

## **Hindustan Times**

### **Despite anti-India sentiment, rush for police jobs in Kashmir**

Farooq\* holds a grudge against Indian security forces for the rights violations they allegedly commit in the Valley, but he was seen standing in queue at the district police lines on Monday morning. The 20-year-old Ganderbal resident has applied for the post of a special police officer (SPO) with the state law-enforcement agency.

“Unemployment is the main reason I have applied for this position,” says Farooq, who has a graduation degree in arts. He has an older sister, a younger brother and elderly parents, and he bears the responsibility of supporting them.

“The Azaadi movement has its own place, and the harsh realities of life have their own,” says Farooq.

The government had floated advertisements for recruitment to the post of SPO, a temporary position in the police force with a starting salary of Rs 5,000. According to official figures, at least 26,000 youngsters have applied for jobs in the Kashmir police force.

In the first phase of the fitness test held on Monday, applicants from Ganderbal and Tullamulla tehsils were summoned for document verification and a physical examination.

A senior police officer overseeing the test admitted that while many of the applicants were said to have participated in anti-government protests over the last few months, such people would be disqualified through a rigorous verification process.

In the queue was a post-graduate degree holder from IGNOU, who went on to explain why thousands applied for the job of SPO even though pro-secessionist sentiments are widespread among the Valley’s youth population. “There are many here who fought for the Azaadi movement, and they are well aware of the atrocities committed. However, at the same time, they need to support their families. The state government has not done too well at providing employment to the Kashmiri youth,” he says.

As the applicants stand in queue to submit their documents, a cameraman tries to take a photograph. But the youngsters immediately hide their faces behind their files.

Why? They feel that if their images are published in newspapers, harassment by anti-India protesters in their localities may soon follow. The applicants don't speak much to reporters either.

Kashmiri policemen walk a tight rope, attacked by militants and despised by civilians. "Yes, there is a threat to our safety. Even this morning, I came with my file tucked inside my jacket. This job would require me to take on my own people, but how else can I support my family?" asks another applicant.