

RISE ON NATIONAL STAGE

For decades, cricket in Jammu & Kashmir existed on the fringes of India's domestic landscape, overshadowed by infrastructural constraints, limited exposure, and political uncertainty. Today, that narrative is changing steadily and convincingly. The recent performances of the Jammu & Kashmir cricket team in national tournaments mark not just sporting success, but a broader story of resilience, opportunity, and institutional reform.

J&K's rise is rooted in consistency rather than isolated brilliance. The team has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to compete with established domestic sides, often upsetting traditional powerhouses. This progress reflects improved player fitness, sharper technical skills, and a growing tactical maturity. More importantly, it signals that talent from the region, long recognised but under-utilised, is finally being given platforms to flourish.

A crucial factor behind this transformation has been enhanced infrastructure and administrative support. The construction of modern cricket stadiums, improved practice facilities, and increased exposure to high-quality competition have narrowed the gap between J&K and elite domestic teams. Regular participation in national tournaments has allowed young players to adapt to pressure, conditions, and professional expectations—an essential step in high-performance sport.

Equally significant is the emergence of players from diverse districts across both Jammu and Kashmir, breaking the earlier concentration of talent from limited urban centres. This widening talent base underscores the impact of grassroots programmes, district-level competitions, and structured selection processes. The message is clear: when access expands, excellence follows.

The rise of J&K cricket also carries social and psychological importance. Sport, particularly cricket, offers a powerful avenue for youth engagement in a region often defined by challenges.

The Arjun tree: Nature's gift to wellness

PROF. DR R.D. GUPTA

In India, Arjun tree is mainly confined to Sub-Himalayan regions, covering the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. It is also found in sub-mountainous areas of Sivaliks of these states, popularly known as Kandi belts including Punjab and Haryana having an altitude ranging 300 m to 1000 m above mean sea level. West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Deccan Plains of Southern parts of the Country are the other areas where Arjun tree is frequently grown. Apart from India, where this tree also stands grown are Myanmar (Burma) and Sri Lanka where it grows in moist places.

The Rigveda and Atharva Veda state that Ayurvedic Physicians in India used the bark of the tree in heart ailments. Apart from this, Arjun tree is also found to prevent other diseases.

**Medicinal values:** Vagabhatta, the famous Ayurvedic physician, was the first to record its use in heart diseases. Charaka data have described it as a tonic and as an astringent. It is also considered useful to arrest bleeding and urinary infections and to dissolve urinary calculi.

Other rare uses include healing fractures and contusions, diarrhoea and dysentery. An ointment made out of the bark and honey is proved very useful in curing acne cases.

The juice of the fresh leaves has been found useful in ear ache.

Ashes of the barks relive pain from the scor-



pion stings and decoction of the herb heals chronic non healing ulcers. The powder of the bark is even considered to have aphrodisiac properties, if taken with milk over a long period of time. However, unfortunately this remedy has not been well proved and there is not much data available about its efficacy. Ayurvedic physicians have been using it in all sorts of heart diseases and claim marked success in angina, palpitations and valve diseases.

**Homeopathic uses:**

Homeopathic research reveals that the bark possesses large quantities of calcium, magnesium, aluminium, an astringent and a compound known as Arjunimine, Arjunetin,

essential oils and colouring matter.

**Botanical description:**

Arjun tree is not a major component of the forest vegetation, especially in Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir State. It is planted as avenue tree and is very easy of its cultivation from nursery stocks. Arjun tree is a magnificent tree of great economic and environmental value. Arjun tree is being grown up to 1000 m above mean sea level in the Sivaliks and Himalayan foot hills of Jammu. Arjun tree produces lot of quantities of fruits annually which mostly go waste. Fruit is winged edible and sour in taste. Leaves of the Arjun tree are opposite oblong - elliptic. Flowers are sessile.

