

Register Magazine
Postal Registration No. L/SK/Kashmir Central 2023-26

From- J-24, Jawahar Nagar Srinagar, 190008

HOW KASHMIR'S TERROR LANDSCAPE IS BEING REWRITTEN

RNI No: JKENG/2022/81439

VOLUME 5 | EDITION 2 | 1 JANUARY 2026 | ₹200

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KASHMIR CENTRAL

KASHMIR 2026

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As 2026 begins, hybrid terrorism, religious radicalisation and hardened polarisation expose the limits of stability and the urgent need for trust.

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KASHMIR CENTRAL



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VOLUME 5 | EDITION 2
1 JANUARY 2026

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**OWNED, PRINTED AND
PUBLISHED BY**

Bashir Ahmad Bhat

Registered with the
Registrar of Newspapers
of India under RNI No:
JKENG/2022/81439

PUBLISHED FROM

J-24, Jawahar Nagar,
Srinagar, 190008

**ADDRESS FOR ALL
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Srinagar, 190008

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POSTAL REGISTRATION NO.

L/SK/Kashmir Central 2023-26

PRINTED AT

Elegant Curves, Brein Nishat,
Srinagar - 191121

Phone: 8491859135

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All Advertising enquiries,
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welcome at kashmircentral997@gmail.com

Periodicity: **Monthly**

Language: **English**

Price: **₹200**

The information contained in this
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KASHMIR CENTRAL

A QUIET NEW YEAR, A RENEWED HOPE



Kashmir welcomed 2026 with an absolute serenity. As soft snow settled over Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Sonamarg, the valley stepped into the new year with a calm confidence that felt both natural and overdue. There were no roaring crowds or manufactured celebrations. Instead, there was warmth in open spaces, quiet walks on snow covered roads, celebrations and conversations that lingered a little longer. It was a beginning that suited Kashmir.

For years, uncertainty cast a long shadow over daily life and livelihoods. Tourism, one of the valley's most vital lifelines, bore the brunt of that instability. Empty rooms, shuttered shops and anxious winters became familiar realities. This New Year did not erase that history but it offered precious reassurance. Full hotels, moving taxis and open markets signalled not a miracle but a meaningful shift.

Snow arrived at the right moment as gentle, welcoming and undisturbing. Visitors came seeking peace rather than noise, space rather than excess. Kashmir met those expectations with quiet dignity. Behind the scenes, coordinated planning, functioning services and a focus on safety ensured that celebration remained effortless and humane. Trust was rebuilt not through slogans but through experience.



As 2025 fades into memory, 2026 opens with cautious optimism. This is a year in which people hope to live better, safer lives where tragedy and violence do not define the calendar and where places associated with sorrow, whether in Kashmir or beyond, are replaced in public memory by stories of resilience and care. Hope, after all, is also a form of responsibility.

Yet this moment demands balance. Tourism remains fragile and growth must be sustainable. Communities must remain at the centre, the environment protected and simplicity preserved. One good season is not an end; it is an invitation to do things right.

Kashmir's New Year message is clear. Progress does not always announce itself loudly. Sometimes, it arrives softly, like snow, bringing with it the promise of renewal.

Bashir Assad

CONTENTS



◀ 05 THE WAY FORWARD - MODERATION, MODESTY, AND MATURITY

by Bashir Assad



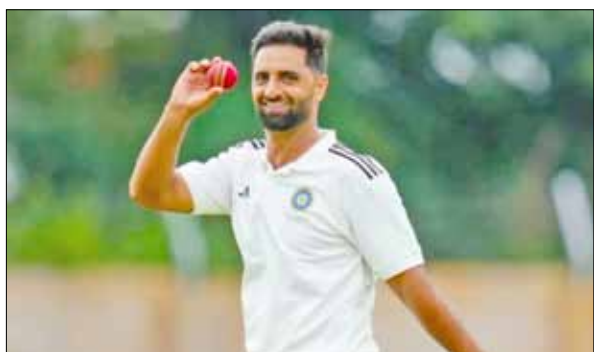
◀ 14 CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE NEW ENVIRONMENTAL REALITY OF KASHMIR

by Mareaya Fayaz



◀ 24 KASHMIR, COLD AND THE DISCIPLINE OF SURVIVAL

by Mian Tufail



◀ 32

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM

by Uzma Khan



The Way Forward

MODERATION, MODESTY, AND MATURITY



by **Bashir Assad**

KASHMIR CENTRAL | 1 JANUARY 2026 | 5





The protests are gone, the streets are calm and governance appears stable. From jungle warfare to ideological radicalisation, from silence to disengagement, 2026 may decide whether Kashmir moves towards resolution or sinks deeper into managed instability.

As Jammu and Kashmir steps into 2026, it does so under a dangerous and persistent illusion, the illusion of calm. The streets are quieter than they were a decade ago. Protest slogans have faded from public squares. The vocabulary of everyday life appears less confrontational, less defiant. To a distant observer, the conflict seems to have retreated, perhaps even resolved.

But this calm is deceptive.

Beneath the surface stability lies a far more complex, volatile and unresolved reality. Kashmir has not moved beyond conflict; it has entered a new phase of it. The violence has not disappeared; it has changed its shape. The anger has not vanished, it has withdrawn. And the politics have not healed, they

The violence has not disappeared; it has changed its shape. The anger has not vanished, it has withdrawn. And the politics have not healed, they have hardened.

have hardened.

For two consecutive years, through 2024 and 2025, *Kashmir Central* consistently warned against mistaking silence for peace. Our reporting showed that what appeared as normalcy was, in fact, a transition. The conflict was mutating though structurally, ideologically and strategically. It was becoming

less visible but potentially more dangerous.

As 2026 begins, Kashmir stands at a crossroads shaped by three interlinked forces: a transformed security threat, deepening political alienation and the absence of a credible political future. Together, these dynamics will determine whether the region moves towards stability or slides into a prolonged phase of managed instability.

A CHANGED WAR

The insurgency that once defined Kashmir has undeniably collapsed. The era of mass mobilisation, street violence, stone-pelting crowds and open glorification of terrorists is largely over. Over ground

worker networks have been disrupted, urban militancy has receded without any doubt and the ecosystem that sustained public insurgency has been dismantled.

Yet to interpret this as the defeat of terrorism would be dangerously premature.

What Kashmir is witnessing instead is a shift from mass insurgency to what security analysts increasingly describe as hybrid terrorism. This new model relies less on public mobilisation and more on stealth. It favours ideology over spectacle, endurance over immediacy and survival over visibility.

