



LOOKING AHEAD

STRENGTHENING J&K'S ECONOMY WILL BRING PEACE

As soon as my flight took off from Srinagar after my visit to the Kashmir Valley, I remembered my trip to Indonesia two-and-a-half years ago. After my lecture on Indian culture at Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia, a student asked me how India is able to accommodate the world's second largest Muslim population.

I said the idea of India does not require any Indian to make any special effort for this. India's culture teaches values such as unity, harmony, cooperation, brotherhood, truth, non-violence, renunciation, humility, equality etc. and motivates us to move ahead with the spirit of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam."

I told them how India, with a population of 1.25 billion, was not just a country but a whole subcontinent where different customs and traditions are practised. This unique philosophy of diversity rarely seen in any other region of the world is in India.

In India our dialect changes every 50 miles. You travel a couple of hundreds of miles and you will see a different guise and language. If you go 1,000 miles away the whole lifestyle looks different.

Today, when I have returned from Kashmir after a short stay of two days, my perception has grown stronger. It was very clear after meeting students, teachers, delegations and the common people of Kashmir that everyone in the Valley is in favour of peace. Everyone wants a better future for their children and nobody wants to live under the shadow of fear. People want a promising future, a prosperous Kashmir.

I witnessed Kashmir's tolerance and pluralism in Srinagar. It has been enshrined in the shape of an ancient Shankaracharya temple dedicated to Lord Shiva at a height of 300 meters above sea level near the majestic Dal Lake in a Muslim-majority area.

The foresight of Prime Minister Narendra Modi will ensure a bright future for Kashmir. The government has promised a holistic development of Jammu and Kashmir as per the aspirations of the Kashmiri people comprising communities such as the Dogras, Kashmiri Pandits, Ladakhis, Sikhs and Chris-

tians as well as various shades of the Muslim community like Sunnis, Shias, Gujjars, Barkarwals and Paharis.

I have always believed that the entire Himalayan region is rich in a variety of resources, apart from amazing human resources. The people are innocent and hard-working. If appropriate planning and dedicated efforts are made, development can be brought about. If the basic problems in education, health and employment are resolved, the Valley will prosper in peace.

A socioeconomic change can herald a new era in the Valley. Since the partition of India in 1947, the political history of Jammu and Kashmir has been in turmoil. I have always held the view that the special status accorded to Jammu and Kashmir through Article 370 barely helped it, rather it isolated J&K from mainstream development.



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Embracing Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's policy of 'one legislation, one head, one mark,' the Union Government led by the Prime Minister took the historic decision of scrapping Article 370 and Article 35A of the constitution and decided to reorganize the state of Jammu and Kashmir by splitting it into two union territories. The scrapping of Article 370 might have withdrawn the nominal autonomy that Jammu and Kashmir enjoyed but it opened the doors of development and will rid the region of terror spread.

Unfortunately, a specific class considering itself the 'elite' set an intimidating narrative that it was impossible to remove Articles 370 or 35A and warned that if it is attempted, the unity of the country would be in danger. These anti-national forces have obstructed the development of the entire region by confusing the innocent Kashmiri youth with an atmos-

phere of chaos and violence.

Today, there is an honest attempt to create an environment of peace and goodwill in Kashmir. Last week, 45 projects of school, colleges and universities were inaugurated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Additionally a two-day teacher training programme called NISHTHA was organised. The Srinagar campus of the Indian Institute of Management, Jammu, was inaugurated and Rs 51 crore approved to operationalise this temporary campus by March 15, 2020.

I called upon the university scientists to conduct research by promoting an interdisciplinary research. Arts, culture and traditional knowledge, environmental sciences, horticulture, flora, green technologies, geology disaster planning and reduction, renewable energy, electronics, IT and biotechnology can all work together. There is a need to develop a new culture of research.

The development of the Himalayas has been close to the heart of the Prime Minister, which is reflected in his statements from time to time. In the Budget 2020, the Modi government has made a generous allocation for Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. For the overall development of the region, the government announced ₹30,757 crore for Jammu and Kashmir and ₹5,958 for Ladakh.

We are fortunate that India is respected across the world for its strong leadership. India's reputation has grown considerably. Pakistan raised the issue of Article 370 on various world platforms but it merely received embarrassment. Pakistan is finding it difficult to digest the fact that the seven decades-old Kashmir dispute has been resolved peacefully.

Our government aims to strengthen the economy of J&K, which is dependent on agriculture and services. Efforts are being made to develop the state's tourism, handicraft, sericulture, handloom, horticulture, food processing and agriculture. Our effort is to reduce the average unemployment rate of 15 per cent. I myself believe that we can create an environment of peace, prosperity, harmony, love, brotherhood and happiness in the region only by bringing back the era of progress.