

Mantrana 2020: Summary

The Social and Political Research Foundation, in collaboration with Polstrat and CVoter hosted Mantrana 2020 on January 27th, 2020 at India International Centre(IIC), New Delhi. Mantrana 2020 engaged with challenges of growth and development in the newly formed union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. The aim of the inaugural Mantrana was to initiate and engage in dialogue that looks beyond the years of conflict that engulfed the erstwhile state.

Welcome Address and Opening Remarks

Speaker: Shri Pushpesh Pant

Mantrana 2020 opened with a welcome note delivered by Dr Pushpesh Pant, former Professor of International Relations at Jawaharlal Nehru University, noted Indian academic, food critic and historian, and a trustee of The Social and Political Research Foundation. Speaking about the motivation behind Mantrana, Dr Pant focused on the paramount significance of building a platform for young individuals to help them realise the centrality of debate and dialogue in a democracy. Setting the stage for the inaugural Mantrana, Dr Pant brought to the fore the core values of *vimarsh* (consultation) and *samvaad* (dialogue) in a democracy, where the person being consulted is well-informed and non-partisan, and on the other hand, the person receiving the information has an open mind and at the same time exercises discretion.



The inaugural Mantrana focused on the erstwhile states of Jammu and Kashmir, post the abrogation of Article 370. In the context of the ongoing debate around restoration of normalcy in light of abrogation of Article 370 and the communications lockdown in Jammu and Kashmir, Dr Pant posed a significant question, emphasising the need to understand the concept of 'normalcy' as a loaded one - Were the erstwhile states of Jammu and Kashmir “normal” before?

Evoking the essence of dialogue in a democracy, with a focus on the need to pave the road ahead, Dr Pant invited the youth to engage and get involved in Mantrana 2020 to explore and discuss the possibilities which surround the erstwhile states of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

Address by Chief Guest

Speaker: Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi

Honourable Union Minister of Minority Affairs, Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi was the Chief Guest for Mantrana 2020. While speaking of the challenges of the growth and development in the newly formed union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, the Central Minister viewed the abrogation of Article 370 as a step towards the betterment of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. According to Shri Naqvi, the Central Government is steered towards launching skill development programmes and creating new job opportunities in the region.

“With Article 370 going away, 370 problems did too. When I visited the valley, there were countable numbers of tourists near Dal Lake. People's feedback highlighted a safe environment in the valley like never before. This definitely ought to boost the tourism sector in the coming days. The residents told me that in the last 3-4 months they have felt safe and secure. The terrorism has ended and there is a need to give a positive message about the change in Kashmir,” he said.



Shri Naqvi also officially launched SPRF's research docket titled 'Jammu and Kashmir, An Analysis of the Erstwhile State: Dialogues for Development of the Two New Union Territories', which is an accessible repository of knowledge that showcases existing trends and official data pertaining to the erstwhile state.

Setting the Scene: Peace Polls

Speakers: Dr Colin Irwin and Shri Yashwant Rao Deshmukh

To further the endeavour of strengthening public policy in India through research based on facts, the first session was conducted by Dr. Colin Irwin in conversation with Shri Yashwant Rao Deshmukh. They jointly discussed the results of the Peace Polls carried out in Jammu (including in Kashmiri Pandit camps), Kashmir Valley and Ladakh in 2008. Dr. Colin Irwin is a member of the World

Association of Public Opinion Research and a Research Fellow in the Department of Politics at the University of Liverpool. As an expert on public opinion, public diplomacy and peace processes he has advised the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) on their procedures as well. Shri Yashwant Rao Deshmukh, a member of the board of trustees at SPRF is the Founder - Chairman of C-Voter and over the years has worked as a journalist, pollster, evaluation expert, and TV news anchor.



Shri Deshmukh began the session by recalling his visit to Kashmir on being asked by the Week Magazine in 1996 to carry out peace polling. Since that was the first time opinion polling was being carried out in Kashmir, he mentioned that at that point in time 82% of the population in Kashmir Valley said that opinion polling would be rigged.



Dr Irwin explained the thorough and rigorous process of carrying out peace polls, focusing on the unique nature of peace polls, with the stakeholders of the conflict (the army, students studying in Kashmir, the Kashmiri Pandits as well as the residents of Pakistan-administered Kashmir) being active participants in helping identify key areas of concern. According to Shri Deshmukh, the document prepared post the peace polls has been the only data set in the last seventy year that has ever been created and analysed by all of Kashmir, including Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

Further, they discussed the issues of region-based discrimination in the Valley and also talked about the staticity of leadership in the last seventy years. While reviewing the polls, they outlined the differences in opinions of people from different regions and made everyone cognizant of the variety of issues faced by the people of the erstwhile state.

