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Another youth rally in Valley — this time for jobs as Special Police Officers

WHILE THE rest of the Valley remained shut, hundreds of youths stood in long queues outside the District Police Lines (DPL) in Pulwama and Anantnag districts on Tuesday and Wednesday, awaiting their turn for physical tests for recruitment as Special Police Officers (SPOs).

According to official data, 26,553 applications have been received from candidates across Kashmir.

The recruitment rally began soon after the state government put out an advertisement for SPOs in the first week of August, when the Valley was witnessing massive protests over the death of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani.

While the advertisement did not announce the number of posts, the Ministry of Home Affairs on Wednesday approved the recruitment of 10,000 SPOs, in addition to the over 25,000 SPOs in the state police force at present.

Addressing a press conference in Srinagar last month, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh and Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti had also put the figure at 10,000.

This is the first time that the government has announced a recruitment drive for SPOs in the Valley. In the past, they were appointed as per requirement.

While an SPO was earlier paid a monthly salary of Rs 3,000, according to the new advertisement, they will get an initial monthly salary of Rs 5,000, which will be increased to Rs 5,300 after one year, and Rs 6,000 after three years.

The figures show that 4,916 applications have been received from the four districts in south Kashmir at the epicentre of the current protests — Anantnag (2,190), Kulgam (1,258), Pulwama (774) and Shopian (694).

The highest number of applications has come from Kupwara district in north Kashmir, with over 8,500 candidates applying for the posts. There are about 3,800 applicants from Baramulla and 226 from Bandipore.

In the three districts of central Kashmir, about 4,000 applications have been received from Budgam, 1,600 from Ganderbal and 1,363 from Srinagar.

“We are doing this (recruitment) rally and a few hundred youths come each day,” said DIG, South Kashmir, Nitish Kumar. “More and more youths are coming to us now, saying that they couldn’t come earlier because of curfew and shutdown.”

In fact, the government extended the last date for receiving applications from August 30 to September 6.

“It (number of applications) certainly picked up after the last date was extended,” said a senior police officer. “But when we compare it with past recruitment drives, it is far less. We used to have a difficult time in controlling the crowd, and there would be hundreds competing for each post. This time the ratio is less than three candidates for a single post,” he said.