CURFEW IN JAMMU AFTER ARSON, CLASHES AMID PROTESTS

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Schools to remain closed today # Army conducts flag-march # Div Com conducts all party meet # Relaxation only after situation review in morning: DC

JAMMU, Feb 15: Curfew was clamped across Jammu city on Friday after mob torched several vehicles following verbal clashes amid stone-pelting in sensitive Gujjar Nagar area during protests as the winter capital and adjoining areas observed complete shutdown against Pulwama terror attack.

The shutdown call was given by the Jammu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, transporters and was supported by lawyers, almost all political parties, social and religious groups.

As even the imposition of curfew did not deter protesters resorting to arson following tear-gassing and baton charge by police on both the sides which indulged in stone-pelting, the state administration also called in the army in the afternoon, to prevent situation spiralling out of control. Around half a dozen persons including SSP Jammu Tejinder Singh sustained injuries in the ding-dong battles between police and the clashing sides.

Later, the army also conducted flag marches in several sensitive areas of the city to infuse sense of security among the inhabitants.

The situation eased by evening as the Divisional Commissioner Jammu Sanjeev Verma convened an all party meeting and prominent citizens from both sides and appealed them to help maintaining communal harmony. “All the participants condemned Pulwama terror attack. They also condemned violence which erupted during protests today in the city including burning of half a dozen vehicles. They,

however, assured full support to the administration in maintaining communal harmony," Verma said. He stated that the situation was well under control and adequate deployment was made at sensitive locations. With regard to sense of fear among inhabitants of Kashmir and others, he said that the army was also deployed there to address their safety concerns.

However as a precautionary measure, the administration announced that strict curfew would remain in force even during night hours and asked the people particularly youth to help forces in maintaining law and order situation. Deputy Commissioner Ramesh Kumar, late this evening in a media briefing, stated, "The decision about the relaxation in curfew would be taken after reviewing situation at 8.00 AM tomorrow." He, however, asked people mainly youth to refrain from spreading rumours and posting objectionable or provocative posts on social media. Throughout the day internet remained suspended in the region.

With regard to today's incident, the DC stated that some persons, including police personnel, sustained minor injuries in the violence and some vehicles were also set on fire. Though he did not give exact number of vehicles damaged yet assured to take action against the culprits.

In the meanwhile, the Chief Education Officer (CEO) Roshan Lal announced that all the government and private schools in the municipal limits of Jammu will remain closed tomorrow.

IGP Jammu also appealed the people to not get provoked by the anti-national elements who want to disturb in the society. "Don't play into the hands of anti-national elements. They want to disturb our societal harmony. Defeat their designs. Don't get provoked. Maintain calm," he tweeted.

Earlier, the morning began with normal protests and rallies amid burning of tyres almost at every chowk. The protesters mainly comprised students, advocates and different political parties including Pradesh Youth Congress (PYC), Jammu and Kashmir National Panthers Party (JKNPP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other right wing factions viz., Hindu Shiv Sena, Bajrang Dal. In some cases, small protests were held inside wards where the protesters were led by corporators as it happened in Jewel Chowk. No public transport movement was there.

Main protest demonstrations were held at Bikram Chowk, Jewel Chowk, Janipur, General Bus Stand, Rehari Chowk, Bhagwati Nagar where the protesters resorted to sloganeering amid burning of tyres disrupting even the movement of private vehicles. All the main crossings as well three bridges viz., Bikram Chowk, Bhagwati Nagar and Gujjar Nagar were totally blocked by protesters thus totally halting entire movement towards city. Even private vehicles were not allowed to move thus causing great inconvenience to people.

It continued up to 11.30 AM or so till the protesters mainly students besides local youth, activists of Shiv Sena, Bajrang Dal gathered from different localities across Jammu city and outskirts started moving towards Gujjar Nagar crossing. Conflicting versions erupted as how it all started. Few eyewitnesses stated that as the protesters joined by Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena activists carrying tricolour were raising objectionable slogans this led to a verbal clash between the locals, mainly youth from Gujjar Nagar, which finally spiralled into stone-pelting from both sides. The origin of which, again remained shrouded in mystery, amid contrary versions from two sides. The protesters stated that they were only holding protest demonstrations at the Gujjar Nagar crossing when the stones were pelted from the people perched atop the houses and this proved to be the trigger point. However the locals from Gujjar Nagar said that the protesters resorted to stone pelting amid provocative slogans, thus triggering clashes. This happened although the police had used concertina wires to block the road leading to Gujjar Nagar.

