



# Institute of Regional Studies

## **IRS in-house discussion on the first anniversary of the abrogation of the special status of Kashmir under the Indian Constitution**

5<sup>th</sup> August, 2020 (Youm-e-Istehsal, Kashmir Solidarity Day)



Researchers of IRS held an in-house discussion regarding the first anniversary of “the brutal fascist military siege by India”. Discussion included the damage that this siege has caused economically and the various human rights violations committed by India in just the past year. Opinions and suggestions were shared on the way forward for Pakistan and the next steps it must take in order to navigate this issue.

The participants of the meeting highlighted some of the distressing figures Indian media itself had covered and the toll the siege has taken on Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). According to a report by The Forum for Human Rights in J&K (as published in Times of India), over 6,600 people, including minors, were arrested, including 444 political leaders under the J&K Public Safety Act, which allows detention for up to two years without trial. The participants stated that while the report mentioned how many political leaders had been released it did not talk about how many of the 6,600 civilians had been set free.

All three communication services—mobiles, landlines and internet—were suspended from August 5<sup>th</sup>. It was discussed that the mobile and internet services are restored sporadically and then revoked at will. The education and economy have been greatly damaged by the political lockdown in August 2019 and the Covid-19 induced lockdown since March 2020. According to some calculations, between August 2019 and March 2020, schools were open for a total of 2 weeks. It was highlighted that the rest of the Indian kids had the option of studying online; however, Kashmir didn't have internet services.

The researchers debated that although some businesses had resumed functioning when the security and communication clampdown was partially lifted during the beginning of 2020;



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however, the harsh Covid-19 lockdown damaged the local economy further. The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industries has estimated that the economic losses in the region amount up to \$5.3bn and almost half a million jobs had been lost since August last year.

The participants noted that it was interesting that even Indian sources are now admitting that the Kashmiri involvement, that is the local involvement in terrorism, has skyrocketed after 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019. The share of locals in terrorist fatalities rose to almost 79% from 55% in 2018.

The new political map of Pakistan was also discussed and the researchers were of the opinion that it was a necessary move to highlight the Kashmir issue. They were further of the view that this was an issue that required India to come to the table for resolution and drastic measures needed to be taken in order to achieve that. As one of the participants of the meeting highlighted, Dr. Maleeha Lodhi's remarks in a recently organized IRS webinar held on the Kashmir issue, the three C's regarding Kashmir, i.e., clarity, consistency, and consensus, needed to be kept in mind.

The Ayodhya inauguration was also mentioned regarding the relevance of the day that India has chosen to conduct it. Why today of all days? This move seems like a hostile step to divert the attention from the Kashmir siege and to further harm the sensibilities of the Indian Muslims. Some of the researchers questioned whether it would be an effective method to take a concrete step towards integration of Gilgit-Baltistan, as India did with IIOJK. What would be the repercussions and would it lead to military conflict between the two countries? There was a general consensus that integration would weaken our stance on the plebiscite. It would lead to a demographic shift which would not be beneficial for AJK and GB. Furthermore, there is widespread opposition regarding that proposal from the voices in AJK, IIOJK and also the international community.

It was noted that although Pakistan tries to not alter the demography of the areas it administers, this demographic shift is already taking place in India. Specifically since the revocation of Article 35(A), there has been a flurry of Indians buying property and businesses in IIOJK. The debate emphasized the importance for Pakistan to counter this demographic shift and to bring to light the covert and overt machinations of India.

Some of the suggestions made included producing a comprehensive, unbiased report regarding the Law and Order situations in both AJK and IIOJK. The situation of law and order, civil and human rights is exponentially better in AJK than in IIOJK. Such a report would be eye opening for the international community. AJK has a better management system, infrastructure, healthcare system than IIOJK and an extremely high rate of literacy.

Another suggestion was to project proactive people from AJK who augment Pakistan's stance and viewpoint. An AJK TV channel could be launched where the viewpoints of Greater Kashmir are aired. This would focus on the self determination of the Kashmiri people and would give an unbiased and transparent outlet for their voices. Ultimately, a UNSC resolution and a free and fair plebiscite would be the final solution to this issue. Till then, the participants all agreed, Pakistan needs to consistently raise its voice against the atrocities committed in IIOJK and the travesty of justice happening right in front of the international community.