

THE **KASHMIR**

GET THE DIALOGUE GOING

The Youth Need A Roadmap
For Involvement
And Empowerment



CONNECT

VOLUME 2

EDITION 8

18 JANUARY, 2023

ISI STRATEGY

**EFFORTS TO ROPE IN
YOUTH FOR TERROR
CELLS IN
KASHMIR**

**Triggers In Rajouri
To Keep Security
Forces Engaged**

**In Calling For Peace, Pakistan
PM Is Not Serious Or Sincere**



THE **KASHMIR**
CONNECT

FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

People Of POJK Want To Be Indian Citizens

Karma Strikes Back

The demand of the people of Pakistan-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir to merge with India and to be citizens of the Republic of India demolishes so many myths. This is the cycle of Karma.

For decades, Pakistan caused devastation in Kashmir. ISI made fools of thousands of innocent and gullible Kashmiri youth. The youth were brainwashed and exploited. Pakistan made them pick up the gun, kill and die.

Now, in 2023, the Pakistan Prime Minister is saying that he and his country have learned its lesson after three wars with India. Mr Shehbaz Sharif has stressed that his nation now wants peace with its neighbour. Mr Sharif has also called for "serious and sincere talks" with Prime Minister Shri Narendra

Modi on "burning points like Kashmir".

So even with the lessons learnt, Pakistan can't get it right. Kashmir is no "burning point". The ground situation in Kashmir is rapidly changing. Understandably, it will take time for the Indian state to undo the damage done by Pakistan for over 40 years in Kashmir. The journey has begun.

In Kashmir, commoners are admitting that Pakistan made fools of them for years together. Pakistan ruined life for them and their children.

Pakistan is now watching the meltdown of its economy. Pakistan is being ravaged by home-grown terror that it nurtured and nourished. And the people of Pakistan-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir want to be part of India. Karma strikes back.

GAYATRI MOHAN

THE KASHMIR
CONNECT

VOLUME 2 EDITION 8

18 JANUARY, 2023

Editor-in-Chief

GAYATRI MOHAN

Deputy Editor

ABIDA WAR

(HONORARY ROLE ONLY)

Consulting Editor

SHEIKH MUDASIR HUSSAIN

Roving Editor

MUDASIR DAR

Cover photograph

AL MUNEEB LONE

All Rights Reserved.

Reproduction in

whole or in part without written permission is prohibited

All Advertising enquiries,

comments and feedback

are welcome at

thekashmirconnect@gmail.com

Website

thekashmirconnect.com

Periodicity: **Weekly**

Language: **English**

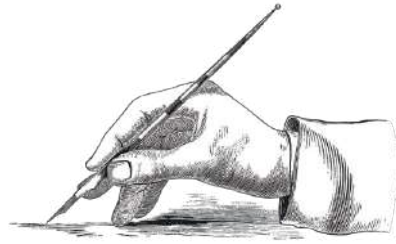
The information contained in this magazine has been reviewed for accuracy and is deemed reliable but is not necessarily complete or guaranteed by the Editor. The views expressed in this Magazine are solely that of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of KASHMIR CONNECT

Office

THE KASHMIR CONNECT

Khan Arcade, Jawahar Nagar,
Srinagar

Follow me    



FROM THE DESK OF THE DEPUTY EDITOR

SAY NO TO DRUGS, SAY NO TO DOWRY

of a society. Each of us must realize the value of educated and empowered mothers, sisters, daughters.

If each one of our daughters is educated and empowered, they shall be able to rise against the social menace of dowry. As mothers, they shall be able to control the scourge of drugs that has afflicted our land.

Strong societies make strong nations. In order to make our society and our nation strong, our children must excel in academics, in sports, in the arts, in music and all other varied activities related with positivity and development.

We shall be able to make our society and our nation strong if we make education and empowerment the backbone of our society. We have to engage with our youth. We have to give them the platforms where they can communicate their fears, their anxieties, their aspirations. Collectively, we have to make our youth realize the immense opportunities they enjoy as citizens of a democratic republic. Each of us must take the responsibility to help our youth build their happy, meaningful and fulfilling future.

Collective change always begins at the individual level. It is for each one of us to initiate positive change.

It is time for each one of us to rise and say no to drugs, say no to dowry. And it is time for us to say yes to the education and empowerment of our daughters.

