

PM-Rahat Scheme: A Lifeline for Vulnerable

The Government of India has introduced the PM-Rahat (Prime Minister - Relief for Assistance to the Vulnerable) scheme as part of its broader social welfare initiatives aimed at providing immediate financial relief to the country's most vulnerable sections. In an era marked by rising economic uncertainty, global price fluctuations, and unforeseen crises, such targeted interventions are vital to ensure that citizens at the grassroots receive timely support. The PM-Rahat scheme primarily focuses on providing direct monetary assistance to households affected by natural calamities, pandemics, and other emergencies that disrupt livelihoods. By channeling funds directly to beneficiaries, the scheme not only reduces bureaucratic delays but also empowers citizens to make decisions suited to their immediate needs. In addition, the program underscores the government's commitment to inclusive development by ensuring that no section of society, particularly those in remote and marginalized communities, is left behind. One of the key strengths of the PM-Rahat initiative is its integration with digital platforms. Leveraging tools such as the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) and Aadhaar-linked transfers, the scheme ensures transparency, reduces leakages, and guarantees that the relief reaches the intended recipients. Such measures are particularly crucial in rural and semi-urban regions, where access to traditional banking channels may be limited, and bureaucratic hurdles often delay timely assistance.

Critics may argue that relief schemes can sometimes foster dependency or that the funds are insufficient to address long-term challenges. While there is merit in emphasizing sustainable development, it is equally important to recognize that schemes like PM-Rahat are not designed as permanent income sources. Instead, they act as a stopgap measure, providing immediate assistance during crises while larger development policies—such as employment generation programs, skill development initiatives, and rural infrastructure projects—work to create long-term resilience.

Another notable aspect of the PM-Rahat scheme is its focus on inclusivity and accountability. Special provisions ensure that women-headed households, differently-abled individuals, and other vulnerable groups receive priority. Moreover, monitoring mechanisms have been built into the program to track fund utilization, assess the impact, and make mid-course corrections. This approach reflects a shift from mere handouts to responsible and data-driven welfare governance. The relevance of PM-Rahat has been particularly highlighted during recent natural disasters and economic disruptions. For instance, floods, cyclones, and sudden spikes in commodity prices have pushed several households to the brink of financial distress. In such contexts, the timely deployment of PM-Rahat assistance has helped families meet essential expenses, sustain their livelihoods, and recover from shocks without falling into debt traps. However, for the scheme to achieve its full potential, it is imperative to complement it with awareness campaigns. Citizens must be informed about eligibility criteria, application procedures, and grievance redressal mechanisms to ensure that no deserving household is excluded due to lack of information. Coordination with local authorities, panchayats, and civil society organizations can play a crucial role in this regard. In conclusion, the PM-Rahat scheme exemplifies proactive governance aimed at protecting the most vulnerable during times of crisis. While it cannot replace long-term developmental strategies, it serves as an essential safety net that upholds the principles of equity, transparency, and social justice.

Nurturing Faith in a Spring Evening

■ SANJAY ROHMETRA

In the city of temples the transition into the month of March is marked by more than just the arrival of spring; it is heralded by a strong sense of faith coming alive. As the city prepares for the sacred days of ensuing Navratri, we all feel strong attraction toward the Kali Mata Temple—the ancient heart of the Bahu Fort. This is not merely a visit to a shrine; it is an re-anchoring of our identity, a journey to the Bawe Wali Mata who has stood as the divine protector of this region and Dogras for centuries.

Perched majestically on the rugged cliffs overlooking the Tawi River, the fort is a masterpiece in its historical setting. Originally established by Raja Bahu Lochan the brother of Jambu Lachan—the legendary 14th-century BCE ruler of the Suryavanshi dynasty credited with founding the city of Jammu and later fortified by the Maharaja Gulab Singh of Dogra Dynasty after his coronation in 1822, the temple has remained an unwavering center of devotion. Its legacy stretches from the erstwhile Royal Family of Jammu to the modern-day citizens, serving as a bridge between our storied past and our vibrant present.

The architectural and strategic development of Bahu Fort reached its peak under the subsequent rulers of the Dogra dynasty, who transformed it into a formidable stronghold and a spiritual hub.

Maharaja Ranbir Singh, who reigned from 1857 to 1885, played a pivotal role in modernizing the structure. Following the foundations laid by his father, he focused on expanding the fort's physical dimensions and reinforcing its defensive capabilities.

Under his leadership, the fort remained a vital military asset, serving as a key garrison and a strategic lookout over the Tawi valley throughout the late 19th century.

As the administrative center of the Dogra monarchy eventually transitioned to more elaborate palace complexes like Mubarak Mandi, the fort's primary role shifted from a seat of governance to a symbol of religious and cultural heritage. Rulers such as Maharaja Pratap Singh maintained this legacy, ensuring the fort remained a centerpiece of Jammu's identity, particularly through the continued patronage of the Bawe Wali Mata temple.

