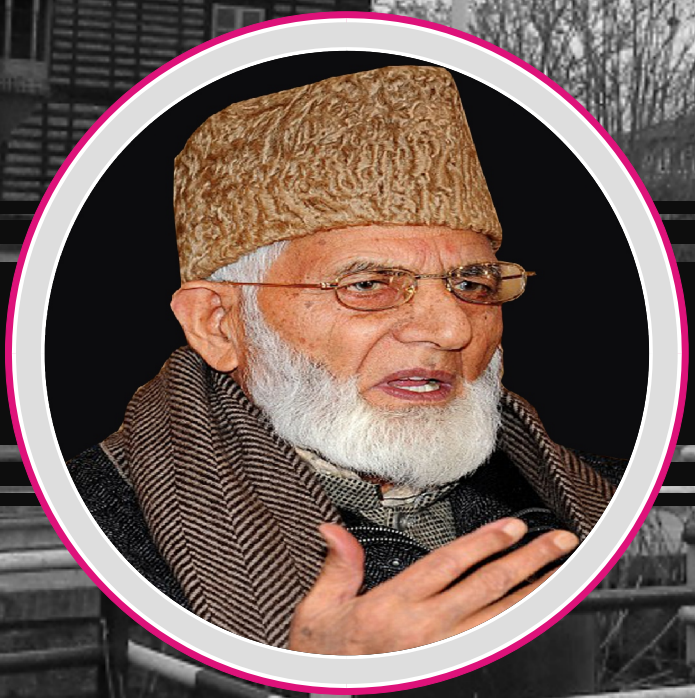




September 2021



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Patron
Raja Tariq Mehmood Khan

Chief Editor
Raja Muhammad Sajjad Khan

Editor
Muhammad Sarfraz Khan

Assistant Editor
Matloob Hussain

Circulation
Naqeebullah Gardezi

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Published by:

Chief Editor Kashmir Today K-Block, New District Complex, Muzaffarabad.

Website: www.jklc.org

E-mail: kashmirtodaymzd@gmail.com

Ph: 05822-920072, 05822-920074

Month: September 2021

Volume: 07

Issue: 06

Quantity: 1000

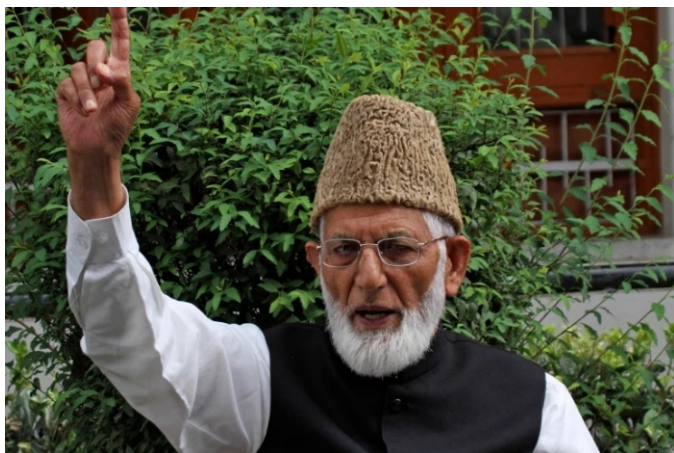
Price Rs. 150/-

Yearly Subscription: Rs. 1000/-

Registration No.MZD-31

Obituary: Syed Ali Shah Geelani was symbol of Kashmir resistance

Geelani spearheaded Kashmir's movement for right to self-determination and was a staunch proponent of merging with Pakistan.



Geelani speaks during a press conference in Srinagar, Indian-administered Kashmir [File: Mukhtar Khan/AP]

Top Kashmiri separatist Syed Ali Shah Geelani died on Wednesday evening. He was 92. As soon as news of his death began to make the rounds in the disputed Himalayan region, authorities blocked the internet and deployed hundreds of troops in the main city of Srinagar to prevent a mass funeral procession or protests against Indian rule. His family told Al Jazeera the police “snatched his body and forcibly buried him” in a quiet pre-dawn funeral on Thursday.

Syed Ali Shah Geelani: Kashmir separatist leader dies at 92

Geelani, who headed a hardline faction of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), died at his Srinagar residence after a prolonged illness.



Syed Ali Shah Geelani led a separatist alliance rejecting Indian rule and demanding a merger of Kashmir with Pakistan [File: Altaf Qadri/AP Photo]

Srinagar, Indian-administered Kashmir

Syed Ali Shah Geelani, a top separatist leader in Indian-administered Kashmir, has died at the age of 92 after a prolonged

illness.

Geelani, who quit politics in June last year, died at his residence in the main city of Srinagar on Wednesday night.

He was buried in a tightly controlled pre-dawn ceremony on Thursday as Indian authorities imposed a lockdown across the Himalayan region. Only a small number of his relatives were present, including two of his sons, reports said. A police official had told Al Jazeera on Wednesday night that only family members and a “few neighbours would be allowed to take part in the funeral”.

Troops deployed, restrictions imposed

Geelani headed a hardline faction of All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), a separatist alliance that rejects Indian rule and demands a merger of Kashmir with Pakistan. He long rejected any dialogue with India over the future of the region. After the region's August 5, 2019 abrogation of Article 370, which granted special status to Kashmir, Geelani was confined to his house due to his weak health.

His family said the elderly politician had been ailing for years and had been under house arrest for the last 12 years after leading several anti-India protests.

In the hours after his death was announced, large contingents of police and paramilitary troopers in riot gear were deployed outside Geelani's home. Restrictions were imposed across the region and mobile internet services were down.

Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan and is claimed by both in its entirety. Many Muslim Kashmiris support the goal of uniting the territory, either under Pakistani rule or as an independent country.

Indian officials describe the Kashmir rebellion as Pakistan-sponsored “terrorism”. Pakistan denies the charge, and most Kashmiris consider it a legitimate freedom struggle.

Tens of thousands of civilians, rebels and government forces have been killed in the conflict since the armed rebellion against Indian rule erupted in 1989.

Condolences

Kashmir's former chief minister, Mehbooba Mufti, offered her condolences over the leader's death. “Saddened by the news of Geelani sahab's passing away. We may not have agreed on most things but I respect him for his steadfastness and standing by his beliefs,” Mufti tweeted.

Kashmiri novelist and journalist Mirza Waheed said Geelani will remain an “enduring icon of resistance to tyranny”. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan also paid tribute to Geelani and said the country would hold a day of mourning. “Deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Kashmiri freedom fighter Syed Ali Geelani who struggled all his life for his people & their right to self-determination. He suffered incarceration & torture by the Occupying Indian state but remained resolute,” Khan wrote on Twitter. “We in Pakistan salute his courageous struggle & remember his words: 'Hum Pakistani hain aur Pakistan Humara hai' ['We are Pakistan and Pakistan is ours']”. The Pakistan flag

will fly at half-mast and we will observe a day of official mourning.” Last year, Geelani was awarded Pakistan's highest civilian honour, the Nishan-e-Pakistan, an award bestowed upon the likes of Nelson Mandela, Richard Nixon and Fidel Castro. Pakistani cricket legend Shahid Afridi also tweeted in tribute. “The fight for Kashmir's freedom has taken so many of our elders who have carried the weight of this movement for decades,” he wrote. “May we carry on their courage and legacy.”

India locks down Kashmir after quiet burial of separatist Geelani

Authorities blanket disputed region with troops and clamp down on communications to prevent protests over Syed Ali Shah Geelani's death.

Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the veteran separatist leader from Indian-administered Kashmir, has been laid to rest as the Indian authorities crack down on public movement and impose a near-total communications blackout to prevent protests. Geelani, the icon of the disputed region's resistance against New Delhi's rule, died late on Wednesday. He was 92. Geelani was buried in a quiet funeral organised by the authorities under harsh restrictions, his son Naseem Geelani told Al Jazeera. He said the family had planned the burial at the main martyrs' graveyard in Srinagar, the region's main city, as per his will, but “they (police) snatched his body and forcibly buried him”. “We told the administration that we will bury him at 10am so that our relatives who live in far-off areas could attend,” Naseem told Al Jazeera.

“But they took the body forcefully at 3am and did not allow any of us to take part in the last prayers. They even argued with the women in the family who resisted taking away his body.” Naseem said it was only at 10am on Thursday that the family members were allowed to see Geelani's grave. The Press Trust of India news agency reported that officials buried Geelani's body and disallowed any mass funeral in anticipation of anti-India protests.



Indian forces patrol near Geelani's residence in Srinagar after his death [Danish Ismail/Reuters]

Icon of Kashmiri resistance

Among the most prominent political leaders in Kashmir a Himalayan region claimed by both India and Pakistan in full, but ruled in parts Geelani for years led an umbrella alliance of

secessionists, known as the Hurriyat Conference. The alliance used civil disobedience in the form of shutdowns and protests as a tactic to counter Indian rule.

But the Hurriyat Conference split in 2003, when a group of separatists led by Geelani, who advocated Indian-administered Kashmir's merger with Pakistan, walked out after moderates decided to hold talks with New Delhi.

Geelani strongly opposed any dialogue with New Delhi, a position rejected outright by successive Indian governments who often dubbed him a hardline politician. He was kept under house arrest more than a decade after leading several anti-India protests. Around Geelani's home and elsewhere in Srinagar, armed troops lined main roads and manned checkpoints, as authorities sought to prevent protests following his passing.

The city's main business area remained deserted, with most shops closed, and the movement of vehicles restricted, the witness said. Authorities also cut internet connections and mobile networks in the Kashmir valleys since late on Wednesday. The clampdown echoes restrictions that were imposed in August 2019 when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi split Jammu and Kashmir then the country's only Muslim majority state into two federally administered territories. The shock move was opposed within Indian-administered Kashmir, including by the likes of Geelani who quit his Hurriyat Conference faction, saying that it had failed to counter New Delhi's efforts to tighten its grip on the disputed region.



Geelani, centre, flanked by separatist leaders Yasin Malik, right, and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, left, during a 2015 protest in Narbal near Srinagar [File: Mukhtar Khan/AP]

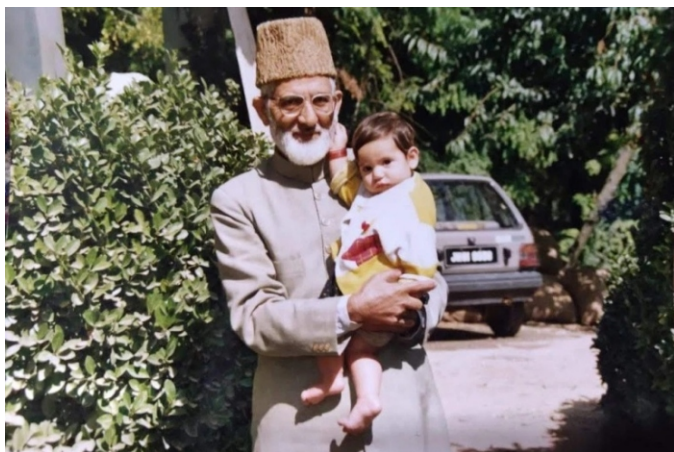
Syed Ali Shah Geelani: A life dedicated to Kashmir and its people

Oppression does not last,' my grandfather now 91 and in ailing health tells me as police line the roads outside.

It was a frosty February afternoon in the Turkish city of Kayseri. I had just finished my exams, and was hoping to have a rare moment of respite after submitting all my assignments. But before I could heave a sigh of relief and relax, I got a text: “Just heard about your grandfather. I am so sorry.” My grandfather, my “Aba”, is Syed Ali Shah Geelani, one of the most prominent figures in the Kashmiri resistance movement and the leader of

he closed his eyes and started reciting verses from the Holy Quran. As he was humming “La Ilaha illhala...” he suddenly stopped, raised his hand, and feebly shouted “Allah-u-Akbar!”

Aba dedicated his life to Islam and Kashmir's freedom struggle. For him, the two have always been inseparable. This is why, even when he barely had the energy to breathe, he was either reciting from the Quran or talking about Kashmir. “Do not give up on freedom. Zulm chu ne poshaan! Oppression does not last!” Aba kept repeating as I spoon-fed him. He kept reciting it to himself, as if he was trying to etch those words to his memory so that he would not forget what he had stood for all his life.

