



When we free ourselves of desire,
we will know serenity and freedom.

~ Gautama Buddha



FIGHTING A SILENT WAR

For decades, Jammu and Kashmir has confronted terrorism as its gravest internal security challenge. Yet today, another threat is spreading quietly through neighbourhoods, schools and homes. This one that destroys lives not through bullets, but through addiction, crime and social decay. The growing drug menace in the region now rivals terrorism in its capacity to hollow out society from within. The scale of the problem in Jammu district alone is deeply alarming. During 2025, police arrested 311 drug peddlers, including 35 women, and seized heroin worth over Rs 60 crore in the international market. Alongside this were massive recoveries of ganja, poppy straw, charas and other narcotics, attachment of properties acquired through drug money, and the demolition of illegal structures at known drug hotspots. These figures are not mere statistics but point to a thriving underground economy that preys on the youth, corrodes families and fuels organised crime. Drugs do what terrorism seeks to do, from destabilising society to weaken institutions and robbing the next generation of its future. Addiction leads to crime, broken households, school dropouts and a cycle of poverty and despair. The human cost is immeasurable, particularly in a region that has already endured decades of conflict. If terrorism attacks the state directly, narcotics attack its social fabric, slowly, relentlessly, and often invisibly. Against this backdrop, the recent order by the Jammu district administration to bar courier companies and parcel services from transporting narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and other contraband without valid permits is a timely and commendable intervention. By placing strict accountability on logistics operators, mandating identity verification, record-keeping, employee background checks and staff training, the administration has struck at a key conduit of the drug trade that is the covert transportation. In an era where trafficking increasingly exploits courier networks and digital anonymity, such regulatory vigilance is essential. This sends a clear message that the war on drugs will not tolerate complicity, negligence or profit at the cost of public safety. Enforcement agencies, too, deserve recognition for intelligence-led operations, community engagement and the use of financial investigations to dismantle the economic backbone of drug syndicates. Yet, while these measures mark important progress, the fight against narcotics cannot remain confined to districts where the problem is already acute. Drug trafficking networks do not respect administrative boundaries. Routes shift, supply chains adapt, and enforcement gaps in one area quickly become entry points in another. If Jammu district acts decisively but other parts of the Union Territory lag behind, the menace will merely relocate rather than recede. What is required is a region-wide, coordinated strategy across Jammu and Kashmir, combining strict law enforcement, financial tracking of drug proceeds, monitoring of transport and courier channels, and robust community-based prevention. Schools, colleges, religious institutions and civil society must be active partners in awareness, early intervention and rehabilitation. Simultaneously, governments must invest in de-addiction centres, counselling services and livelihood programmes for recovering addicts, ensuring that recovery is possible and sustainable. The choice before Jammu and Kashmir is stark. Either drugs become another long-term wound, compounding the scars of conflict, or the region confronts this threat with the same resolve shown against terrorism. The numbers from Jammu are a warning but also a call to action. To safeguard the future of its youth and the stability of its society, the war on drugs must be fought with urgency, unity and zero tolerance across the entire Union Territory.

Your Agency Vs My Police

KISKI LAATHI AUR KISKI BHAINS?

■ POONAM I KAUSHISH

What is it about yesterday's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and today's Enforcement Directorate (ED) that it is always in the eye of the storm? Wherein, its fatal attraction for political cover-ups, clean chits, hit-ins and fool proof surety for law enforcers to become law breakers has earned it an ignominious nickname: Election Dha-kosla. With the devil taking the hindmost!

Last week's drama in West Bengal bears this out when ED raided several locations in Kolkata and Delhi of political consultancy firm Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) and its head Pratik Jain for crime in a multi-State money laundering offence of Rs 2742.32 crore from illegal coal mining with receipt of proceeds of crime of over Rs. 20 crore, but was obstructed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee along with her Chief Secretary, State DGP, Kolkata Police Commissioner and personnel.

Worse, they snatched files and electronic evidence containing incriminating material from ED's possession, CCTV cameras which captured Chief Minister's and her cohorts activities. Accusing Mamata of "taking law into her hands and misusing State police whenever any crime is investigated, which is not to her liking or which has potential of some incriminating material against her, Ministers, Party workers or officials working in cahoots."

It is open secret that there has been a long battle of attrition between State Government and Central agencies. Last year there was flare-up over attack on ED by TMC workers and police in Sandeshkhali. Mamata's nephew and TMC General Secretary being questioned in the illegal mining and cash-for-teachers-job scams. In 2019 a showdown over CBI questioning Kolkata Police Commissioner in Sardha and Rose Valley scams with Mamata sitting-ins.

