

FOR KASHMIR'S SAKE

Rajnath's call for dialogue, peace must be paid heed to

In May when stone-pelting mobs injured a schoolboy and a tourist, there was a massive outrage in Kashmir calling for stringent punishment for wanton acts of violence. Many voices decried the pardon granted by the PDP-BJP state government to first-time stone-pelters. The BJP didn't give in to the temptation of retributive justice as that would have compromised its quest for peace in the Valley. Union Home Minister, Rajnath Singh has adhered to that narrative of inclusion and cordiality when he urged the separatist groups to desist from encouraging children to play with fire and stones. He is willing to acknowledge the many differences of opinions that outfits like Hurriyat might have with the central government if such groups are "right-minded" in fostering peace and prosperity in Jammu and Kashmir. Violence in the Valley has not only claimed thousands of lives in three decades, but has permanently scarred and traumatised a generation that finds itself with virtually no recourse to livelihood. Separatist leaders have enjoyed the fruits of the unrest by exploiting the impressionable youths as cannon fodder for a hopeless, illegitimate cause. Singh, and by extension, the BJP, is committed to a composite dialogue involving all stakeholders since that is the key to peace. The silent majority of peace-loving Kashmiris has understood that by engineering unrest in the Valley, Pakistan and its allies in the state want to halt Kashmir's economic progress. Singh has assured the people that the government would never allow that to happen. The choice between development and destruction is never really an option for poor Kashmiris who have to battle every day for survival. Separatist forces should pay heed to Singh's overtures. Their alignment with Pakistan will end in betrayal.