**Cultural Practices:**

**Climate requirement:** Arjun tree naturally grows in subtropical and tropical moist regions of the country.

**Soil requirement:** The tree prefers alluvial loamy or black cotton soils. These soils must be fertile and should have good drainage and water holding capacity. River bank soils, streams, and rivines are the natural habitat of the Arjun tree. It is point to mention that the Arjun tree also survives the best in open, sunny and low rainfall areas.

**Planting Material and Time of Sowing:** Propagation has been found to give best results when the seeds are used. The seeds should be sown in nursery beds during early summer usually just after collection.

Germination starts in about 8-12 days after sowing and is completed in about 7 to

8 weeks. The germinated seeds may be transplanted in poly bags filled with sand, clay and manure in equal parts. Alternatively the pretreated fruits are directly put in polythene bags during April, with half of the fruit above the soil. Pre germinated seeds are preferred to save time and ensure very good germination. The seedlings are sensitive to drought during the germination stage as well as during growth stage.

**Planting in field:** The field is well prepared by ploughing and planking, which should be well leveled. Dug the pits of size 45 cm x 45 cm at a spacing of 6m x 6m. About 10 kg farm yard manures are added per pit and thoroughly mixed with soil as basal dose. About 10 months old saplings are transplanted in the pits during August at a spacing of 6m x 6m as stated above.

**Interculture and Irrigation:** Fields should be kept free from weeds which should be done by hand weeding. Irrigation is recommended at 15 days intervals during summer.

**Spraying of biopesticide Azadirachtin controls the pests**

**Harvesting and yield:** The Arjun tree starts flowering from 6 year after planting. The bark of the tree is removed from well grown tree preferably 10 years on wards.

**Yield:** About 500 kg dried bark can be obtained from 1 ha of plantation every year from the 10th year onwards.

(The writer is Ex-Associate Dean cum Chief Scientist KVK SKUAST-J)

Manufactured Sand-An Alternative option to River Sand

H. L. LANGEH

River Sand or Natural sand is a readily available construction material but its resource is very scarce corresponding to the demand in a Himalayan region like the JK UT. Rivers produce Exclusive Sand Deposits (ESD's) in rare geological environments but they generate and transport the earth particles of diverse nature derived from the variety of rocks disintegrated during the course of their journey from the higher reaches to the plain areas. These particles form sand, silt, clay, gravels, pebbles and cobbles with boulders in varying proportions, collectively known as River Borne Deposits (RBD), commonly termed as River Bed Material (RBM) which constitute an economically significant material, used for building infrastructure.

In Jammu region, the Basantar River and its tributaries namely Rui Khad and Devak River in Nudand Koulpur localities of Samba District are the major producer of sand resources that not only cater the domestic demand of the home district but also support the needs of adjoining districts like Jammu & Kathua and distant located districts like Ramban and Rajouri. Quality sand located in Nikki Tawi around Badyal Brahma village in R. S Pura Tehsil and in Aik nallah flowing through various parts of Bishnah Tehsil form the known sources in Jammu District. The exclusive sand producing sites have also been earmarked in Chenab River flowing through Kanthan areas of Reasi District are very productive. Many more, economically potential sites could have been identified and mapped in the adjoining areas which remained unutilized because of inaccessibility issues. Considering the economic potential and the demand, possibility of approach issues can be explored by devising the mechanically engineered design such as pulley system or by constructing these specific roads for retrieving the considerable reserves of sand after conducting proper techno economic feasibility studies. Similar kind of exclusive sand deposits identified in the Mighty Chenab River flowing in the jurisdiction of Doda offer good resources for meeting the needs of constructional projects by relaxing the means and modes of extraction within the statutory framework. Noticeably, some sites are also mappable in the Chenab River flowing in the jurisdiction of



Akhnoor which need attention for conductance of proper mapping and feasibility studies and can prove to be very productive.