Besides, ED too is besmirched by playing handmaiden to its political mai-baaps BJP of selectively targeting opponents given the overwhelming number of cases to intimidate them ahead of a State election, often with a little help of 'partner' Income Tax Department, filing of FIRs, hours of questioning to charge-sheets. Never mind if it raises serious doubts about its honesty and integrity of purpose to weed out the corrupt.

Ditto what Congress did under UPA 2004-2014 when BJP accused it of using CBI as its "caged parrot" by filing cases against opponents.

Think. Over the last ten years ED's conviction rate has been less than one per cent. Yet the agency continues to use "process as punishment." According to a recent report 95% politicians probed by the agency came



from Opposition ranks over the years.

The Government's response, "We did not make PMLA or ED. They were there. It's just that they were completely useless... did no work. All these allegation of using ED against rivals is wrong. During Congress regime ED confiscated a mere Rs 34-36 lakhs. We were in Opposition. But since NDA came to power over Rs 2200 has been seized. How can they defame ED when heaps of notes are recovered on TV."

According to ED, it registered 775 PMLA cases, last year, 333 prosecutions filed, 1773 cases under trail and conviction of 34 secured from courts this year. It has issued 461 attachment orders valued at Rs 30,036 crores, up from 441 last year.

Alongside, the police acted par of the course: Pleasing its political masters. Willy-nilly being used as an instrument of partisan agenda by the Party in power which utilizes it for its unsavoury ends to "fix" their problems. Favoursome, cracking down on others, going slow on key cases, messing up investigations, left half-way or not done at all. Those who refuse are humiliated and given punishment postings. Whereby, criminalization of politics has turned to politicization of police and political criminals.

At the same time, Mamata's actions risk undermining her case and cause as she holds a Constitutional post of Chief Minister, not just TMC Chief. She cannot afford to bypass

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due process of law by making it a stand-off between Your Agency vs My Police. ED's charge against I-PAC may or may not hold but that is for courts to decide not her. As, anything else invites questions and concerns about intimacies between TMC and I-PAC.

Regrettably, as oft happens, our netagan continue in legitimizing crime and corruption. Such is the nasha of power that all conveniently choose to merrily make political capital. Raising a moot point: Is the ED and police more sinned against than sinning? Are politicians the main culprit? Is the pot calling the kettle black?

The truth is mid-way. All work in tandem in furthering their own interest. Consequently, the system becomes self-perpetuating. Over the years, the threatened political elite have given more and more powers to ED and police to get their way and have their say. Their merit and investigative skills don't really matter. What counts is loyalty and trustworthiness to the leader.

Unsurprisingly, investigation suffers as there is no "scientific investigation or procedures." A recent report shows conviction rate is as low whereby it uses "process as punishment." Thereby, sullyng ED and police's reputation, replete with its "failures" to back up charges with required evidence.

It is nobody's case that accountability for corruption should not be fixed. However scrupulous adherence to due procedures and

zero compromise on transparency should be the guiding principles. But, knowing our polity and its hypocritical culture, we will no doubt continue to hear noises or even be treated to some cosmetic measures. It is absurd nonsense to say that the ED cannot deliver.

What next? Prime Minister Modi has oft spoken about ushering in transparency in governance. It is high time ED stops being His Masters Voice and prevents abuse of power. Undoubtedly this would be a formidable task given that the agency needs purging of "yes men" and cleansed of backdoor instructions.

As the country's premier financial crime agency it has a responsibility to be tough and uncompromising and investigate grubby deals without fear or favour. Certainly, in high stake cases there will be some setbacks. But today, the perception of political bias threatens to strain its efforts. If its probes are seen as biased it is not good for its reputation. It needs to imbibe greater transparency to dispel for fog of bias. Time for it to introspect and course correct.

In the ultimate our leaders must desist from playing havoc with ED and police. They need to answer two questions: Will both agencies be guided by law of the land only or by Government of the day? Questionably, who will cast the first stone? Kiski laathi aur kiski bhains? ---- INFA.

Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2026: Unlocking Youth Leadership for Viksit Bharat

■ DR. MANSUKH MANDAVIYA

India's growth story will be written by those who are shaping its ideas today. Across the country, young Indians are thinking deeply about how India can grow faster, govern better and become developed by 2047. Their ideas are emerging from campuses and communities, start-ups and sports fields, classrooms and village meetings. The real question is no longer whether the youth have something to contribute, but whether their ideas are given a credible platform to influence the nation's direction. The Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue (VBLYD) is designed to provide that very platform.