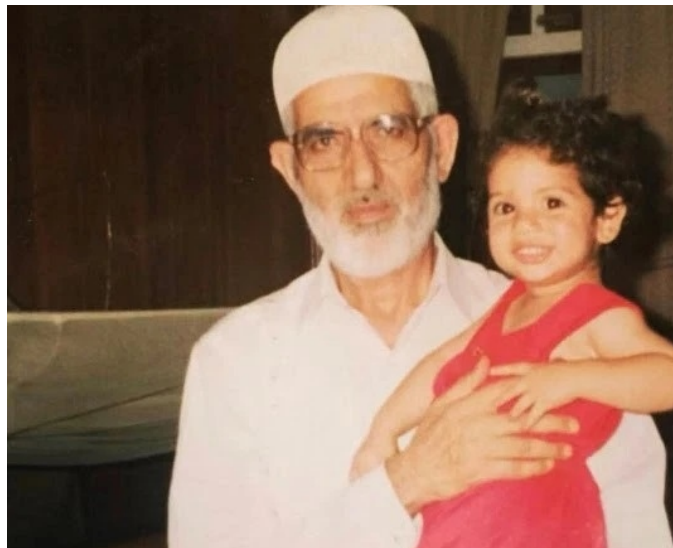


Syed Ali Shah Geelani, one of the most prominent figures in the Kashmiri resistance movement, has been under house arrest in Indian-administered Kashmir for years [Photo courtesy of Ruwa Shah]

By the end of my first day at Aba's house, his condition was getting slightly better. He was, after all, receiving very good care. A team of doctors sent by the authorities was visiting Aba on a daily basis. The Indian authorities are not normally known for their compassion and care for members of the Kashmiri resistance. However, after their move to revoke Kashmir's partial autonomy, and the unrest that followed, they are careful to prevent any episode that could trigger a mass gathering. And they know my grandfather's passing would cause many Kashmiris to take to the streets.

That evening, I went to my parents' house to spend the night. When I returned to my grandfather's house the next morning, I saw that the security outside the gate has been beefed up. Now, only close family members were allowed to enter, and people in the house were banned from using their phones. Fearing that I may not be able to return if I ventured out, I decided not to leave the house until things calmed down. That evening, two of the three people working in Aba's house were also removed by the police. All this was because a video of Aba, depicting his deteriorating state of health, was posted on social media. The video had gone viral, triggering panic among the people and alarming the authorities. The rumours that my grandfather is on his deathbed reached such levels that day that government officials inquired about my family's plans for Aba's burial and

last rites. “They will not let us do anything in case anything happens. They want to handle all of it,” my elder uncle, Naim Geelani, said.



The writer and her grandfather, Syed Ali Geelani [Photo courtesy of Ruwa Shah]

Aba wishes to be buried in the Martyr's Graveyard in Eidgah, Srinagar. How his burial is handled is important for us, because he is the head of our family. It is important for the state, because his death can lead to an outburst of anger. But most importantly, it is important for the Kashmiri people, because they love him, respect him and look up to him. Between all the discussions about the funeral, the fear of the unknown, and the acute sadness of knowing Aba is unlikely to get better, the health of my uncle, who has a heart condition, started to deteriorate. Just like his brother and my cousins, he was not only trying to come to terms with the looming demise of the head of our household, but also mentally preparing to get arrested. The number of officers outside was constantly increasing, and we all knew any one of us could be taken into custody at any second. We felt practically jailed in our grandfather's house. Somehow, I managed to send a message to a few journalists and tell them we had been locked in it made me feel a bit better to know that people outside, people who know my grandfather, are aware of our plight.

To cope with the tension, we all stayed up, watched some old videos, laughed and talked about how our lives have been shaped by politics. Aba's situation improved the next day, and the siege was relaxed. But he was clearly still in pain. As he laid restlessly, his eyes remained open and moved repeatedly from side to side.

Not sure what to do or how to help, we took turns sitting by his bed.

Throughout my life, I only had the opportunity to be alone with Aba a few times. But during these few days in February, I spent more time with him alone than any other member of our family. I jumped at every opportunity to be in his room because I knew that our time together was limited, and I wanted to talk to him as much as I could while he is still with us. He has always been an

important force in my life. A few years ago, in 2013, my parents refused to let me study journalism. It was Aba who finally convinced my father to allow me to follow my passion. Aba is much more progressive than anyone who only knows him as an orthodox leader would assume.



Syed Ali Shah Geelani shouts slogans at a rally in Srinagar on April 10, 2009 [File:Danish Ismail/Reuters]

Once he specifically asked for me, and I was overjoyed. I sat by his side for several hours and I keenly listened to him as he tried to speak in bits and pieces. “Your father was very young and energetic when I saw him for the first time ... He was sharp because he was from the old city (in Srinagar),” he said. Before the house in Hyderpora, Aba lived in Dooru, Sopore, a village in north Kashmir. “It was your father who asked me to move to Srinagar ... He always gave good advice,” Aba added after a long pause. “Give him my Salaam when you see him ... Do see him before you go back.”

My father is Aba's only son-in-law, among five others, who is an active part of the freedom struggle. In one of his letters to me from the prison, my father told me how Aba's character and dedication to the freedom struggle drove him to work with him. As Aba continued to talk fondly of his memories with my father, I thought of the times Aba, my father and I had spent in that very room across the years. When I was younger, I spent many hours watching Aba read, write, pray, exercise and passionately talk to my father and his other colleagues about Kashmir in that room.

Every move Aba made, every word he uttered was indicative of his strong and disciplined character. In spite of all his illnesses, he followed a strict schedule until the very end. He woke up before morning prayers and exercised for an hour. He also had a very limited diet, and never indulged in “fancy” food. He would have one yolk-less egg in the morning with a glass of milk. For lunch, one piece of chicken, a small bowl of soup without spices, and a small portion of rice. And for dinner, a single piece of flatbread with some vegetables. This was his routine for years.

As I tried to spoon-feed him fluids, I thought of all this, and broke down in tears.

All my life, I thought of him as someone unbreakable the epitome of strength and conviction in the face of difficulty and strife. But now, he was crumbling. Syed Ali Shah Geelani, who has spent a life time fighting for Kashmir, and stood tall in the face of endless persecution and abuse, is now fighting physical pain. And, for the first time in his life, he knows he is in a battle he has no way of winning. I spent three unforgettable days with my grandfather in Kashmir before returning to Turkey. On my way back, as Aba wished, I spent a day in New Delhi and visited my father in the Tihar jail. Now, I am back in Turkey and I do not know when I will get to see my grandfather again.



Syed Ali Shah Geelani addresses a protest in Srinagar on August 3, 2007 [File:Adnan Abidi/Reuters]

I am trying to live my life and follow my dreams, because I know that is what Aba would have wanted for me. But I still tremble when I receive a text at an unexpected time, fearing it could be from someone informing me that Aba is no longer with us.

I, of course, know Aba is never really going to leave us. Even when he is no longer physically with us, his devotion to Kashmir and the suffering he endured for our freedom will be remembered and honoured by generations of Kashmiris to come.

I cannot help but think how similar Aba's life has been to the Kashmiri freedom struggle itself an honourable journey full of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, a battered dream hoping to come true. So, it is no surprise that even today, when he cannot remember much, he remembers Kashmir and the longing its people have for freedom a dream that he knows will be realised one day.

Veteran Kashmir leader SAS Geelani quits pro-freedom alliance

The 90-year-old quit Hurriyat Conference faction he led for decades over alliance's inability to counter India's move.

A veteran politician in Indian-administered Kashmir has quit his faction within an umbrella alliance of pro-freedom groups, saying it had failed to counter New Delhi's efforts to tighten its grip on the disputed region.

The decision of Syed Ali Shah Geelani, 90, could further weaken the region's movement after India last August scrapped a decades-old constitutional provision giving the Jammu and

Kashmir state special rights.

Geelani, who has been under house arrest in the region's largest city, Srinagar, for several years, accused the faction he led within the umbrella Hurriyat Conference of inaction over New Delhi's move in a two-page letter and short audio message on Monday.

"Keeping in view the present situation in Hurriyat Conference, I announce my decision to part ways with it," he said, accusing members of the grouping of conspiring against him and saying it lacked discipline and accountability. In the run-up to the abrogation of the Muslim-majority region's autonomy, hundreds of pro-freedom leaders and activists were arrested and flown out of Indian-administered Kashmir to jails in several Indian cities.

A few, however, were put under house arrest in the region or were not detained at all. Addressing those leaders, Geelani said in the letter: "After August 5, the leaders who were not arrested were expected to lead the people, give them hope. Despite my house detention and government's curbs, I searched hard for you, but you were not available. I couldn't do much because of my health and detention." On August 5 last year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government stripped the disputed region of its special rights and split it into two federally-administered territories. Both India and archrival Pakistan claim the Himalayan region in full, but administer parts of it.

Hurriyat Conference was formed in 1993 by various pro-freedom groups in Kashmir to provide a political platform for independence or merger with Pakistan in the wake of an armed revolt against New Delhi. But the group split in 2003 when a faction headed by Geelani, who advocated Kashmir's merger with Pakistan, walked out after another group decided to hold talks with New Delhi and formed their own faction.

With the split, Geelani was elected chairman for life for his faction of the Hurriyat, made up of more than 24 constituent parties, some of which have only a handful of members.



Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, right, of the other Hurriyat faction with Geelani on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr in Srinagar in this 2008 photo [File: Danish Ismail/Reuters]

The other faction is led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, who has been under house arrest since August last year. Both Hurriyats used to regularly issue statements and protest programmes. But after India's clampdown last year, the activities of both factions have

come to a standstill. Hurriyat leaders from Geelani's faction were not immediately available for comment.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA

New Delhi had reasons to be apprehensive: For decades, Geelani was the symbol of popular resistance for the Kashmiris who either want to carve an independent country out of the Himalayan territory or merge with neighbouring Pakistan.

Until June last year, Geelani headed the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), an umbrella group of various Kashmiri political and religious groups formed in 1993 to spearhead a movement for the region's right to self-determination.

The Himalayan region of Kashmir has long been a flashpoint between India and Pakistan, with the two nuclear powers claiming the region in full but administering separate parts.

Kashmiri rebels have been fighting against Indian rule since 1989. Most Kashmiris support the rebel goal of merging the region with Muslim-majority Pakistan or creating an independent country.

New Delhi accuses Pakistan of sponsoring Kashmiri fighters, a charge Islamabad denies. Tens of thousands of civilians, rebels and government soldiers have been killed in the conflict. Geelani was born in 1929 into a poor family in Zoorimunz village in Indian-administered Kashmir's Bandipora district in the north.

He studied in local schools and later in the current Pakistani city of Lahore under the tutelage of Mullah Saeed Masoodi, a close confidante of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah.

Referred to as "Sher-e-Kashmir" (Lion of Kashmir), Abdullah was the founder leader of the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference and the first elected prime minister of Indian-administered Kashmir after its accession to India in 1947.

'Loss to the society'

In the 1950s, Geelani joined Jamaat-e-Islami, the region's largest political-religious organisation that shared ideological affinity with the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt. The organisation was banned by India's Hindu nationalist government in 2019.

Geelani had been a thorn in India's side since the early 1960s when he began campaigning for the Muslim-majority territory's merger with Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

Geelani was jailed for nearly 10 years in 1962 and after that was often restricted to his home. He contested and won several regional elections and lost one election for the Indian parliament.

"I have heard his addresses in assembly when I was in opposition. He was a young man. He had a good hold on Urdu and his style and knowledge was intense," senior Congress politician Saif Ud Din Soz told Al Jazeera.

"He had a deep knowledge of Quran. He used to talk about social, political and religious issues... He was very well educated."

"It is a loss to the society despite me having many disagreements

with ideology”.

Three decades of armed rebellion against Indian rule saw Geelani transition from a three-term legislator for his home constituency in Sopore to becoming a “spiritual leader” of Hizbul Mujahideen, an armed group that wants the region's merger with Pakistan.

In many songs sung and slogans raised by the rebel group, Geelani was the central character.

'He confronted both' India and Pakistan

In a famous move in 2005, Geelani rejected then-Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's four-point solution to the Kashmir dispute.



Musharraf had proposed joint control of the Himalayan region between India and Pakistan and increased access to trade and travel between the regions controlled by the two nations.

“When he felt that General Parvez Musharraf was inclined to compromise, he bluntly opposed him and he continuously, without any hesitation kept on resisting the Indian rule,” academic and political analyst Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussain told Al Jazeera in February last year.

Moves like that made Geelani popular among the masses in Indian-administered Kashmir in comparison with prominent leaders such as Sheikh Abdullah, whose legacy, according to experts, was compromised.

Hussain said Geelani “espoused the (Kashmiri) cause for a long time” when Abdullah had “abandoned it”.

“Unlike Sheikh Abdullah who, despite rendering huge sacrifices, made his first mistake in 1947 by opting a wrong track,” he said.

“I feel he tried to perpetuate the flame of Kashmir aspiration when almost every actor in Kashmiri had lost hope and abandoned to espouse the cause of freedom,” Hussain added.

“Usually, the politicians in Kashmir were obliged to side either by the Indian or Pakistani governments. But he confronted both and that added to his stature.”

After stepping down from the hardline faction of the APHC, Geelani handed over control to his deputy Muhammad Ashraf Sehrai, who died in police custody earlier this year while in detention under the Public Safety Act (PSA), a controversial law

under which a person can be detained for a year without trial.

'He did his work'

Most of the separatist groups in Indian-administered Kashmir such as Hurriyat have been in disarray since India began its crackdown following an attack on Indian forces in Pulwama in February 2019.