Hamari betiyan hamara intezaar kar rahi hai. Our daughters are waiting for us. Women's empowerment paves the way for the growth and development

**Staff Correspondent
cum Staff Photographer**
AL MUNEEB LONE

Staff Correspondents
CHASWEEDA ASLAM
DR SUMI SAIDULLAH
MISBA YOUSUF

**(Deputy Editor Ms Abida War
has an honorary position
with The Kashmir Connect)**

CONTENTS

THE KASHMIR CONNECT



07



15

06 | Efforts To Rope In Youth For Terror Cells In Kashmir

By Gayatri Mohan and Sheikh Mudasir

14 | Get The Dialogue Going

By Mudasir Dar



20



24

20 | Empowered Herself Empowering Others

By Chasweeda Aslam

24 | Wheels of Glory

By Gayatri Mohan

TRIGGERS IN RAJOURI TO KEEP FORCES ENGAGED

EFFORTS TO ROPE IN YOUTH FOR **TERROR** **CELLS IN** **KASHMIR**

by Gayatri Mohan and
Sheikh Mudasar

Currently, all focus is on Rajouri after the terror attack. But just the way ISI swiftly shifted the terror focus from Kashmir Valley to Jammu region, the shift may happen again.

According to very recent inputs received by The Kashmir Connect, ISI operators are activating their

networks to recruit boys and young men into terror networks in Sopore, Baramulla and adjoining areas.

Some days ago, five AK 47 rifles were received by some terror cells in the Lachipora region. The source named the following places where movement of ammunition by the terror handlers is being carried out – Lachipora, Dazna (a village in Lachipora region, Uri sector) and Mayan.

The terror operators have stashed these guns, and are identifying the youth to whom the guns shall be provided to carry out attacks. At least five to eight persons in the Lachipora belt are aware of the presence of these weapons and are waiting to send them out.

Sources from Lachipora informed that mostly, the youth from these areas do not involve themselves in terror attacks. "The youth in this belt and other Over Ground Workers (OGWs) make good money from receiving the consignment of weapons and storing them. Other people in the terror chain then reach the ammunition to militants or hybrid militants," revealed a source. Lachipora and Mayan are close to the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Terror Group Formed To Focus On Attacks

ISI has created a group of young men from within Pakistan and is giving them weapons to carry out terror acts in Kashmir. About this group, a source said, "ISI ne ek confidential aur mazboot group tayar kar ke rakha hai (ISI has a confidential and strong group of terrorists



ISI has created a group of young men from within Pakistan and is giving them weapons to carry out terror acts in Kashmir. About this group, a source said, "ISI ne ek confidential aur mazboot group tayar kar ke rakha hai (ISI has a confidential and strong group of terrorists ready for operations in Kashmir)." Some of the youngsters in this group are stated to be Pakistanis

ready for operations in Kashmir)." Some of the youngsters in this group are stated to be Pakistanis.

Youth from Kashmir are being identified who shall be part of this group.

This group of youngsters may be made part of the terror tanks of any tanzeem like Jaish e Mohammad, Hizbul Mujahideen, The Resistance Front (TRF) or any other similar group. This is because all tanzeems –terror

groups – operating in Kashmir are working collectively now.

Terror operators are looking for Kashmiri youth to be involved in these networks because the involvement of the local boys is essential to give ISI's exercise the benefit of local flavour. It is ISI's constant endeavour to make the terror activities in Kashmir look indigenous and home-grown.

Youths At Some Dar ul Uloom Influenced By Terror Groups

Sources spoke of a Dar ul Uloom where the boys have been contacted for becoming part of this activity to handle the AK 47 and other weapons. The sourced did not specify the Dar ul Uloom where the boys have been contacted.

Sources said that these boys have been "taken into trust. They have also spoken to some Maulvis at this Dar ul Uloom," said the sources.

Sources revealed that the terror handlers have identified some youngsters of Kashmir who shall be part of this group. "Some boys are ready. They have been told to function as a sleeper cell. The instructions for them are that there is no need to talk to anyone about this activity or the network. All the work has to be done in strict confidence. Phir aap in ki nazar mein nahin aoge (then you won't come in the radar of the security forces)," the youngsters have been told.

Keeping Weapons Used As Money Making Exercise

The OGWs in the Lachipora belt or elsewhere who are engaged in the safe-keeping of weapons are drawn into this network primarily because they get money for storing the consignment of weapons. They may expand their tasks further to recruit the local youth in the network. More money is paid if they are able to rope in local youngsters into the ranks of militants or hybrid militants.

"If the youngster recruited by them kills someone, then these OGWs claim credit for it and are paid additionally. If the youth himself gets killed, money is sent by the tanzeem for his family. We don't know whether the money actually reaches his family or not," revealed a source.

LACHIPORA MAN SAID MOVEMENT OF MILITANTS IS EASY HERE

In a recent casual conversation, a man residing in Lachipora told me that the movement of militants seems to be easy in his area. I felt concerned when the man told me, "*Yahan itni sakhti nahin hai. Kaun aaya, kaun gaya, koi khaas pata nahin rakhte.* Night patrolling is also less. If a local person supports militants, it is not so difficult for him because checking is limited.

NOTES FROM THE VALLEY



FROM THE CONSULTING EDITOR'S DESK

SHEIKH MUDASIR HUSSAIN



ESSENTIAL TO IDENTIFY, DISMANTLE NEW TERROR GROUPS

| S | may still keep the heat on in Rajouri. Simultaneously, ISI is activating other terror tracks. It is engaged on multiple fronts, trying to pump in ammunition.

