

JAMMU TO GET VILLAGE DEFENCE GROUPS

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People's wrath: A protest in Srinagar in 2015 demanding the disbanding of the erstwhile Village Defence Committees. PTI | Photo Credit: PTI

The Union government will re-establish village defence committees (VDCs) in Jammu to fight militancy, provide hi-tech weapons and ensure equal salary to its members, top leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have said in Jammu.

"A meeting was called by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi recently with us. It was decided that VDCs will be re-established with a changed nomenclature. They will be called 'village defence groups' now. We expect a formal order soon from the Union Home Ministry. We have demanded hi-tech weapons for them so that Pakistan's designs can be foiled," J&K BJP general secretary and Kashmir in-charge Sunil Sharma said in Jammu.

The VDCs were constituted in 1995 in 10 districts of the Jammu region to fight militants in far-off places.

Around 26,567 locals were recruited into them. Most of the VDCs were disbanded after its members were accused of violence.

CPI(M) leader M.Y. Tarigami said, "The move is bound to prove counter-productive. These committees have faced accusations of gross abuses in J&K. Their role is shadowed by their involvement in rampant human rights abuses."

Former Chief Minister and People Democratic Party chief Mehbooba Mufti criticised the move as "another addition to a slew of decisions that contradict the Government of India's much-touted normalcy claims. It will also create a wedge between communities."

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