Normally, by means of water action which act as natural transportation agent, all the sand deposits are easily replenishable after the good spells of seasonal monsoons provided these are exploited within the guided principles of existing Sand Mining Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Environment Forest & Climate Change (MOEF & CC) and the instructions imparted from time to time for proper conservation of the resources while maintaining environmental norms. But the limited sand resources are being exploited beyond the permissible limits as compared to the replenishable quantities observed in the rivers due to the exponential growth in the infrastructural activities in the JK UT during the recent years despite the stringent measures imposed by the regulatory authorities. The fact remains that the state of over exploitation of the river bed resources results in the general degradation

of river environments. Amongst the most common adverse impacts of over extraction of river sand and gravels include slowing of ground water levels, erosion of nearby land or river bank, and destruction of aquatic life essential for maintaining ecosystems.

Contrary to the statutory environmental norms, the continuous demand of sand and gravel is on the rise in view of the envisaged infrastructure development activities. Due to rapid development strides and upcoming of larger number of constructional projects in the JK UT such as widening of National Highways, Ring Road, Delhi-Katra Expressway, Railway Construction Works, Border Road Organization, PMGSY road projects, the prestigious AIIMS and other projects of local importance the demand of minor minerals and sand and other building materials has enormously been increased. Imposition of blanket ban on the extraction of sand and gravel would be impractical which can lead to shortage crisis of the construction material and would eventually halt the

process of development in the UT. A well processed Manufactured Sand as partial or full replacement to river sand is the need of the hour as a long-term solution, which has already gained prominence in some of the southern States. Amongst, the M-Sand producing states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, the Karnataka state takes lead which produces 20 million metric tons annually and have 164 manufacturing units.

M-Sand is produced by crushing of rocks, quarry stones to a stipulate size of 150 microns. M-Sand is an artificial sand produced from crushing hard rocks into small sand sized angular shaped particles, washed and finely graded to be used as construction aggregate. It is a superior alternative to River Sand for construction purposes. In order to arrive at the required grain size, existing coarser hard rock deposits are crushed in a series of crushers and the crushed material is segregated in different fractions as suited to various construction activities. The sand obtained through this process is further refined by removing fine particles and impurities through sieving and washing. The literature review revealed that the M-Sand has higher concrete strength compared to river sand. M sand concrete has a marginally higher bond strength, over those of river sand. It has zero silt. Since M-Sand is free of impurities such as clay, dust and silt and has denser particle packing than natural sand particles thereby reducing the voids in aggregate and hence saves cement requirement in concrete production.

The source rocks or raw material used in the M-Sand includes Granites, Gneisses, Basalt, Trap rocks, Quartzite and other suitable constituent rock that conforms to the specifications depending upon its chemical characteristics. The J&K, having been located in Himalayan Region, is endowed with huge potential of such rocks that can be used for M-Sand production. If such mineral resource is properly developed and utilized it can not only meet the domestic needs but has the capacity to export the finished products to the neighbouring states like Delhi, Punjab and Haryana thereby generating the revenue manifold. These source rocks are identifiable in Doda, Kishtwar, Ramban, Kathua, Rajouri, Reasi, Udhampur and Poonch in Jammu region; and Anantnag, Badgam, Kulgam, Kupwara,

Baramulla in Kashmir region.

Expectedly, by putting the M-Sand practices on the analogy of other states we can reduce the dependence of river sand and allied building material and save the rivers and its surrounding environments from degradation. Usage of M-Sand can drastically reduce the cost since like river sand, it does not contain impurities and wastages is nil since it is made with modern technology and machinery. Once the M-sand becomes more popular in the construction industry of JK UT, the demand for river sand and illegal sand mining would come down. Thus, for having a flagship project in the Mining Sector, in JK UT, the following suggestions are made for breakthrough in the envisaged endeavour:

- Survey and Mapping of the rock resources in the entire UT of JK.
- Introducing pre-embedded mining blocks, where essential clearances (environmental, mining plans) are secured before auction thereby allowing immediate operation of mining blocks for ready availability of raw material to the envisaged M-Sand Units.
- Commencement of Research and Development initiative to decide the utility of the rock sources.
- Handholding with the States who has already industrialized the mining of rock sources for operation of M-Sand Units.
- Formulation of a separate M-Sand Policy in the UT.
- Reduction on royalty for M-sand units to promote the production of M-sand and business enterprise.
- Extending Loan facility for purchase of Machinery and Special Industrial Incentive to the unemployed educated aspirant youths for start-ups.
- Reservation of few blocks for M-sand plants only as end user category.
- Dedication of Single Window System for ambitious Project Proponents for seeking essential clearances from the stake holding organization.
- Encouraging the use of Manufactured sand in Public Construction Works, if possible, shall make mandatory to use Manufactured sand.