India today is home to the largest youth population in the world. It is therefore but natural that the direction of the nation's future will be shaped not merely by policies or institutions, but by the imagination, conviction and courage of its young citizens. This vast reservoir of Yuva Shakti is far more than a demographic advantage; it is India's greatest national asset, capable of driving innovation, strengthening democracy and propelling the country towards inclusive and sustainable development.

The aspirations of India's young generation are guided by a strong sense of purpose and possibility. Today's youth are not driven solely by personal advancement; they are equally motivated by a desire to shoulder responsibility and make a meaningful impact. They seek avenues where their creativity can translate into solutions, their energy into leadership and their ambition into service.

During my time as Youth Affairs and Sports Minister, I have had the opportunity to engage with young Indians in varied settings, on university campuses, in rural districts, at sports arenas

and during youth-led community initiatives. What consistently stands out is the seriousness with which young people think about the nation's future. I recall meeting a group of rural youth volunteers who had organised informal learning centres in their villages. With limited resources but strong conviction, they were addressing gaps in education and skill development through locally designed solutions. Their ideas were practical, rooted in ground realities and driven by a clear sense of responsibility. Experiences like these reaffirm a simple truth: when young people are trusted and given space, they do not merely participate, they lead.

Inspired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's call from the Red Fort to bring one lakh youth without political backgrounds into public life, the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue was launched in January 2025 reimagining the National Youth Festival in an entirely new format. The response was unprecedented. Over 30 lakh young people engaged through the Viksit Bharat Challenge, more than two lakh essays were submitted, and thousands of youth presented their ideas at the state level. The journey culminated at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, where 3,000 youth leaders interacted in a free-flowing dialogue with the Prime Minister, who spent several hours listening to their ideas and inspiring them to lead.

Beyond the numbers, it was the nature of engagement that made the Dialogue truly historic. It recognised, both in letter and spirit, that the voices of India's youth matter in shaping the India of 2047. Young participants were encouraged to think critically about national challenges, propose solutions and align personal ambition with collective purpose, bridging the gap between aspiration and action.

The strength of the Viksit Bharat Young

Leaders Dialogue lies not only in its scale, but in its design. Diversity of thought, language, culture and lived experience is embedded into the very structure of the initiative. Youth from urban and rural India, students and professionals, innovators and grassroots leaders come together on a common platform. Multiple stages of engagement ensure that ideas are refined through dialogue and exchange, not filtered out by geography, language or background. In doing so, the Dialogue ensures that every young person who participates has both a voice and a platform to amplify it.

India's youth have always been at the heart of the nation's defining moments, from the freedom struggle to the building of the institutions of an independent India. At every turning point, young Indians have stepped forward with courage, conviction and a willingness to lead. Today, the nation once again looks to its youth not just for participation, but for leadership and dynamism in co-creating India's growth story. The vision of Viksit Bharat at 2047 goes beyond economic progress alone; it calls for social harmony, environmental responsibility, technological stewardship and inclusive growth. These complex challenges require fresh thinking, adaptability and an ability to embrace the new: qualities that reside strongly in India's Yuva Shakti.

Building on the resounding success of a landmark first edition, VBLYD 2026, scheduled from 9-12 January 2026, signals a decisive leap from a national youth convening to a platform with global resonance. With new initiatives such as Design for Bharat and Tech for Viksit Bharat, and the inclusion of the international Indian youth diaspora, the dialogue expands beyond borders. Yet, at its heart, the mission remains unchanged: to empower young Indians to think boldly, create fearlessly, and lead with conviction.

The scale of this edition underscores the depth of that ambition. More than 50 lakh young people participated in the Viksit Bharat Quiz, the first stage of selection for VBLYD 2026, making it one of the largest youth engagement exercises of its kind. Over four intensive days, participants from every corner of the country will engage with leading national and global voices, drawing upon practical insights, ideas, and visions that transcend disciplines and geographies.

What truly sets VBLYD 2026 apart, however, is that it gives our Yuva Shakti an opportunity not only to speak, but to be heard. The platform enables young Indians to articulate their ideas, aspirations, and solutions directly to the Prime Minister of India. On 12 January, observed nationwide as National Youth Day in commemoration of Swami Vivekananda, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will personally interact with the youth at Bharat Mandapam, listening to how they imagine, and intend to shape, the future of Bharat.

As India advances towards the centenary of its independence, it demands the engagement of young individuals who possess the courage to imagine boldly and the resolve to translate ideas into meaningful action. More than a platform for dialogue, the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue is a movement that calls upon young Indians to lead from the front, confront national challenges, and channel their ambitions towards building a Viksit Bharat.

A Viksit Bharat will be built by those who have the confidence to lead and the commitment to serve. India's youth are ready. The nation must be ready to walk with them.

(The author is Union Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports and Labour & Employment)

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