The Architectural Legacy—the enduring structure of Bahu Fort is a testament to the distinct Dogra architectural style. This influence is characterized by Ornamental Design—The use of intricate floral patterns and ele-

gant arches, particularly visible within the Baradari (the royal pavilions), which blend aesthetic beauty with functional design and Structural Integrity—the use of locally sourced sandstone, lime, and brick mortar. This robust combination of materials has allowed the fort to withstand centuries of environmental wear and historical conflict, preserving its original grandeur for modern visitors.

The air in Jammu during mid-March carries a soothing feel and distinct energy. As the winter chill recedes, it is replaced by the Pre-Navratri excitement—a spiritual quickening that draws the heart toward the banks of the Tawi River. For any resident of this ancient city, a visit to the Kali Mata Temple within the historic Bahu Fort is not merely a religious ritual; it is a communion with the very soul of Dogra heritage.

The spring evening is nothing short of magic. As the sun dipped below the horizon, the fort is bathed in a soft, amber glow. In the fort the gathering of Jammuites is a pleasant tapestry of generations and the air hummed with a collective sense of peace.

There is a specific mood of Jammu during this season—a vibration that is both festive and deeply spiritual and introspective. The shared smiles between strangers and the rhythmic chanting creates a communal harmony that gives feelings of a warm embrace.

Approaching the deity requires navigating the pathways of the fort, where one encounters the playful monkeys. Far from being a



deterrent, the local macaques—ever-vigilant for a taste of sweet prasad—served as a source of lighthearted entertainment. Watching devotees skillfully shield their offerings while children giggled at the monkeys' antics adds a layer of earthly joy to the spiritual trek. It is a reminder that in the presence of the Divine, there is room for both solemnity and play.

Reaching the Sanctum Sanctorum of the Temple is a sensory revelation. The transition from the open fort to the inner temple feel like entering another realm. The atmosphere is dominated by the heady scent of dhooop and agarbattis, weaving through the crowd like a silver thread. Against the backdrop of a vast, black Spring sky, the temple glows with an ethereal intensity. It appears as a diamond exhibiting its own light, a brilliant spectacle of white marble and shimmering lights, guiding the weary pilgrim towards the Mother.

Inside the compound of the temple the sheer rush of devotees—driven by the upcoming Navratri—preludes a long stay within the inner chamber. However, a fleeting darshan (vision) of Mata Kali is all that is required. One look at the deity's serene yet powerful form is enough to quench the spiritual thirst of the soul. In that brief moment of eye contact with the Divine, time seemed to suspend itself, offering a eternal satisfaction that hours of meditation elsewhere might not achieve and make you calm and serene.

The spiritual journey extends beyond the

main shrine. The temple complex is a curated landscape of divinity, featuring the beautiful shrines of Katu Sham Ji (Lord Krishana), Shri Bagla Mata Ji, and Shani Devta Ji besides many other deities. Each sub-temple adds a layer of gorgeous beauty to the fort temple, creating a holistic pilgrimage site where every facet of the human experience—from the karmic justice of Shani to the playful grace of Krishna—is honoured.

The ancient Banyan tree (locally known as the Bud tree) has stood as a silent guard on the pathway of Kali Mata temple serving as a profound center of spiritual life. What must have begun as a traditional practice of offering prayers, has, through the deep-seated devotion of the people, evolved into a sacred space. Small murtis (idols) have been placed at its base, gradually transforming the site into a living shrine.

This enduring worship of the Bud tree is more than a religious ritual; it is a testament to the strong conviction of Jammuites toward the preservation of nature. By intertwining divinity with the existing world, the people of Jammu have ensured that environmental conservation is woven into the very fabric of their cultural and spiritual identity.

One of the most poignant observations of the evening was the presence of the transgender community within the premises of the fort. In a remarkable display of Jammuites deep-rooted astha, devotees were seen approaching them with profound sincerity, requesting their prayers for their blessings for prosperity in their lives. This level of spiritual belief—where blessings are sought from those often marginalized by broader society—is a testament to the inclusive, mystical fabric of our people. It is a level of faith that remains etched in the heart long after leaving the gates of the temple.

The visit to Kali Mata temple makes you mentally bathed and spiritually renewed. The experience strips away the superficial layers of worry, leaving the core of one being refreshed. It is not merely a change of scenery, but a recalibration of the heart.

As you descend from the fort and pass back through its formidable gates, you do not leave simply as a tourist or a casual visitor. You depart as a soul recharged, carrying an inner luminosity that provides the strength to greet the challenges of a new season.

