

## ARAB STREETS, GOVTS WAKING UP TO UGLY REALITY IN INDIA, AJK PRESIDENT



Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) President, Sardar Masood Khan has said that coupled with the occupational lockdown of August 5, the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed a twin lockdown on the Kashmiris, the first being more lethal than the latter.

“Under the cover of COVID-19, Indian soldiers hunt down young boys and kill them in fake encounters. Posthumously they are dubbed as militants supported by Pakistan. They do not release their bodies to families for fear of large funerals and instead inter them in unmarked graves”, the President said.

He made these remarks while speaking at a webinar titled “Kashmir in the age of detention: What changes for the Kashmiris pre and post-pandemic”. The webinar organized by the Center for Security and

Policy Research (CSSPR) was also addressed by Dr Maleeha Lodhi, former Ambassador to the US, UK and UN, Ms Victoria Schofield, historian and author of “Kashmir in Conflict” and Mr Awais Raof, Chairman Board of Governors, University of Lahore, Dr Rabia, Director CSSPR and others.

The AJK President in his address said that the most vicious step taken by India was to introduce the so-called New Domicile Rules that would open the floodgates for the ingress of Hindus from all over India to settle in Kashmir. Kashmiris’ special rights to permanent residence, acquisition of property, education and employment – are all gone, he said.

“This is an evil plan to grab Kashmiris’ land, property, farmland, forests, livelihoods and businesses. They would be homeless in their homeland; aliens in their own State. It is truly a scorched earth policy. This is the beginning of the Saffronisation of Jammu and Kashmir, where Muslims would be reduced to a minority,” President Khan added. He regretted that only the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has condemned these rules which, he said are akin with Hitler’s Nuremberg Laws that paved the way for the Holocaust. “Now it is the Kashmiris’ turn to face genocide and a pogrom”, he warned.

Referring to provocative cross border shelling by Indian occupation forces, Masood said India deliberately escalates hostile fire, with heavy weaponry, to divert attention from its atrocities in the Occupied Kashmir.

“This year, so far, India has violated the ceasefire more than 850 times, causing fatalities and destruction. Its purpose is to signal to the world that the turbulence in Kashmir is not about Kashmiris’ resistance but about a potential nuclear escalation between India and Pakistan.

Urging the participants of the webinar to reach out to the international community, President Masood said “while Kashmiris are literally under

lock and key, we in Azad Kashmir and Pakistan are free – free to reach out to opinion leaders and decision-makers. The media, Parliaments and human rights organisations are amenable to our narrative. Let's use that space. Let's regain their attention.”

The challenge is that COVID 19 has eclipsed the Kashmir story and India wants to use this opportunity to remove Kashmir from the global agenda. We would not let that happen, he underscored.

The State President went on to say that Kashmir has now become part of the Great Game - the game of clash of religions and civilisations. Kashmir and Indian Muslims, in the BJP-RSS mindset, are synonymous with traitors and terrorists. So, it is going to be a long haul and the fault lines of this clash are immensely incendiary, he said.

“The Arab street and Governments have recently woken up to the ugly reality in India. They have warned India and Indians to discard anti-Islamism; otherwise, there would be consequences. It is our historic responsibility too to upend the Hindutva juggernaut,” AJK President said.

Proposing initiation of a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against India, President Masood questioned that why corporate leaders and entrepreneurs should invest in a fascist regime?

AJK President also appealed to Ms Victoria Schofield to convey to the Labour Party leader Honourable Keir Starmer that Kashmir is a cross-party issue, supported by the entire political spectrum – Conservatives, Labour, Lib-Dems and S&P. Revisionism under the pressure of Indian lobby will neither be prudent nor advisable.

Predicting that Post-Corona world will be volatile where powerful nations will be pitted against one another and there would be a sharp rise in ethnic and religious nationalism and Islamophobia, trade wars, and stiff competition on new technologies, Khan said, the space for Kashmir will shrink unless we demonstrate leadership. “People of

Jammu and Kashmir will not capitulate and that they would continue their freedom struggle until they attain their promised self-determination”, he said.

The President expressed his profound gratitude to Dr Rabia Akhtar and Mr Owais Raof for organising this timely webinar on Kashmir.