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Government assures help as J&K Gujjars face boycott

The Gujjar community has said it is being subjected to a "hate campaign" related to the Tablighi Jamaat gathering last month in Delhi's Nizamuddin, which has emerged as a Covid-19 hotspot as several participants came from abroad and allegedly brought in the infection.

By [Hakeem Irfan Rashid](#), ET Bureau | Last Updated: Apr 17, 2020, 11:31 AM IST



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"This country runs on perceptions created by electronic media. And we have become its latest victims. Some elements in Jammu want to hurt us financially and started a campaign that all muslims especially Gujjars are corona virus carriers. Many people stopped buying milk from us," says Jameel Choudhary, president of [Dodhi Gujjar Association](#) in Jammu. He himself runs a dairy farm and has suffered huge losses in past few weeks.

Despite milk being an essential commodity, the Gujjars alleged that they weren't allowed to move by the authorities and subsequent boycott campaign from some sections of society resulted in wastage of huge quantity of milk. After facing the problems in distribution, Gujjars decided to give milk free of cost to all the quarantine centers in Kathua, Samba, Jammu, Reasi and Udhampur districts and offered free delivery to consumers as well.

"We aren't even allowed to graze our animals in areas, for which we have already made yearly rental payments. This has further amplified our concerns and fears," says Choudhary. Gujjars milk production business forms a backbone of rural economy in Jammu. Besides selling milk they also rent fields for grazing against rental payments twice, every year.

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir police has assured support to [Gujjar milk sellers](#), who have alleged that they are facing a vilifying campaign of being coronavirus carriers and business boycott from sections of society in various areas of Jammu division.

The Gujjar community has said it is being subjected to a "hate campaign" related to the [Tablighi Jamaat](#) gathering last month in Delhi's [Nizamuddin](#), which has emerged as a Covid-19 hotspot as several participants came from abroad and allegedly brought in the infection. This has directly impacted the

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"We had a meeting with J&K police IG in Jammu today and he assured that we won't be stopped now onwards. We hope it translates into action on ground," says Jameel, who had complained that authorities weren't paying heed to their concerns in past few weeks.

The Dodhi Association also met animal husbandry officials in Jammu asking them to issue an advisory regarding the quality of their milk, so that people don't fall prey to any propaganda.

"We also advised them to start a helpline so that consumers can reach out to the officials if they face any problem because of our milk. We also told them to issue order saying that milk cans of a vendor should be treated as restriction passes," said Jameel.

The mindset behind the negative propaganda against Gujjars, Jameel alleges is aimed at disenfranchising the community financially and take over their business.

"They took away the business from chammars/dalits by stigmatizing the profession and now a section of society controls the whole shoe business, where chammars are working as employees. Now they want to take communal route to stigmatize us and take over the business," said Jameel.

Another problem faced by the Gujjars is delay in migration to higher reaches along with the cattle--an annual routine of many nomad gujjars in summer-- due to the corona virus pandemic. "We are facing an existential threat, but we just to live our lives and do our business, without any confrontation or nursing any grudge," said Jameel.

"We have assured them that they would be allowed to move," inspector general (IG) of J&K Police in Jammu, Mukesh Singh, told ET after a delegation of Dodhi Gujjar Association led by Jameel Choudhary met him with their complaint.

"As of now we haven't got any specific complaint about boycott or organized vilification campaign. We will take action, if they come forward with any specific complaint," Singh told ET.

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