

Army foils infiltration bid, four held

CRACKDOWN Army says newly recruited militants were nabbed while trying to cross into PoK, three Al Badr terrorists escaped

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SRINAGAR: Four newly enlisted militants allegedly trying to cross into Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) were held while their three guides escaped in North Kashmir's Kalaroos on Sunday.

Army spokesman Colonel Rajesh Kalia said the four were held after they were tipped off about the plans of three Al Badr terrorists to guide the four across the LoC. "The army, in a joint operation with police, laid an ambush and trapped the terrorists," he said. The four were captured after a brief gunfight.

"Extreme restraint was exercised and an opportunity was given to the terrorists to surrender. While the four newly-recruited terrorists surrendered, the three Al Badr terrorists deserted the new recruits and fled under cover of fire," Kalia said.

The security forces had launched a manhunt to trace the three. The four were not immediately identified. But reports said they are in their early 20s and residents of North Kashmir's Handwara. They said one of them was pursuing MBA while another is a diploma holder in operation theatre management.

There has been an increase in the number of educated local youth in the militant ranks particularly after Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani's killing in 2016. They include at least two PhD scholars.

Local media reports said the

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four held in Kupwara district had announced they had joined militant ranks while their pictures, showing them wielding guns and pistols, had gone viral on the social media on Saturday.

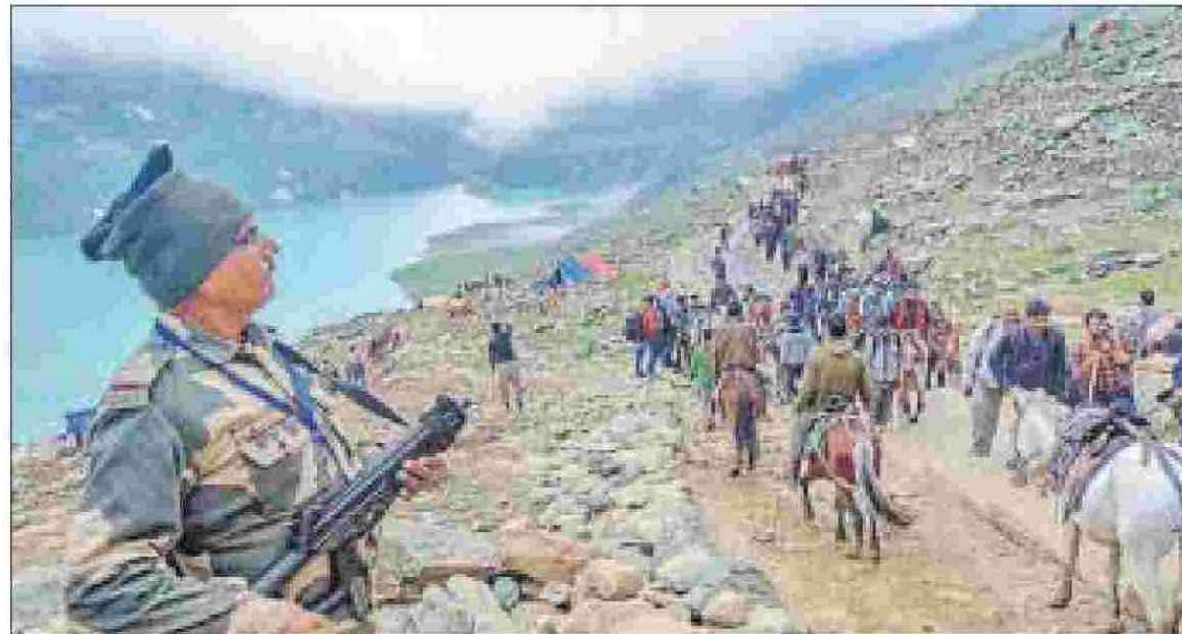
The police had on Saturday said they had busted three hide-outs, seized weapons and held four militant sympathisers from south Kashmir, where three policemen and a political worker were killed on Wednesday.

The spike in violence coincided with Satya Pal Malik's appointment as Jammu and Kashmir's 13th governor. Malik has the state's direct administrative control.

Jammu and Kashmir has been under the governor's rule since June when the Bharatiya Janata Party withdrew support to Peoples Democratic Party-led coalition government. Malik's immediate challenge is to hold local bodies' elections later this year.

The elections had been delayed after the coalition government told the Centre that the situation was not conducive to hold them.

There are approximately 225-250 militants operating in Kashmir. About 150 of them are locals. So far, 142 militants have been killed in different encounters with security forces this year.



■ Pilgrims en route to the holy cave shrine of Amarnath, in Sheshnag Lake, Kashmir.

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