However after verbal clash leading to stone-pelting between two sides, the police personnel, whose presence was skeletal as compared to the number of protesters at different Chowks, and who played the role of mute spectators to the developments as they unfolded so far, swung to action. Police personnel deployed at Gujjar Nagar in strength resorted to tear-gassing and lathicharge on the protesters. From this point, the situation took an ugly turn as irked over police action on them, the protesters started vandalizing vehicles parked on and along the road side at Gujjar Nagar, JDA parking opposite Hari Singh Park, Residency Road, Vivekanand Chowk and other areas.

Around 13 vehicles were set on fire while 20 others were vandalized with smashing of

window panes at Gujjar Nagar. One vehicle at JDA parking opposite Hari Singh Park, five at Residency Road, four vehicles along the road stretch facing Jogi Gate Cremation Ground, one at Vivekanand Chowk and at least 3 vehicles near Moti Mahal hotel were totally burnt while around half a dozen vehicles and two-wheelers were vandalised. While majority of the vehicles bearing Kashmir/Doda/Poonch/Kishtwar/Rajouri registration number bore the brunt of mob vandalism, few with Jammu registration also got vandalized. Police had to resort to lathicharge yet again besides using water cannons to disperse the hooligans from both sides yet in vain as the ding-dong battle between the protesters and police continued.

This vandalism continued up to 1.45 PM or so till the administration finally announced the clamping of curfew. An order of the District Magistrate said the decision was taken “In view of prevailing law and order” situation in Jammu district. “There is every likelihood of breach of peace, which may lead to acts of arson, targeting vehicles and causing loss of life and property..., ” the order read.

As even curfew remained ineffective, the administration also called in army at around 2.30 PM or so. Army column initially directly reached Gujjar Nagar, the main spot of action to control the situation. Even after the arrival of army columns, the stone pelting continued from both sides amid sloganeering. Later, it (army) took control of other sensitive areas as well.

However before dominating the sensitive areas, in order to avoid to be in direct interface with civilians, the army allowed police to free area from hooligans from both sides and then it took control of Gujjar Nagar, Wazarat Road, Shaheedi Chowk and adjoining sensitive areas by putting concertina wires and placing army vehicles on the road to effectively enforce the curfew. Army also held flag-march to instill sense of security among the civilian pockets on these areas. The situation eased only by evening after imposition of curfew effectively. However the people mainly tourists were greatly inconvenienced throughout the day due to shutdown and blockade of all main crossing including the three Tawi bridges.

Prior to violent incidents, people under the banner of various social, political and trade bodies took out protest rallies in Jewel Chowk, Purani Mandi, Kunwani, Rehari,

Janipur, Gandhi Nagar, Bakshi Nagar, Muthi, Talab Tilloo and Satwari areas of the capital city and protested against Pulwama killings.

Raising anti-Pakistan, anti-terrorist slogans, the protestors demanded action against Pakistan for “sponsoring terrorism in the Valley.” Members of the Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena and the Dogra Front were seen protesting in large numbers. Jammu and Kashmir High Court Bar Association too had suspended work in all the courts in Jammu, including the high court and the tribunals to protest “the dastardly acts of frustrated terrorists” in Pulwama.

In the meanwhile, reports of complete bandh amid stray incidents of violence also poured in from Poonch, Mendhar, Kathua, Samba, Reasi, Udhampur and other places.

In the all party meet convened by the Divisional Commissioner, prominent among those participated included Kavinder Gupta, Bali Bhagat from BJP, Rattan Lal Gupta from NC, Mula Ram, R S Chib from Congress, BAJ president, Jammu Muslim Front Shuja. With regard to Janipur incident, where some families from Kashmir expressed fears about their safety following stone-pelting, the Divisional Commissioner stated, “It was not stone-pelting incident. Some miscreant during protests hurled one or two stones which hit a house or two. We had visited them to address their safety concerns.”

Reports suggested that some people from a particular community pelted stones at MES headquarters but the police parties reached in time and again fired teargas shells to disperse them.

Amidst minor clashes Poonch district also observed complete bandh in protest against the Pulwama terror attack in which 48 jawans were killed. In a stray incident, a rally of protesters was passing through Alla Pir locality in the town when some mischievous elements pelted stones at them which led to a brief clash and an incident of vehicle vandalising.

Paying tribute to the CRPF jawans, Poonch, Mendhar and Surankote observed complete bandh with people of all community participated in processions. In Poonch, procession started from Purani Poonch and after passing through Bus Stand, Nakhawali road, Hathithan Bazar, Main Bazar, Tandon Market, Kila Bazar, it

culminated at bus stand Poonch.

Addressing gathering MLC Pardeep Sharma demanded action against the perpetrators of the incident and demanded action against Pakistan. Mendhar observed bandh from 11.00 AM to 12.30 PM and the traffic also remained off the roads. Protests rallies were taken out by the members of both the communities condemning Pulwama terror attack. In the evening, however, markets were opened and the vehicles also plied normally.