While talking about the effects of the step taken by the central government, he remarked that "Post abrogation of Article 370, there is a loss of Rs 15,000 crore in the tourism sector in J&K, Ladakh." Shri Deshmukh and Dr. Irwin also expressed their desire to carry out the next round of peace polling later this year to understand the difference in the ideas of the people post the abrogation of Article 370.

Special Address: Security and Border Management

Speaker: Shri Sanjeev Tripathi

Shri Sanjeev Tripathi, former Chief of the Research and Analysis Wing, focused on external threats and challenges that are hindering the developmental processes in the newly formed union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. He started his speech by briefly mentioning four important documents: Kashmir's Accession to India, UNSC Resolution on Kashmir, Simla Agreement and 1994 Parliament of India Resolution on Kashmir, and the history and relevance of these documents with respect to the events in J&K.



He spoke in length about the recent history of the erstwhile state, in particular the abrogation of Article 370 and the creation of the two union territories, and his opinion on why the incumbent government was moving in the right direction with these steps. He also mentioned that various ethnic groups and shareholders need to be involved in the decision making with the dissident leaders through the medium of newspapers and conferences, among others.

Next, he made recommendations to counter external threats, mainly focusing on Pakistan, Pakistan-sponsored terrorism and the growth of radical Islam. He added that the Indian government needs to be more assertive in the coming years, and Indian leaders and diplomats need to establish contact with citizens from different groups, even citizens that have been exiled from Pakistan. He stressed on the importance of bilateral relations between the two nations, particularly on the issue of J&K and how it should be on top of the list for the two countries, along with the problem of terrorism.

He concluded by mentioning the importance of educating people on the issue of Kashmir, how it is essentially a border dispute among the two nations and particularly affects the Kashmir valley. Finally, he engaged in an interactive session with the audience, answering questions on a variety of issues, ranging from the recent communications shutdown in the region to the recent hike in cross-border infiltration attempts.

In Conversation: Administration Challenges in the Erstwhile State and Opportunities for Better Governance in the Two New UTs

Speakers: Shri Wajahat Habibullah and Dr Pushpesh Pant

The session began with a dialogue on the possibility of discussing the road ahead for development of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh without taking into consideration the conflict-ridden history of the region. Dr Pant emphasized how the younger generation living in the Valley has grown up under the shadow of instability, making it harder to erase their memory of institutionalized conflict. The abrogation of Article 370 in August last year has further intensified their feelings of discontent with the state. In this context, it is difficult, in the opinion of the speakers, to forget the past and move forward.



Shri Habibullah, Chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities and formerly the first Chief Information Commissioner of India, spoke from years of experience as part of the state's administrative infrastructure and brought under criticism the decision of the central government to put several local leaders of the erstwhile state under house arrest. Keeping aside the technical and legal issues surrounding the decisions made in the recent past, Shri Habibullah urged the audience to recognize the turmoil in the region as an emotional issue. It is essential for Kashmiris to feel like they are an integral part of India and identify as Indians. The local narrative is replete with terminologies such as 'illegal occupation by India'. Usage of phrases such as 'portion of the state ruled by India' are also common in the mainstream narrative in the rest of the country. This, in itself, brings to the fore the essence of the conflict.

During the course of their dialogue, both Shri Habibullah and Dr Pant recognized the need to provide the region with a clean and honest administration. Subsequently, they also discussed the negative fallouts from the State Government's monopolistic hold over the processes of industrialization. The need of the hour is to facilitate the participation of Kashmiris themselves in the growth of the region

by loosening governmental control over businesses. We need to harness the merits of the local population and support the development of their entrepreneurial skills.

The session, thus, provided an excellent opportunity for those in attendance to reflect upon how a unilateral imposition of political and administrative changes in the region destabilizes the foundations of democracy and secularism. Political instability will continue to hinder investments in the region, as investors prioritize a peaceful, secure environment more than anything else. Hence, it is crucial to reconcile the objectives of national security and development with an aim to win back the trust of the Kashmiris. To fully restore democratic functioning of the administrative infrastructure in the region should be, in conclusion, the biggest priority of the government.

In Conversation: Economic Development and Opportunities for Investment in the Region

Speakers: Shri Ram Mohan Mishra and Shri Keshav Verma

The next session was headed by Shri Ram Mohan Mishra and Shri Keshav Verma. Shri Mishra, Special Secretary and Development Commissioner MSMEs, with over thirty years of experience as an Indian Administrative Service Officer and having worked in over ten fields shared his valuable discernment on the economic analysis of the state. Shri Verma, a leading expert on urban development who worked for over 30 years as a bureaucrat and as a World Bank Official and now the appointed chairman of the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Corporation, also helped in providing a constructive dialogue of the road ahead.



