

DNA India

Over 12,000 youth from Kashmir Valley line up for army recruitment

Yasir Ahmad Chahuan, 18, looks frail and frightened. Puffing and wheezing in a corner at the High Grounds here, Yasir took a big risk by masquerading as a labourer to crisscross the vulnerable areas of South Kashmir to reach the venue of the Indian army's recruitment rally here with a hope to become the proud soldier of this country.

"I started at 2am from my village on foot. After covering 15 kilometres, I saw a vehicle coming from the opposite direction. The driver stopped and asked me where I was heading. I said I am going for the recruitment rally. He said don't go ahead as stone-pelting was going on there," Yasir told dna.

Son of a poor shepherd, Yasir, who had fallen in love with olive greens ever since he was a child, did not give up and returned home to hire a bike for Rs 500 and set off his journey to reach the venue.

"I wanted to take this risk. We are poor people. My father is a shepherd who grazes the cattle of other farmers to eke out his living. I am mentally prepared to become a soldier to serve this country," he said.

Welcome to South Kashmir, the epicentre of the current unrest in the Valley. More than 84 people have died and over 10,000 have suffered injuries since the unrest began after the killing of Hizbul Mujahedeen leader Burhan Wani on July 8. Anantnag district, being the worst hit, has topped the list of casualties in this unrest.

Yet the Indian army is the biggest attraction for the restive youth of south Kashmir who are often being stereotyped as stone throwers and anti nationals.

More than 12000 youth had registered online for the job of soldiers in the valley. Six thousand candidates had registered online for the five districts of South Kashmir alone. On the first day of four day recruitment rally held here, over 425 candidates turned up for necessary tests for the job of soldiers.

"Initially, we had planned the rally for July but because of the situation prevailing that time we had to postpone it. We brought it down to

September. I think with the present response it was a good decision under the prevailing situation," said Brigadier JS Samyal, deputy director general, recruitment, Indian army.

Given the prevailing situation and lack of transport due to the shutdowns and curfew, all the registered candidates could not make it to the venue on Wednesday.

"None the less 425 candidates have made it. It was definitely a challenge to organize and conduct the rally. But because of the civil government and the army's involvement we have been able to conduct this rally very well", said Brigadier Samyal.

Passion and enthusiasm was running high among the youth who braved azadi protests to reach the venue for the rally. Such was the zeal that youth who could not make it in the running test struggled and pleaded before the instructors to allow them entry for the second round.

Even one of the youth had to be whisked away when he missed the finishing line by a fraction of second. However instructors did not allow him given the tough rules and regulations.

"I want to become the soldier not only to serve my country but to feed my family as well. I have traveled a long distance to reach here with a hope that I will make it inshallah (God willing)", said Mohammad Iqbal, another aspirant.