

3 militants who killed J&K cop gunned down

Ashiq Hussain

letters@hindustantimes.com

SRINAGAR: Three Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militants responsible for a police constable's torture and murder in South Kashmir's Kulgam district a day earlier were killed in a firefight with security forces on Sunday, police said.

Police identified the three as Muawiya, Suhail Ahmad Dar and Mudassar alias Rehaan. Muawiya was from Pakistan, while the rest were local residents, they said.

A police statement said Muawiya's involvement had been established in a number of civilian killings while Suhail, a labourer, had joined militant ranks after dropping out of school.

It called the three the "prime accused" in constable Mohammad Saleem Shah's abduction and murder and added they were cornered due to "concerted efforts of the security forces".

"Police probe is on for ascertaining complicity of the other co-conspirators who assisted in the commission of the gruesome



■ Villagers gather around houses damaged in a gunfight between security forces and militants in Kulgam on Sunday. PTI

crime leading to the death of police person Saleem Shah," the statement said.

Police said the three were part of a joint LeT and HM group formed to kill constable Shah. They did not specify their individual affiliations. The statement said the firefight was triggered after the Army, Jammu and Kashmir police, and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) laid a siege around the area where the three were holed up. It added the three fired on the security forces

first and were killed in the retaliatory fire.

Residents said a few militants showed up in Kulgam's Redwani and fired some shots in the air at the slain local militants' funeral.

Authorities suspended mobile internet services in Kulgam and neighbouring Anantnag district as a precautionary measure.

Jammu and Kashmir police chief Shesh Paul Vaid said three weapons were recovered at the firefight site in Khudwani village.

CONTINUED ON P 6

Militants who killed Kashmir cop gunned down

“Terrorist group that tortured our colleague CT (constable) Mohd Saleem (Shah) of Kulgam & killed him brutally are all trapped in an encounter with J&K (Jammu and Kashmir) Police/Army/CRPF (Central Reserve Paramilitary Force) in Khudwani Kulgam,” Vaid tweeted earlier in the day.

Police said Shah’s body was recovered from a nursery near village Redwani Payeen. It bore “severe torture marks indicating he had been brutally tortured”, they said. Shah had been abducted from his home in Kulgam’s Mutalhama village on Friday night.

Shah had joined the Jammu and Kashmir police in 2016 and had been posted to district police lines in South Kashmir’s Pulwama after training. He is survived by his aged parents, two brothers and a sister.

Police said Shah was his family’s lone bread earner and “the only hope for his aged parents”.

They had cited initial investigation into the murder and said it indicated the “proscribed terror outfit HM” had killed him. The police had vowed to bring Shah’s killers to justice.

Shah is the 25th policeman to be killed in Jammu and Kashmir this year. His murder came a month after militants abducted another police constable, Javeed Ahmad Dar, from his home at Vehil in neighbouring Shopian district and killed him.

Army soldier Aurangzeb was abducted from a private vehicle when he was going home for Eid in Shopian last month. His body was recovered from a village in Pulwama district.