Borrowing from his experience of having worked in the SME sector in India, Shri Mishra gave directions for the building up of a comprehensive policy for the erstwhile state. The two bureaucrats highlighted the sectors of the state that can be utilized in boosting the economy, taking example of the apple industry in the state. Shri Keshav Verma denounced the middlemen who are instrumental in the worsening condition of the people of the state and provided a clearer understanding as to who reaped more benefits pointing out to the middlemen from Delhi who become responsible for the increasing debt traps of the local farmers. They placed maximum emphasis on facilitating inclusive growth and entrepreneurship development as well as possible opportunities for investment in the two new UTs. They also mentioned the need to prioritise the erstwhile state's natural economy.

While discussing the scope of the economy, they mentioned the presence of great potential for a paradigm change, owing to traders now being open to more business activity. At the same time, they

brought about the idea of creating a brand image for the state to attract more consumers. Shri Verma, a leading expert on development, commented on the possibility of creating a connection between the products of Jammu and Kashmir and their linkages to the state of Gujarat.

While comparing Srinagar to Geneva, they praised the linear infrastructure placing it in the same standards as that of Geneva and thereby bringing out the idea of city development in the region. Alongside, they made a case for the value of the green ecosystem present in the region but at the same time talked about our tendency to overdevelop due to the possible ignorance of the fragility of Kashmir's ecosystem. Lastly, a remark was made on the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and the need to create a conducive ecosystem to ensure the creation, growth, and survival of MSMEs.

Panel Discussion: Improving Investments and Opportunities for Small and Medium Enterprises

Speakers: Shri Vishnu Dutt, Shri KS Thyagarajan, Shri Nishant Malhotra and Shri Vinod Kumar

The panel discussion on 'Improving Investments and Opportunities for Small and Medium Enterprises' was held among Shri Vishnu Dutt from Jakson Limited, Shri KS Thyagarajan from Crystal Crop Protection, Shri Vinod Kumar from the India SME Forum and Shri Nishant Malhotra from the Start-up India division of Invest India. The panel was moderated by Ms Sitara Srinivas who currently works at the Social and Political Research Foundation.



The panel discussion saw three main segments. First, each speaker provided an overview of their sector's work in the erstwhile state and their plans for the union territories; second, questions over policy or the lack thereof and third and lastly, questions surrounding sustainability and climate change. Shri Vishnu Dutt from Jakson Limited spoke about the issues regarding availability of power in the erstwhile state and the profound potential that non-conventional, renewable sources like hydel or solar power had. He noted that this potential could not be tapped into entirely by the government alone and the corporate sector must come in to play a role.

Shri KS Thyagarajan stated similar points from Crystal Crop Protection, where he focused on the big gap between "what is expected, and what needs to be done". Highlighting the immense potential of growing crops like rice and wheat, as well as the development of active horticulture industries, he

emphasised that the role of the corporate sector was vital to enhancing cropping cycles via steps like hybridisation, agri inputs, use of high yielding variety seeds etc. He also brought up the example of PepsiCo in West Bengal's potato industry and stated that a similar model could be set up in Jammu and Kashmir.

When asked about the nature of the new industries that were to come up in the new Union Territories, Shri Vinod Kumar of the India SME forum focused on the potential of the tourism industry. Drawing parallels between Cannes in France and Davos and Switzerland, he stated that there was an opportunity to create a similar space, especially in Kashmir. Additionally, traditional industries like papier-mache and walnut wood could also be simultaneously tapped to meet the demands of the tourism industry. Shri Nishant Malhotra of Start-up India spoke about the growth of the start-up culture in the region highlighting the ways people, especially women, are using technology and AI. He also stressed on the need to create awareness, especially among students and young people.

The next segment focused on policy, where there was a more cohesive agreement between all four panellists about the need to formulate and implement a stable policy in their sectors. This included renewable energy policy and agricultural policy, a start-up awareness and policy that created an ecosystem to operate small and medium enterprises in.

The last segment tied into the broader issue of climate change and sustainability, especially considering the two union territories have seen several glaciers melting and have faced multiple natural disasters. This segment not only allowed an understanding of what the present steps are in dealing with these issues but also served as a useful conclusion to the panel, allowing each panellist, as well as the audience an understanding of what more had to be done in creating a conducive ecosystem for small and medium enterprises.

In Conversation: Reporting in and from Kashmir

Speakers: Shri David Devadas and Shri Jawahar Lal Kaul

Journalist and author, Shri David Devadas opened the session by referring to the year 1990, the beginning of Kashmir's militancy, as a year of great change not just for its society and culture, but also for journalism in J&K. In the years that followed, particularly after the opening of a journalism school in Kashmir University in 1997, a distinct narrativization took shape. As part of this, significantly different narratives were told to journalists by their local contacts in the valley, depending on whether they were from the state, from another state in India, and from another country. Shri Devadas then described the importance of understanding the differences between the idea of Kashmir in the minds of the generation of Kashmiris who grew up during the 1990s and those who grew up in the 2000s. This is required so as to get a sense of the major and minor narratives at play within Kashmir and outside Kashmir particularly since the year 2008.