For the security agencies, it is very essential to examine who are the youths in Kashmir that are readily moving into the terror sleeper cells. Who are the OGWs that are supporting this group? It is essential to identify these youths and take strict action, so that the security

agencies are able to crack and break down this network.

The terror players may continue to make suspicious movements in Rajouri, so that the security forces stay engaged there. While the focus stays on the Rajouri-Poonch area, ISI shall activate sleeper cells elsewhere.

A highly valuable source told The Kashmir Connect, "ISI ne militant activities aur par ke training centers ko activate karne mein shiddat laayi hai. The focus is on both aspects. Trying to push in weapon consignments, and working on a wider manpower base."

Back to back, TRF is issuing posters, targeting one or the other vulnerable group. Some sources say that this is an indication that some action is being planned.



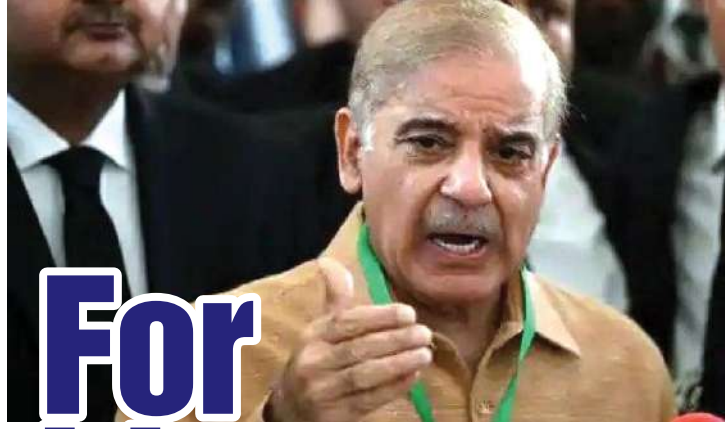
Why Terror Cells May Be Activated As Winter Ends

A source highlighted that during winter, terror cells "stay on mute" so that they are able to minimize the loss of manpower. Hiding is a problem in winter, hence activities are deliberately kept low.

As summer draws close, the terror cells are able to hide in forests, hence they get charged up. The winter period is also used for the movement of weapons to militants or hybrid militants.

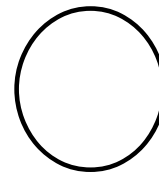
JK Police and other security agencies need to identify or plant additional sources to keep abreast of the movement of terror players.

Photo: Al Muneeb Lone



In Calling For Peace, Pakistan PM Mr Shehbaz Sharif Is Not Serious Or Sincere

by Gayatri Mohan



On January 17, the statement of Pakistan Prime Minister Mr Shehbaz Sharif

dominated the headlines in both India and Pakistan. In an interview with a Dubai-based TV channel, Mr Sharif said that Pakistan has learned its lesson

Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

after three wars with India and stressed that now it wants peace with its neighbour.

It is to be noted that even in his offer for peace and saying that Pakistan has learnt its lesson, Mr Sharif retains the Kashmir caveat. This is Pakistan's old game. Pakistan continues to make Kashmir the fulcrum of its communication with India.

This positioning is so dated. It is also invalid. The Pakistan Prime Minister may have been more honest in his appeal by saying that his nation wants peace with India. By hyphenating it with Kashmir, Mr Sharif has lost the window.

Examine his statement.

"We have learnt our lesson, and we want to live in peace with India, provided we are able to resolve our genuine problems."

Herein lies the rub. When Pakistan uses "we" in the equation, the other party in the "we" isn't India. It is the Pakistan Army. Going by Pakistan's TTP woes, the economic meltdown and the high terror threat, Pakistan sincerely needs to resolve its "genuine problems".

Is Pakistan Army On The Same Page?

Is the Pakistan Army on the same page as the prime minister when he speaks of



Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

peace with India? Going by their shenanigans in Kashmir, evidently no.

Examine the other give-away.

Says Mr Shehbaz Sharif:

"Pakistan wants peace but what is happening in Kashmir should be stopped." He seems to be referring to all the negative activities in the Valley.

Mr Sharif may like to be informed that all the negatives of "what is happening in Kashmir" are the play of ISI. Pakistan Army is trying to make this happen not just in Kashmir, but also in Poonch, Rajouri, Ramban and Doda-Kishtwar.

Why Mr Shehbaz Sharif Is Trying To Change the Headlines

Mr Sharif is valiantly trying to change the headlines in his country because of what Pakistan is currently facing.

Mr Sharif said in his interview to the Dubai-based channel, "We have learnt our lesson, and we want to live in peace with India, provided we are able to resolve our genuine problems."

