**The struggle continues**

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Indian occupied Kashmir continues to bleed. On August 5 this year, it will be three years since the Modi government unleashed its reign of terror following the abrogation of articles 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution.

The Kashmiri people have been subjected to unprecedented brutal repression and cynical political machinations. That the Kashmiri freedom struggle has survived this onslaught is a tribute to the courage and indomitable spirit of the Kashmiris. They are prepared to bleed and die for their freedom rather than succumb to Indian domination.

After India reneged on its commitment to implement the UN’s decision for a plebiscite in Kashmir to resolve the dispute with Pakistan, it adopted articles 370 and 35A in 1954 to create the façade of Kashmiri autonomy and special status with the collaboration of quislings like Sheikh Abdullah and others. But when even Sheikh Abdullah proved unmanageable, he was imprisoned and a string of puppets were imposed either through fraudulent elections or resorting to direct rule from Delhi. Such manipulation induced the popular Kashmiri uprising that erupted in 1989 and has continued since despite massive Indian repression.

The Hindu chauvinist BJP had consistently opposed even this facade of autonomy and under Modi’s leadership was determined to revoke this ‘special’ status for the Kashmiris. After his thumping electoral victory in May 2019, fueled by anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan rhetoric, Modi struck on August 5, 2019 with over-whelming support of the Indian legislature to abrogate articles 370 and 35A. This was a blatant violation of not only India’s own declaratory policy but even more seriously of international law, UN Security Council resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention, apart from the bilateral Shimla and Lahore agreements with Pakistan.

These changes were enforced through unprecedented brutal repression that still continues, implemented by over 900,000 troops granted impunity through draconian laws such as the Public Safety Act, Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. This state of siege has involved denial of fundamental freedoms and massive violations of human rights, including rape, torture, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, fake encounters, custodial deaths, cordon and search operations, involuntary disappearances and destruction of property for collective punishment. Use of weapons meant to cause grievous injury such as pellet guns have been indiscriminately used, including against women and children.

Political leaders, even those supportive of India, have been detained without charge or on trumped up charges. Similarly, lawyers, teachers, students, human rights defenders and even children have been incarcerated. A glaring travesty of justice is the imprisonment for life of iconic Hurriyat leader Yasin Malik on contrived and fabricated charges. Since 2019, Indian forces have martyred 640 innocent Kashmiris while in 2020 alone 119 people were martyred. Thousands of others languish in jails across India, including children.

This latest bout of barbarity has accentuated Indian repression since 1989 to bludgeon the Kashmiris into submission. According to reliable figures, since 1989, 94,089 Kashmiris have been martyred. Among these 7,244 were due to custodial killings. Civilians arrested are 164,931. Most horrifically, 11,255 women have been gang-raped or molested. The number of children orphaned is 107,866 and the number of women widowed is 22,946. Over 110,484 houses and buildings have been destroyed as a form of collective punishment. Even children have not been spared-on. An estimated 13,000 children and youth have been put in arbitrary detention and tortured or abused, the youngest being nine years old.

Another insidious aspect of Modi’s agenda is to change the Muslim majority demography of Occupied Kashmir and to disenfranchise the Kashmiri Muslims. By revoking Article 35A, non-Kashmiri Hindus have been allowed to settle in the territory and to purchase property. Since 2019, more than 4.2 million illegal domicile certificates have been issued to non-Kashmiris settlers while putting up land in the occupied areas for sale to outsiders. As a result, Kashmiri Muslims would become a minority in their own land. This is a violation of UN resolutions, the UN Charter and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Similarly, the ‘Delimitation Commission’ seeks to disenfranchise Kashmiri Muslims by giving more seats to the Hindu-dominated constituencies such as Jammu, which is inconsistent with the population figures.

India’s growing strategic partnership with the US and its allies has enabled its repression of the Kashmiris and demonization of their legitimate freedom struggle as ‘terrorism’. This is despite Western claims to uphold human rights and denounce ‘autocratic’ governments. Despite such double standards, some Western organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Genocide Watch and the Russell Tribunal on War Crimes, have accused India of massive human rights violations including war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Moreover, the UN secretary-general, the high commissioner for human rights, special mandate holders of the Human Rights Council and the president of the UN General Assembly as well as the European Union and the OIC, have all raised grave concerns over Indian human rights violations against the Kashmiris.

Pakistan has played a key role in mobilizing international support in favour of the Kashmiris through outreach to the UN leadership, the EU and the OIC as well as through bilateral diplomacy. With China’s cooperation, two sessions on Kashmir were held by the UN Security Council after a hiatus since 1965.

Apart from such growing international criticism, Modi’s 2019 action has increased hostility with Pakistan while exacerbating tensions with China in the disputed Ladakh region of Kashmir. These developments make the Indian misadventure in Occupied Kashmir untenable in the long term. Even though India claims to be able to fight on two and a half fronts – against Pakistan, China and the Kashmiris – it has failed to even subdue the Kashmiris since 1989.

Instead of overcoming the Kashmiri uprising, Modi’s policies have further alienated the people. Consequently, India has already lost Kashmiri hearts and minds. This irreversible situation requires a political solution based on the wishes of the Kashmiri people. Ultimately, India will have to recognize this reality. Until that happens, Pakistan must continue to support the legitimate freedom struggle of the Kashmiri people.

The writer is a former ambassador of Pakistan.