

**Dineshwar Sharma as J&K interlocutor can build on the gains achieved in recent times**

Security forces can encounter militants, not engage with people and adversaries the way politicians do. In that sense, the Centre's decisions to appoint an interlocutor, albeit not a politician, for dialogue with all stakeholders in Kashmir is a positive step.

Votaries of dialogue had for long sought a blend of a military and political approach to the Kashmir imbroglio. The move half meets the call but is well-timed. Kashmir hasn't returned to normalcy. It's experiencing nevertheless a relative calm that can be strengthened by reaching out to alienated groups and formations.

It's not clear whether the Hurriyat will be a port of call for former IB chief [Dineshwar Sharma, the interlocutor](#). The possibility isn't ruled out, what with Home Minister Rajnath Singh leaving the decision to him.

In fact, J&K police chief Shesh Paul Vaid had the other day made out a case for a political initiative to build on the security force's success in taking out 160 militants this year. A repeat of a Burhan Wani kind of trigger, he had feared, could negate the gains of the past months.

Among those eliminated were Abu Dujana and Bashir Lashkari of the LeT. People turned out for their funerals, but there was no outrage of the kind that followed Wani's death.

The dip in stone-pelting is attributed to the NIA probe against the Hurriyat operatives accused of funding mobs. In reality that's just one factor in the counter-militancy story in which the police has been a key protagonist.

But from where should the peace overture start and how? As Mr Vaid suggested, the Opposition should refrain from eulogising stone-pelters as freedom fighters. His allusion was to Farooq Abdullah's response to the prime minister exhorting the Kashmiri youth to choose between "terrorism and tourism".

At the same time, the Centre and the PDP-BJP regime in J&K would be well advised to vigorously implement pro-people elements in their common agenda of governance. That will build the ambience for talks by strengthening a peace that's still tenuous.

Besides, the Centre, through its points-person, should attempt at an understanding with pro-India parties like the National Conference and the Congress to not be expedient on issues requiring political consensus. Much of that will also depend on the Centre's own sincerity on having all stakeholders on board.

For their part, the Opposition too should, in the interest of Kashmir and the country, lead from the front — rather than being led by popular sentiments. Only a united polity can repair the political and emotional chasm in Kashmir.

**END**