

Kashmiri boys yearn for Kolkata calm

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kolkata: Md Maroof of Pukharnik village of Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district, bordering Pakistan, dreams of donning the Olive Green of the Indian Army and standing guard on the border. And it is not just Maroof alone. Many boys from the valley look up to Indian soldiers as role models.

The Metro train ride was fun. I never knew trains could run underground! And people here roam about freely without any fear. I wish there was such peace in Kashmir too

— Ankush Chowdhary | CLASS X
STUDENT OF KASHMIR'S RAJOURI

“The violence and bloodshed has taken a toll on Jammu and Kashmir. We want peace to prevail and it will happen only when each of us has a feeling for our motherland. I want to serve India as a soldier of the Indian Army,” said Maroof, a Class XII student.

He and 22 other schoolboys from Kashmir's Rajouri district are in



Kashmiri schoolchildren visit Victoria Memorial on Wednesday as part of the Army's Operation Sadbhavana

Aranya Roy Chowdhury

Kolkata as part of the Army's Operation Sadbhavana, a project aimed at integrating youths from the border villages with mainstream India. There is a network of 16 Sadbhavana schools to facilitate education for needy boys and girls of the border areas.

“I have seen Indian soldiers work tirelessly to protect our borders. I also want to join the Army one day and do my bit for the country,” said Balbinder Singh. The son of a driver of Lam village, the Class XII student lives barely 5km from the India-Pakistan border.

Coming from poor families, none of these boys had ever stepped out of their villages. They reached Kolkata on Tuesday and will visit Guwahati, Shillong and Cherapunji. Personnel from the Tithwal Brigade of the Sikh Light Infantry are accompanying these boys.

“The Metro train ride in Kolkata was fun. I never knew trains could run underground! And people here roam about freely without any fear. I wish there is this kind of peace in Jammu and Kashmir too,” said Ankush Chowdhary of Loka village.

Belle Vue Clinic and Priyamvada Birla Aravind Eye Hospital of the MP Birla Group are partners in this mission by the Army. On Wednesday, the boys had a free eye check-up. The boys will be in the city till Friday.