**Kashmir Solidarity Day a ritual should graduate into a programme of action**

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February 5th returns every year and has been observed as a Solidarity Day with the people of Indian occupied Kashmir for the last 30 years. Unless it graduates into a programme of action, the ritual would not be of any help to the people who have been exposed to a renewed army oppression from 5 August 2019. We need to examine the results achieved from a huge participation in numbers and from the total time spent on the day indoors or on the streets. This year it was all virtual. Covid pandemic has taken away the element of optics and therefore the embedded merits need a thorough appraisal.

Pakistan High Commission in London hosted a Webinar in connection with Kashmir Solidarity Day on Friday 05 February. It attracted an impressive number of British Parliamentarians (including members of the House of Lords), politicians active and retired, civil society leaders, human rights defenders and members of the community. Contributions were rich and there was a sense of concern for the people placed under siege by the Indian army. Ambassador Moazzam Ahmed Khan and Events Team at the High Commission for Pakistan, London had worked very hard for the occasion. They all deserve a special “hurrah”.

It was encouraging to see that British MPs who do not have Kashmiris as constituents were in attendance. Their presence did not have any kind constituency pressure but participated on merit. This was seen as a reliable plus in the Webinar. Kashmir Solidarity Events could not be allowed to pass by as a pony and dog show but shall have to graduate into a full programme of action. It is the duty of the Government of Azad Kashmir, Government of Pakistan, Kashmiri Diaspora and members of Kashmiri and Pakistani origin in the two houses of parliament, that they use the numbers and the aggregate time, towards a well-planned work plan that would bring relief in the lives of people in Kashmir.

Government of Azad Kashmir and the Government of Pakistan should not miss any future opportunities and should brief the APPG on Kashmir and support other NGOs working at the UN, to work on the three UN reports

It is much more important that Kashmiris do not use anyone of these MPs to advertise their personal or group interests in the Webinar or at any other time. If we start using anyone of these parliamentarians in that manner, it will snowball into an abuse and there would be no end to it. A mischief by an individual or a group to seek an advertisement of any kind does not remain in the best interests of the people. If there is a need for an appreciation, it should be general and in equity. Therefore, Kashmiris need to hold their personal interests under control. We should keep in mind that the merits of our case and the various elements of our character remain under a microscope of the system.

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Kashmir (APPG on Kashmir) should be encouraged to assist us beyond their Committee Room Meetings (addressing Kashmiris and Pakistanis), reports and statements on Kashmir. Indian Diaspora and in Particular Kashmiri Pandits also have their respective All Party Parliamentary Groups.

APPG on Kashmir and others who support in the British Parliament need to be told that Britain has the Presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. Every effort should be made so that British Permanent Representative to the UN in New York considers some kind of discussion on Kashmir in the Security Council. India has taken its seat as a non-permanent member of the Security Council from January this year for two years. India would be very active and has a daily interaction with other members. However, the President could bring the Kashmir situation on the agenda.

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Kashmir in the British Parliament needs a credible guidance and it could only come from people who do not use constituency blackmail to force them to participate but use the merits of the Kashmir case. Otherwise, we shall fail to win over important members of Parliament from all parties, who do not have the constituency pressure. It should not appear that MPs are supporting us for reasons of a vote only. It is these (latter) members who fail to prevail during question time or in their representations made to a Government minister on behalf of Kashmiris. India is always smart in making inroads with the Government ministers and flag the MP’s interest as a quid pro quo.

There is a need to revisit our modus operadndi of listening to these members of Parliament in the Committee Room or arranging their visits to Azad Kashmir. These members of British Parliament were told (by the author) at the Webinar hosted by Pakistan High Commission that they need to re-group and branch out in their support to the people of Kashmir. The first and foremost is to address the recommendation made in the June 2018 OHCHR report to Human Rights Council and 17 recommendations made to the Government of India, to correct and improve her human rights record in its occupied part of Kashmir.

Human Rights situation in Indian occupied Kashmir has been scientifically documented in the three UN Reports of June 2018, July 2019 and May 2018. There is no need to go beyond this evidence but there is a need to cite the evidence compiled by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Secretary General, JKCHR and other NGOs.

APPG on Kashmir should be encouraged to follow upon the recommendation made to the Human Rights Council to “establish a commission of inquiry to conduct a comprehensive independent international investigation.” There are 10 countries, including Britain, India and Pakistan sitting on the 46th session of the Human Rights Council, who have remained robustly involved in the UN Security Council Debates on Kashmir. Therefore, it is lot easier to access these countries and build a pressure for the establishment of a Commission.

India is also required to institute five investigations in paras ©, (d), (e), (l) and (n). Recommendation 17 para (q) has asked India to “Fully respect the right of self-determination of the people of Kashmir as protected under international law”. Recommendation 7 para (g) asks Pakistan to “Fully respect the right of self-determination of the people of Kashmir as protected under international law”.

Recommendation 6 in para (f) has asked Government of India to “Provide reparations and rehabilitation to all individuals injured and the family of those killed in the context of security operation”. APPG on Kashmir delegation during their visit of Azad Kashmir should have been briefed on the kind of support required to advance the Kashmir case. Unfortunately, their escorts accompanying them from London are good meaning but very mediocre people, unfit to brief.

Government of Azad Kashmir continues to pay lip services to the Kashmiri case (there are reasons for it) and it does not have the institutional framework for it as provided in the Act 1970 and Act 1974. Government of Pakistan carries the other half of the burden to set up this institutional framework as provided in the Karachi Agreement of April 1949 and thereafter in the two Constitutions of Azad Kashmir. Government of Pakistan could have helped the Azad Kashmir Government to correctly re-set the compass of its responsibilities.

The Director General of Kashmir Liberation Cell is a 10+ pass (intermediate) Kashmiri and one can pity the mind-set that has agreed to this quid pro quo between Muzaffarabad and Islamabad at a time when India has aggressed against the people of Kashmir. Government of Azad Kashmir and the Government of Pakistan should not miss any future opportunities and should brief the APPG on Kashmir and support other NGOs working at the UN, to work on the three UN reports. We need to consider means to force India to undo its actions of 5 August 2019 and return to the UN template on Kashmir.

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