Pakistan's political leadership and also its Army is well aware that the nation's "genuine problem" isn't Kashmir. Pakistan's "genuine problem" is the proscribed outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which had ended a ceasefire with the country's security forces late last year. Now TTP is unabashedly carrying out terror attacks on the Pakistan Army and the Pakistani people alike.

Pakistan is rocked by rising prices of flour, of sugar, the fuel shortage. In the midst of facing this, the Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif wants "serious and sincere talks" with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on "burning points like Kashmir."

Pakistan is facing an abyss

in terms of economy and the threat posed by TTP. It is a measure of Pakistan's assessment at this critical juncture that its "burning problem" remains Kashmir.

ISI's Terror Moves A Constant In Kashmir

Old Kashmir observers are reminded of the time when Gen Musharraf was making statements of peace with India. Almost simultaneously, Pakistan launched the Kargil attack.

We are not insinuating that alongside the statements made by Mr Sharif, Pakistan is going to launch a terror attack on India. The point we are making is that while the Pakistan PM is batting for peace with India, ISI's terror moves are a constant in Kashmir.



On January 17, after the statement made by Pakistan Prime Minister Mr Shehbaz Sharif, hugely popular Twitter handle **Indianhistorypics @IndiaHistorypic** tweeted:

In 1970s Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Said That Pakistanis Will Eat Grass, Go Hungry But Will Have Nuclear Bomb

In 2023 Pakistanis Are Eating Grass, Begging Entire World For Money, Depending On India For Life Saving Medicines And Are Having Their Own Nuclear Bomb

The tweet has gone viral big time. It had registered 672,000 views by mid-day on January 19.

FROM THE DESK OF THE ROVING EDITOR

The Youth Need A Roadmap For Involvement And Empowerment

GET THE DIALOGUE GOING

by Mudasir Dar

After the scraping of Article 370, political activity in Kashmir came to a halt. There was no political engagement with the youth who are mindful of such activities and like to engage politically.

For decades, our politicians had not meaningfully engaged the youth. Political power was passed on from father to son – or from father to daughter – without bothering for the

important for a society. The restoration of dialogue with the young minds will accelerate the system that has been frozen by the politicians who were driven by their narrow interests only.

It needs to be borne in mind that active youth engagements pave the way for a larger, composite dialogue with our young and bright youth. These activities contribute to peace building. Now that the security situation in Kashmir has improved remarkably, the responsibility lies on the shoulders of the state to keep the dialogue going.

A sizable section of our youth is ambitious. They aspire and work for a meaningful, constructive life. But we also have those youth who think that life is not offering them much. Their energy is not getting channelized in the right direction.

We cannot afford that these youth take to the path of violence. Then it creates a highly negative cycle in society. The negative cycle vitiates the environment and impacts the children.

This is why it is highly important that the UT Administration must play a more proactive role in rescuing the misguided youth from the path

UT Administration must play a more proactive role in rescuing the misguided youth from the path of violence. Through proactive action in every district, block and village, UT Administration must involve the families and the youth alike

involvement of the common Kashmiri.

In the name of conflict, our politicians had strictly limited political power only to their coterie. They did not want to lose power, and they did not want to share power. Hence for decades together, they kept the common Kashmiri youth in the dark. Their fear springs from their incompetence. They are fearful that a young competent leadership shall take over.

Not only the political dialogue, but other dialogues and robust activities are equally

of violence, in which they target other people and go down the path of destruction. Through proactive action in every district, every block and every village, the UT Administration must involve the families and the youth alike.



Photo: Al Muneeb Lone



**THE STATE, THE FAMILY –
BOTH HAVE A CRUCIAL
ROLE TO PLAY**

**VITAL TO
STOP THE
CYCLE OF
VIOLENCE**

by Mudasir Dar

The UT Administration must initiate viable institutional actions required to establish connections with the youth. There is a need to construct the architecture of hope and dignity for adolescents and their identities

With the intervention of the state and the family,

hundreds of our budding youngsters can be saved.

The family plays a very important role in keeping the young and fertile minds away from violence. We recently saw how a family motivated a young man to surrender after he snatched a service rifle from the cop in Pulwama. The man realized that he had committed an error. After he was persuaded by his family, he peacefully cooperated with the security forces.

To mainstream the Gen X of Kashmir, the UT Administration must engage the youth in fields that can yield positive outcomes for the individual and the nation. For long, we have known that Kashmiris have highly fertile minds and a high intelligence quotient. The Kashmiri youth can do wonders for the society and the nation if they are guided properly.

Youth Lack Facilities At Village Level To Engage In Meaningful Pursuits

Like the rest of the country where children and youth are engaged in co-curricular activities and have no chance for giving thought to negative things, we need a similar atmosphere in Kashmir. The government needs appropriate spaces at the village level. It is important to provide all the facilities to the youngsters

to keep them away from discussions that are fatal for them, and which compromise the security of the nation.

I have observed the youngsters across many villages in Kashmir that were considered as major centers of militancy and militant-related activities. I have observed that when the youngsters leave the house in the evening to meet their friends, most of them are talking only about militants and militant commanders.