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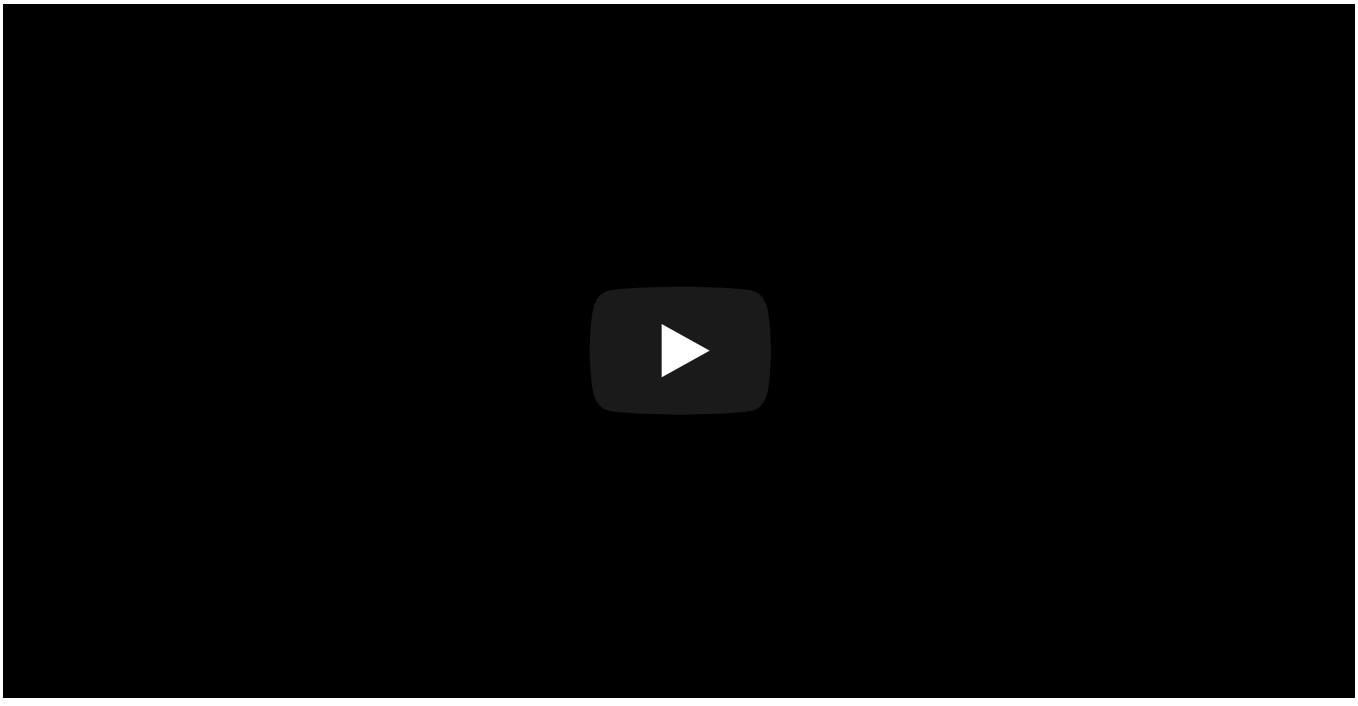

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J&K RELATED WEBSITES

- J&K Govt. Official website (http://jkgad.nic.in/)
- Jammu Kashmir Tourism (http://www.jktourism.org/)
- JKTDC (http://www.jktdc.co.in/)
- Mata Vaishnodevi Shrine Board (http://www.maavaishnodevi.org/)
- Shri Amarnath Ji Shrine Board (http://www.shriamarnathjishrine.com/)
- Shri Shiv Khori Shrine Board (http://www.shivkhori.org/)

UTILITY

- Train Enquiry (http://www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in/ntes/)
- IRCTC (http://www.irctc.co.in/)
- Matavaishnodevi (http://www.matavaishnodevi.com/)
- BSNL (http://www.bsnl.in/)
- Jammu Kashmir Bank (http://www.jkbank.net/)
- State Bank of India (http://www.statebankofindia.com/)

PUBLIC INTEREST

- Passport Department (http://www.passport.gov.in/)
- Income Tax Department (http://www.incometaxindia.gov.in/Pages/default.aspx)
- JK CAMPA (http://www.jkcampa.com/)
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- IT Education (http://www.actit.co.in/)
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EDUCATION

- Jammu University (http://www.jammuuniversity.in/)
- Jammu University Results (http://www.coeju.com/)
- JKBOSE (http://www.jkbose.co.in/)

- Kashmir University (http://www.kashmiruniversity.net/)
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