With a heart full of light and a mind cleared of shadows, the journey to Bahu Fort Kali Mata temple remains a source of strength for the people of Jammu and seekers from afar alike.

A Riot of Colours - Mesmerizing Tulip Garden of Kashmir

■ BAIRAJ CHAWLGAMI

It is the former one-time Chief Minister Gulam Nabi Azad who is credited to have conceived and given practical shape to Tulip garden in Srinagar Kashmir.

In Kashmiri language Tulip-garden is called Gul-e-Lala. Every year government of Jammu and Kashmir through the department of Floriculture, Gardens and Parks organises Tulip festival. Since in middle of March, the Tulip garden is in full bloom and so chief minister of J&K, Omar Abdullah inaugurated Tulip festival on 16th of March 2026. On this day the Tulip garden is thrown open for the people, visitors and tourists. Tulip garden is a big tourist attraction and a large number of local, domestic and foreign tourists visit Srinagar Kashmir to see Tulip-garden and get mesmerized and enjoy the viewing of colourful flowers. Tulip garden is a good tourist destination and the people of Jammu and Kashmir are fortunate enough to have Tulip-garden. The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden in Srinagar is Asia's largest tulip park, located at the foothills of the Zabarwan Range overlooking Dal Lake. Opening for the 2026 season on March 16, it features over 1.7 million tulips of 75+ varieties across 30 hectares, arranged in seven terraced levels. It is located in Sriaj Bagh, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir [adjacent to Indira Gandhi Tulip Garden. Opens annually in spring usually March 16, 2026, with peak bloom lasting until mid-April. Situated on a 30-hectare -74-acre sloping site, the park features seven terraced levels. It has besides 75 tulip varieties and features 46 other flower types including hyacinths, daffodils, and ranunculus. Tulip Garden was founded in 2007 to boost tourism and horticulture in the Kashmir valley. Tulip garden was declared the second-best such garden in the world by the World Tulip Summit Society in 2014. The garden has become a major tourist hub, drawing over 2.5 lakh visitors in past season, and is managed by the department of Floriculture and Gardens Jammu and Kashmir government. An annual festival is organised during the spring season to showcase the blooms. The Tulip garden which is largest such garden in Asia was opened and inaugurated by the chief minister Jammu and Kashmir Jenab Omar Abdullah on March 16 for 2026



locals of the area. Tulip garden offers a panoramic view of Dal Lake and Zabarwan hills. The 2026 season includes enhanced floral densities to provide a more immersive experience for visitors. The tulip garden is managed by the Department of Floriculture, J&K Government. This garden was opened in 2007 to give boost to tourism and expand floriculture. The garden is built on a sloping ground in a terraced fashion consisting of seven terraces. Apart from tulips, many other species of flowers—hyacinths, daffodils and ranunculus have been added as well. Tulip Festival is an annual celebration that aims to showcase the range of flowers in the garden as a part of tourism efforts by the government of Jammu and Kashmir. It is organized during the onset of spring season in Kashmir valley. Opened in 2007 [formerly Model Floriculture Center] to boost tourism and horticulture in the Kashmir valley. Tulip garden was declared the second-best such garden in the world by the World Tulip Summit Society in 2014. The garden has become a major tourist hub, drawing over 2.5 lakh visitors in past season, and is managed by the department of Floriculture and Gardens Jammu and Kashmir government. An annual festival is organised during the spring season to showcase the blooms. The Tulip garden which is largest such garden in Asia was opened and inaugurated by the chief minister Jammu and Kashmir Jenab Omar Abdullah on March 16 for 2026

season to mark the start of Kashmir tourism for 2026 season. It is located on the foothills of the Zabarwan Range, which is the best sightseeing for the Dal Lake, and this iconic tulip garden in Srinagar attracts thousands of tourists every spring with more than 1.5 million blooming tulips and breathtaking views of Kashmir's landscape. The blooming season usually continues until mid-April, depending on weather conditions. During this time, thousands of tourists visit the garden to witness the colourful tulip fields. The tulip garden in Srinagar is one of the biggest tourist attractions of India. The garden was opened in 2007 with the aim to boost floriculture and tourism in the Kashmir valley. It was formerly called as Siraj Bagh. About 1.75 million tulip bulbs, all in multiple colours, were brought from Keukenhof of tulip garden of Amsterdam. The Tulip festival is an annual spring festival to increase tourism by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir. The festival showcases a variety of flowers in the garden. In 2023, the garden received a record number of visitors. Over a span of one month between March-April 2023, the garden was visited by 365,000 tourists, including 3,000 foreign tourists. The tulip garden is home to around 75 varieties of tulips. Besides tulips, there are 46 varieties of flowers, including hyacinths, daffodils, and ranunculus which were also brought from Holland. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah inaugurated Tulip