(The author is a Former Joint Director, Geology & Mining, J&K, UT)

The Fiscal Compass: Navigating Jammu & Kashmir's Youth Crisis toward a New Horizon

ANKIT PATEL

On February 6, 2026, as Chief Minister and Finance Minister Omar Abdullah rose to present the ₹1,13,767 crore budget for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the atmosphere in the Legislative Assembly was one of heavy anticipation. Outside the hall, a generation of educated, digital-native, yet increasingly anxious youth looked toward the fiscal compass for a sign of direction. For decades, the narrative of Jammu and Kashmir's economy has been one of volatility and unmet expectations. However, the 2026-27 budget represents a bold, if controversial, attempt to shift the gears from a government-dependent economy to an investment-led growth engine. But beyond the staggering spreadsheets and the 9.5% projected GDP growth lies a human story, one that is defined by the struggle between the Street Vendor with a PhD syndrome and the new Nano-enterprise hope.

To understand the weight of this budget, one must look at the story of Ishrat, a 26-year-old postgraduate in Biotechnology from Anantnag. Just eighteen months ago, Ishrat's reality mirrored the alarming statistics cited in recent research. Despite her academic excellence, she found herself among the 35.3% of urban youth in the region who are unemployed at a rate double the national average. "I

had the degree, but the doors were locked, Ishrat recalls. In Kashmir, if you aren't in a government job, you are often seen as unemployed. Ishrat's turning point came through Mission YUVA (Yuva Udyami Vikas Abhiyan), a cornerstone of the government's youth strategy. Breaking the taboo of government-job-only aspirations, she applied for a ₹5 lakh loan under the Nano-enterprise model. With hand-holding from a Small Business Development Unit, she established a small-scale soil-testing lab catering to local apple orchardists. Today, Ishrat is not just self-employed; she employs two other graduates. Ishrat is one of the 85,000 success stories from the 2025-26 fiscal year, but she remains an outlier in a region where the Graduate Unemployment Rate has touched a staggering 46%.

The 2026-27 budget is strategically bifurcated. On one hand, it is a Capex heavy document. The government has channeled the entire ₹3,000 crore increase in the net budget into Capital Expenditure, taking the total to ₹33,127 crore. This is a clear signal: the state is betting on infrastructure roads, biotech parks, and Unity Malls to create the ecosystem that Ishrat and her peers need to thrive.

For the youth of J&K, sports have always been more than a game, they are a bridge to the mainstream. The 2026-27 allocation of ₹155 crore for

Sports and Youth Affairs reflects a shift toward modernization. The proposed Digital Athlete Ecosystem will track performance via unique IDs and dashboards. This isn't just about playing; it's about creating professional pathways. When J&K athletes won 11 gold medals at the 69th National School Games, they proved the talent exists; the budget now provides the "floodlighting and high-performance centers" to turn that talent into a career.

Perhaps the most debated aspect of Omar Abdullah's budget is the mandate for industrial units to prioritize local hiring. The policy is simple: if you take government-subsidized land or electricity, you must hire J&K's youth. Critics, however, point to a structural reality. Most regional industries are small-scale and struggle with supply chain disruptions. Industry bodies like the FCIK have cheered the "visionary blueprint," but they also warn that symbolic compliance is a risk. Without a robust corporate presence, can a "mandate" really solve the 32% unemployment crisis? Research by the Jammu and Kashmir Policy Institute (JKPI) suggests that until the services sector which contributes 62% to the GDP is fully integrated with modern skill-sets like AI and digital content creation, the brain drain will continue.