Why are the youngsters engaging in this empty talk that can have highly negative repercussions? This is because the youngsters don't have suitable facilities in their districts where they might get engaged with more meaningful pursuits.

The terror operators take advantage of this vacuum to lead youngsters in the wrong direction. The terror operators plant themselves or their conduits in these groups for glamourising militancy. In this way, young brains are brainwashed for the so-called jihad and other anti-national activities.

Youth Feel Lonely, Need Engaging Activities

It makes me deeply sad to observe that part of Kashmir's youth is suffering. Many youngsters say that they feel lonely. Their energy does not find the right channels, hence they yearn for someone or something that isn't there.

At this juncture, the UT Administration must initiate viable institutional actions required to establish connections with the youth. There is a need to construct the architecture of hope and dignity for adolescents and their identities. Kashmir needs a new road map for the empowerment and involvement of the youth.

Different segments of the society are disillusioned with the current state of affairs following the 2019 constitutional revisions. On the ground, there is a clear political/ideological vacuum. The breakdown of the political middle ground (represented by mainstream politicians) has exposed Kashmir to radical forces.





URGENT NEED FOR SUPPORTIVE GUIDANCE OF MISGUIDED YOUTH

Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

The way the misguided Kashmiri youth are treated needs to change quickly.

It is important for the UT Administration to remember one thing. For the youth who are aspiring and ambitious, the requirements are the same as in the rest of the nation. For them, the UT Administration has to create an enabling environment for growth, where they can find the opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship and development.

As a democratic and welfare state, the system needs to do more for the youth that are

The state must implement policies that will support and encourage the youngsters to speak for themselves without any intervention or intimidation by a third party. Enabling democratic atmosphere shall cement the relation of the youth with the state

misguided. They cannot be allowed to go down the path of self-destruction. The state must not decide to deal with an iron-hand with all youth who simply need hand-holding and direction.

It is my ardent appeal to the policy makers – please see the misguided youth as foolish children who should be mentored rather than punished harshly. I myself have seen DCs and SSPs who have adopted

I myself have seen DCs and SSPs who have adopted kind and sincere efforts to deal with the youth and lead them in the right direction. This is the right model to be adopted



Photo: Al Muneeb Lone

kind and sincere efforts to deal with the youth and lead them in the right direction. This is the right model to be adopted.

The Importance Of Honest And Compassionate Efforts

Honest and compassionate efforts by the system have the potential to propel Kashmir to new heights of peace and stability. The UT Administration must develop strategies that grant privileges to the youth who have been weaned away from the wrong path.

It is important to remember that these gullible youth are misguided by terror operators who are deliberately seeking to brainwash and radicalize them. If the UT Administration adopts a very strict approach in dealing

with these youngsters, where will they and their families go?

These misguided youth are also sons of Kashmir. They need to be treated gently and compassionately. It is important to wean them away from the path of terror in a firm, kind manner.

If this gentle and firm approach is adopted by the state, it will generate immense goodwill in the society and positively influence the other youngsters. Our youth shape tomorrow's thoughts and attitudes. Constructive involvement with youngsters should be promoted.

The Black Villages Of Pulwama, And How Their Youth Suffered

I am reminded of Lelhar village of Kakapora block in Pulwama district, and of Karimabad village in the same district. Both were declared as "black villages" by the administration. The youth of these villages could see no light, no future. More and more of them were exploited by the terror ecosystem. Children who grew up in this vitiated atmosphere could not save themselves from the dark shadows around them.

The state can rescue the people and especially the youth from falling into the clutches of



Mr Mudasir Dar

The Author is a socio-political activist, a recipient of the President Award in World Scouting, and former president of the Jammu and Kashmir Students Union. He is based in South Kashmir and can be reached at mudasirdariust@gmail.com

the terror players. It is the state's principal responsibility to free citizens from terror and allow them to enjoy essential rights such as life, liberty, and property.

