

## **The Times of India**

### **J&K youths defy Geelani call, line up for police jobs**

SRINAGAR: In a clear defiance of Hurriyat hardliner Syed Ali Shah Geelani's call to Kashmiris against joining police service in the valley, thousands of youths have opted for the job of special police officer (SPO after Union home minister Rajnath Singh's announcement of an employment package for 10,000 youths in the J&K police.

More than 5,000 youths filed applications and appeared for fitness tests for the post of SPO in various district deputy commissioners' offices across the valley, sources said. SPOs are engaged on a small monthly salary of Rs 6,000 — raised from Rs 3,000 a month since January this year. Initially the SPO post was given to surrendered militants who worked with the police's special operations group (SOG). But, over time, the SOG was disbanded and around 24,000 SPOs were merged with the J&K police.

As former militants, SPOs have sound knowledge of militancy and have proved to be assets for the Army, police and paramilitary forces. Geelani had said in August that the government's decision to recruit SPOs was aimed at reviving the notorious 'Ikhwan culture' in the state and warned youths against taking up the job. Ikhwanis were surrendered militants from various terrorist outfits and notorious for grave violations of human rights. Subsequently, Ikhwan was discouraged by New Delhi with improvement in the Kashmir situation post-2002.

Interestingly, the highest number of youths who've applied for the SPO post are in four districts of South Kashmir: Anantnag, Pulwama, Kulgam and Shopian, considered the hotbed of the ongoing unrest. Around 5,000 youths have applied in South Kashmir, with the highest applications seen in Anantnag. No less than 1,363 youths filed applications for the post of SPO in Srinagar district.