Throughout 2024 and 2025, *Kashmir Central* documented this transformation in detail. Foreign terrorists, primarily Pakistani nationals, have consolidated themselves in dense forest belts across South Kashmir, the Pir Panjal range



What Kashmir is witnessing instead is a shift from mass insurgency to what security analysts increasingly describe as hybrid terrorism.

and the Rajouri-Poonch belts. These are not temporary shelters or transit routes. They are long-term operational zones designed for sustained engagement. This marks a clear doctrinal shift.

The increasing reliance on forest based operations reflects a calculated strategy. Jungle terrain neutralises technological superiority, stretches security grids thin and allows small, highly trained groups to survive for long periods with minimal exposure.

This is not an improvisation. It reflects lessons drawn from other conflict theatres like, Afghanistan, parts of Africa and Latin America where state forces struggled against mobile, ideologically driven fighters embedded in difficult terrain.

Kashmir Central repeatedly warned that this shift would make counterterrorism more complex, not easier. Encounter numbers may remain low but the strategic risk increases. Even a single successful strike, carried out after months of invisibility, can have disproportionate psychological and political impact.





The war has not ended. It has slowed, deepened and adapted.

Perhaps the most misunderstood change in post-2019 Kashmir is the disappearance of mass protests. Many outside observers interpreted this silence as acceptance or as exhaustion-driven reconciliation. From the outset, our reporting challenged this assumption. What Kashmir has experienced is not

This disengagement is dangerous. It creates fertile ground for radical ideologies that promise identity, certainty and purpose in a landscape of political stagnation.

depoliticisation but withdrawal.

Young Kashmiris today are less likely to confront the state on the streets. But they are also less likely to engage with formal politics at all. Elections return, institutions function but emotional and political participation remains shallow.

This disengagement is dangerous. It creates fertile ground for radical ideologies that promise identity, certainty and purpose in a landscape of political stagnation.

Radicalisation in contemporary Kashmir does not announce itself through rallies or slogans. It is individualised, digitised and internalised. It spreads through encrypted platforms, informal religious spaces and grievance narratives that remain unanswered. The absence of visible anger should not be mistaken for the presence



of trust.

DANGEROUS CONVERGENCE

One of the most worrying trends identified during 2024-25 was the growing convergence between foreign terrorists and radicalised local youth. This relationship is no longer strictly hierarchical. It is increasingly symbiotic.

Foreign fighters bring tactical expertise, ideological framing and operational experience. Local recruits provide terrain knowledge, logistics, social cover and legitimacy. Together, they create a hybrid threat that is far harder to detect and dismantle.

This is where Kashmir's conflict begins to resemble global jihadist models. The emphasis has shifted away from territorial control towards ideological endurance. Leadership structures are decentralised. Cells are smaller, quieter and more resilient.

Terrorism in Kashmir is no longer only a regional security issue. It is increasingly



Terrorism in Kashmir is no longer only a regional security issue. It is increasingly embedded in transnational extremist logic and that significantly complicates both military and diplomatic responses.

embedded in transnational extremist logic and that significantly complicates both military and diplomatic responses.

Pakistan's internal instability remains a critical variable. Political paralysis, economic

collapse and resurging extremist violence have created contradictory incentives. While these conditions limit Islamabad's capacity for large-scale proxy warfare, they also encourage low-cost, high-impact asymmetric strategies. Keeping



Kashmir unstable, without provoking escalation, remains a strategic temptation.

At the same time, the alignment of Pakistan based groups with global jihadist rhetoric has grown more visible. Kashmir is no longer framed solely as a territorial dispute. It is increasingly projected as part of a broader ideological struggle. This narrative shift internationalises the conflict and

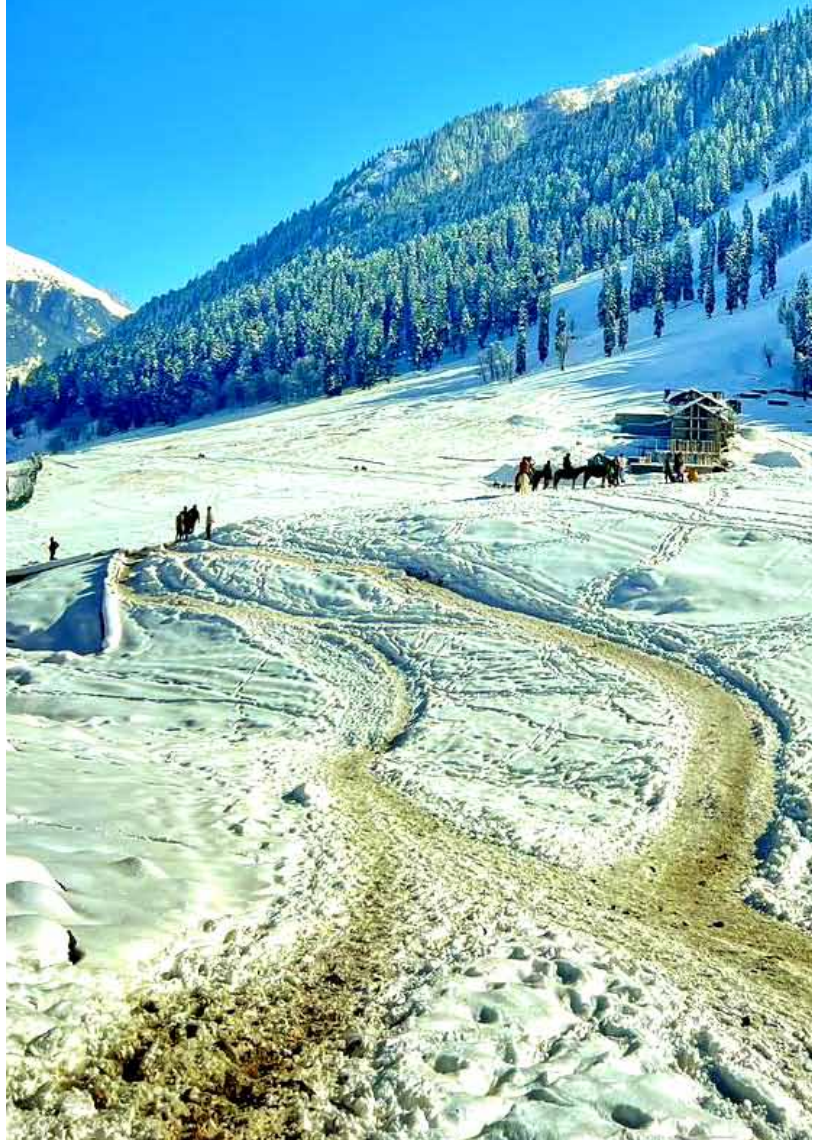


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makes resolution harder.