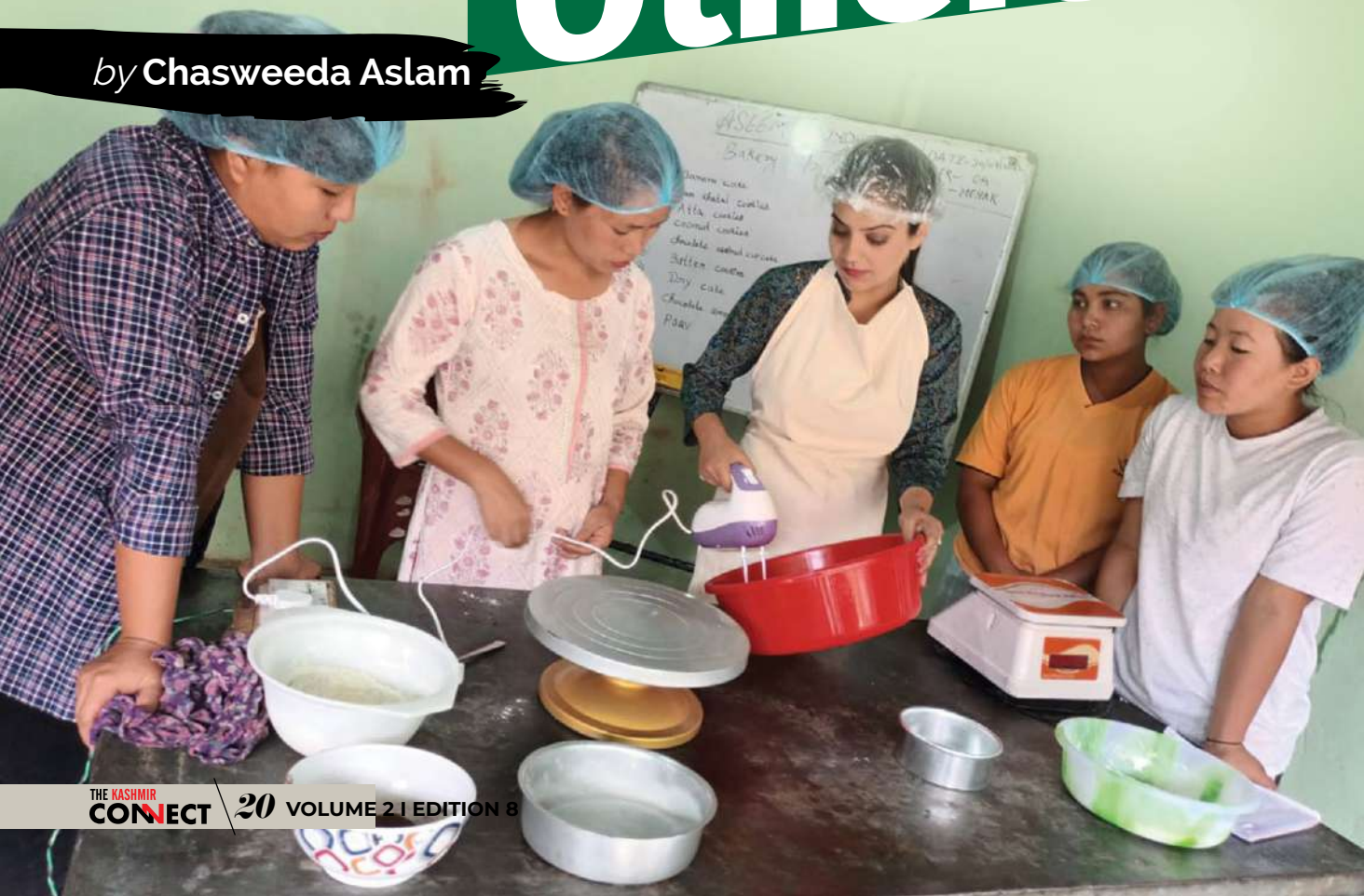
The state must design and implement policies that will support and encourage the youngsters to speak for themselves without any intervention or intimidation by a third party. Such policies and the enabling democratic atmosphere shall cement the relation of the youth with the state. The youth will find opportunities for growth. Their closeness with the state policies will chart a new future for this militancy-torn region of India.

MEHAK KHURSHID
MASTER CHEF AND BAKER

Life as we
KNOW it

Empowered
Herself
Empowering
Others

by Chasweeda Aslam





Mehak's ambition to rise high took her to villages where empowerment is a dream for women. Mehak not only thought of it but made it possible by doing it. She has trained many rural women and made them realize the true strength of womanhood

M meet the Master Chef and Baker from Uri who has been instrumental in educating and boosting the morale of rural women by providing training to them in bakery workshops – not just in Jammu and Kashmir but also in Assam.

This accomplished young lady is Miss Mehak Khurshid, who hails from Salamabad in Uri. Mehak has been successful in inspiring numerous women to become experts in baking and to follow their passion.

Mehak's journey in this field started when she was just 18 years old. She had to leave schooling due to a financial crisis in her family. She was the youngest among three sisters,

and stepped forward to share the burden of her father.

Mehak was interested in baking since childhood, and she had not imagined that in the years to come, her hobby would shape her career. Things were difficult for Mehak. Her shoulders were burdened with the responsibility of caring for a family of six members. At that time, no member of her family was employed.

In 2016, Mehak got the opportunity to be part of a workshop organized at Uri by Tata Strive, the youth skill enhancement program of the Tata Group. The workshop was organized by the Army's Naujawan Club. The trainers recognized her potential and choose her for professional training Mehak got training for

bakery and other professional skills.

Mehak was the single girl in the batch of 11 boys, a girl, breaking stereotypes one by one fearlessly, and creating her own space in a gender-biased society.

