

New interlocutor is known as a dove

On a mission: Former IB Director Dineshwar Sharma with Finance Minister Arun Jaitley PTI

Former Intelligence Bureau (IB) chief Dineshwar Sharma, who was appointed as the government's special representative to carry forward a dialogue with all sections of the people in Jammu and Kashmir, has said that he would ensure that "normalcy returns to the State as soon as possible."

Speaking to *The Hindu*, soon after his name was announced at a press conference by Home Minister Rajnath Singh, Mr. Sharma said he was approached by the Centre two days ago. A top government source said Mr. Sharma was chosen as he is known to have "moderate views and is committed to dialogue."

"I hope I can rise to the expectations of the people of India. Would like to see that normalcy returns to State as soon as possible," Mr. Sharma said.

Crucial meeting

The source said that on October 17, National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval, Home Secretary Rajiv Gauba, Director, IB, Rajiv Jain and other senior officials met J&K Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti at her Akbar Road residence in Delhi to discuss a new political process in the State.

"The officials went over three previous processes of dialogue held in the Valley — the roundtable discussion by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the talks held by former Home Minister P.Chidambaram and the report of the three interlocutors appointed in 2010," said the source. The committee discussed various names. "It was felt that a politician may be too public a figure. The name of a top official of a key investigating agency was also considered. They finally decided on tried, tested and trusted Dineshwar Sharma," the source said.

Asked if Kashmiris would be apprehensive of opening up to a retired police officer who has also been the intelligence chief, Mr. Sharma said, "I have been interacting with all kinds of people when I was in IB... it never occurred [to me] that people are scared to talk to me."

Official sources that there was no restriction on talking to separatists.

Mr. Sharma, a 1979-batch IPS officer of the Kerala cadre, was appointed as Director, IB, in December 2014 for a fixed two-year term. Post- retirement, he was appointed as an interlocutor for talks with Assam-based insurgent groups in June. He also heads a committee to restructure the Home Ministry.

The Centre was keen on giving an extension to Mr. Sharma as IB chief, but he turned down the offer. Mr. Sharma has worked with Mr. Doval when the latter was IB chief. He headed the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau of Uttar Pradesh when Home Minister Rajnath Singh was the Chief Minister.

(With inputs from

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