The suicide attack, blamed on a Pakistan-based armed group of Kashmiri rebels, led to the mass arrests of the region's leaders, including from the religious group Jamaat-e-Islami and the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF).

The groups were banned by New Delhi for “harbouring secessionist ideology”.

After Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government scrapped the region's partial autonomy in August 2019, most of the region's pro-independence and even pro-India politicians were arrested and booked under stringent laws.

For more than a decade, Geelani was under detention and confined to his home despite his multiple ailments. He was only allowed to visit hospitals. A police vehicle was permanently stationed outside his residence in the main city of Srinagar.

His continued detention and relentless defiance against Indian rule earned him a huge following in India's only Muslim-majority region. He used to issue shutdown and protest calendars during the mass uprisings in 2008, 2010 and 2016.

But in the aftermath of the scrapping of the region's special status two years ago, accompanied by a massive crackdown and restrictions, Geelani maintained an unusual silence.

For the first time in recent decades, no statement came from Geelani and there were no formal shutdown calls. His close associates attributed the silence to his failing health.

After a severe chest infection in 2014, Geelani's health deteriorated, but he continued to maintain a strong grip on his political conglomerate. Geelani's family remembers him for his steadfastness for the cause. He rejected any direct talks with New Delhi until it “accepts Kashmir as a disputed territory”. All Indian governments since independence in 1947 have insisted on the country's sovereignty over all of Kashmir.

“His persistence and his faithful stance is the only thing that kept us going. I think he didn't choose the life for himself, he cared about people. He always did what he believed was right,” one of his family members, who did not want to be named, told Al Jazeera.

Kashmiri political analyst Siddiq Wahid said Geelani became “the very symbol of resistance” in the last decades of his life.

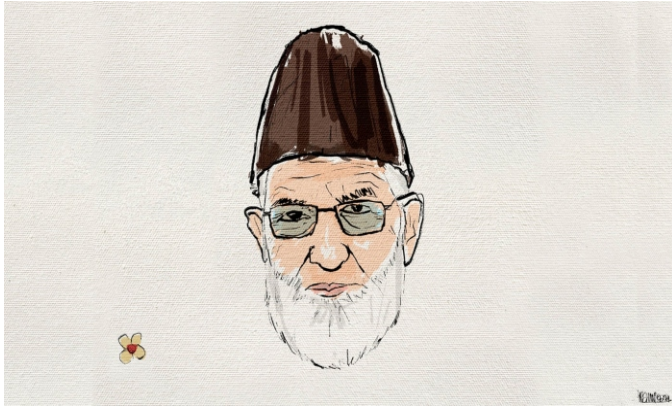
“His gift to us was one of successfully piercing the carapace of insincerity that shielded government of India's policies in Jammu and Kashmir. He did his work.”

SOURCE: ALJAZEERA



Final moments of Geelani: a broken door, resisting family, and chaos

The Kashmir Walla spoke to Syed Ali Shah Geelani's sons, who were with him when he passed away, to explain what happened



before and after his death until he was buried.

Kashmir's most prominent resistance leader, Syed Ali Shah Geelani's cold body, wrapped in Pakistan's flag, lay unattended at his Srinagar residence. Locked inside a room, the family, including children, stood against the door, to protect his body from the pressing government forces' personnel.

The family resisted, pushing their weight against the odds of armed policemen, but the door's clutches broke and it was wide open. "They broke the door and pushed themselves inside. From the other door, more cops came in and they began picking the body," said Naseem. "We continued to resist and there was highhandedness with women."

At 3:10 am, in the early hours of 2 September, amid the chaos, the police "forcibly snatched and took away" Geelani's body from the room. An ambulance was stationed outside the gate.

"The family had no preparations for the burial the administration had managed everything," said Naseem. "They had already dug the grave, brought a coffin, bathing plank, and shroud." His elder brother, who suffers from heart ailments, broke down and told the police, "Either you let us do it or else go: do whatever you have by using the force."

Then Kashmir's staunchest anti-India voice and resistance leader, Geelani's body was whisked away into the darkness through a lane towards a main road, which was dotted by hundreds of the government forces' personnel.

Moments before death



The government forces on the road outside the residence of Syed Ali Shah Geelani an hour after his death. Photograph by Kaiser

Andrabi for The Kashmir Walla.

On the evening of 1 September, a helper held Geelani's legs and massaged the 91-year-old man as per his daily routine. Naseem, his younger son who spent his day at work, had reached the residence by 9 pm. He sat by his father, who asked him about his children and the family's well being.

"His condition was fine, thanks to Allah," Naseem recalled. "It wasn't like that he was very unwell and we should have stayed at home." Naseem held his father's hand and Geelani firmly held his hand. As Naseem asked him about his health, Geelani replied: "I'm fine, Alhamdulillah."

Soon, Naseem left for the prayers. After he returned, the helper rushed to Naseem: "Please come quickly, I see something is not fine." Geelani then suddenly suffered a jerk from shock, Naseem recalled.

By 9:55 pm, Naseem and other family members put Geelani on his bed and put him on oxygen concentrator. "We tried to check his vitals on an oximeter, which didn't show any reading ... not even the pulse," he said. Then, from years long practice, Geelani's medical assistant Omar found that the condition "wasn't good".

Naseem rushed to call his younger brother, Naeem, and brother-in-law, who arrived quickly. "We were reciting *Kalima Shahadat*. I was reciting loudly to him," Naseem told *The Kashmir Walla*, "and I could see his lips moving. He was murmuring."

As the clock struck 10 pm on 1 September 2021, Geelani, the staunchest anti-India and prominent resistance leader of Kashmir, suffered two more shocks and breathed his last.

Before the family could grieve, Naseem noticed unusual movement outside his residence. The government forces personnel stationed at his home, who have confined the revered leader to house detention for most of the last decade, "also got to know and they informed higher officials," said Naseem.

Naseem fantrically telephoned a local hospital that immediately sent an ECG team. Geelani was declared dead. The Director of Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), Kashmir's premier hospital, also arrived, "who was informed by the administration".

Several calls were made to the family members across Kashmir, urging them to rush to Srinagar. "Many of them tried to come but were stopped at checkpoints. The police weren't allowing them," Naseem told *The Kashmir Walla*.

By now, the word was out in Kashmir. The photographs of the body of "Bab", or "father" as he came to know among people in Kashmir, were circulated on social media. The government forces rushed to barricade the valley; personnel were deployed on streets, sealing all routes to Hyderpora, where Geelani lived for decades. Press was disallowed. Communications were snapped. And a deafening silence took over Kashmir, yet again.

The long night

In one of the last messages to people, his family said, Geelani

wished to be buried next to “martyrs of Kashmir” in Eidgah next to the hundreds of civilians killed by the government forces in street protests and the militants, who were laid to rest by a flood of people gathering to collectively mourn.

The task at hand for the governor's administration was to avoid that. Overlooked directly by New Delhi, the administration zeroed down on a patch of land. Nobody except a few officers, who were already at his residence, knew the burial spot.

Since March 2020, the administration hasn't given the body of the militants, including top commanders, after the killing to avoid large gatherings at the funerals. Neither the bodies of the civilians killed “in action”. Now, what was Geelani's destiny?

Naseem left to pick his brother's and own children from their other house nearby. “The police had already put concertina wires in the lane [which leads to Geelani's house],” Naseem said, recalling the beginning of a long night. “We told them we are his family and they let one car inside.”

The police officers went into the room, where Geelani's body was kept. Kashmir police's chief, Vijay Kumar also arrived at his residence, as Naseem recalls. Standing in the courtyard, Kumar told “my brother [Naseem] that burial should happen sooner as we have security concerns,” Naseem said.

But the family wanted the relatives to arrive. Naseem told the police's chief that the family would rather wait till 8-9 am. “There won't be any issue but at least our relatives can see his face. I told him that restrictions have already been imposed and it will be only our relatives and neighbours,” Naseem recalled saying to Kumar. “No other people can come.”

Naseem Geelani, Geelani's elder son, a doctor by profession, was also in touch with the police officers. Naseem later told *The Kashmir Walla* that, to begin with, the police chief condoled his father's death, a gesture he appreciates.

“The IGP [police chief] told me that they do not want to create any controversial issue and there is no bloodshed to which I told him how will there be bloodshed?” said Naseem. “We are innocent people and arms are with you, [then] how will we create bloodshed? We will never wish this to happen. We want to do it peacefully and we will cooperate but give us time.”

“The IGP said let us see how much time it will take you. However, an SSP rank officer, who was with him, was more aggressive. He told me to do it within an hour. We asked how it is possible to do it in an hour?” Naseem recalled.

“And you are telling us to bury him in darkness, God forbid was he a wrong person that we have to bury him during the darkness of night,” Naseem said he told the police. “We will do it in daylight.”

Inside his home, Geelani's cold body, wrapped in Pakistan's flag, as he was staunchly pro-Pakistan and once raised a prominent slogan in a mass rally: “We are Pakistanis and Pakistan is ours”.

His body was surrounded by a few relatives, while men, women and children wailed. Some time later, other officers came and reiterated to bring the body for burial.

Naseem demanded to speak with higher officers, again. By now, he said, the paramilitary forces personnel were in the courtyard of the house and policemen came into the room, where the body was kept.

“There was chaos in the room when they were pressuring to take away the body,” said Naseem. “We were resisting. A policeman was standing near the switchboard and was turning the lights of the room off. I told him why are you doing it, there are women also here,” said Naseem.

But it was darker outside the room; amid a void of information, the rumors and panic were fast spreading across Kashmir. Journalists, who were stopped a few hundred meters away from the residence, were aloof to the developments.

A broken door, lights out, and a managed funeral



Syed Ali Shah Geelani being disallowed from moving out of his home in Srinagar. Photograph by Umer Asif

Around 3 am, the policemen reattempted to enter the room, Naseem told *The Kashmir Walla*. As they forcibly pushed a door of the room, the family resisted pressing against the closed door.

The clutches broke and the door was wide open. “They pushed themselves inside ... more cops came in and they began picking the body,” Naseem recalled. “We continued to resist and there was highhandedness with women.”

“After that we could not recognise who was [doing] what and who was hitting whom. There were women as well and we told them [forces] to switch on lights: 'do you have no shame?'.” The light then returned.

In a video of the incident shared with *The Kashmir Walla* by a family member, Naseem is heard telling the police: “we cannot participate in this. Do whatever you want to do. You have power, you have authority, we have nothing.”

“May Allah punish you,” a woman told the armed personnel. “Inshallah!” another followed.

At 3:10 am, the police then “forcibly snatched and took away” Geelani's body from the room. Both the brothers told *The*

Kashmir Walla in separate interviews that nobody from the family went out after the body was snatched. "We didn't go out then they did it themselves," said Naseem. "We got to know the next morning that he was buried in Hyderpora."

Naseem believes that the government had planned everything about the burial of his father in advance.

"They were doing mock drills for the last five years, and it intensified especially after 5 August 2019. They used to do it every month," said Naseem. "The entire residential area is now surrounded by bunkers. They knew if something would happen that day [death of Geelani] people would come and they can control it from inside."

The police later in the night issued a statement refuting all allegations of the family that the body was snatched. It said that the police, instead, facilitated the family members to take his

body from home to the graveyard and also didn't let miscreants misuse the situation.

Next morning, Naseem went to see the grave with other family members. "We met some people who had participated in the funeral," said Naseem. One of them walked the brothers to the grave, now under a siege by the government forces. "He told us that except some locals, many people who participated in the funeral prayers were among them [police and administration]."

Fahad Shah

Fahad Shah is a journalist and writer. He is the founder and editor of *The Kashmir Walla* magazine and has written extensively on politics, human rights, culture, and media for various international publications. In 2020, he was nominated for the RSF Press Freedom Prize for Courage and in 2021 he won the Human Rights Press Award.

India extends Kashmir lockdown after defiant icon's death

Death of Syed Ali Geelani, aged 92, has heightened tensions in disputed Himalayan territory after India refused to allow resistance leader's burial at the site he had wished and let him have a public funeral.

Thousands of Indian troops have maintained a tough lockdown across disputed Kashmir after the death of a top resistance leader sparked clashes with anti-India protesters. The death of Syed Ali Geelani at the age of 92 heightened tensions in the disputed Himalayan territory after Indian authorities refused to allow his burial at the site he had wished and let him have a public funeral. Authorities said an internet and mobile phone shutdown ordered after the resistance icon died late on Wednesday would continue and tight security was expected around Friday prayers in the main city of Srinagar. Many mosques in the Muslim-majority region have announced that they would say special prayers for Geelani.