It was in the year 2008, Shri Devadas opined, that certain keywords like "mass graves" and "occupation" became a part of the standardised narrative about the conflict within the minds of young Kashmiris to evoke parallels with Palestine and Sarajevo. Referring to a survey he conducted for one of his books, he mentioned that corruption is the most important issue faced by Kashmiri youth. He suggested that ending corruption should be the priority of the government post the abrogation of Article 370. This is because in regions of conflict, it is difficult to hold institutions accountable and that becomes one of the factors that drive the conflict further. He also emphasised that there is a

serious lack of data collation and dissemination on Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, particularly within the state. He suggested the development of a think tank that could undertake this task. Focusing briefly on the subject of elections and governance in the region, he identified a need for empowering multi-tiered federalism within the two new UTs taking into account the vastly different languages, cultures, and societies within the mountainous region.



Veteran Journalist Shri Jawahar Lal Kaul, taking the session forward, began with recounting his childhood years in Skardu and Muzaffarabad, both now in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Being a lifelong observer of the socio-political events of the region, Shri Kaul explained the roots of the issue of corruption in the Valley. He mentioned how corruption was never a dirty word in Kashmir, as it was an inherent part of Kashmiri society since the days of the Dogras. Under the British, the system of *baksheesh* was prevalent that brought additional income to the people of the valley. Afterwards, the government of Sheikh Abdullah inherited this corrupt system and only ended up enriching it to the point that matrimonial ads in newspapers used to openly mention the “additional income” of the prospective groom over and above regular salary.

Pointing to the issue of agitations and the reasons why many Kashmiri youth do not use democratic means to find solutions to their problems, Shri Kaul suggested that people should first enquire as to whether democracy has ever existed in Kashmir. He mentioned that from the time of Sheikh Abdullah, Kashmiris have not had an accountable democratic system which is the reason behind their present mindset. Both the speakers ended by briefly touching upon the various geo-strategic interests at play in the region since the 18th century that have influenced its internal politics and overall stability. Shri Kaul mentioned the continuing strategic importance of the Gilgit region since the days of the British empire as part of its tussle with Russia, to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) at present.

Closing Remarks

Speaker: Shri S.M. Sahai

Mr S.M. Sahai, Additional Secretary of the National Security Council Secretariat was the penultimate speaker of the day, delivering the closing remarks for Mantrana 2020. He focused on the significance and centrality of youth in any society, highlighting that Jammu and Kashmir’s significant youth population finds it more difficult than those of many other parts of the country to actualize their

aspirations. This “aspiration deficit”, according to Shri Sahai is not because Kashmiri youth is different from other youth groups in terms of aspirations. There is, however, a significant difference in access to opportunities. The challenge also lies in identifying the areas in which Kashmiri youth can contribute to the Indian economy. The GSDP of the erstwhile state is higher than many other Indian states, but unemployment remains high among educated youth. Shri Sahai thus spoke of the need to align the aspirations of the youth of the erstwhile state to that of the rest of the country, emphasizing that this could be the solution to several national and regional issues.



The next issue that Shri Sahai brought up was of the women of Jammu and Kashmir. Terming them some of the most enlightened women in the country, he simultaneously highlighted that patriarchy continues to be a significant problem curtailing their development. Through schemes targeting the issues faced by the youth and women of J&K, many current problems in the area can be successfully addressed. Instead of the rest of India forming opinions on what the erstwhile state should be like, which is a fairly common practice, there is a need instead to understand the region better. There is minimal conversation, for instance, between industries of the Indian subcontinent and the chamber of commerce of J&K. There is a need to facilitate those conversations, and building B2B and B2C contacts. Creation of economic linkages would automatically lead to, as Shri Sahai put it, “emotional linkages”

Vote of Thanks

Speaker: Shri Ram Bahadur Rai

Shri Ram Bahadur Rai, Padma Shri awardee and noted journalist and Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of Social and Political Research Foundation delivered the Vote of Thanks for Mantrana 2020. Thanking the teams of SPRF, Polstrat and CVoter, Shri Rai reiterated the essence of Mantrana - a forum for debate and dialogue, towards which the inaugural event is the first step.



He further emphasised on the need for political empowerment in the erstwhile state, including the people of Jammu and Kashmir in the political process and exploring possibilities of development and hope for the people of the region. Evoking the significance of Panchayats and local politics in building a stronger democracy, according to Shri Rai, the erstwhile state will soon be the first to achieve Mahatma Gandhi's dream of Gram Swaraj, an attempt at creating a true paradise on earth.