**Kashmir: A Lost Cause?**

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The story of Kashmir in the last 200 years is of subjugation and tyranny. The Dogra rulers were followed by the treaty of Amristar when Kashmir was sold to Maharaja Gulab Singh for 75 lakh rupees. A beautiful Muslim majority region with exceptional arts and crafts, the home of the Paisley design has been struggling with its right to liberty and self determination. The current political movement for freedom was ignited on 13 July 1931 with the martyrdom of twenty-two Kashmiris against the oppression of Maharaja Hari Singh’s forces. The subsequent accession of Kashmir to India, in 1947, was against the wishes of the people. Realizing the injustice of this impending accession, Kashmiri veterans of World War 2 and pashtun tribesmen took matters in their own hands, and were able to liberate what we now call as Azad Jammu and Kashmir. India took the dispute to the United Nations on January 1, 1948 and three resolutions 37, 38 and 47 were passed by the UN, asking for a ceasefire, UN observers in the region and a Plebiscite to determine the will of the people of Kashmir. After the ceasefire, India held elections in the state, and a special status was granted to Kashmir by revoking Article 370 of the Indian constitution and 35A. This decision was taken to quell the demand for a plebiscite. Over the years, Pakistan and India have fought three wars over the Kashmir dispute. The reversal of the two Articles of the Indian constitution on 5th August 2019, was followed by unprecedented restrictions and a communication blackout. Internet access and freedom of speech were denied. Pulitzer prize winner and photo journalists such as Masarat Zahra are facing persecutions of all sorts regarding access to the occupied area.

After 31st October 2019, India has issued over 3.4 million domicile certificates to settlers from outside IIOJK under the so-called “Jammu and Kashmir Grant of Domicile Certificate (Procedure) Rules, 2020”. Kashmiri administration has been replaced by Indians in universities, hindu and muslim shrines, banks, etc. Moreover, persons charged under the severe Public Safety Act, 1978 can be sent to jail anywhere in India.

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New Delhi has empowered the administration to evict locals from properties that they might had purchased from hindu pandits. Golf courses, forest lands and tourist development authorities are now directly controlled by New Delhi. They can issue, allot, lease or provide prime land and facilities to anybody from India. Indian Administrative Officers of Kashmir origin have been replaced by non-local officers. In this military siege, which has now lasted for almost 2 years, hundreds of Kashmiris have been killed, most often in fake encounters, where innocent Kashmiri youth are executed depicted as terrorists. Over 3,700 Kashmiris have been injured; nearly 15,000 have been arbitrarily arrested, hundreds faced tortured, collective punishments imposed, and entire neighbourhoods and villages have been destroyed. Almost all of the Kashmiri leadership is detained in jails, detention centres or is under house arrest, including the Hurriyet leadership, and ailing leaders such as Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Yasin Malik and Asiya Andrabi. As a result, Mr. Ashraf Sehrai, a veteran political leader and Chairman of the Tehreek-e-Hurriyet, died in Indian detention on 5 May, 2021. According to reports, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, essential life-saving equipment such as oxygen kits and cylinders have deliberately been not provided to IIOJK

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All actions taken by India in IIOJK, since 1951, including the measures initiated on and after 5 August 2019, and any additional unilateral changes that India may introduce in the future, are violations of the laws of Security Council Resolutions and the 4th Geneva Convention. It is, therefore, a matter of great concern, according to reports, that India might be contemplating the imposition of further illegal and unilateral measures in IIOJK, including division, bifurcation and demographic changes in the occupied territory.

However, Pakistan desires peaceful relations with all its neighbours, including India. A just settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, in accordance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions, is essential for durable peace and stability in South Asia. International community, especially the UN Security Council, must assert its legal and political authority to ensure the full implementation of its resolutions guaranteeing the exercise of Kashmiris’ right to self-determination. The Council must also call upon India to end its campaign of repression in IIOJK and reverse all its illegal actions, including those initiated on and after 5 August 2019, and to cease and desist from imposing any additional unilateral changes in the occupied regions.

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