Compounding this regional dynamic is political change beyond Pakistan. The resurgence of *Jamaat-e-Islami* in Bangladesh, following the post-Sheikh Hasina political realignment, introduces a new layer of uncertainty. A more assertive Islamist political space in Dhaka could indirectly strengthen cross-border extremist networks and reshape regional security equations, including those affecting

A more assertive Islamist political space in Dhaka could indirectly strengthen cross-border extremist networks and reshape regional security equations, including those affecting Kashmir.



Kashmir. Throughout 2025, *Kashmir Central* maintained that this ideological globalisation poses a deeper long-term threat than traditional infiltration or militant numbers.

If the security landscape reflects tactical success mixed with strategic uncertainty, the political landscape tells a more troubling story, governance without reconciliation.

Since 2019, Jammu and Kashmir has been administered under unprecedented central control. Development projects have moved forward. Administrative efficiency has improved in select areas. Institutions function. But political trust has not followed.

Instead, the region remains deeply polarized between centre and periphery, nationalism and local identity, security narratives and civil rights discourse. These binaries dominate public debate and leave little room for nuance or dialogue. Silence is often mistaken for consent. In reality,



If the security landscape reflects tactical success mixed with strategic uncertainty, the political landscape tells a more troubling story, governance without reconciliation.

it frequently reflects fear, fatigue or disengagement.

Electoral processes have returned but without substantive empowerment they risk becoming procedural rituals rather than instruments of reconciliation. *Kashmir Central* has consistently argued that legitimacy cannot be manufactured through administration alone. Without a credible political horizon,





alienation becomes structural. And that vacuum is precisely what extremist narratives exploit.

BATTLE FOR THE MIND

The conflict in Kashmir has always been as much psychological as territorial. In 2026, the cognitive battlefield may prove decisive. On one side is a state narrative centered on integration, development and security dominance. On the other is a fragmented but persistent counter-narrative rooted in grievance, memory and identity. Between them

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stands a population more focused on survival than ideology.

Political polarisation sharpens this divide. Simplistic

labels like, pro-India versus anti-India, nationalist versus separatist, erase the lived complexity of Kashmiri society and push individuals towards extremes.

Kashmir Central warned repeatedly that narrative suppression is not narrative victory. Silencing dissent does not eliminate belief. It drives it underground, where it becomes harder to confront and easier to radicalise.

STRATEGIC DILEMMA OF 2026

As Kashmir enters 2026,



the central dilemma is unmistakable. Can security dominance translate into political confidence?

The tools that dismantled mass insurgency may be insufficient against ideological radicalisation and hybrid terrorism. Governance without trust risks preserving order while perpetuating instability. Counterterrorism must remain firm but also lawful, intelligence-driven and accountable. Excessive securitisation risks regenerating the alienation it seeks to contain.

Elections are necessary but they are not enough. What Kashmir requires is sustained political engagement rooted in dignity, representation and realism, not performative outreach, illusory slogans or symbolic gestures.

The battle ahead is not only against terrorists. It is against narratives. That requires space for non-violent dissent, credible local voices and intellectual engagement.

Kashmir in 2026 is neither at war nor at peace. It exists in a fragile equilibrium, quiet but combustible, stable but unresolved.

The region has escaped the chaos of mass violence but it has



not escaped conflict. Terrorism has evolved. Political alienation has hardened. Polarisation has deepened.

The decisions taken in 2026 will determine whether Kashmir moves towards durable stability or enters a prolonged phase of low-intensity, high-impact conflict shaped by global jihadist logic and internal

disengagement.

Over the last two years, *Kashmir Central* has consistently returned to one fundamental truth: Control can suppress violence. Only trust can end conflict.

The question now is whether the political imagination exists to match the security success.



CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE NEW ENVIRONMENTAL REALITY OF KASHMIR

Kashmir is not turning into a desert but scientific data suggests it is becoming drier. From declining snowfall to stressed rivers and shrinking wetlands, climate change and environmental degradation are reshaping the valley's hydrological future, demanding urgent policy and ecological intervention.



by Mareaya Fayaz

Due to its extensive effects on numerous economic sectors, livelihoods and ecosystems, climate change and global warming have recently gained significant attention from the scientific community, governments, media and the general public. Global warming is mostly caused by the concentrations of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and other gases, which have been rising dramatically over the past few decades.

