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**Unending persecution**

Since the launch of the freedom struggle in 1989, the people of Indian-occupied Kashmir have been subjected to ruthless oppression by the Indian security forces to subdue their movement.

The history of oppression is replete with incidents of a horrendous nature, with the Indian security forces exhibiting extreme brutality. In this regard, the killing of 55 Kashmiris on January 21, 1990 in Srinagar – who were protesting against the rape of Kashmiri women by personnel of the Indian security forces – constitutes an act of ultimate bestiality.

International human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, have been regularly compiling reports about these killings and human rights abuses by the Indian security forces. According to these reports, the Indian security forces during the period from January 1989 to December 2020 have killed 95,723 Kashmiris, arrested 161,330 civilians, demolished 110,383 houses, widowed 22,922 women and gang raped 11,226 women.

It has been a story of unparalleled persecution, perpetrated with impunity by the Indian security forces which enjoy immunity from prosecution under ‘The Armed Forces (Jammu & Kashmir) Special Powers Ordinance 1990’. Amnesty international is on record to have recorded a number of incidents where the Indian security forces indulged in extrajudicial killings, and has been stressing the need for the repeal of that draconian law. The extent of the inhuman actions of the Indian government and its security forces can be judged from the fact that mass and unnamed graves of 2043 Kashmiris have been unearthed at more than 18 sites in Occupied Kashmir.

The nature and extent of the brutality of the Indian security forces has taken a new turn after the repeal of articles 370 and 35 A of the Indian constitution by the BJP regime headed by PM Narendra Modi; bifurcation of the territory into two; its annexation to the Indian Union and the promulgation of laws to change the demographic realities of the state in contravention of the Security Council resolutions, international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

With a view to quell the anticipated resistance by the people of Kashmir, the Modi government deployed more troops in the valley. Since August 5, 2019 a population of over 14 million is under siege, coupled with a communication blockade which continues unabated. Extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearance, torture, harassment of civilians, arbitrary arrests of the youth, persecution of political leaders, ban on human rights organizations and witch-hunt against dissenters, media houses and journalists – this and more is being employed to kill the freedom movement and the likelihood of any resistance. According to a report compiled by the Kashmir Institute of International Relations, 305 Kashmiri youth have been killed since August 5, 2019 during cordon and search operations and fake encounters staged by the Indian security forces.

The siege and suspension of economic activities since August 5, 2019 has also led to a severe economic meltdown, which is being widely perceived as a deliberate attempt on the part of the BJP government to render Kashmiris economically crippled and dependent on the Indian state.

India has been striving to sell the narrative that what it has done in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir is its internal matter. Nevertheless, the redeeming fact in this regard has been that the international community has not accepted that narrative. Two UN reports also corroborate abuse of human rights in the state. A number of world leaders and persons heading important UN organizations have expressed grave concern regarding violation of human rights in Occupied Kashmir. Newly elected US President Joe Biden has said: “In Kashmir, the Indian government should take all necessary steps to restore rights for all the people of Kashmir. Restrictions on dissent, such as preventing peaceful protests or shutting or slowing down the Internet, weaken democracy.”

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michele Bachelet, expressing concern on the situation observed, “In the last one year in Jammu and Kashmir, incidents of military and police violence against civilians continue, including use of pellet guns. While I welcome the release of some political and community leaders, hundreds of people remain in arbitrary detention, with many habeas corpus petitions still pending – including those of many of Jammu and Kashmir’s political leaders”.

The UN secretary-general has also shown concern on the abuse of human rights in Indian-occupied Kashmir and emphasized a solution of the Kashmir dispute in conformity with UN resolutions. The UNSC in its three informal meetings held in the backdrop of the Indian action of August 5, 2019 has also reiterated that a solution to the Kashmir dispute should be found in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter and the relevant resolutions.

Unfortunately, while the resolution of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with UNSC resolutions is acknowledged as a way forward and concern is shown over the abuse of human rights in Occupied Kashmir, no initiative has come forth either by the UN – which has the obligation to resolve the dispute in consonance with Security Council resolutions – or world leaders to use their influence on India to rescind its actions in the state, stop the persecution of the Kashmiris through inhuman actions and fulfill its obligations under the UN resolutions.

Like Palestine, the issue of Kashmir is hostage to global politics. India’s strategic partners are looking the other way while the Modi regime continues to persecute the Kashmiris. It is a reward for India for its role in furthering the objectives of their ‘Contain China’ policy, which badly reflects on their humanitarian credentials and the much-trumpeted respect for the UN Charter, international Law and UN resolutions.

They fail to realize that their indifference to the plight of the Kashmiris and India’s hegemonic designs, spurred by the supremacist RSS ideology of ‘Hindutva’, is pushing the region towards perennial instability and a possible military confrontation between the two nuclear neighbours. Such an eventuality would not only undermine their strategic interests in the region but also prove destructive for the South Asian region and beyond.

Non-resolution of the Kashmir dispute even after 72 years is an affront to the conscience of the world community as well as to the UN as a peace-making body. India needs to be stopped before it is too late. Indian leaders must also understand that they cannot get away with their machinations of keeping the people of Occupied Kashmir under subjugation, denying them their right to self-determination and maintaining a hostile posture towards Pakistan which is a party to the dispute.

Acting as a war-like state could ultimately also prove self-destructive for India. History is witness to the fact that war-like states ultimately had to bite the dust.

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