Police accused of seizing Geelani's body

Thousands of police and paramilitary troops manned barricades and patrolled streets to keep people indoors following clashes between residents and Indian forces in Srinagar late on Thursday. Police fired tear gas to disperse stone-throwing protesters but no injuries were reported. Geelani's son accused police of taking his father's body away to be buried in the middle of the night, hours after his death. The family said no relatives were allowed at the burial but police rejected the allegations as "false propaganda". A video widely shared on social media showed police in a scuffle with Geelani's relatives before taking away his body that was wrapped in a Pakistani flag. "At about 3:00 am, police barged inside our home and took our father's body," one of his sons, Naseem Geelani, told AFP news agency. "We insisted that we would perform his funeral after morning prayers and bury him according to his wish at the Martyrs Cemetery." Police "snatched my father's body and did not allow anyone from our family to participate in the burial", the son added.

"We heard later that police undertook washing rituals for my father's body and had him buried."

Backer of UN-monitored plebiscite

Geelani, who had spent much of the past five decades in jail or under house arrest, had infuriated successive Indian governments with his pro-Pakistan stance and demands for a UN-backed self-determination vote.

Geelani was an ideologue and a staunch proponent of the merger of Kashmir with Pakistan. Over the years, he had repeatedly said no to any talks with New Delhi, asserting that "India can't be trusted unless it calls Kashmir a disputed territory, demilitarises the region and releases political prisoners for a meaningful dialogue." The nuclear-armed neighbours have disputed the region since their independence in 1947 and have fought two wars over Kashmir. Kashmir's fury at Indian rule has long been seething. After a series of political blunders, broken promises and a crackdown on dissent, Kashmiri activists launched a full-blown armed revolt against Indian rule in 1989.

India describes the armed rebellion as Islamabad's proxy war and state-sponsored terrorism. Most Muslim Kashmiris consider it a legitimate freedom struggle and support the rebel goal that the territory be united, either under Pakistani rule or as an independent country. Pakistan observed a day of official mourning for Geelani on Thursday. Hundreds of people staged a protest against India after attending the funeral prayer in absentia for Geelani in Islamabad, Pakistan on Wednesday.

Most-militarised region

India imposed a similar internet shutdown and other restrictions for nearly a year after stripping the territory of its semi-autonomy and annexing it in 2019. An insurgency against Indian rule erupted in 1989 and has left tens of thousands of dead. Security forces still fight near daily gun battles with rebels.

India has stationed some 500,000 troops in the tiny Muslim-majority region the highest concentration of troops anywhere in the world.

Source: AFP

FUNERAL PRAYERS OF SHAHEED SYED ALI GILANI AT DIFFERENT PART OF THE COUNTRY



Killing the story: How the Kashmiri press was silenced after the region lost autonomy



An Indian security force personnel keeps guard alongside a road during restrictions after the government scrapped the special constitutional status for Kashmir, in Srinagar August 15, 2019. REUTERS/Danish Ismail

[Ipsita Chakravarty](#)

Journalist Irfan Amin Malik was having a quiet evening at home with his family. It was August 14, 2019, the eve of Indian Independence Day celebrations. Security was tight, especially in South Kashmir, where Malik lives. All the phones were dead. There was no internet.

“I was showing my wife some pictures on my phone,” he remembered. “Then my sister she was downstairs called us to say someone was knocking on our door. My parents went out and found security forces in our compound. They had not just opened the door; they climbed over the walls. I saw 50 to 60 security personnel. It was like they had come to capture a big terrorist.”

They had come to arrest Malik, who covered South Kashmir for a well-known local daily, *Greater Kashmir*. An officer asked him to accompany them to the police station, about half a kilometre away. No reason was offered, Malik said.

It was not until the following evening, on Independence Day, that Malik was released from custody. Before he was allowed to go, he had to sign a bond. “It mentioned that my detention was necessary for peace in a particular area. If I was out there, I would be a threat to peace,” said Malik.

How the crackdown started

The events leading up to Malik's arrest went back nine days to August 5, 2019, when the Indian government stripped the state of Jammu and Kashmir of autonomy and split it into two Union Territories, directly controlled by the central government.

Or maybe the events went back 70 years, to when India and Pakistan became two separate states in 1947. Both states claim the entire territory of Jammu and Kashmir a crown-shaped piece of land once ruled by the Dogra kings. The two countries have fought three wars over it, leaving the region divided by a makeshift ceasefire line that has come to be known as the Line of Control (LoC). Since 1989, the Kashmir Valley on the Indian

side of the LoC has also had an armed movement for secession from the Indian state. While some factions of the militancy favoured merging with

Pakistan, others wanted an independent Jammu and Kashmir.

On August 5, 2019, the Indian Parliament attempted to snuff out that debate by revoking the autonomy guaranteed to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. It also repealed Article 35A, which ensured special protections to people defined as permanent residents of Jammu and Kashmir. The two new Union Territories were Ladakh, an expanse of mountainous desert that is partly claimed by China, and Jammu and Kashmir, two regions hyphenated by geopolitics but coexisting in an uneasy truce.

This essay is focused on the Kashmir Valley. When India's central government, popularly referred to as “the Centre”, revoked autonomy on August 5, 2019, it cited militancy in Kashmir as one of its reasons. The unruly Valley, which demanded “azadi” (freedom) from the Indian state, had to be co-opted into the project of “national integration”.

For this project to succeed, it was important the legislative changes received favourable press coverage. From the largely state-centric national media, the government had little to fear. The local press was another story.

One of the many outcomes of the conflict was the extraordinary growth of the Kashmiri press. Over the past three decades, it had become the cornerstone of a Kashmiri public sphere dominated by the demand for freedom. Since 1989, Kashmir's burgeoning press had negotiated the external pressures from both militant groups and the state, who were engaged in an information war.

By 2019, the government had developed more sophisticated tools of control, while militant groups were decimated. So when the Centre moved in on August 5, it was able to shut down a vibrant, adversarial local press almost overnight.

The state was able to gain influence over the Kashmiri press by controlling the levers of production: government advertisements were withheld or released according to the content that was published. Besides, journalists and editors critical of the government and security forces faced legal action, harassment and violence. Government policies explicitly controlling the press were also formulated.

As the government revoked autonomy and special status for Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019, thousands of troops were deployed in the region. All communication lines were snapped and the region was placed under complete lockdown to quell dissent against the legislative changes.

While the press was being silenced, almost all of the political leadership in Kashmir was rounded up and arrested or detained. Activists, lawyers and any individuals identified as a threat to peace were also swept into preventive detention. The crackdown on the Kashmiri press was necessary to manage perceptions around the August 5 legislation. I also argue it was part of a more ambitious project to remake the Kashmiri public sphere: from its

politics to its information economy.

Two distinct public spheres

Jürgen Habermas's "public sphere", according to Professor Simon Cottle, is "a communicative space in which ideas and information, discourses and opinions find representation and elaboration and thereby help constitute civil societies". The Indian national media and the Kashmiri press reflected two entirely different public spheres.

At the national level, much of the mainstream media embodies the majoritarian politics that has come to dominate India's public life. So its celebration of "national integration" shaped a consensus on the August 5 decisions in the Indian mainland.

Left to itself, the Kashmiri press was unlikely to have followed that narrative. For decades, Article 370 had marked out Jammu and Kashmir as politically and geographically distinct. The Valley, with its predominantly Kashmiri Muslim population, and its history of struggle against Dogra rule, was also politically distinct from Jammu. The Kashmiri press, which had grown during three decades of conflict, was traditionally adversarial to the state.

The newspapers launched in the first decade of the conflict fed a hunger for local news. There was no telling which town was curfewed, which village was under an Army crackdown, where the latest gunfight had broken out, whose son had disappeared the night before. "When there is a threat to your life, the only thing that keeps you alive is to stay updated," said researcher Raashid Maqbool, who grew up in downtown Srinagar, an epicentre for the militancy in the early days.

Growing literacy swelled readership, but there were other important factors driving this demand for news, points out Arif Nadaf, who teaches journalism at the Islamic University of Science and Technology in Kashmir. Residents of the Valley did not buy the "national media narrative", he said. It was the local press that reflected their lived realities and covered the minutiae of regional political developments. These newspapers spoke the language of the Kashmiri public sphere, a language of dissent.

National coverage of the politics of Kashmiri separatism was replete with guns and fanatics, described as stemming partly from religious fundamentalism, and partly thanks to the machinations of Pakistan. The local press spoke more freely of Kashmiri self-determination and covered separatist politics in tandem with pro-India parties. In the early days of the militancy, some Urdu publications even carried interviews with militant commanders.

During the second wave of the armed movement, which picked up pace up a decade ago, interviewing militants was no longer within the realm of the permissible. But local papers extensively covered militant funerals, where large crowds of mourners chanted slogans for *azadi* [freedom], an evidence of popular support. They also devoted their energies to reporting on human rights violations: from enforced disappearances and shootings to violent police action on protesting crowds that left hundreds dead

or maimed.

Pressures from the national public sphere, with its centre of gravity in Delhi, always acted on the Valley. Decades of conflict have fed into the spectre of the "*markaz*", the central government, controlling public life in the Valley. According to popular lore, sinister machinations of the *markaz* are behind a range of events in Kashmir: from changes in the local government to the splintering of a militant group, from rumours that set off panic to the placement of street lamps.

In this context, the press became an arena for the unequal political contest between the *markaz* and the Valley. Professor Gadi Wolfsfeld describes such contests as "public confrontations between a government and at least one other antagonist in which the state [...] has a significantly superior amount of coercive reserve at its disposal". Competition over the news media, he writes, is "part of a larger and more significant contest among political antagonists for political control".

In the case of Kashmir, this was not just a contest between the national and local press, but a battle for control over the local press itself. Eventually, the state won.

Apart from physical intimidation and police cases, the most well-worn means of containing the local press was through withholding funds. "There are four key sources of revenue for any media," said the editor of an English magazine in Srinagar. First, there were advertisements from the local private sector, which barely exists in Kashmir. Second, corporate advertisements from various parts of India, which rarely reached the Valley. Third, central government advertisements. Finally, there were advertisements from the local Department of Information, the mainstay of the Kashmiri press.

Early on, leading dailies were accused of taking funds from both sides – government and separatist. Whatever the truth of these allegations, the government soon wielded far greater financial control over the local press.

In 2017, a Union Home Ministry report suggested that the government establish greater "control" over mosques, madrasas, newspapers and television channels. Later that year, the ministry recommended that the state government stop advertisements to papers that published "anti-national articles". By August 2019, the state of Jammu and Kashmir had been erased and the local directorate of information was part of the Union Territory administration, taking directions from the Centre.

The *markaz* had emerged from the shadows. It was officially in charge.

A deafening silence

As Kashmir went through cataclysmic political changes after August 5, 2019, politics dropped off the pages of its newspapers. In the international media and sections of the independent national media, there were reports on human rights violations by security forces in the districts of South Kashmir and protests in a Srinagar neighbourhood. The Kashmiri press, once dedicated to documenting the toll of conflict, barely spoke of it.

What accounted for this silence? There were physical curbs such as the communications blockade, the lockdown, the presence of troops at every street corner. But that was not the whole story.

If there was a formal government veto on critical reporting, few editors or reporters in Srinagar will speak of it. Instead, most journalists talk about a cloud of suggestion and fear emanating from the government, paralysing the local press.

The message went out in a number of ways. In the early weeks after August 5, 2019, journalists leaving their homes were travelling into oblivion. You could be arrested or beaten up and no one would know. And there had been actual arrests. Qazi Shibli, editor of *The Kashmiriyat*, an online only news portal, was held days before August 5 and questioned about his coverage of the security build up in the run up to the legislative decisions.

Those who still wrote critical reports were met with intimidation, even open rebuke. “Now, the SSP [senior superintendent of police] will call up the reporter directly and threaten to lodge a FIR,” said one young journalist in Srinagar. FIRs, or first information reports, are preliminary police complaints lodged before an investigation can begin.

The message also trickled down through editorial diktats in newsrooms, where reporters say they were warned not to stray from the government line. A young reporter at another English daily said she was instructed to do “soft” stories. They were encouraged to do stories on health amid the communication blackout. Stories more directly linked to the political situation were embargoed.

Many other stories died a quiet death because of stonewalling by government sources, local journalists say. They could report press releases handed out by the Department of Information. But specific questions were rarely entertained. Without an official version, many stories could not be published.

In the weeks following the August 5 decisions, the government controlled the flow of information through a “media centre” set up at a plush hotel in Srinagar, the political nerve centre of the region. Government officials would hold daily briefings here, largely for the benefit of journalists from the national media, most of whom were staying in the hotel. For weeks, the media centre was also the only source of internet for journalists in the Valley, who queued up to file their stories there every evening.

As the excitement around the decisions waned, and the national media left the Valley, local journalists were herded into the offices of the Department of Information at Srinagar. This became the new “media centre”. For months, this was the only source of high speed internet for Kashmiri journalists, many of whom had to drive for hours to file their stories. News from districts outside Srinagar inevitably dried up.

How the local press suffered

The crackdown crippled the local press in material ways, leaving it shorn of revenues. Government ads, long used to control the local press, dried up overnight. Even when they started trickling back, they would be withdrawn abruptly if newspapers published

critical content, local journalists say. Revenue losses forced salary cuts and layoffs. Together with the long lockdown, they also drove a drastic fall in circulation.