Sharing Her Knowledge, Her Skills With Rural Women

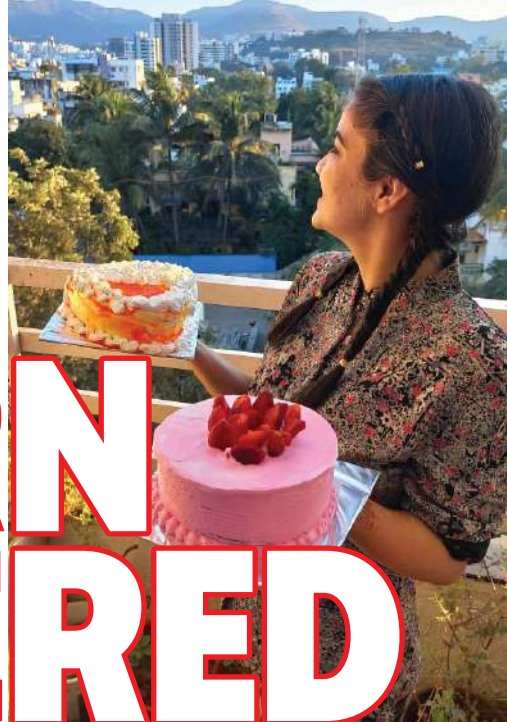
After training, Mehak got associated with an NGO and took the initiative to share her knowledge of bakery with women in rural areas all over the state. In this way, Mehak empowered these women by equipping them with a professional skill.

Mehak visited many areas like Kalakote, Poonch, Rajouri, Jammu, Bagga, Laamb, Akhnoor etc to train the women. She also went to Kibithu, a remote village in Arunachal Pradesh to train the women in bakery.

Mehak's ambition to rise high took her to villages where empowerment is a dream for women. Mehak not only thought of it but made it possible by doing it. She has trained many rural women and made them realize the true strength of womanhood.

Mehak trained them in baking and also set an example for them that passion sees no borders, no hurdles or hindrances. Such is the power of women. This is the zest of a woman that must be applauded. This is the empowerment of hundreds of women that Mehak made possible.

WOMEN ARE BORN EMPOWERED



When I interacted with Mehak, I recalled what our Deputy Editor Ms Abida War often says, "Women are born empowered."

By this, Ms War means that women just need to be recognized, supported, respected, and encouraged

so that they can do wonders and make society a better and healthy place to live.

After getting empowered herself, Mehak has empowered hundreds of other rural and women by training them in bakery. Mehak has also worked at Taj Vivanta as a chef and baker. She has been honored on many platforms. She has used

those platforms to encourage and inspire girls to focus on personal growth and also social growth.

Mehak has demolished outdated norms that could chain her wings and shatter her dreams. She paved her way to the sky, full of opportunities, hope, and success.

The 24-year-old has come a long way. No doubt Mehak is a strong girl, but there have been many times when she thought that she should quit. Mehak was mocked and taunted by people with toxic comments like * Yeh ladki hath se nikal gayi hai. * Kisko patah kya kaam karti hai. * Bina padhai ke kya kar legi and so on.

Mehak Took The Challenges Head On

Mehak faced character assassination, societal harassment and pressure from her relatives. Not only Mehak but her family was also targeted. Instead of helping them in their



hard times, people made their lives more difficult. In the past six years, she and her family were ruthlessly targeted by jealous and insensitive people around them.

But all their mocking and taunting made no difference to the woman who was set to achieve big so that she could support her family and fulfil her dreams. Mehak turned the impossible into possible. She refused to be traumatized by the fake societal norms, thrust upon the women and girls who desire to achieve.

Mehak's journey is marked by pain and struggle, by many ups and downs. The strong girl faced all these challenges gracefully without letting go of her dreams.

When we talk about the strength of women, we talk about a woman like Mehak Khurshid. A young woman who is fearless, talented, and ready to take the challenges head on. Her courage is unmatched, and her zest is praiseworthy. Our society needs girls like Mehak Khurshid. She is the pride of Uri, and among the gems of Jammu and Kashmir.



Mehak's Message For the Youth

If you are fearless and have the zest to bring change, no one, and nothing can stop you.

If they can do it, we can also do it. If I can do it, you can also do it.

Follow Your Dreams

So this is the story of Mehak who very courageously stepped out of the sad, negative mentality that so many people nurture. They refuse to let girls work towards or achieve their dreams. To all the girls who feel that they are stuck in a sad space, I want to say – focus on your dreams. Work on your growth. Be passionate, know your worth and don't ever settle for less. Follow your dreams, don't let your talents go in vain. Empower yourself, empower women and girls around you.



Chasweeda Aslam

I am Chasweeda Aslam. I reside at Salamabad, Uri.