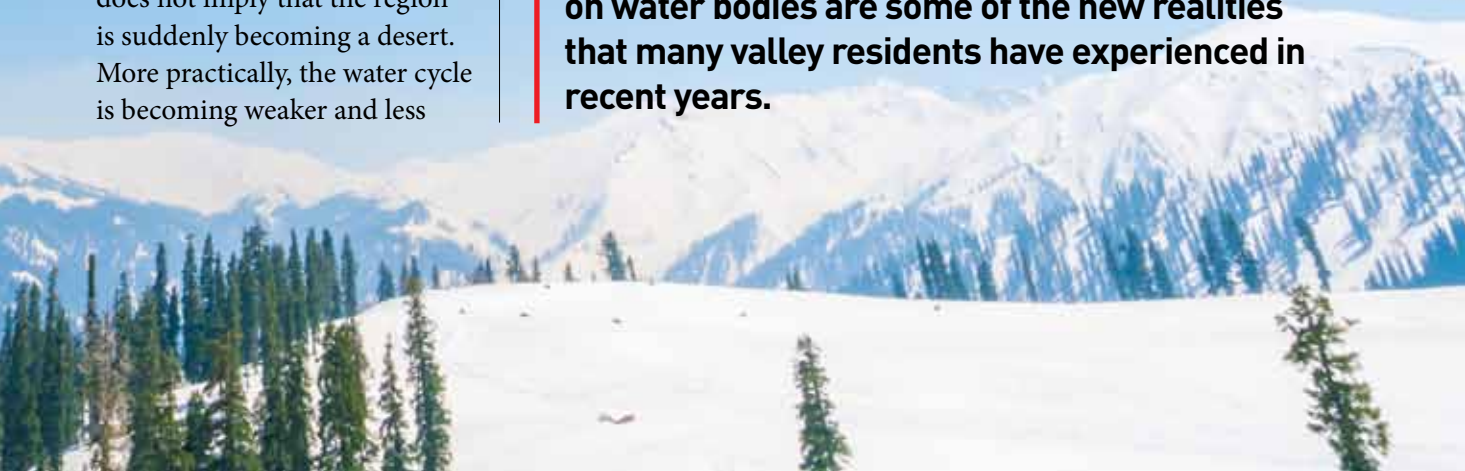




The abundance of scientific study on the topic, mostly compiled by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in the form of Assessment Reports, has shown beyond a shadow of a doubt the existence of global climate change. Snow, lakes, springs, and verdant slopes are the hallmarks of Kashmir. Long dry spells, decreased river flow, drying springs, dustier air and increased pollution load on water bodies are some of the new realities that many valley residents have experienced in recent years. “Kashmir is becoming arid” does not imply that the region is suddenly becoming a desert. More practically, the water cycle is becoming weaker and less



Long dry spells, decreased river flow, drying springs, dustier air and increased pollution load on water bodies are some of the new realities that many valley residents have experienced in recent years.



dependable, resulting in less rain and snow when required, faster soil and spring drying and more stress on farms, forests and public health.

Like many other parts of the world, Kashmir, is feeling the effects of climate change. Because of its distinct geographic and ecological features, the Himalayan region including the Kashmir valley is especially vulnerable. If preventive and corrective action is not taken in a timely manner, the area known as “Paradise on Earth” would face a serious environmental problem. The temperatures in Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh Himalaya are rising at noticeably faster rates than the rest of the world.

In contrast, there has been no discernible change in the region’s total precipitation but during the past few decades, the type of winter precipitation has shifted from snow to rain which has caused a concern among masses, *Is Kashmir becoming more*



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Arid? Aridity does not mean turning into a desert overnight but it does mean increasing dryness caused by reduced moisture availability and higher evaporation. Scientific data now shows that this concern is real and growing.

The consistent decrease in snowfall, particularly during the busiest winter months, is one of the most important yet sometimes disregarded indicators that Kashmir is getting increasingly arid. In Kashmir, snowfall serves as a natural water reservoir in addition to being a seasonal occurrence. In contrast to rain, snow melts gradually in the spring and early summer, supplying groundwater, rivers, lakes and springs in a regulated way. However, winters have gotten warmer and shorter in recent years and more precipitation has fallen as rain rather than snow. Faster runoff, less snowpack storage and lower groundwater recharge are the results of this shift.

Rising winter temperatures in the western Himalayan region have disrupted typical snowfall patterns, according to official climate assessments and IMD data. Reduced snow cover also exposes soil earlier in the year, causing evaporation and erosion while decreasing the biological buffer that forests and alpine meadows formerly supplied. As a result, even if overall annual precipitation does not appear to be considerably lower, the loss of prolonged snow accumulation significantly adds to water stress, drying springs and the general feeling that Kashmir is becoming



Reduced snow cover also exposes soil earlier in the year, causing evaporation and erosion while decreasing the biological buffer that forests and alpine meadows formerly supplied.

drier.

A significant official indicator comes from a Government of India response in Lok Sabha (by the Ministry of Jal Shakti), which incorporates IMD rainfall data for Kashmir valley districts from 2020 to 2024. In that annexure, the Kashmir division's average annual rainfall is shown to be below normal in each of the listed years. For example, rainfall in Kashmir division is indicated as 650.8 mm (normal 878.0 mm) in 2020, 766.8 mm





(normal 878.0 mm) in 2021, 679.2 mm in 2022, 744.5 mm in 2023 and 598.6 mm in 2024, all with a negative departure from normal.

This is significant since Kashmir's water system is primarily reliant on winter precipitation and snowfall, which gradually melts and recharges springs, groundwater and rivers. When precipitation is insufficient or arrives at the wrong time, recharge decreases and the valley faces water shortage months, even if a few storms later provide temporary relief.

Kashmir is part of the Hindu Kush Himalayan area. According to the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), snow persistence in the Hindu Kush Himalaya has decreased dramatically in recent years, reaching its lowest level in more

than two decades. This means that snow does not stay on the ground as long as it used to. These large-scale changes have an impact on river systems, groundwater recharge and long-term water security throughout the area, including Kashmir.

Glaciers serve as long-term water reservoirs. Scientific studies of glaciers, such as the Kolahoi Glacier in Kashmir,

demonstrate dramatic retreat during the last century. While melting glaciers momentarily improve water flow, their persistent retreat ultimately diminishes total water availability. When glacier volume falls below a certain point, summer flows decline, resulting in increased dryness during the most water-intensive months like June, July and August. This practice directly increases the danger of long-term aridification.

Temperature rise is another major factor. Warmer air increases evaporation from soil, lakes and vegetation. Even if rainfall remains moderate, higher evaporation can still dry out the land. Warmer conditions also cause earlier snowmelt, meaning water flows away before crops and ecosystems need it most. This mismatch between water availability and demand

When glacier volume falls below a certain point, summer flows decline, resulting in increased dryness during the most water-intensive months like June, July and August.

increases stress on both natural and human systems.

Agriculture in Kashmir relies greatly on dependable weather. Apple orchards, rice fields and vegetable farms require appropriate rainfall throughout various growth stages. Reduced snowfall and unpredictable rainfall causes irrigation shortages, less flowering in fruit trees and lower yields. Farmers are increasingly relying on groundwater and artificial irrigation, which raises expenses and puts further strain on already limited water resources.

Less snowfall, unpredictable rainfall, higher temperatures, glacier retreat and land degradation all contribute to an increase in drought-like conditions. While considerable precipitation does occur in Kashmir on occasion, it is often brief and strong, resulting in floods rather than groundwater recharge. Long dry intervals between such events increase water stress and agricultural susceptibility. In addition to long-term changes in snowfall and rainfall patterns, sudden cloudbursts and extreme rainfall events have become more noticeable in parts of the Kashmir region.

