

Kashmir and true democracy

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The tug of war over Jammu and Kashmir has entered a new phase. The Congress government in New Delhi has intensified the human rights rampage, and slaughter of innocent Kashmiris, while throwing crumbs of autonomy on the trapped people of Kashmir. The statements of Hurriyet (APHC) leaders fully expose New Delhi claims that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India. Mohammad Yasin Malik the JKLF leader, who has been repeatedly jailed and tortured, addressed a protest rally in Srinagar on November 21, 2004.

He said, "The ongoing liberation movement will be taken to its logical conclusion at all costs". The gathering was held to commemorate the martyrdom of hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris since 1990. Condemning Indian Army's terrorism, Yasin Malik said, "India is targeting the people of Kashmir for supporting the freedom movement. India has created a war like situation in Occupied Kashmir by inhuman repression. Forcing people including women and children, out of their homes in this extreme cold weather during the night in sub-zero temperature, and subjecting them to beatings and torture is the worst kind of human rights violation. India is resorting to heinous crimes to suppress the freedom movement.

To detract the people of Kashmir from their right of self-determination, the government in New Delhi keeps offering all kinds of carrots, including autonomy under Indian Constitution and military rule. While the Prime Minister of India offers the "autonomy" carrot", Rashtriya Rifles

raids houses, conducts ruthless siege and search operations, kills people, dishonors women and vandalizes household goods". The APHC leaders including JKLF (Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Movement) are the true representatives of Kashmir. They are the ones who have undergone immense suffering, offered huge sacrifices, including death for freedom. They are the brave sons of Kashmir, who continue to lay down their lives to end Indian military occupation.

They remain undaunted in the face of Indian bullets and bayonets, and continue to speak out against Indian oppression. Their courage and resistance to Indian tyranny must be respected and applauded. How to help the Kashmiris to unshackle Indian military bondage should be the number one priority for the people and the government of Pakistan. The Pakistan government has extended diplomatic and moral support to the Kashmir cause, but in the face of Indian intransigence and military repression, it failed to produce desired results.

Volunteers from Azad Kashmir and from Pakistan have also tried to help the Kashmiri freedom fighters to fight Indian state terrorism. But after 9/11 India has manoeuvred to tarnish the Kashmiri armed struggle as "Pakistan sponsored terrorism". The ground realities (overwhelming Indian military power, and lack of US and European sympathy and support) has helped India to tighten its grip on Kashmir. It is becoming difficult to rescue Kashmiris from state terror-

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ism and the plight of foreign occupation, unless a new type of polity - truly democratic polity emerges in Pakistan. It will have to be a long drawn struggle for freedom and democracy.

The people of Kashmir and the Pakistani nation will have to make sacrifices to free Kashmir from the Indian subjugation. A strong Pakistan could be the guarantor for the right of self-determination of the Kashmiris, and for the liberation of Jammu and Kashmir from foreign occupation. Pakistan's national and political unity, economic strength, military power and diplomatic influence would be great assets, and a source of strength for the liberation movement in Jammu and Kashmir. Unfortunately vested interests have caused the ongoing political divide.

With political polarization nearing a chaotic situation in case MMA rallies gain momentum; with General Musharraf sticking to his guns, and feeling smug and powerful; and despite the government circles feeling triumphant over the passage of the President's two office Bill by the Parliament, the political situation is the cause of uncertainty and worry. Government circles and President's po-

litical supporters feel confident that they have subdued the political opposition, and provided legal basis to General Pervez Musharraf to continue as the Chief of the Army Staff, if he so wishes.

This has sent wrong messages across the LOC, to the subjugated people of Kashmir, who are looking to Pakistan as a strong democracy for their salvation from foreign subjugation. But our "democracy" is sustained by the military. A democracy sustained by the military is no democracy. Pakistani democracy walking on military crutches is weak and nebulous as compared to robust Indian democracy. But the people of Kashmir, subjected to repeated rigged elections have been denied democracy and have remained under fascist rule since 1947.

Undiluted democracy in Pakistan will be a source of strength for Kashmiris fight for freedom and democracy. President Pervez Musharraf needs to derive his political strength from public support, i.e. from the people. The Presidential referendum, Parliament passing of the 17th Amendment, and the recent election success of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, was vote of confidence and endorsement of President Musharraf himself. The President is the Commander-in-Chief of the three services, and his authority and public popularity are the guarantors of his security. He has high national standing and a very high international stature, and the NSC should assure him security and continuity in office.

He is widely respected leader of the

Islamic Ummah. Because of his courage and steadfast stand on issues facing the Ummah including his resolve to settle the Kashmir dispute peacefully, he is a pillar of strength and hope for the Kashmiri people. He could bring real democracy to Pakistan by sacrificing his uniform. Pakistan should have democracy as visualised by Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. An army commander as President in uniform would be beyond Jinnah's thoughts and ideals. As a Muslim Musharraf must believe that stature, life and death is in Allah's hand. Allah is the giver and the taker. No one can dictate to Allah. Allah will protect Musharraf out of uniform, and he need not worry because Allah is the only Protector, and not the uniform.

As a humble citizen I wish to appeal to President Musharraf not to hunger for the uniform after December 31, 2004. He should listen to his voice of conscience and not to the flatterers, who have created the fear that a lunatic general could conspire to stage a coup d'état. The National Security Council should take care of such an eventuality. Musharraf is blessed with disciplined and loyal armed forces, whose priorities should be national security, liberation of Jammu and Kashmir and defence against external aggression. The MMA is a natural ally for the achievement of these aims. The MMA should offer cooperation to stabilize the polity and help to end the foreign occupation. Politically united and truly democratic Pakistan will infuse a new spirit among the Kashmiris to break the chains of Indian bondage.