I have been writing for a while. I always felt the need to use my pen to empower weak sects of the society and spread awareness regarding many said and unsaid issues like mental health, suicidal tendencies, social issues like education, gender discrimination, political awareness, violence, equity, equality, health. I am deeply concerned about one of the most vulnerable issues of drug-addicted teenagers. For the well-being of the society, I desire to use my pen to challenge all these odds and become a voice of the helpless. I want to connect to the people through this, as I consider it to be one of the most powerful ways to make a change.

**I was surrounded
by stone-pelters,
drug addicts...
but for me, the
only thing that
mattered was my
cycle and me**

Wheels of Glory

**ADNAN
BASHIR**

A 17-Year-Old Champion Cyclist
From Sopore

Like all children, I was also fascinated by a cycle because it gives a sense of adventure and exploration. I grew up at Nigeen Bagh in Sopore, which was a radicalized area. I am now studying in Class 12 at Sopore's Government Boys Higher Secondary School.

Right from my childhood, I was always surrounded by youngsters who were either stone-pelters or drug addicts. But I never got interested in their activities. For me, my biggest passion was to become a cyclist. I was very focused on it. My cycle and me. That is the only thing that mattered the most to me.

How I Started

I started cycling from a very young age and have always been passionate about it. I have a normal cycle. My father is a farmer and his earnings are enough only to sustain our family. He cannot afford expensive cycles. So, I used

The biggest challenge I am facing is lack of funds to buy a proper racing cycle. I have approached many, but only my friends have helped me. Not having a proper cycle has not stopped me from continuing my practice to become the best cyclist

to ride normal cycles. It was in 2017, when I was just 12 years old that I started cycling on a regular basis.

Two years after I started cycling regularly, my football coach Farooz Ahmad noticed my passion for it and in 2019, he suggested that I should participate in the Baramulla District Cycling Championship. Without any second thought, I immediately jumped at his suggestion and decided to take part in the championship. I had no practice for the event, but I had the self-belief that I could succeed.

So, without any practice or even a proper racing cycle, I took part in the championship. I won the Gold Medal in the district championship. That changed the course of my life. I got a perspective on what I wanted to do in life.

Impressive Performance At National Events

Having won the district championship, I was now selected for the state-level competition but I needed a professional cycle. With my



Whether it is snowing or raining, I leave early every day for practice. People laugh at me when they see me practicing in snow or cycling through mud. But I ignore them. My job is to practice to reach my goal. I always concentrate on what is good and shed negative thoughts

friend's professional cycle, in 2019 I won a gold medal and a bronze medal. The two victories gave me so much confidence that I started practicing wholeheartedly to excel in cycling.

There has been no looking back for me since then. In 2020, I won the Gold Medals at both the district-level and state-level championships. After the state championships, Jammu and Kashmir Cycling Association (JKCA) general secretary

Mushtaq Ahmed Sir called me and said I should give the National trials for the 17th MTB National Championship.

I again won the Gold Medal and got selected for MTB Nationals in 2020, held in Karnataka. I had an ordinary cycle.

All the challenges I faced did not stop me from competing, and I was able to perform well. I won many more accolades in 2020 and was recognized as a champion cyclist. I won the gold

medal at many events nationally. I was selected for the National Championship to be held at Kurukshetra in Haryana.

For the national contests also, I participated on my local cycle. JKCA selected me to participate in the MTB National megaton to be held at Patnitop in Udhampur and I won the gold medal.

Cycling Has Made Me What I am

With the local cycle, I finally joined the SAI Academy in March 2022. I also won many gold and silver Medals. Apart from cycling events, I have also participated in the Sky Running National Championships in 2021 and 2022 and won gold medals. I also went to Nepal to participate in an international event. My team was awarded the best international team. On the district-level Republic Day function, I won the certificate of appreciation for outstanding performance in sports in 2021.

TIME FOR A STANDING OVATION

Once in a local cycling competition organised at Sopore, I was ahead of everyone by some kilometres. And then suddenly my old cycle broke down twice. All the competitors went past me.

My friend Syed Meerab from Baramulla came to me like a guardian angel at that time. He told me to take his cycle and continue the race. I finally ranked second. When I went on the stage to receive the medal, the race organizers appreciated me. They said I am the real winner.



I NEED A PROPER RACING CYCLE

Today, the biggest challenge I am facing is lack of funds to buy a proper racing cycle. I have approached many, but no one

has so far come forward to help me. I am deeply grateful to my friends. They have always helped me whenever I have needed something.

But not having a proper

cycle has not stopped me from continuing my practice to become the best cyclist. Whether it is snowing or raining, I leave early every day for practice. People laugh at me when they see me practicing in snow or cycling through mud. But I ignore them. My job is to practice to reach my goal. I always concentrate on what is good and shed negative thoughts.

Through cycling, I have realized that it is important to focus on one's goals. We shouldn't get distracted by what people say. People will always have something to talk about. But we have to build our lives ourselves. We must succeed with our own efforts.





THE **KASHMIR**
CONNECT