In August 2025, a destructive cloudburst struck Chositi village in the Kishtwar district of Jammu & Kashmir, triggering flash floods along the Machail Mata pilgrimage route. According to official reports and disaster assessments, the event occurred on 14 August 2025 and resulted in at least 68 deaths, over 300 injuries and dozens of people reported



Aridity in Kashmir region is emerging as a complex result of climate change and rising environmental deterioration.

missing after homes, makeshift camps and temporary structures were washed away by fast-moving flood waters. Such intense events are becoming more frequent and severe across the Himalayan region due to changing atmospheric dynamics and increased moisture in the air conditions that climate scientists



link to a warming climate. These cloudbursts not only cause immediate destruction but also stress the valley's water systems, infrastructure and local communities, compounding the impacts of longer-term rainfall and snowfall changes.

Aridity in Kashmir region is emerging as a complex result of climate change and rising environmental deterioration. Rising temperatures caused by global climate change have altered precipitation patterns in the region, resulting in lower snowfall, erratic rainfall and early snowmelt, all of which disrupt the natural hydrological cycle that supports Kashmir's ecosystems. At the same time, environmental degradation caused by deforestation, unchecked urban expansion, wetland encroachment and unsustainable land-use practices has drastically weakened the land's ability to hold moisture and recharge groundwater.

Even in years with average rainfall, the loss of forest cover and soil integrity accelerates surface runoff, inhibits

infiltration and exacerbates drought-like conditions. These climatic and anthropogenic forces interact synergistically, changing seasonal water stress into long-term drought. As a result, Kashmir's growing dryness is more than just a meteorological event; it is a combined human-environmental disaster in which climate unpredictability exacerbates ecological vulnerability and environmental degradation enhances the effects of climate change. Addressing aridity requires integrated methods that incorporate climatic adaptation, ecological restoration and sustainable resource governance.

Ajaz Rasool, renowned environmentalist and Hydraulic Engineering expert from Kashmir valley, speaking to KC, stated that, "Kashmir valley has for several years been experiencing the adverse effects of climate change and global warming. We had the highest ever recorded flood in the valley in September 2014 after the major flood a century ago. This



Kashmir's growing dryness is more than just a meteorological event; it is a combined human-environmental disaster in which climate unpredictability exacerbates ecological vulnerability and environmental degradation enhances the effects of climate change.

was followed by long spells of dry climate with no precipitation or spells of cloud bursts and intense precipitation for short periods in the contributory catchment of the valley."

Though the valley has had four types of seasons of climate classified as Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter with uniform flow in the Jhelum River which drains the valley the river flows would record two peaks one due to rains and snow melt in spring season and the other towards end of Autumn but due to various anthropogenic factors affecting the contributory catchment area of the valley leading to siltation of its aquatic systems the river has now the tendency of frequently recording flows reaching flood declaration levels even with rains of few days due to the deteriorated and denuded catchment area not retaining flows as it would do in earlier



periods.

The siltation of Jhelum and its tributaries have further reduced the flow carrying capacity of river which in turn has resulted in our large Wular Lake having reduced the volumetric capacity by 30% in last three decades. These changes with overall effects of global warming and climate change have resulted in erratic pattern of climate in the valley. The valley has now witnessed to be having an increased effect of climate change and global warming over past several years compared to that which were previously seen in the lower Himalayan region.

New records of flow and carriage capacity have been set in previous two to three years for the Jhelum River regime. The river levels dropped so low that houseboats mooring in water were witnessed to be resting on mud and the river gauges dropped to minus values at vital stations with river becoming dry.

The Kashmir region had its area of Ladakh been earlier also found to be having arid climate akin to that of deserts. The mountain there having no significant vegetation and vast area being dry fields with signs of desertification. In comparison the valley of Kashmir is green with more than 50% area under forests cover. It has however lost about 10% forest area in last decades. The valley has its economy mainly based on agricultural activities, horticulture and tourism besides possessing enormous potential of Hydropower. The Riverine regime of Jhelum comprises fertile lands. There are many



The river levels dropped so low that houseboats mooring in water were witnessed to be resting on mud and the river gauges dropped to minus values at vital stations with river becoming dry.

Lakes and Wetlands comprising aquatic assets in the valley. Thus Kashmir valley cannot be said to be turning into a desert in terms of literal sense of sand deserts.

The global climatic change and warming has however resulted in extremes of temperature hitherto not been historically recorded in the valley. This calls for an action to reduce the effects of global climatic change in the valley. Though the climatic change is a global phenomenon requiring a

global remediation by countries in the world yet research and development by G20 countries has been approved by the United Nations and WHO which states that the regions having aquatic assets such as Lakes, wetlands and Rivers canard should work to reduce pollution and maintain health of such assets by maintaining the water budget (inflows and outflows) and optimise the water use of such assets which in turn will reduce the adverse affects of climatic change and global warming in such regions.

Kashmir valley thus needs to adopt measures for the same. It requires formulation of holistic Water Policy for the valley which so far has not been framed to optimise the water use for various fields such as Irrigation, Hydropower generation, drinking and domestic use besides other uses and as such prevent wastage of water. The earlier this is done the better it would be to help towards the goal of addressing global warming and climate change.

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Winter in Kashmir is not merely a season; it is a test of infrastructure, a revival of culture and a lesson in collective resilience. From kangris and pherans to frozen pipelines and winter tourism, *KC* traces how cold shapes Kashmiri life, governance and memory and why winter may be the valley's most honest mirror.



KASHMIR, COLD AND THE DISCIPLINE OF SURVIVAL



by Mian Tufail

▼
Winter does not arrive in Kashmir. It *descends* with a quiet authority that seeps into walls, habits, conversations and eventually thoughts. One morning the mountains appear closer, their shoulders powdered white. By evening, the breath has weight and by the next week, winter has rearranged life.

In Kashmir, winter is not merely a season. It is a ritual and if one listens closely, it's a form of collective enlightenment.

Winter in Kashmir shapes

the body before it shapes the mind. It teaches the language of survival long before it invites celebration. And yet, for those who have lived it even briefly, Kashmir in winter leaves behind a paradoxical ache, harshness

Winter in Kashmir shapes the body before it shapes the mind. It teaches the language of survival long before it invites celebration.

remembered as tenderness and discomfort recalled as intimacy.

I remember winter in Kashmir not through dates or snowfall records but through rituals of warmth. Endless cups of *noon chai* – salted, pink, heavy with fat passed from hand to hand in our kitchens. Oversized *pherans* swallowing bodies into anonymity. And everywhere, always, the *kangri* – cradled under arms, tucked beneath tables, carried like an extension



of the self. This all depicts the resilience the people of Kashmir has shown and endured over centuries.

