

Press Note and Event Summary: Mantrana 2020

The inaugural edition of SPRF (Social and Political Research Foundation) India's annual conference, *Mantrana 2020*, was concluded at the India International Centre in New Delhi, on January 27, 2020. SPRF's Mantrana series intends to focus on development themes important for India. In the run-up to each Mantrana, the SPRF team will closely study available and credible data and discuss multiple aspects of complex challenges in India.



The 2020 edition of the conference brought together experts and stakeholders to debate and discuss, from multiple perspectives, the challenges of growth and development in the two newly formed union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. The conference saw in attendance renowned policy experts, social activists, journalists, and students from several prominent universities as well as serving government personnel and former bureaucrats.

The conference was inaugurated by young members of the audience as representatives of a generation that will be affected tomorrow by the decisions taken today. Dr Pushpesh Kumar Pant, Padma Shri Awardee 2016, and a member of the Board of Trustees of SPRF started the conference gave a welcome note to commence the proceedings of the day and provided an insight into the vision of Mantrana, as a platform for forward-looking, solutions-oriented discussions on socio-political issues facing the country. He emphasized that a non-partisan understanding of the conflict-ridden history of the erstwhile state must precede the exercise of discussing the future of the two UTs.

Honorable Union Minister of Minority Affairs, Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi was the Chief Guest at this Mantrana.



Honourable Minister Shri Naqvi participated actively in the ongoing discussions at the conference before giving a rousing keynote address. Having recently returned from the Valley, he informed the audience about the positive atmosphere of development in the region.

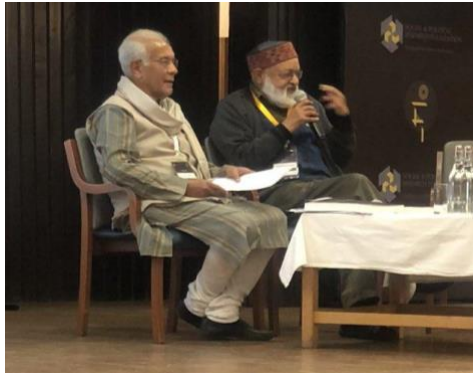
Shri Naqvi also officially launched SPRF's detailed analysis of available data, **'Jammu and Kashmir, An Analysis of the Erstwhile State: Dialogues for Development of the Two New Union Territories'**, which is an accessible repository of knowledge that showcases existing trends and policies for development in the region. This document is now available on the [SPRF website](https://www.sprf.org/).



The first session had Dr Colin Irwin, Research Fellow at the University of Liverpool, in conversation with Shri Yashwanth Rao Deshmukh, Founder-Chairman, CVoter, and a member of the Board of Trustees, SPRF. They jointly discussed the results of the Peace Polls carried out in Jammu (including Kashmiri Pandit camps), Kashmir Valley and Ladakh in 2008. Dr Irwin and Mr Rao also outlined their expectations from the next round of polling to be held later this year.

The session was followed by a special address by Shri Sanjeev Tripathi, former chief of the Research and Analysis Wing. Mr Tripathi highlighted the various security and border management issues that actively hinder the processes of development in the region. He also interacted enthusiastically with several members of the audience who wished to learn from his expertise.





Shri Wajahat Habibullah, former Chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities, in conversation with Dr Pushpesh Kumar Pant discussed in detail the administrative challenges in the erstwhile state and opportunities for better growth in the new UTs. Shri Habibullah stressed upon the need for better integration of the region with the mainland and the entrepreneurial spirit of the local population waiting to be harnessed.

In the following session, Shri Ram Mohan Mishra, Special Secretary and Development Commissioner MSME, and Shri Keshav Verma, a leading expert on urban development, talked about the economic development and opportunities for investment in the region. A panel discussion was then held on improving investment and opportunities for SMEs in the two UTs between industry specialists Shri Vishnu Dutt, Krishnappa Thyagarajan, Shri Vinod Kumar and Shri Nishant Malhotra.

Celebrated author Shri David Devadas took the stage next, joined by Shri Jawaharlal Kaul, Padma Shri Awardee 2016 and a member of the Board of Trustees, SPRF, to discuss the unique nature of, and challenges faced in reporting in and from the Valley. Shri Devadas outlined the changing narratives witnessed while documenting Kashmir over the last decade.

Concluding the conference, Shri S M Sahai, Additional Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat, addressed the audience with a reappraisal of the security situation in the region, particularly speaking about the aspirations of the young and role of women in building a strong future for the former state.

Shri Ram Bahadur Rai, Padma Shri Awardee 2015 and Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of SPRF delivered the vote of thanks, encouraging young people in the audience to engage in more meaningful ways with policy challenges in India. He also stressed the need to build a body of work that is evidence-based and research-oriented without being swayed by opinion formed from what is reported on social media.



The SPRF team has been working through its publications and social media outreach to encourage constructive dialogues for democracy. SPRF will be continuing its evidence-based research on this and other areas of public policy and will remain



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MANTRANA
2020

focused on engaging with youth - the largest voting constituency in India.

This Mantrana was organized in partnership with Polstrat and CVoter.

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