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**Attacks on Gaza**

Israeli bombardment on Gaza has not only destroyed buildings and hospitals; it has also targeted nearly all roads leading to hospitals. The situation was so grim that even picking up bodies of the dead and rescuing the injured became extremely hard.

As the airstrikes continued, large commercial and residential areas in Gaza were deprived of electricity and even small-scale clinics were shrouded in the dark with the wounded languishing in pain. So far nearly 250 Palestinians have been killed including over a hundred children and women. Retaliatory rocket fire from the Hamas has hardly targeted 12 Israelis. Historically, it has been an Israeli practice to kill ten or 20 times more Palestinians even if a single Israeli becomes a victim. Then Israel unleashes its barbarism on children, the elderly, and women in an indiscriminate annihilation of entire families of Palestinians.

In its latest onslaught in Gaza, Israel did not consider the media sacrosanct either, and in an airstrike targeted Aljallah Tower which housed offices of some international media organizations. These media outlets lost their equipment and offices in a series of attacks that continued for two weeks including the last week of the holy month of Ramazan and even during Jumatul Wida, Shab-e-Qadr and Eid which are the most sacred yearly events for Muslims around the world. While the Muslim world bid farewell to Ramazan, the Palestinians of Gaza bid farewell to their dear ones who were killed by Israeli atrocities.

Israel launched its campaign of destruction in the area of Sheikh Jarrah by evicting some Palestinian families from their homes. Sheikh Jarrah is a neighbourhood in East Jerusalem named after Hussamuddin Jarrahi who lived in the 12th century AD and was a personal physician of Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi who liberated Jerusalem from Christian control in 1187. This area has a historical significance as Jerusalem remained under Muslim control from the time of the second Muslim caliph to 1967, barring a period of 88 years when Christian crusaders had occupied in from 1099 to 1187.

The area of Sheikh Jarrah is also famous for its al-Husayni clan which followed the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam rather than the Shafii School which most Arabs follow in Palestine. This area also played an important role in the rebellion against Muhammad Ali who governed Egypt and Palestine in defiance of the Ottoman Empire. For the most part of the 20th century, Sheikh Jarrah remained under the control of Jordan and after the 1948 Arab-Israel War, many Palestinian families evicted from West Jerusalem settled in Jarrah. During the 1967 War, Israel occupied the entire West Bank of the River Jordan including East Jerusalem and Sheikh Jarrah.

Since then many Israeli Jews have moved to Sheikh Jarrah, occupying Palestinian houses and refusing to leave. This practice has intensified in the 21st century and especially during the last decade under the patronage of Benjamin Netanyahu. For example, in 2001, Israeli settlers moved into a sealed sector of the al-Kurd family’s house and refused to vacate it, claiming the property belonged to the Jews. Then in 2008, Jerusalem District Court ruled that more properties in Sheikh Jarrah belonged to the Sephardic Community Committee. Arab families found themselves at the mercy of the Israeli occupants who kept increasing their hold in the area.

Many Jewish families who had been living in rented Arab properties claimed ownership and refused to vacate the houses. In 2009, the al-Haroun and al-Ghawi families were evicted from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah and Jewish families moved in with the support of Israeli courts. This process has heightened tensions in recent years as the settlers have been emboldened by both the government and the judiciary. Israel has been violating its obligations under the Roadmap for peace, rendering Palestinian families homeless who have nowhere to go and no shelter to sleep under.

After the destruction of the Aljallah Tower, the US asked for an explanation but Israel did not feel obliged to explain the reasons for this attack. It is interesting to note that whenever any violations of human rights takes place China, the US is prompt in its condemnation and hue and cry even if there is no solid proof, but in the case of Israel for the past 75 years the US has been openly supporting one of the worst violators of human rights in the world. Innocent Palestinians are targeted and killed but Israel and the US are not much bothered.

Arab and other Muslim countries have been active in raising their voices at various international forums, and that’s it. Some international media organizations were more perturbed when Israel destroyed the Associated Press and Al-Jazeera offices. These media outlets were telecasting live the miseries of Palestinians and apparently Israel wanted to cripple those live transmissions exposing Israeli atrocities. Before Joe Biden assumed power, some observers expected that the US would now alter the policies of the former Republican president, Trump. The new secretary of state, Anthony Blinken, had also given some hints about an impending change in American policy towards Israel.

Now it has become clear that all those expectations were unfounded as Blinken spoke at a presser in Copenhagen and shared with the audience his disappointment at not being able to get much from Israel. He also refrained from terming Israeli attacks as illegal and tantamount to war crimes. As attacks on Gaza assumed a tragic proportion and all civic amenities and facilities ground to a halt, utilities such as electricity, gas, health services, and water became scarce. All these were already under severe strain due to a severe lack of financial resources with the Gaza administration run by Hamas.

As Palestinians moved their dead and injured on stretchers and bedsheets, the conscience of the so-called ‘world community’ was sound asleep with some talk that sounded like mere murmur. The UN secretary general delivered an amazing statement when he asked both sides to stop violence, as if it was a fight between two equal powers. The protective dome that Israel has erected around its air space has given it over 90 percent protection from any rockets fired from Gaza. The protective shield destroys any incoming rocket in the air as soon as it tries to enter Israeli airspace.

The power plant in Gaza has faced acute shortage of fuel to keep itself running and this is further hampering relief efforts. As a result of all this, most Palestinians have been experiencing severe mental stress and tension as there is an unending threat of drone attacks that can resume anytime. Israel is in possession of state-of-the-art drone technology that is lethal and unmatchable. Palestinians have nothing comparable to counter this menace. Israeli drones keep in their memory all Palestinian areas and neighbourhoods and can strike their targets at will with high level of accuracy.

On the other side, the US did provide full support to Israel in the UN. China was a bit better while expressing regret that the US was not keen on speaking against this brutal Israeli violence. The UN Security Council appears once again to be a talking shop with no strategy to stem such blatant aggression. Most countries – rich and not so rich alike – did not fulfil their responsibilities properly and kept calling each other on the phone rather than doing something concrete against Israel. The world needs to shake its conscience and stop using the excuse of ‘both sides have a right to defend themselves’.

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