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# Forces in J&K given a free hand: Rajnath Singh

## Home Minister cites spate of killings

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NEW DELHI

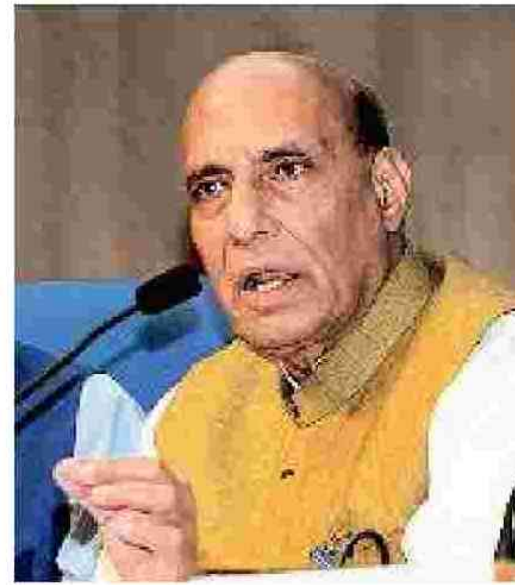
A day after the Centre decided not to extend the suspension of operations (SoO) or cease-ops in Jammu and Kashmir, Home Minister Rajnath Singh said “security forces have been given a free hand.”

He told *The Hindu* on Monday that he was pained by the murders of *Rising Kashmir* editor Shujaat Bukhari and Army rifleman Aurangzeb.

### Rational explained

“A person like Shujaat was killed, Aurangzeb was killed. Apart from this, many other security personnel were killed. We have given a free hand to security forces to conduct operations against terrorists,” he said, explaining why the SoO was not extended beyond the month of Ramzan.

Bukhari and his two personal security officers were killed by three motorcycle-borne “terrorists” on June 14 near his office at Press Enclave in the heart of Srinagar. Next day, the body of Aurangzeb, who was part of the team that killed Hizbul Mujahideen commander Sameer Tiger in April, was



Rajnath Singh

found in Pulwama. Aurangzeb had been abducted the previous day, when he left his camp to go home to Poonch to celebrate Id.

### Smooth yatra

Mr. Singh said the Amarnath Yatra, which begins on June 28, would be conducted smoothly.

On Monday, special representative Dineshwar Sharma met Bukhari’s family. Mr. Sharma, who was instrumental in the implementation of the SoO, is visiting the State this week.

The SoO was announced on May 16 for the month of Ramzan, which ended on June 16.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 10

ANTI-TERROR OPERATIONS

RESUME IN KASHMIR ► PAGE 10

# Forces in J&K given a free hand: Rajnath

A senior Home Ministry official said the SoO served the purpose for which it was announced and the impression that it was being withdrawn because of any incident was erroneous.

“The SoO did not have an automatic extension clock. It was implemented for giving relief to people in Kashmir during the month of Ramzan and it served the purpose,” a Home Ministry spokesperson said.

He said the number of civilians who were killed had come down during Ramzan.

“The other side was not forthcoming. There was no cooperation or positive response from the Hurriyat (separatists) or the militants. There was no forward movement on dialogue and no let-up in efforts to infiltrate from across the border during the SoO. Therefore it was not extended,” the spokesperson said.