The crackdown has also left its imprint on the very nature of news. While some stories dropped off the pages entirely, others were treated differently after August 5, 2019. Three subjects, in particular, reflect a marked change: gunfights between militants and security forces, civil protests, and separatist politics.

For years, the facts of these gunfights have been disputed: who opened fire, whether the militants were asked to surrender, whether civilians were killed, whose bullets killed whom. Local accounts and the state version have often diverged. After August 5, 2019, reporters started avoiding the sites of these gunfights, relying on press releases by state agencies instead. Those who did visit the sites to collect local accounts found themselves unable to get a state response to specific questions or allegations. “How do you report a gunfight without an Army or a police quote?” asked Zaid. “Do we kill the story?”

If local voices faded from stories on gunfights, local protests were also muffled. The mass protests of the past decade had been covered closely by the Kashmiri press. It recorded public furies against the government as well as the state crackdown on protesters. After August 2019, civilian injuries may still be reported but recounting the anti-government sentiments that drive protests has become taboo.

Alongside the expression of anti-government sentiment, reporting separatist politics was also proscribed. Statements made by the separatist leadership of the Hurriyat, a conglomeration of separatist parties, have all but disappeared from news pages.

Finally, government control over the press was formalised by the “New Media Policy”, announced in May 2020 by the Department of Information and Public Relations.

First, the policy seems to redefine all news flowing from the government as publicity to create “a sustained narrative on the functioning of the Government in the media”. This was necessary because the “transformative process” of revoking special status had not been covered by the media to the government's satisfaction.

Second, it devised mechanisms to vet both news content and journalists working in the Valley. According to the government, these were needed to address “the issue of fake news” and “plagiarism”.

Third, it laid down fresh criteria for “empanelment”, or inclusion in the list of publications eligible for government advertisements. Ad revenues were also to be refocused on “new media”, namely social and online media.

The new media policy spelt out the state's power to monitor and punish journalists for their work. It dovetailed neatly into the Centre's project of fashioning a “Naya Kashmir”, or New Kashmir. It is to be a polity that breaks with the past.

How Kashmiris received these changes is not known. A curious

silence has descended on the densely storied Kashmiri public sphere that had been shaped by opposition to Delhi. But then, the very idea of a representative public sphere – a matrix of popular ideas and opinions made visible by the press – has been undermined in the Valley. The silence does not necessarily mean acquiescence to the changes.

It speaks rather of a broken accord between the Kashmiri public

Afghanistan debacle marks demise of the 'American Century'

Mushahid Hussain

August 15 will probably go down in history as the day that marked the formal end of the 'American Century' and the beginning of the 'Asian Century'. On that day, the US-propped Kabul regime collapsed, with its head fleeing with around \$169 million cash stashed in his luggage, and the ignominious, panicky exit of the American military coincided with the surprisingly swift but subdued return of the Afghan Taliban back to power after 20 years. Messy exits are now a hallmark of the US in the Third World countries it once dominated, but 'incompetence' was never an adjective that described the American way of doing things, until Kabul last week.

The dizzying speed of these developments reinforce what Lenin once said: "There are decades when nothing happens; and then there are weeks when decades happen!"

There is now a glimmer of hope that the 42-year old Afghan conflict can perhaps come to an end after three Afghan Wars (1979-1989 'Afghan Jihad' funded by the US against the Soviet occupation), then the Afghan Civil War (1989-2001), and finally the 'War of Terror' undertaken by the US after 9/11.

President Carter's National Security Adviser Dr Zbigniew Brzezinski claimed in his memoir, *Power and Principle*, that Carter had signed a directive on July 3, 1979, to start funding the dissident Afghan Mujahideen with an initial funding of \$695,000 which would be distributed by the CIA via Pakistan. This was six months before the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

Eventually, Afghanistan became the centre of CIA's biggest covert operation after WWII, codenamed Operation Cyclone. When the Geneva Accords were signed a decade later, providing the framework for the defeated Red Army's exit from Afghanistan, almost \$5 billion had been funnelled for this guerilla war, with Saudi Arabia providing matching funds to the American money (\$2.1 billion each), plus another \$1 billion from other countries over a 10-year period. Over 100,000 Afghan Mujahideen had been trained and armed, besides about 10,000 Arab and other Muslim volunteers. The Afghan Taliban, who now are in power, are the ideological offspring of the Afghan Mujahideen, some actually having fought in the war against the Red Army.

During an interview with French newspaper *Le Nouvelle Observateur* published in its issue of January 15-21, 1998, Dr

and the press that it once felt represented by. Journalists going out to report find themselves greeted with a bitterness and suspicion that was once reserved for "markazi" journalists from the national media. "People tease you, heckle you in public spaces," said a journalist who works with an English daily in Kashmir. The cruellest cut of all? "People question whether we are journalists."

Brzezinski was asked whether he had regrets in funding a struggle that spawned religious extremism, destabilising parts of both the Muslim and Western worlds, he answered without batting an eyelid: "What is more important in world history? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet Empire? Some agitated Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and end of the Cold War?"

It was largely an American-created genie that the US tried, albeit abortively, to put back into the bottle when Washington, under President George W Bush, launched the 'War on Terror' after 9/11. Pakistan was coerced into joining the war, although India was the first in the region to offer unstinted cooperation to the American war effort. And Saudi Arabia too was cajoled into the post 9/11 war effort because it feared American reprisals as 15 of the 19 hijackers that attacked the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington were from Saudi Arabia (of the remaining four, two were from Egypt and one each from Lebanon and the UAE).

America's Afghanistan Project came unstuck for three reasons starting in 2003.

First, that year, an over-confident US went to war with Iraq, instead of stabilising and strengthening Afghanistan. The US shifted attention to Iraq, fighting a war of choice because of Bush's ideological foreign policy fixation, when he labelled Iraq, Iran and North Korea as part of the 'Axis of Evil', although none of these countries had anything to do with 9/11; and, in fact, Iran had actively cooperated with the US in the removal of the Taliban regime.

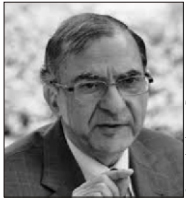
The second reason was an inability to learn lessons from history due to imperial hubris and US duplicity with allies like Pakistan. Just before the Anglo-American invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, a top-secret British delegation was in Moscow seeking 'expert advice' from the Russian experience in Afghanistan. Their advice was instructive, but never followed: "You will make the same bad choice we did, you will go in, you will lose, many of you will die and then you'll be forced to retreat, which will be good for us".

Regarding duplicity with allies, for example, in his book, *Lawless World*, Philippe Sands reveals the contents of a telephone conversation between President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair on January 30, 2003, just a few weeks before the launch of the war on Iraq on March 20. In that conversation, Bush tells Blair that he "wanted to go beyond Iraq in dealing with WMD proliferation, mentioning in particular Saudi Arabia, Iran,

North Korea and Pakistan”, at a time when Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were supposedly US allies. And by 2005, the US, in another example of double-dealing with Pakistan, violating its own laws as well as IAEA rules, went ahead to sign a major civil nuclear deal with India, with a view to roping in India against China, backed later by massive armaments and sophisticated technology to India, to the detriment of Pakistan.

The third reason for failure apart from the confusion why the US was in Afghanistan was the US perpetuating its military presence by propping up a small self-serving corrupt Kabul elite dependent on doleouts from Washington. To expect any self-respecting Afghan soldier to lay down his life for such a corrupt clique was delusional, to say the least. *The Washington Post* did an excellent expose of the deception and lies that lay at the heart of America's ill-fated Afghanistan Project, by publishing the *Afghanistan Papers* in November 2019, as there was a yawning chasm between what was publicly stated and what was privately believed. On the eve of the 20th anniversary of 9/11, the Afghanistan debacle has evoked memories of Cambodia and

Vietnam 1975 or Iran 1979, where the departing American ambassador announced somewhat bitterly: “Till yesterday, we were ruling this country!” Afghanistan is much more than an intelligence failure or an error of policy judgment. It has turned out as the nemesis of the US policy of 'regime change' in the Third World, which the US attempted 72 times during the Cold War, 1945-1989. Over 75 years ago, when the US emerged as the victor of WWII, it was heralded as the harbinger of the 'American Century'. This view was reinforced when the Afghan War against the Soviet Union sparked the collapse of the USSR and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, symbolised by the demolition of the Berlin Wall. The sole superpower's President, George HW Bush, triumphantly proclaimed in 1991: “What we say goes!” That was 30 years ago. Today, the image, clout and confidence of the sole superpower lies buried in the debris of the destruction of the war in Afghanistan, which has lived up to its reputation as 'the graveyard of empires', devouring the American superpower, as it did earlier with Britain and Soviet Union the superpowers of the 19th and 20th centuries.



Kashmir: What next?

Dr. Ghulam Nabi Fai

The conflict over the disputed territory of Kashmir is soluble only if pragmatic, realistic and tangible strategy is established to help set a stage to put the Kashmir issue on the road to a just and durable settlement. Since, we are concerned at this time with setting a stage for settlement rather than the shape the settlement will take, we believe that it is both untimely and harmful to indulge in, or encourage controversies about the most desirable solution of the dispute. Any attempt to do so at this point of time amounts to playing into the hands of those who would prefer to maintain a status quo that is intolerable to the people of Kashmir and also a continuing threat to peace in South Asia; and also amounts to playing into the hands of those who would like to give an impression that Kashmir is the most complex issue. Complexity is in the eyes of beholder. There is not a single international issue which is not complex. If there is an interest to resolve the issue then complexity becomes a motivating factor. If there is none, then complexity becomes an instrument of passivity and inaction.

We depreciate raising of quasi-legal or pseudo-legal questions during the preparatory phase about the final settlement of the Kashmir dispute. It only serves to befog the issue and to convey the wrong impression that the dispute is too complicated to be resolved and that India and Pakistan hold equally inflexible positions. Such an impression does great injury to the cause.

The United Nations is in a unique position to play a more activist and mediatory role in regard to Kashmir by initiating a peace process. This can take the shape of:

1. Six-party talks United Nations, China, Russia, India, Pakistan and Kashmir; or

2. an appropriate use of the newly developed procedures and mechanics at the United Nations.

In neither case would the handling of the dispute be a rehash of the old arid and acrimonious debates at the United Nations. The United States by itself or through the United Nations, would supply the catalyst that is needed for a settlement. There are alternative courses of action which can be spelled out and involved a sequence of interactive steps over a period of time. None of them would put the peace process in the straitjacket of rigid adherence to old texts. But if a solution of the problem will be a graduated process, consisting of incremental measures, the violence in Kashmir needs to be brought to a quick end in order to set the stage for a solution.

It is interesting to note that when the Kashmir dispute erupted in 1947-48, the world powers championed the stand that the future status of Kashmir must be determined by the will of the people of the territory and that their wishes must be ascertained under the supervision and control of the United Nations. The United States was a principal sponsor of the resolution # 47 which was adopted by the Security Council on April 21, 1948, and which was based on that unchallenged principle. The basic formula for settlement was incorporated in the later resolutions.

Today, the urgent necessities are:

1. To demilitarize the area of conflict the state of Jammu & Kashmir through a phased withdrawal of the troops (including paramilitary forces) of both India and Pakistan from the area under their respective control.
2. To take the sting out of the dispute by detaching moves towards demilitarization of the state from the rights, claims or recognized positions of the three parties involved. In order to do this, it might be necessary to make the demilitarization of the State the first step towards the reduction of Indian and

Pakistani forces on their borders outside of Kashmir. It is after the peace-process is set afoot that the rights and claims of the parties can be considered in a non-violent atmosphere.

At times, various proposals have been made by different people to set a stage for a settlement of the long-standing conflict of Kashmir. Most of them seem to be absolute non-solutions. However, regarding solution, I would rule out one thing and that is doing nothing. Because time is not on the side of Kashmiris. Time will never heal the problem. Time has made the things worst in Kashmir. Let me mention some of the so-called 'solutions' here.

1. Convert the existing cease-fire line into a permanent international boundary. This is the ideal non-solution. One cannot imagine a better formula for sowing a minefield in South Asia that will lead them to a nuclear disaster. To a Kashmiri, the line of control is a line of conflict. To talk about converting it into an international border is an insult to the intelligence of the people of Kashmir.

2. An India-Pakistan condominium over Kashmir. This is not a cynical idea. But it needs two things, first a maximum sense of cooperation and goodwill on the part of both India and Pakistan and an absence of friction within the State of Kashmir. If either or both of these conditions do arise, the arrangement will not only collapse, it will create crises no less grave than those already existing.

I believe that any future negotiations between India and Pakistan can be meaningful and successful if all parties concerned Governments of India & Pakistan and the Kashmiri leadership take the following steps:

First, Government of India must rescind the Domicile law which was enacted in 2020 simply to change the demography of Jammu & Kashmir. Until it is done, the people of Kashmir are on the brink of genocide.