Garden in Srinagar, where nearly 1.8 million tulips of over 60 varieties are on display which mesmerised the tourists. Tulip garden is made to play a vital role in boosting tourism in spring season. It is highly recommended for tourists, photographers, and nature lovers to visit the annual Tulip Festival to witness the full bloom. Beyond the far-reaching sea of tulips, tourists can expect selfie points and decorative planters. The Department of Handicrafts & Handlooms, Kashmir, in collaboration with the Department of Floriculture, Kashmir, is organising a Craft Blossoms exhibition, featuring displays and exhibitions of the crafts of Kashmir, such as copperware, Pashmina, wood carving, papier mache and carpet weaving. The tulip blooms and thousands of domestic and international tourists every year visit the garden and help in boosting local tourism and hospitality businesses. The garden is still 7-8 days away from its full bloom, but it is already bursting with colour. The garden looks amazing. The team of gardeners have done an amazing job under the supervision of the Floriculture Department officials said by Omar Abdullah. In short, the tulip garden is mesmerising, amazing and feast to eyes and the tourists should visit this garden in March-April in big numbers to witness the full bloom of tulips and flowers of many varieties. Those who plan to visit Kashmir should prefer to come in spring season and witness the tulips in full bloom.

The Pashmina of Many Colours

■ REENA

The recent Supreme Court judgment in the case of the dismissal of an Army officer from service for refusing to take part in regimental-mandated religious parades on the ground of conscience drew massive attention across the country. At a time when the undercurrent of religious division between Hindu and Christian communities in the country is on an uptrend, the judgment stirred a sensitive yet essential debate about the relationship between personal faith and professional duty in the Armed Forces.

I was reminded of a memorable and touching incident that took place a couple of years ago.

I was visiting my brother, who was serving in the Indian Army and posted in Jammu. Being from the Northeast, Jammu feels like a second home to me because of topographic similarities. I have always admired the simplicity and welcoming nature of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

One early Sunday morning around 6:00 am (or, 0600 hours as the army men say) my brother received a call and rushed to the regiment.

Later that evening, my brother told me that a Muslim soldier's wife had passed away in her sleep, leaving behind two young children (Jammu being a family station, Armed Forces personnel are allowed to keep their families with them). The next few days were hectic and filled with confusion.

Being new to the present environment, I waited eagerly for my brother to return home so I could enquire about the well-being of the bereaved family. He had kept me updated regularly.

After medical clearance and with the consent of her husband and parents, the deceased woman's body was buried in a

maqbara in Jammu according to her religious customs.

The family belonged to Bihar, and transporting the body over such a long distance would have been difficult and inconvenient for the family members.

After a week of the burial, my brother informed me that everything had been settled and that the children were going to stay with their grandparents.

I felt relieved, thinking that at least there would be elders to look after them. I assumed the story had ended there and that a new chapter would begin for the children. Little did I know that I was soon to be proven wrong.

About two weeks after the lady's passing, on another Sunday morning, my brother rushed to his office without saying much. That evening he returned home looking confused, his hair disheveled as if he had been running his hands through it all day.

During dinner, he finally explained the situation. The living quarters of the deceased lady was now vacant, but the family living next door claimed they had seen a lady in white walking up and down the corridor.

They also reported hearing someone weeping at midnight.

Very soon, other families in the building too began complaining about seeing similar apparitions and hearing strange sounds. Clearly, ghosts have no religion!! Things came to a pass when all six families living in the building requested immediate relocation.

The problem was practical. How would the unit authorities arrange alternate quarters for so many families at one go at such sudden notice? No wonder my brother had been scratching his head and wracking his "mini computer" brain all day.

After two days of sus-

pense, a decision was made and action was taken. A fire ritual was conducted in the deceased lady's quarter. The Christian family living next door helped with the arrangements.

A Sikh neighbor from the ground floor coordinated the logistics. The regiment's Hindu pandit recited hymns and shlokas during the ritual. The lady who had passed away was Muslim, yet every faith came together in that small apartment.

After the ritual, everything returned to normal. No one mentioned seeing a ghost in white or black again.

My brother later joked that perhaps the ghost became confused about which apartment to haunt, and surrounded by Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs, quietly decided to leave.

That day, being closely connected to the Armed Forces, I realized something profound.

The social fabric of Indian Armed Forces are like a beautiful Pashmina shawl, intricately crafted and woven by soldiers of different religions, castes, and creeds.

Like the many colors of the shawl, each retains its identity. Yet once they put on the uniform, faith and belief come together in a shared purpose. They learn to stand together, to respect one another, and to transform "mine" into "ours."

The recent Supreme Court judgment reflects clarity within the system. It sends a strong message that faith can coexist with mutual respect and professional duty.

In the Armed Forces, unity is not about erasing differences. It is about weaving them together into something stronger than any one thread alone.

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