While the budget looks forward, it does not forget the scars of the past.

The sponsorship scheme for 6,000 orphan children, providing ₹4,000 per month via DBT, is a compassionate acknowledgement of the region's history. Combined with the increase in the State Marriage Assistance Scheme to ₹75,000 and the expansion of the Ladli Beti scheme, the 2026-27 budget functions as a social security document for those the economy might otherwise leave behind.

Furthermore, the Street Vendor with a PhD phenomenon is a haunting reminder that a Nano-enterprise loan of ₹5 lakh may not satisfy the aspirations of a research scholar. The government's challenge is to ensure that Mission YUVA doesn't just create shopkeepers, but also innovators.

The Jammu and Kashmir Budget 2026-27 is a high-stakes gamble on the region's youth. It moves away from the old model of buying peace through government handouts and toward earning prosperity through entrepreneurship and digital literacy. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's fiscal compass is pointed in the right direction, but the success of this budget will not be measured by the ₹1,13 lakh crore outlay. It will be measured by how many Ishrats can transition from job-seekers to job-creators. It will be measured by whether the Digital Athlete makes it to the international stage and whether the AAY student becomes a scientist.

Strike Dilutes Workers' Rights

S. P. TIWARI



The implementation of the four new Labour Codes marks a significant step toward improving the ease of living for India's vast workforce, particularly those in the informal and unorganised sectors. These reforms aim to ensure floor-level minimum wages for all workers, without the hurdles of complex industry classifications. By introducing mandatory identity cards for every worker, the Codes seek to empower them with direct access to social security benefits. Regular and compulsory health check-ups will help safeguard workers' well-being, enabling them to lead healthier and more productive lives. Furthermore, a time-bound grievance redressal mechanism promises to reduce the mental stress and uncertainty faced by aggrieved workers. Collectively, these measures represent a progressive framework focused on dignity, security, and inclusive growth for Indian workers.

However, despite these positive provisions, a section of politically motivated central trade unions frequently resorts to strikes, often without fully considering their adverse impact. Such strikes result in significant wage losses, particularly for the nearly 380 million workers in the informal economy, who depend on daily earnings for survival. Instead of resolving their issues, frequent strikes tend to weaken the process of constructive and rigorous collective bargaining, thereby undermining the possibility of achieving fair and balanced outcomes for workers and employers alike.

Over time, the repeated call for strikes has proved to be both ineffective and counterproductive. The frequency of such actions has led to widespread fatigue among workers, causing an overwhelming majority to disengage or ignore

these calls. In some cases, a small section of workers is compelled to participate in strikes against their own will, further eroding the moral legitimacy and collective strength of these movements. Ultimately, this trend diminishes the overall impact of labour welfare measures and weakens solidarity within the workforce.

The broader consequences of strikes extend beyond the workplace. Industrial production suffers, daily commuters face severe inconvenience, and the livelihoods of street vendors, domestic workers, and small service providers are disrupted. For these workers, even a single day's loss of income can trigger a livelihood crisis, forcing them to exhaust their limited savings and plunge deeper into economic insecurity.

In emerging economies like India, trade unions must prioritise dialogue, negotiation, and constructive engagement with employers and the government. A model based on sustained bargaining and cooperative problem-solving can resolve workers' concerns without disrupting manufacturing, employment, and overall economic growth. In the current context, Indian central trade unions, which are gradually losing their influence, need to introspect and adapt to more effective and forward-looking approaches followed elsewhere.

Indian workers should be organised with a holistic vision that emphasises ease of living, social security, and positive engagement. Resolving disputes through dialogue rather than confrontation will ensure that the operational process remains uninterrupted and the engine of national growth continues to run smoothly. Only through such balanced and pragmatic strategies can workers' rights be genuinely strengthened and protected in the long run.

(The author is National General Secretary, Trade Union Co-ordination Centre (TUCC))