Second, there has to be a cease-fire from all sides that must be followed by negotiations. Negotiations cannot be carried out at a time when parties are trying to kill each other.

Third, there cannot be and should not any precondition from any party, other than commitment to non-violence and to negotiations.

Fourth, as James Wolsey, former Chief of CIA has said correctly that both India and Pakistan have lost faith in each other. And we all know that it is true that they don't trust each other. Therefore, the time has come that there must be a third-party mediation or facilitation or engagement to make sure that the talks between India and Pakistan remain focused. Third-party facilitator does not need to be the United Nations or United States, it could be a person of an international standing.

Fifth, we do not need to invoke principles because, principles will not help launch a peace process. Principles can easily be twisted, and they lend themselves to various interpretations. But the principles that are involved in the Kashmir dispute shall

remain guiding force in any final settlement. The principle # one: It is the inherent right of the people of the five zones of the State of Jammu & Kashmir to decide their future according to their own will. Principle # two: It is almost impossible to ascertain the will of the people except in a condition free from coercion, intimidation, or pressure from any quarter.

Sixth, the history of last 73 years testifies to the fact that the bilateral talks between India and Pakistan have been always fruitless. In fact, any attempt to strike a deal between any two parties without the association of the third party will fail to yield a credible settlement. The arrangement between Jawahar Lal Nehru (then the prime minister of India) and Sheikh Abdullah (then the prime minister of Jammu & Kashmir) in 1952; and the pact between Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Abdullah in 1975 sought to bypass Pakistan, leaving the basic issue of Kashmir unsettled. Likewise, The Tashkent Agreement of 1966 between India and Pakistan, the Simla Agreement of 1972, the Lahore Declaration of 1998 sought to bypass the people of Kashmir and it resulted in a failure. So, the time has come that talks must be tripartite. The reason that talks must be tripartite is that the dispute primarily involves three parties India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir. But the primary and principal party are the people of Kashmir because it is ultimately their future, the future of 23 million people of Jammu & Kashmir that is to be decided.

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The Great Game in central Asia is over - and America lost

Marco Carnelos

Biden has very few options to restore US global credibility and counter the rise of the Eurasian power bloc. And all of them are bad

The US is leaving in chaos, with the 20th anniversary of 9/11 approaching, thus ending the cycle of imperial overreach which became the so-called "war on terror"; a cycle which one of the leading scholars of the region, Professor Fawaz Gerges, called "the greatest strategic disaster in the United States' modern history". Some commentators are legitimately asking if the Taliban victory marks the beginning of the end of the western empire.

The war on terror spawned more terrorists than it eliminated. Ultimately, it was a trap that Osama bin Laden designed, and which the US walked into. It took 20 years to climb out of it, double the time it took the notoriously clumsy Soviets.

Chapter draws to a close

However, another chapter is drawing to a close, and with it another US defeat: the "Great Game" in Central Asia.

As a veteran US intelligence operative pointed out: "Washington's focus on Afghanistan ... has had very little to do with establishing a better and more equitable society for the Afghans. The ostensible impulse ... was nominally to destroy the presence of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan... The deeper and more profound reason ... was more pointedly to establish a military and geopolitical foothold in central Asia on the very borders of Russia and China... The 'nation-building and humanitarian' aspects of the American occupation were largely window dressing to cover Washington's geopolitical ambitions."

The US great game in Afghanistan was preventing the rise of a Eurasia power bloc - the key, as the father of geopolitics Halford Mackinder theorised a century ago, to continue controlling the world. In 21st-century terms, it means stopping China and its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which symbolises the shifting of world power, and disrupting the increasing cooperation between China, Russia and Iran.

It is not coincidental that Iran is also to formally enter the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the political format that will set the Eurasian agenda, a big event that has gone almost totally unnoticed by the western media. While the G7, through which British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been

pressurising US President Joe Biden to put back the timetable for withdrawal from Afghanistan, has appeared totally inadequate to deal with the unfolding crisis.

So, is the US also about to end another cycle: the "Forty Years War", fought against Iran and its allies in the Middle East. Or, in more evocative terms, what will be the endgame between the Abraham Accords' signatories and the "Axis of Resistance"?

Aslim chance

What will the Biden administration do regarding Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Much will depend on the likelihood of returning to the nuclear deal with Iran, the JCPOA, or an agreement that also includes a basic security framework for the region.

Irrespective of attempts by Israel and its supporters to prevent this from happening, the chances of coming to a deal with Iran are slim. The problem lies in the fundamentals.

Having been let down both by former US President Barack Obama, who signed but did not honour the nuclear deal, and by Trump, who walked away from it, Iran, not unnaturally, is asking Biden for guarantees.

Tehran does not believe that Biden, whatever he signs, will comply or be allowed to comply with the terms of the deal. Any fair understanding will require sanctions to be lifted. Even Biden's more talented negotiators agree that there can be no guarantee of getting the lifting of sanctions through Congress. While that doubt is in place, Iran will not sign.

In addition, US insistence that any security framework in the region should prioritise the termination of Iran's ballistic missile programme and the end of its "malign activities" in the region is also a non-starter.

No Iranian leader will voluntarily surrender Iran's security policies. The refusal to do this is sustained by Israel's bombing of its allies, attacks on its nuclear plants, the uninterrupted flow of US weapons to Iran's neighbours and its interventions around the Middle East.

Few options

It is a situation - which brilliant analyst Alastair Crooke has defined as a seismic geopolitical shift - where Biden has relatively few options left. And all of them are bad.

First option could see Biden mobilising Europe against China and the BRI, as it is already attempting to do, but this would reignite transatlantic tensions. Europe is already highly dismayed by US behaviour in Afghanistan, and it does not wish

to lose precious trade with China during a tough post-Covid 19 recovery. Above all, Europe cannot decouple its economy from China's and sever its supply chains from Beijing (neither can the US).

Secondly, Biden could set the Middle East ablaze again, starting a new war against Iran, and creating a huge southern soft belly to the BRI. This would not be the best way to promote his foreign policy for a hurting American "middle-class" - just after exiting from an unpopular two-decade war in Iran's eastern neighbour. This option would gift an "America is back" narrative to Donald Trump if he decided to run for president in 2024.

A third option could see him engage China and Russia more assertively using many pretexts (Ukraine, cyberwar, Xinjiang, Taiwan). This would risk localised conflicts and possible dangerous escalations. And the last option is for the US to take a sabbatical - for a decade - from its role as global hegemon, based on "liberal interventionism and democracy and human rights promotion", and instead dedicate all resources to "nation-building" within the US, which is badly needed.

Washington blame game

Biden is being blamed for the withdrawal from Afghanistan, which was negotiated by Trump. This is like blaming Gerald Ford for the Vietnam War.

At least other three US administrations should take such blame (George W Bush, Obama and Trump), while a wider historical perspective would also implicate four other presidents: Bill Clinton, George HW Bush, Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter.

Biden is unlucky to be holding the can for his predecessors' gross

miscalculations. He can, however, be fairly accused of having failed utterly to plan for this event, and for the sheer lack of empathy he has shown for the Afghans flocking to the airport and for the fate of thousands of Americans still in the country.

The US military and security establishments continue to live in a bubble detached from reality. Just a few weeks ago, Biden claimed there was no risk of an Afghan military collapse. The blame game in Washington has only just started.

Of the four bad options listed above, the best this administration could do for itself, and the rest of the world, is to take a sabbatical for a decade from policing the planet.

It is the only way of restoring the US's credibility and to return as a leader without hubris and arrogance. Those who encouraged the withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran are now shouting that no one will believe America after Afghanistan. The project of revising America's

dangerous sense of itself and its own exceptionalism, its belief in the US role in the world as fundamentally benign and Pax Americana being a universal good, has never been more urgent.

Biden, of course, will plough on along another cul-de-sac. In the autumn he aims to convene a summit of democracies. This will ascribe global insecurity to rising authoritarianism, which is the word America now uses for anyone who resists American hegemony. However, Biden may find recruitment for a new coalition to be more complicated, even among the US's most devoted allies.

The views expressed in this article belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Middle East Eye.

NEWS SECTION

Newly elected President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry was sworn in as the President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir at a ceremony held here on Wednesday.

Chief Justice of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Supreme Court



Justice Raja Saeed Akram Khan administered the oath. Muzaffarabad (PID) Addressing after the oath taking ceremony the President Barrister Sultan Mehmoood Choudhary said that his first and foremost priority is the liberation of occupied

Kashmir and will continue to project the Kashmir issue in its true perspective and Indian forces atrocities internationally. He said Indian government after abrogating the 370 and 35 of the Indian constitution the statues of occupied Kashmir has been changed but despite Indian illegal and immoral action the India has failed to crush liberation struggle launched by the people of occupied Kashmir for attaining their internationally recognized right to self-determination even with the use of military force and assured that a strong voice will be raised from the base camp. He warned India to learn lessons from Afghanistan as the voice of the people struggling for liberation could not be suppressed with the use of military force. The President pointed out that nine lack Indian forces have failed to crush the indigenous freedom struggle launched by the people of occupied Kashmir and assured to the people who attended the oath taking ceremony that he will make justice with the office of the President and will devote his energies for liberation of occupied Kashmir and to make Azad Kashmir a welfare oriented state. The President said that there is vast potential of tourism, Hydro power and minerals in Azad Kashmir and therefore steps would be taken to make Azad Kashmir economically strengthen and in this context he underlined the need for holding local bodies election to transfer

R the power at gross root level. He said overseas Kashmiri are a great asset and they have played a vibrant role in protecting the Kashmir issue at international level. He urged the leader of the House, leader of the opposition and all the members of the



assembly to give the right of votes to the overseas Kashmir and make necessary legislation in this regard. He also called for increasing the seats of women in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir legislative assembly. Later a smartly turned out police contingent presented guard of honor to the President. The Ceremony was attended by the Prime Minister Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi, the outgoing President Sardar Masood Khan Federal Minister for Kashmir affairs Ali Amin Gandapur, members of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir legislative Assembly Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan and high ranking civil and military officials

Barrister Sultan takes oath as 10th president of Azad Kashmir

AJK Chief Justice Raja Saeed Akram administers oath to Barrister Sultan Mahmood in Muzaffarabad on Wednesday.

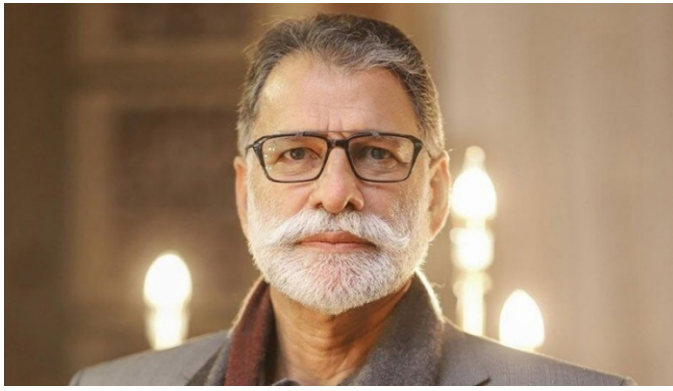
MUZAFFARABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) regional president Barrister Sultan Mahmood took oath as president of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) on Wednesday, replacing former diplomat Sardar Masood Khan after the expiry of his stipulated constitutional five-year term. Mr Mahmood, who had returned in July 25 elections from LA-III, Mirpur-3, was elected as the territory's next constitutional head by 34 members of the AJK Legislative Assembly, 32 from the PTI and two from the allies, on Aug 17. The oath was administered to him by AJK Chief Justice Raja Saeed Akram. In a departure from past traditions, the oath-taking ceremony was held on a big playground in the middle of almost all important government offices in Chattar neighbourhood, instead of the presidency or any other official building, due to a huge number of participants from across Azad Kashmir. Many of the participants had also travelled from Britain and other European countries, where Mr Mahmood has a vast following among the Kashmiri diaspora. He is fourth Kashmiri politician to have been elected against both offices of AJK president, PM after 1985. Prominent among the attendees were AJK Prime Minister Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi, outgoing president Khan and parliamentary Kashmir committee chairman Shehryar Khan Afridi. However, Legislative Assembly speaker Chaudhry Anwarul Haq and senior minister (currently the only cabinet member) Sardar Tanvir Ilyas were conspicuous by their absence. Inside the swearing-in venue, Mr Mahmood was brought by a large group of charged PTI workers who kept chanting slogans in his favour throughout the ceremony. After the introduction of the parliamentary form of government in AJK, Mr Mahmood is the 10th elected ceremonial head. He is the first president belonging to the AJK's influential Jat tribe that has a large presence in the

southern Mirpur division. Interestingly, he is the fourth Kashmiri politician after Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan, Sardar Sikandar Hayat and Sardar Yaqoob Khan to have been elected against both the offices of AJK president and premier after 1985. In his

address on the occasion, Mr Mahmood vowed to continue his efforts, as his foremost priority, to highlight the Kashmir issue in its true perspective and expose India's fascism. While recalling that he had previously organised events on Kashmir almost all over the world, including formation of Kashmir committees in the parliaments of different countries, he assured the people of occupied Kashmir that he would struggle for their freedom with much more vigour and enthusiasm. He said his predecessor Sardar Masood Khan had also assured him of his guidance on the basis of his vast experience on Kashmir issue at the international level. Referring to the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35-A of India's Constitution as an illegal and immoral act in violation of the UN Security Council resolutions, Mr Mahmood said: "Not only India usurped the basic rights of the Kashmiri people but it also turned the entire occupied territory into a big prison by laying a military siege that continues to this day." Condemning the reign of terror in occupied Kashmir, he maintained that history was testament to the fact that freedom movements could not be quelled through such tactics. India should learn lessons from Afghanistan where two superpowers had been defeated in succession by the indomitable people, he said. He assured the AJK people that he would do justice with the office of president in keeping with his practice as [former] prime minister and leader of the opposition. He said he would press the government to hold local bodies polls within six months so as to transfer power at the grassroots level to the young generation, adding that he would also try to get the right to vote for the overseas Kashmiris who had always played a vibrant role in projecting the cause of struggling Kashmiris.