SNOWFALL IN KASHMIR

Snowfall in Kashmir is not decorative. It is functional, disruptive and deeply consequential. Roads vanish beneath white layers. Pipes freeze into silence. Water so abundant in Kashmir becomes a negotiated privilege. Flights are

Patients feel privileged if they reach hospitals on time from extreme rural areas. Entire districts retreat inward. For outsiders, these are hardships but for locals, these are coordinates of memory.

delayed, diverted or cancelled with a regularity that Kashmiris accept with resigned humour. Traffic gets stuck on roads. Patients feel privileged if they reach hospitals on time from extreme rural areas. Entire districts retreat inward. For outsiders, these are hardships but for locals, these are coordinates of memory.

When temperatures plunge below minus three to six, the first casualty is water. Pipes burst. Taps turn ornamental. Motors die down. Snow becomes a resource and replacement.

Although, Infrastructure has improved over time with insulated pipes, quicker response teams, better planning but winter still tests systems ruthlessly. Electricity outages, though less frequent than in previous decades, continue to punctuate daily life. Traffic withers from roads. Economy went into doldrums. The world shrinks.

And yet, paradoxically, **life**



thickens. Families and friends gather closer. Conversations lengthen. Silence becomes a companion.

Talking to KC, a man in his sixties selling *kangris* in the Iqbal market Sopore market said, “Winter teaches the people of Kashmir patience. We cannot fight it. We have to only adjust as per its harshness. That adjustment is the essence of our survival.”

CULTURAL REVIVAL

Winter in Kashmir also revives tradition. The *pheran*, long dismissed as archaic, returns with dignity. Woollen shawls are no longer accessories but necessities. Layers of clothes replace fashion. Warmth becomes aesthetic. Women wrap themselves in embroidered pashminas. Men adjust their *pherans* to cradle the *kangri*, the earthen firepot that is both warmth and metaphor. The *kangri* is not merely heat; it is an intimacy and ancestral wisdom in clay and charcoal. But burns



“Winter teaches the people of Kashmir patience. We cannot fight it. We have to only adjust as per its harshness. That adjustment is the essence of our survival.”





Sundried vegetables stored carefully through warmer months return to the table like old friends. Turnips, dried brinjals, pumpkins, nadru (lotus stem), pulses, winter resurrects them all.



and blisters ended up with the kangri experiment. The kangri demands skill, familiarity and respect.

Sadiya, a female from Srinagar, working in a private sector sector told KC that, “In winter, we stop dressing for others. We dress for survival and somehow that feels honest. Dresses are no more a fashionable attire but a survival strategy to beat the chill.”

Perhaps nowhere does winter assert itself more profoundly than in the Kashmiri kitchen. Summer’s light meals retreat. Winter demands substance, heat and nourishment. Diets shift instinctively as meat consumption increases, fats are no longer feared, spices grow bolder and pherans help us to hide the accumulation of fat.

Harissa simmers overnight, slow-cooked until flesh dissolves into devotion. Noon chai replaces cold drinks as the drink of endurance. Sundried vegetables stored carefully through warmer months return to the table like old friends. Turnips, dried brinjals, pumpkins, nadru (lotus stem), pulses, winter resurrects them all.

Winter reminds us why our ancestors preserved food. It’s not nostalgia, it’s intelligence.

PSYCHOLOGY OF COLD

Winter alters not just routine but temperament too. Movement slows. Time stretches. In the long evenings, Kashmir turns inward. Weddings reduce. Social gatherings become selective. The loudness of summer yields to



winter's introspection.

Psychologists often speak of seasonal affective shifts but in Kashmir winter produces something subtler, a collective inward gaze. People read more. Pray more. Bow down for repentance. Think more. Winter makes people face themselves. There are fewer distractions.

For the underprivileged, winter is not poetic. Daily wage labourers lose work. Poor settlements lack insulation. Homeless populations face life threatening exposure. Children walk to tuition centers in worn shoes through icy lanes. The elderly suffer silently. Farmers have no means of income during winters.

Despite improved road connectivity and better electricity penetration, winter remains unequal in its impact. Infrastructure buffers some, abandons others. Yet even here,

Despite improved road connectivity and better electricity penetration, winter remains unequal in its impact. Infrastructure buffers some, abandons others.

Kashmir's social fabric reveals resilience. Neighbours share firewood and meals. Mosques open doors. Some donate quietly for others deserving. Charity becomes less performative and more urgent. Winter exposes inequality but it also exposes humanity imbibed in the hearts of people here.

Snow is nature's pause button. Although in last four years

nature didn't reset pause button for us. Hence we witness flash floods, melting of glaciers and erratic water supply. Snow helps pollution to drop. Noise recedes. The air sharpens. The Dal Lake breathes differently. Trees rest. Wildlife adapts.

Winter reminds Kashmir of its ecological limits. Excessive burning, deforestation, plastic waste, all stand exposed against white snow. What was hidden in summer becomes stark in winter. Snow shows us what clean looks like. The question is do we remember it in summer? Unfortunately, NO!

Winter hurts. Winter heals. It hurts joints, livelihoods and routines. But it heals excess. It shatters noise. It restores balance. It forces rest in a world addicted to motion. There is a reason why Kashmiris say winter *purifies*. It strips life to essentials like, warmth, food, company



and faith. Winter is not cruel in Kashmir. It is honest and mesmerizing.

Winter reminds us the progress without compassion is hollow. That culture survives not in museums but in kitchens and clothes. That ecology is not optional. That resilience is collective. Winter teaches Kashmir who it is - again and again.

For the state, winter is never sentimental. It is administrative, infrastructural and political. Frozen pipes, electricity stress, road closures, flight disruptions, winter exposes every fault line in governance. The Srinagar-Jammu highway becomes a barometer of state efficiency. Airport cancellations turn



weather into headline news.

And yet, over the last few years, something has shifted. Winter is no longer treated only as an emergency to be managed but increasingly as a season to be engaged.

Winter tourism has reimagined the season not as obstruction but an opportunity. Skiing in Gulmarg, winter carnivals and national-level

winter games have repositioned cold as capital.

Government initiatives promoting winter sports have generated employment, visibility and pride. For the youth, winter is no longer downtime; it is a season of possibility and shift.

The most visible manifestation of this shift is the Khelo India Winter Games in Gulmarg. These games are not merely sporting events; they are statements of intent. They signal that winter is not an interruption to normalcy but part of it. Hotels remain operational deep into January. Ski instructors, guides, transporters and small businesses find winter



employment. Gulmarg, once dormant under snow, now pulses with activity.

