on the whims of the powers that be. Journalists in Kashmir complain that by not allowing them to cover public events organised by the government is akin to deliberately sabotaging their careers.

Meanwhile, the J&K administration has introduced a new verification process to identify "real" journalists by asking for submission of salary slips as well as detailed background information from those who want to be included in the list of "bona fide" media professionals.

In a directive issued on October 31, the District Information Officers have been instructed to collect the background information of the media personnel operating in their jurisdiction, request them to submit salary slips for the last six months and maintain a regularly updated "verified list" of accredited and bona fide media persons.

The justification for such a directive is the "repeated complaints" received about the misuse of media credentials, curbing impersonation, blackmail and extortion and circulation of defamatory content. Officials argue that the move was necessitated by the rise of social media platforms and locally trusted digital outlets. These, they claim have, blurred the lines between professionals and self-styled journalists.

Journalists have opposed the move calling it intrusive and a potential crackdown on press freedom.

The Lt. Governor, the journalists claim, keeps talking of tackling the over ground workers (OGWs) and the terrorist eco-system and apprehend that any one of them can be designated as part of that ecosystem and prosecuted. A journalist Irfan Mehraj has been in Rohini Jail in Delhi for over 1,00 days now they point out and each time he applies for bail, he finds the judge has changed and the hearing has to begin afresh.

6. Trade and business after Pahalgam

Tourism:

Post-Pahalgam terror, Kashmir was emptied of tourists overnight. The tragedy struck at the beginning of the promising tourist season in which thousands of Kashmiris are involved – Hoteliers and their staff members, taxi operators, houseboat owners,

shopkeepers and scores of other businesses. The tourism industry was hit badly. As weeks stretched into months without any tourist traffic, thousands who depended on their livelihoods on tourism were left without work and prospects of no earnings, so necessary for the harsh winter months when tourist traffic is reduced.

During our visit several hoteliers also told us that many had to lay off some of their staff. During the Diwali vacation there was some tourist traffic which increased to about 30% but we also heard another hotelier saying the increase in tourist traffic was hardly 10-15%. Perhaps different categories of hotels were hit differently. However, the total loss to tourism industry is hard to estimate as no one has calculated the loss of revenue so far.

One of the other issues bothering the hoteliers of Kashmir (and also of Jammu), is the Union Territory's new Land Policy. Most leases are expiring or have expired. But instead of renewing these, as happens in rest of India, the UT government as per the New Act decided to auction the land on which the hotels have been built.

Gulmarg has been a special focus for implementation of the policy. Although the land leases of hotels in Srinagar and Jammu too have expired, these are not the focus of government action. The current owners who have invested substantial amounts in constructing and running these hotels, are not given any preference in the auctions conducted. The hoteliers have been demanding that the same rules be applied to expired land leases in Delhi which is also a Union Territory, as well as the other states in the rest of India.

Horticulture:

This sector generates major revenue for Kashmir and Kashmiris. Almost every family in South Kashmir has a small or big orchard and earn something out of it. This sector of THE economy too suffered badly in 2025.

Just as the apples were being harvested, there were heavy rains in the Jammu region. This caused landslides with some stretches of Srinagar-Jammu Highway being washed away. For about 20-22 days, around 4,000 trucks laden with fruits were stranded on the highway. This transportation delay completely damaged the fruit. During that period the harvested apples remained in the orchards and could not be shipped out. Although Kashmir has now cold storage facilities for apples, it is not adequate to store all the harvested apples. Some of the fruit was also damaged when heavy rains came to Kashmir.

According to the President of the Pulwama Fruit Mandi, the orchardists have suffered losses of over Rs. 2000 crore this year. At the Pulwama fruit Mandi, every day during the harvest season, 50 trucks with an average capacity of 25-30 tons of fruits, are loaded. Each truck is worth around Rs 7 lakhs – amounting to a daily profit of Rs 3.5 crore. This activity goes on for about two and half months.

The Central Government and the J&K government did respond to the crisis by sending goods trains from Srinagar to ferry Apples to the Indian markets in Delhi and elsewhere to address the crisis but not before substantial losses had already incurred. Some smaller trucks also took the fruit via the Mughal Road to the Jammu

Mandi. The Fruit growers want crop insurance for fruits as well. They also feel that the J&K Government does not give as much support as the Himachal government gives to the fruit growers there.

The launching of goods trains directly from Delhi and Punjab has, however, upset the Jammu traders and transporters, who transported goods including fruit, to the Jammu and Delhi markets. They fear that Jammu would suffer further economic loss because of this, as the entire transport sector – truck owners, loaders and others in Jammu Mandi would see job and income losses. A member of the Jammu Chamber of Commerce commented, “The government is not consulting traders here before implementing important decisions that will affect trade here.” He was very bitter about this.

SUMMING UP, WE FOUND THAT THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND, SPECIALLY IN THE KASHMIR VALLEY IS MUCH FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH THAN THE ONE PRESENTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA OR ITS MEDIA IN DELHI.

Signatories:

Yashwant Sinha Kapil Kak Bharat Bhushan Sushobha Barve