Qayyum Niazi elected 13th premier of AJK

MUZAFFARABAD (Tariq Naqash) Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan Niazi of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) took oath as the 13th Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir here on Wednesday. The oath was administered to him by AJK President Sardar Masood Khan at a well-attended ceremony at President's House in Muzaffarabad. Earlier, in the election for the coveted office, Mr Niazi secured 33 votes as against 15 bagged by his rival Chaudhry Latif Akbar, a joint candidate of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The 33 votes of Mr Niazi included one by Jammu Kashmir Peoples Party (JKPP) legislator Sardar Hassan Ibrahim. Speaker Chaudhry Anwarul Haq was also among the voters notwithstanding objections by the opposition on the grounds that every voter was required under the relevant rules to vacate the hall after recording his choice before the assembly secretariat's



official concerned.

Earlier, Latif Akbar, who is regional president of the PPP, had also raised objections to the procedure adopted for the voting, and instead advocated for secret balloting. However, the chair maintained that the rules did not allow what he demanded. At this, Mr Akbar called for suspension of rules “the way it was done on Tuesday to restrict the schedule for prime minister’s election from two to one day”. However, his plea was turned down by the chair.

Mr Akbar could bag 15 votes because Chaudhry Yasin and Javed Badhanvi of his party the former having been returned from two constituencies have not taken oath of office as yet, while Sardar Yaqoob Khan of the PPP abstained on Wednesday due to some personal reasons.

Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan, the lone Muslim Conference legislator, was also unable to take part in voting as he showed up and took oath as MLA after its conclusion. After the result was announced, the chair gave the floor to Latif Akbar, who has also been designated as leader of the opposition, to express his views. While criticising the “violation of rules in the instant election”, he also spoke about alleged deals on Kashmir and vowed that the opposition would fully resist all such shenanigans. Immediately after his speech, former premier and PML-N leader Raja Farooq Haider also sought the floor to speak out his heart but the chair did not allow him despite insistence by his colleague and former speaker Shah Ghulam Qadir. At this moment, the opposition lawmakers staged a walkout from the house and the prime minister-elect delivered his speech in the absence of the opposition. In his speech, the new AJK leader, who belongs to an area that has long borne the brunt of exchange of shelling across the Line of Control (LoC), spelt out his priorities and assured that his government “will utilise all of its energies and resources for the well-being of the people of the state in accordance with the vision of Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan”. Abdul Qayyum Niazi said provision of health facilities, promotion of education and development of infrastructure and communications will be the top priority of his government, with special focus on the people living along the LoC. On the Kashmir issue, he said plebiscite was the only way for the settlement of this longstanding dispute and made it clear that no other formula in this regard was under consideration. Earlier in the morning, almost the entire PTI parliamentary party was taken by surprise

when federal minister Ali Amin Gandapur announced that Prime Minister Imran Khan had given his blessing to Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi. It may be recalled that on July 29 PM Khan had invited PTI’s regional president Barrister Sultan Mahmood, Sardar Tanveer Ilyas, Khawaja Farooq Ahmed and Azhar Sadiq at the PM House where they were separately interviewed. The development had created a wide impression that any of the four could turn out to be his pick for the AJK premiership. However, the following day Mr Niazi and Ansar Abdali, a PTI legislator from Kotli, were also flown to the PM House by a chopper for similar interviews. Nevertheless, from political pundits to a common man, a vast majority was betting on Mr Mahmood, Mr Ilyas and Mr Ahmed. However, Wednesday’s decision came as a bolt from the blue not only for them but also for Mr Niazi. It was widely believed that a change in the schedule for prime minister’s election and announcement of Mr Niazi’s name at the last moment were in fact designed to leave no time for any grouping in the party at the hands of allegedly disgruntled leaders. Soon after the swearing-in of PM Niazi, the AJK president also administered oath to Tanveer Ilyas as the “most senior minister”. His portfolio was, however, not announced immediately.

Azad Kashmir legislators take oath of office

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly gathered here on Tuesday, with outgoing speaker Shah Ghulam Qadir in the chair, during which 48 newly elected members...

MUZAFFARABAD: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Legislative Assembly gathered here on Tuesday, with outgoing



speaker Shah Ghulam Qadir in the chair, during which 48 newly elected members were sworn in. Outgoing Speaker Shah Ghulam Qadir administered the oath to the legislators after the notification of their election was read out by the Secretary Assembly. Three newly elected members were not sworn in outgoing opposition leader and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) member Chaudhary Yaseen, who has been elected on two seats; Muslim Conference leader Sardar Attique, who was not present in the House; and PPP’s Chaudhry Javed Budhanvi, who is said to be sick with Covid-19. After the lawmakers were sworn in, the Speaker adjourned the session to file nomination papers for the election of the new speaker and deputy speaker. The election for both the offices was to take place on Tuesday evening. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had nominated former speaker Chaudhary Anwar-ul-Haq for the office of speaker and Chaudhry Riaz

Gujjar for the office of deputy speaker, while opposition parties nominated PPP's Faisal Rathore for speaker and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) MP elected on a reserved seat, Ms Nasaran Abbasi, for the office of deputy speaker. Anwar-ul-Haq and Riaz Gujjar won the office of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively, both securing 32 votes, according to Geo News. Anwar-ul-Haq was subsequently sworn in by his predecessor Shah Ghulam Qadir. Gujjar was sworn in afterwards. The leader of the House the prime minister will be elected today (Wednesday), who will take the oath of office in the evening. Meanwhile, former AJK prime minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan, who was also sworn in as a lawmaker on Tuesday, alleged the federal government rigged the election and said PML-N's lawmakers took the oath of office "in protest". In a conversation with reporters, he said the party would shortly be issuing a white paper against the alleged rigging and would "deliver the facts to the public". He also said he and allied lawmakers would be protesting the alleged rigging with the people. A day earlier, the PTI secured a total of 32 seats out of 53 in the AJK Assembly after elections on reserved seats concluded. Polling on three seats reserved for technocrat, overseas Kashmiris and Ulema was conducted on Monday and the PTI won all three seats securing 27 votes for each candidate.

UN Report Expresses Concern over the Intimidation of The Kashmiriyat Editor and Other Journalists in Kashmir

In a report expressing concern with the "acts of alleged arbitrary detention and intimidation of journalists covering the situation in Jammu and Kashmir," the United Nations has demanded an explanatory response regarding the mentioned cases from the government of India. The editor-in-chief of the news organization The Kashmiriyat, Qazi Shibli, was among other journalists mentioned along with the daily journal The Kashmir Times. The report also makes a mention of the ordeals of The Kashmir Walla editor Fahad Shah and two other independent journalists Auqib Javeed and Sajad Gul. It sums up how on 29 July 2019, Shibli was detained in Anantnag allegedly for "reporting a story related to the deployment of security troopers in the Kashmir valley," before the abrogation of the Articles 370 and 35-A on 5 August, 2019. "After being questioned intermittently, he was kept in detention under the Public Safety Act for a period of 9 months and placed in solitary confinement. He was subsequently released on 24 April 2020," says the report. In July 2020, once again, Shibli was arrested "for reporting on a Fake Encounter in Shopian Kashmir. He was reportedly detained for more than 18 days with no access to legal representation." It's pertinent to mention that this particular issue was widely reported after Shibli brought it out and after investigation, the allegations of the families of the deceased persons turned out to be true. Among other things in the report, the closing of the Kashmir Times was one of the concerns mentioned. "We are also deeply concerned by the alleged closure of the Kashmir Times

offices, which also seems to be connected to its independent and reportedly outspoken reporting in the region," it reads. It says that while the U.N. does not "wish to prejudge the accuracy of the information made available to us, we express serious concern at the reported acts of harassment and seemingly arbitrary detention and criminal proceedings and detentions levied or imposed against the aforementioned journalists, which is reportedly related to their journalistic activities on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir." The report expresses particular concern with the fact that "some of the above journalists seemingly did not have access to legal representatives while in detention, in apparent contravention of the right to counsel and to a fair trial under international human rights law."

"We are deeply concerned that these alleged violations of the rights to freedom of expression, privacy, and to a fair trial and defence guarantees may be part of a broader pattern of silencing of independent reporting in Jammu and Kashmir," which might end up deterring other journalists and civil society from reporting on issues of "public interest and human rights in the region." It reads that the U.N. was also "deeply troubled by the fact that, in addition to being punished for it, some of these journalists were reportedly told or threatened to change the focus of their reporting, sometimes on vague national security related grounds."

It says to the GoI that "any limitations must be determined by law and must conform to the strict test of necessity and proportionality must be applied only for those purposes for which they were prescribed and must be directly related to the specific need on which they are predicated."

The U.N. seeking clarification from the Government of India, in all cases brought to their attention, has asked for additional information regarding all the allegations made in the report and the legal and factual basis for the arrests and charges against the journalists mentioned in the report, and information on the legal basis for the decision of the State Department to close The Kashmir Time's office.

"Please provide information on the compatibility of the criminal charges against Mr. Javeed, Mr. Shah and Mr Qazi with your Excellency's Government's obligations under international human rights law," the report demands. It also seeks from the government of India, the information on the measures that have been taken to ensure the peaceful and legitimate work "in a safe and enabling environment without fear of threats or acts of intimidation and harassment of any sort." The report dated June 03, 2021, was sent to the GoI, for it to respond within 60 days, after which, the report was supposed to be made public via their communications reporting website. Irene Khan, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and Elina Steinerte, the Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention have also urged to the GoI that "all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in

the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.”

16 members of AJK cabinet allotted portfolios

Muzaffarabad(*Tariq Naqash*) Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi on Monday allotted portfolios to his 16-member cabinet, in exercise of his powers under rule 3 (4) of the Rules of Business, 1985. All but one of these 16 ministers was appointed by Mr Niazi on Thursday, three weeks after assuming the office of prime minister. According to a notification, issued by the Services and General Administration Department (S&GAD), physical planning and housing (PPH) and tourism were allotted to Sardar Tanvir Ilyas, the senior minister; local government and rural development (LG&RD) was given to Khawaja Farooq Ahmed; agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy development, irrigation and small dams were allotted to Sardar Mir Akbar, who held the lucrative portfolio of forests during the past five years of the PML-N government. Abdul Majid Khan, Akmal Sargala who returned on Pakistan-based refugee seats get coveted slots. Among other departments, food was given to Chaudhry Ali Shan Soni; planning and development and environment to Chaudhry Mohammad Rashid; population welfare to Sardar Mohammad Hussain, power and water resources (previously referred to as electricity and power development organisation) to Chaudhry Arshad Hussain; elementary and secondary education, and Technical and Vocational Training Authority (Tevta) to Deevan Ali Chughtai; social welfare and women development to Shahida Saghir; communications and works to Azhar Sadiq; higher education to Zafar Iqbal Malick; revenue, stamps, rehabilitation and custodian (evacuee property) to Chaudhry Mohammad Akhlaque; health services to Nisar Ansar; law, justice, parliamentary affairs and information to Sardar Faheem Akhtar Rabbani.

All these ministers have returned from the AJK territory. Of the remaining two ministers, who have returned from Pakistan, Abdul Majid Khan was given finance and inland revenue and Mohammad Akmal Sargala was allotted forests, wildlife and fisheries. Unlike past traditions, both ministers from Pakistan-based refugees from occupied Jammu and Kashmir had been given the most important portfolios, which were previously allotted to lawmakers returning from the AJK territory.

Meanwhile, according to a separate S&GAD notification, the prime minister had approved “division of work” between advisers to the government, Chaudhry Maqbool Ahmed and Chaudhry Mohammad Akbar Ibrahim. Both have returned from Pakistan.

Mr Ahmed would look after commerce and industries, labour welfare, mineral resources, sericulture and government printing press and Mr Ibrahim would look after civil defence and disaster management, thenotification said.