Sonamarg and Pahalgam too have entered the winter imagination. New Year and Christmas celebrations draw domestic and international tourists. Snow, once feared as blockage, is reimagined as attraction. This matters both economically and politically.

Another manifestation is the *Jashn-e-Chillai Kalan*, literally the festival of the harshest forty days marks a conscious effort to reclaim winter from the language of suffering and reposition it as pride, culture and continuity. Traditionally, Chillai Kalan was endured in silence. Construction halted, weddings paused, public life contracted. The season was respected not romanticised. *Jashn-e-Chillai Kalan* alters that equation not by denying winter's severity but by acknowledging it publicly and building community around it. Through food festivals, local music, handicrafts, winter sports and cultural gatherings, the celebration reframes cold as an inheritance rather than an affliction. It asserts that Kashmir's relationship with winter is not accidental but civilisational.

TOURISM AFTER TRAUMA

▼ The renewed push for winter tourism also carries urgency. Tourism in Kashmir remains fragile, easily disrupted. The Pahalgam attack last year stalled arrivals, reminding everyone how quickly perception can



When tourists celebrate New Year under falling snow in Gulmarg, they are participating knowingly or not in Kashmir's assertion that life continues.

undo years of effort.

Winter tourism offers diversification. It reduces dependence on short summer windows and distributes economic opportunity across seasons. More importantly, it projects resilience. When tourists celebrate New Year under falling snow in Gulmarg, they are participating knowingly or not in Kashmir's assertion that life continues.

Yet there is an emerging complication that snow is becoming unreliable. Erratic snowfall patterns, shorter winters and delayed snow cover are no longer anecdotal, they are climatic signals. This demands

a rethinking of winter policy. If snow recedes, celebration must adapt.

Kashmir's winter is often described as vicious but cold is not unique to the valley. Europe, North America and parts of Central Asia experience harsher temperatures. The difference lies in systems and sensibility.

In a place like the United Kingdom, winters are celebrated - festivals, winter markets, public skating. Infrastructure anticipates disruption. Civic sense protects public spaces. Ecology is respected.

Kashmir stands at a crossroads between endurance and enjoyment. We have the climate. We have the culture. What we need is planning that respects both people and nature. Winter should not be survived alone. It should be managed collectively.

The kangri, the pheran, dried food, seasonal withdrawal, these are not symbols but they are systems. Modern governance must learn from them and not to overwrite them.

Winter is not to be defeated. It is to be negotiated collectively.

When Auqib Nabi Dar walked into the IPL spotlight, he carried with him the dreams of an entire generation. This is the story of how Jammu and Kashmir's athletes, shaped by adversity and driven by belief are redefining what is possible, not just in cricket but across India's sporting spectrum.



From The **MARGINS** **TO THE MAINSTREAM**

by Uzma Khan

When Auqib Nabi Dar's name echoed across the IPL auction room, culminating in a staggering Rs. 8.40 crore deal with Delhi Capitals, it was more than a personal triumph. It was a moment of collective arrival for Jammu and Kashmir cricket, a statement that talent from the region is no longer knocking on the door of Indian sport but confidently walking through it.

Alongside Auqib's rise, Udampur's Brijesh Sharma earning an IPL call-up with Rajasthan Royals reinforced a deeper truth that this is not an isolated breakthrough but part of a wider, irreversible shift. Jammu and Kashmir's athletes, long constrained by geography, infrastructure and unfortunate circumstances are increasingly finding space on India's most competitive and glamorous sporting platforms.

To view this moment as sudden would be a mistake. Jammu and Kashmir has always produced cricketers of skill and temperament. What it lacked



It was a moment of collective arrival for Jammu and Kashmir cricket, a statement that talent from the region is no longer knocking on the door of Indian sport but confidently walking through it.

for decades was opportunity. For most players, ambition ended with Ranji Trophy cricket, where exposure was limited and the national team remained an almost unattainable dream, restricted to a squad of fifteen.

The Indian Premier League has fundamentally altered this reality. It has created a parallel ecosystem where geography matters less than impact. Teams scout relentlessly for bowlers who can win games, batters who can finish matches and athletes who can adapt under pressure.





In this ecosystem, Auqib Nabi Dar's rise is especially significant.

He arrived without the cushion of international caps or India A exposure. His credentials were forged entirely in domestic cricket through relentless performances in the Ranji Trophy, Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy and Duleep Trophy. His numbers spoke louder than reputation with match-winning spells, consistency across seasons, power hitting batting

For young cricketers in Kashmir and Jammu, the message is unmistakable that domestic performance is no longer a ceiling. It is a launch pad.

and a temperament sharpened by years of being overlooked. The bidding war that followed was not sentimental; it was a professional validation of excellence. For young cricketers in Kashmir and Jammu, the message is unmistakable that domestic performance is no longer a ceiling. It is a launch pad.

Equally compelling is the story of Brijesh Sharma from Udhampur. Raised in a modest household, a father working as a



labourer and a mother employed as a Class-IV worker, Brijesh's journey reflects a different kind of courage. Recognising the limitations at home, he left Jammu and Kashmir to seek stronger competition, first in Delhi and then in Bengal's unforgiving club circuit.

His IPL selection is not just a sporting milestone; it is a social one. It challenges the assumption that elite sport is reserved for those with early access, resources or privilege. For youngsters across Jammu province, Brijesh's story resonates deeply proof that sacrifice, belief and persistence can still carve pathways through structural barriers.

BUILDING A PIPELINE

▼
The presence of other J&K players within the IPL ecosystem strengthens this narrative of continuity. Umran Malik's raw



Recognising the limitations at home, he left Jammu and Kashmir to seek stronger competition

pace has already unsettled international batters. Yuvraj Singh's steady presence with Rajasthan Royals signals trust and longevity. Before them, Parvez Rasool, Rasik Salam, Yuvraj Singh, Manzoor Panday and Abdul Samad had carried the flag, proving that J&K

players could survive and thrive at the highest level. Together, they represent a pipeline, not anomalies.

SPORT AMID DISRUPTION

▼ This rise carries deeper meaning when placed against the lived reality of Jammu and Kashmir's youth. For much of the past decade, particularly in the valley, normal life was repeatedly interrupted by *hartals*, shutdowns, stone-pelting, cross-border firing and a pervasive atmosphere of fear and anxiety. Training schedules were disrupted, tournaments cancelled and mental focus constantly tested.

To choose sport and to pursue it with discipline under such conditions required extraordinary resilience. In many ways, the mental toughness displayed by athletes like Auqib Nabi Dar was shaped



Access to elite coaching, sports science and competitive exposure remains uneven, particularly in rural areas.

as much by circumstance as by coaching.

It would be dishonest to romanticise the challenges. Infrastructure in Jammu and Kashmir has historically lagged behind. Pitches often low, slow and inconsistent rarely mirror the conditions players face elsewhere in the country. Access to elite coaching, sports science and competitive exposure



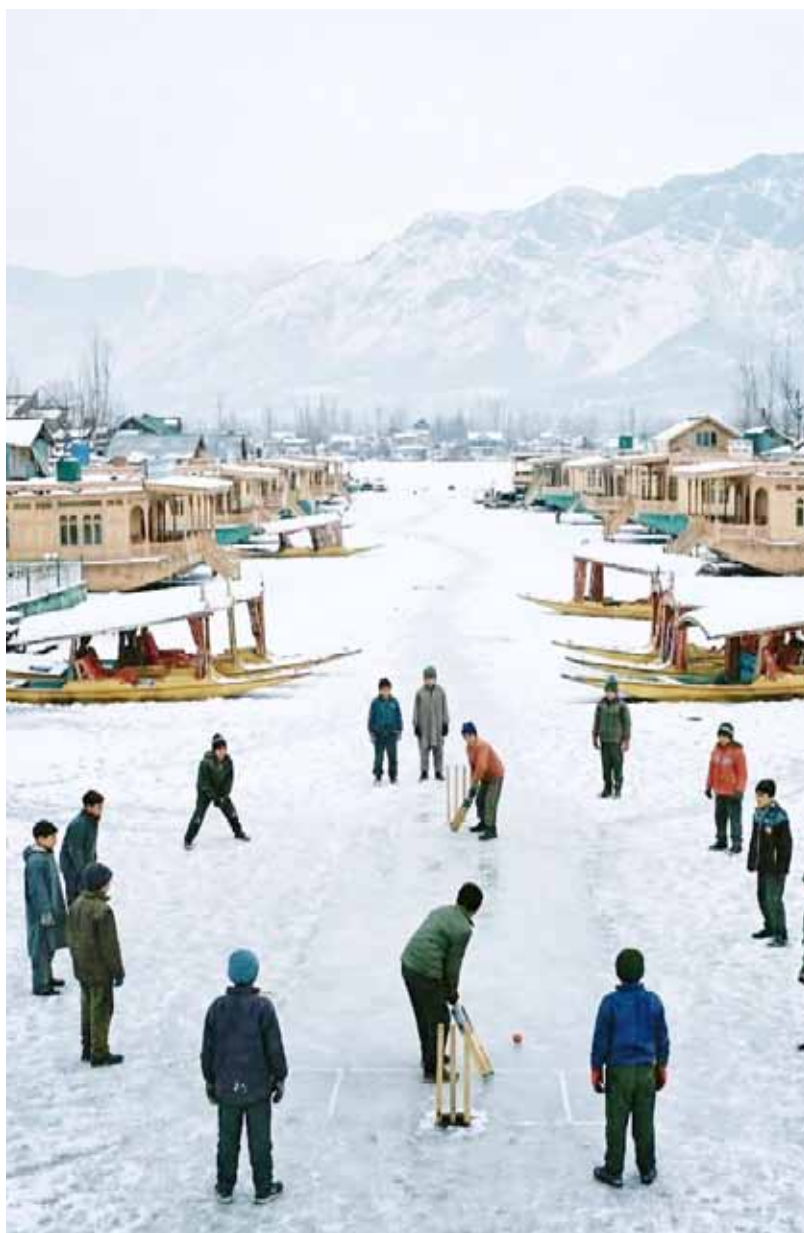


remains uneven, particularly in rural areas.

Yet, there has been visible progress. Government investment in sports infrastructure like, stadiums, indoor halls, synthetic tracks, club tournaments and village level facilities has expanded both access and aspiration. Government-sponsored leagues, inter-district tournaments and structured coaching programmes have created regular competitive platforms where talent can be identified early.

The growing activity at venues like Bakshi stadium and Sher-e-Kashmir stadium is emblematic of this shift. Even imperfect leagues, when sustained and supervised, contribute to a sporting rhythm, something the region was denied for years.

The story of private leagues in Kashmir reflects both ambition and caution. Earlier exhibition matches featuring national stars like Irfan Pathan, Chris Gayle, Martin Gupthill and others generated excitement and helped



Unregulated ventures can erode trust and exploit local aspiration. The lesson is clear that while private participation is welcome, oversight and accountability are essential.

normalise professional sport as entertainment and aspiration. They boosted visibility and inspired young athletes.

However, the collapse of the Indian Heaven Premier League where organisers allegedly left mid-tournament without paying players or staff serves as a warning. Unregulated ventures can erode trust and exploit local aspiration. The lesson is clear that while private participation is welcome, oversight and accountability are essential.

Sustainable sports culture cannot be built on broken promises.

BEYOND CRICKET

Importantly, this transformation is not confined to cricket. Athletes from Jammu and Kashmir are making national and international marks in archery, taekwondo, wushu, athletics, football and winter sports. From medal winners in martial arts to archers representing India at global events, the region's sporting identity is diversifying. This breadth matters. It ensures that opportunity is not monopolised by one sport and that talent wherever it emerges has a pathway forward.

The economic dividends of sporting success like, contracts, endorsements, professional security are significant. But perhaps more crucial is sport's social role. Structured leagues, training schedules and role models offer young people alternatives to drugs, crime, radicalisation and alienation. They create discipline, routine and hope. Sport is no longer viewed as a gamble; it is increasingly recognised as a legitimate profession and a stabilising force.

There is reason for optimism but not complacency. Infrastructure must deepen, coaching must professionalise further and exposure must expand beyond a handful of success stories. Talent identification needs to reach the remotest villages and governance both public and private must remain transparent and



accountable.

As the next IPL season unfolds, every wicket taken or six hit by a J&K cricketer will echo far beyond packed stadiums. It will reverberate through villages, mohallas and school grounds across the Jammu and Kashmir.

For the youth of Jammu and Kashmir, these players are no longer distant stars. They are local heroes. And their rise marks not just sporting success but a broader story of resilience, opportunity and a region steadily reclaiming its rightful place on India's sporting map.



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