The posts of two advisers and as many special assistants were

incorporated in the AJK Constitution through the 13th amendment but no oath of office was proposed for them.

An official at the S&GAD told Dawn that the division of work between them was approved by the premier under section 7 of the Rules of Business, 1985.

However, advisors would not enjoy the powers admissible to the ministers, such as posting, transfers of employees up to BS-18, he said.

AJK assembly pays tributes to Ali Geelani

Muzaffarabad: Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly on Saturday paid tributes to the former All Parties Hurriyat Conference chairman Syed Ali Shah Geelani for devoting his life to the supreme cause of Kashmiri nation. The house which initially met with speaker Chaudhry Anwarul Haq in the chair was later presided over by ruling party's Rafiq Nayyar as member of the panel of chairmen. Speaking on the occasion, AJK Prime Minister Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi, leader of the opposition Chaudhry Latif Akbar, former prime minister and PML-N leader Raja Farooq Haider, Jammu Kashmir People's Party chief Sardar Hassan Ibrahim, cabinet members Sardar Tanvir Ilyas, Khawaja Farooq Ahmed, Abdul Majid Khan and others said Mr Geelani had resolutely faced the worst ever repression at the hands of Indian army, including the past 12 years of continuous house arrest, but did not budge an inch from his principled stance. Terming Mr Geelani as an icon of the liberation movement, they said he had prepared a whole lot of young generations to sustain the struggle until its success. The speakers also expressed confidence that every Kashmiri would more aggressively pursue the mission of Mr Geelani aimed at bringing an early end to the Indian occupation of their motherland. Earlier, the AJK cabinet also held a special sitting to pay homage to Mr Geelani. However, ironically, nine of the 16 ministers, including Mr Ilyas, did not turn up at the special sitting for one or the other engagement in their respective constituencies. Meanwhile, former AJK president Sardar Masood Khan described Mr Geelani as a determined leader who had not only spearheaded the peaceful liberation movement with courage and steadfastness for over a half-century but also awakened an enduring spirit of freedom in the hearts of Kashmiri youth. “Revered by his followers and respected by peers, Syed Ali Shah Geelani was supreme and unquestioned leader beyond a shadow of a doubt. He inspired and led the peaceful freedom movement for decades, galvanised youth and political cadres for generations and emerged as an icon for liberty and self-determination,” Mr Khan said in a statement.

Kashmiris observe India's independence day as black day

Muzaffarabad: People from different walks of life took to a main thoroughfare in the capital of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) on Sunday to mark India's independence day as 'black day' in protest against New Delhi's perpetual denial of the right to self-determination of Kashmiris and unrelenting war crimes by

Indian forces in occupied part of the disputed Himalayan region. Resounding with anti-India slogans, the rally was in sharp contrast to the joyous celebrations held here a day earlier on the independence anniversary of Pakistan, in what the officials said was a clear manifestation of the final will of Kashmiris. "Yesterday, we enthusiastically celebrated the independence day of Pakistan, our advocate and supporter, to renew our bonding with it and today we are on the streets to express abomination of the oppressor India which has been perpetrating the worst ever human rights violations on our innocent brethren across the divide particularly after stripping the occupied territory of its special status," said Khawaja Farooq Ahmed, the newly elected Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's (PTI) lawmaker and its central joint secretary at the outset of the anti-India rally he led in the state capital. Organised by the state-run Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Cell in collaboration with Pasban-i-Hurriyat, an organization of post-1990 migrants from India-occupied Kashmir, the rally started from Burhan Wani Chowk and ended some 600 yards ahead at Garhi Pan Chowk with its participants wearing black armbands, holding black flags and black banners inscribed with anti-India and pro-freedom slogans. "Independence Day of India is [a] Black Day for the people of Jammu and Kashmir," read the two large banners held by participants in the front row. At Garhi Pan Chowk, they also burnt some used tyres in "an attempt to draw attention towards the burning valley of Kashmir". Speaking on the occasion, Mr Ahmed said that deserted streets in Srinagar and elsewhere in occupied Kashmir and anti-India demonstrations in Azad Kashmir served as a renewed message for the United Nations (UN) and the international community that Kashmiris had rejected India from the day one. "It's ironic that a country that has usurped the fundamental right to freedom of Kashmiris is celebrating independence day without a semblance of shame," he said of India. Lambasting the UN for its "double standards" the PTI lawmaker questioned that if the world body could hold referendums in East Timor and South Sudan after insignificant unrests, why it was not meeting a similar obligation in Jammu and Kashmir which had been on fire for decades. "Can't the UN see how brazenly India has been violating Security Council resolutions on the decades old Kashmir dispute? Can't it notice the mass killings in public and in prisons, use of pellet guns to blind peaceful protestors, molestation of women folk, arson of civilian properties and countless other forms of repression in addition to the latest abhorrent attempts to change the demography of the territory under its occupation?" Mr. Ahmed made it clear that people on both sides of the divide would not surrender their right to decide their future status on their own free accord and asked India and its sympathisers in the comity of nations to read the writings on the wall. He also expressed his gratitude to the people and the government of Pakistan, particularly Prime Minister Imran Khan, for exposing the ugly face of fascist Hindutva driven regime in India on the one hand

and their unwavering support to the Kashmiris' just struggle on the other. Prominent among others who spoke at the rally were refugee leaders Uzair Ahmed Ghazali and Mushtaqul Islam and PPP leader Shaukat Javed Mir. Similar rallies and demonstrations were held at all other divisional and district headquarters in AJK.

Pakistan unveils dossier on war crimes, rights violations in Indian-occupied Kashmir

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, along with National Security Adviser Dr Moeed Yusuf and Federal Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari, on Sunday presented a detailed dossier on war crimes and human rights violations in Indian-occupied Kashmir.

Addressing a press conference in Islamabad, the foreign minister pointed out that the decision to compile the dossier was taken due to the actions of Indian authorities after the death of Kashmiri separatist leader Syed Ali Geelani and their treatment of his family.

"We decided that considering the situation there, (IoK) and the kind of government's thinking present there, we should play our role and unveil the real face of this [India] government claiming to be the world's biggest democracy before the world," he said.

Qureshi said there was a continuing communications blackout in IoK as independent journalists and observers were denied access, while facts were distorted and brutalities went unreported "by design".

The foreign minister said the dossier comprised 131 pages and had three chapters: one on war crime by the Indian army and its genocidal actions, second on the disappointment of Kashmiris and how a local resistance movement is being born despite the propaganda of everything being normal, and a third chapter on how UN Security Council resolutions, international laws and humanitarian laws were being violated through efforts to bring about a demographic change in the valley.

FM Qureshi pre-empted any concerns regarding the dossier's credibility, explaining that the majority of the references in it were from international and Indian media outlets as well as international human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Calling upon the media to examine it for itself, the foreign minister said the dossier contained details on a vast range of incidents and atrocities from war crimes, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, pellet gun injuries, rapes, over 100,000 cases of children being orphaned, search and cordon operations, false flag operations, fake encounters and planting of weapons on innocent residents to implicate them and harm the resistance movement.

Indian patronage, training of IS 'a serious concern'

Foreign Office spokesperson Asim Iftikhar, while presenting statistics and figures from the dossier, stressed that there was a "great need" to make the world aware so that action could be taken to bring an end to the grave human rights violations in IoK.



"This dossier is a step in that direction," he said. During his brief, Iftikhar pointed out that Indian patronage and training of the militant Islamic State group was a "serious concern". He alleged that evidence suggested India was operating five training camps in Gulmarg, Raipur, Jodhpur, Chakrata, Anupgarh and Bikaner.

"By injecting these state-trained ISIS fighters, India may try to establish linkages of the freedom movement with international terrorism in order to malign the freedom struggle and to justify its own crimes as counter-terrorist operations," he said.

Responding to a question on the dossier's dissemination, Qureshi said it was being printed and sent to Pakistan's foreign missions and multiple forums, and that every method would be used to achieve "maximum circulation".

Yusuf, the NSA, meanwhile, said: "My request would be to remember that this dossier and its timing are a tribute to Geelani sahab. His whole life was spent for this purpose (IoK's freedom) but the struggle continues and we have to bring it to completion." FM Qureshi said protecting fundamental human rights was not just the state's responsibility but there were international obligations, instruments and mechanisms to ensure their protection and that they should be fulfilled.

"The UN must compel India to allow access to special procedure mandate holders of the UN Human Rights Council for an independent investigation of human rights violations taking place in IoK," he said.

"The UN department of peacekeeping operations must note the names of individuals and units in IoK who have been directly responsible for human rights violations. They should be identified, named and disallowed to be part of UN peacekeeping operations."

The foreign minister presented the following five demands after the briefing:

India to stop human rights violations of Kashmiris

Action taken against perpetrators highlighted in the dossier

An end to demographic change

An end to the military and digital siege

Release of all political prisoners

Allow unhindered access in IoK to the UN, the independent permanent human rights commission of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, independent journalists, human rights organisations and civil society organisations

'You can't cherry-pick'

Meanwhile, the human rights minister questioned the UN for not placing sanctions on India despite contravention of its resolutions and asked it and the international community why they did not push India to allow access of UN observers in IoK.

"I also want to call on the UK that made special sanctions laws after it left the EU. Why is the UK not bothering to assert itself on the human rights issue [in IoK]? because of business interests?" she railed, adding that Pakistan was told that human rights were a central focus of Western countries' foreign policies.

"But if you do not fairly apply your own principles of foreign policy across the board [...] this means that there is no respect of human rights by these Western states."

Mazari lobbed similar criticism at the European Union for not giving a statement against India's annexation of IoK, asking why sanctions were continued on Russia on the Crimean issue while there were none on India.

"Why is there duplicity of standards? [...] the change in demography in an occupied territory is a war crime according to the fourth Geneva Convention. Why is not anyone taking notice? [...] You can't cherry-pick," she thundered.

"The UN Security Council (UNSC) presidency has been given to India at a time when the Indian government is a Hindutva-fascist regime like the Nazis. Would the UN have allowed a Nazi regime to chair the UNSC presidency?

"This hypocrisy has to be exposed because we are going to get more lectures on human rights in our region from Western democratic countries. So we need to be prepared and not be defensive and say, 'show us your intent by implementing your own policies you made for yourself against India and its occupation in IoK'," the human rights minister said, adding that unless they did, there would be "no credibility" to their claims of upholding human rights.

'Far-reaching consequences'

The foreign minister agreed with Mazari and said history showed that a policy of appeasement did not work.

"This is the time to jolt the conscience of the world, wake them up and tell them [to] act now before it is too late. These policies [of appeasement] are not just destabilising the region but will have far-reaching consequences," he said.

Qureshi acknowledged that while there were political interests of countries with India, they also had higher values and called upon them to demonstrate and act on them if they believed in them.

Meanwhile, Yusuf said: "There is nobody today who behind closed doors defends what India is doing. I think we should be clear about this. What is happening [in IoK] is so egregious that there is no possibility that anyone can tell you with a straight face that what Pakistan is saying is wrong."

Instead, he claimed, it was conceded that there were economic reasons and other interests for not doing so.

"That is the barrier that the world will have to break for its sake, not Pakistan's sake.

"This is exactly how Europe talked about Hitler and we saw what happened. We are clear where this is going, the region is going to be affected first but the entire world will be affected [as well]," Yusuf warned. When questioned on why India's alleged involvement in fomenting terrorism from Afghanistan wasn't addressed, the NSA opined that one reason was India's interests with the world such as being a counterweight to China.

"Look at what's happening inside India and look at the power that China wields. It's laughable to think that this country can be a counterweight except unto itself but it is what it is.

"There is a clear shift in what the world thinks about India. I'm not taking any credit for ourselves, India is what it's doing inside the country and the world is seeing that," the NSA said.

FM Qureshi too pointed out recent developments that showed increasing criticism of Indian actions in IoK, saying that momentum was building.

"One day I'm confident the oppressors will be held accountable," the foreign minister said.

He pointed out that the image of a "shining India" was no longer true, not only in the world but also in India itself with a big segment of Indian society criticising the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government's handling of the Kashmir issue and alienation of Kashmiris.

"There is a large opinion awakening in India and saying that this behaviour is not correct [...] I think the situation will change [because of] Kashmiri sacrifices and solidarity of Pakistanis."



Muzaffarabad: Minister Local Government & Rural Development AJ&K Khawaja Farooq Ahmad and other speakers are addressing to Seminar on 6 September Defense of Pakistan



Muzaffarabad: Briefing to Interns of KIIR by Director JKLC Raja Sajjad Khan.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN IOK

(From Jan 1989 till Aug 31, 2021)

Total Killings *	95,861
Custodial Killings	7,190
Arrested	162,137
Arson (Houses, Shops, etc.)	110,432
Women widowed	22,932
Children orphaned	107,834
Women gang-raped / Molested	11,245
*Including killings in fake encounters, extra-judicial operations and custody	

