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Report – Seminar

"Commemorating Black Day: Kashmir and Right to Self Determination"

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PICTURES OF THE EVENT

To commemorate illegal and forceful occupation of state of Jammu and Kashmir by India in 1947, the India Study Centre (ISC) at Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) organised a seminar titled "Commemorating Black Day: Kashmir and Right to Self Determination" in collaboration with Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir on October 27, 2020. Mr. Shehryar Afridi, Chairman Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir graced the occasion as Chief Guest whereas, Mr, Afzal Khan, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom was the Guest of Honour. Other speakers included Mr. Zahid Hafeez Chaudhry, Additional Secretary and Spokesperson at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Professor, National Defence University, Islamabad and Dr. Sheikh Waleed Rasool, Director Institute of Dialogue, Development and Diplomatic Studies, Islamabad.

In his introductory remarks, the Director ISC Dr. Saif Malik said that though every day in IIoJK bring miseries in the lives of innocent Kashmiries but 27th October is observed when India in 1947 illegally and against the international norms landed its troops in Srinagar contrary to the wishes of Kashmiries. Since then, perpetual move of ethnic cleansing, atrocities coupled with curfews, human rights abuses, lockdown is yet unending.

While welcoming guests, the Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry said that more than seven decades ago, India illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. It was illegal because it was against the partition plan and later also against the UN resolutions. Last year, the Modi government took this illegality to yet another level when he revoked Article 370 and other steps to change the demography of Kashmir. What Modi is doing is worrisome not only for the region but for India itself also. He went on to explain two parallel trends – internal and external. Internally, the exclusionist Hindutva ideology has instilled a sense of fear among the minorities of India whereas externally, encouraged by the US's tilt, India is now acting as a hegemon in the region. Pakistan has always resisted this hegemony and will continue to do so. In fact, today other smaller countries of South Asia are also standing up to India. He also emphasised Pakistan's unfaltering commitment to the Kashmir cause.

Mr. Shehryar Afridi while expressing his views said that in the last 449 days, the way Kashmiri people have been treated was never experienced before particularly after the creation of the UN in 1945. He made a reference to the 19 July, 1947 meeting where the Kashmiri leadership passed

a resolution of Kashmir's accession to Pakistan and said that it was a clear message for the world to know what Kashmiri actually wanted. Mr. Shehryar Afridi said that what Modi is doing in Kashmir, the UN and the world should have taken notice of that. He expressed his astonishment that a country which claims to be a democratic and secular can indulge in practices like '*Ghar Wapsi Programme*' where minorities are being asked to either revert back to Hinduism or leave India. The sole objective of RSS is to undermine the minorities and control the entire region. He said that not addressing the root causes of disputes was one of the leading factors that led to the failure of League of Nations. He also highlighted the fact that Pakistan has laid down huge sacrifices to combat terrorism and the world need to see what India has been doing since long. He said that the government has decided to reach out to think tanks and academia and all parliamentary forums to seek synergy while making the world realise about the gravity of the Kashmir conflict. He also expressed his firm resolve that Pakistan will stand united as a nation and there will be no compromise on the issues of national security.

Sharing his thoughts on the occasion, Mr. Zahid Hafeez Chaudhry said that India continues to use state-terrorism as a tool to oppress Kashmiries and coerce Pakistan to abandon its support to innocent Kashmiries. The international media and human rights organisations have been unanimous in their condemnation of India for its illegal actions and human rights atrocities. India must realise that it can neither subjugate Kashmiries nor coerce Pakistan into abandoning its Kashmiri brothers. He also emphasised that durable peace in South Asia is not possible till the resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute.

Dr. Shaheen Akhtar dilated on the Indian claim that Kashmir is the integral part of India and wondered how Kashmir can be an integral part of India when it actually never acceded to India. It was India which took the issue to the United Nations Security Council and since then, it is an internationally recognised disputed territory. She also argued that since Kashmiries never acceded to India, therefore, Kashmiries cannot be termed as separatists. She also negated Indian claim that since Kashmiries take part in state election, it therefore be taken as a sign of their willingness to remain with India. She stressed that Kashmiries take part in elections for the sake of administrative issues of the state and it cannot be a substitute of plebiscite. She urged that Pakistan need to deconstruct Indian narrative and reconstruct its own to forcefully push the Kashmir cause across the globe.

Dr. Sheikh Waleed Rasool, was of the view that there are two main actors in Kashmir conflict. There are collaborators who want to maintain status quo and then there are those who want to change this status quo. Kashmiries celebrate black day every day. Kashmiries do not have access to international mechanisms as they are reduced to non-state actors. He said that Kashmiries are at the brink of extinction as the demographic terrorism has been launched since August 5, 2019, which is a war of racism. He further added that Kashmiries who had accepted Islam in 14th century are being pressured to convert to Hinduism under '*Ghar Wapsi Programme'* of Modi government.

The Guest of Honour Mr, Afzal Khan, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom said that the story of Kashmir is unique in a sense that nowhere else in the world, a state indulges in a practice of mass blinding people who only wish to exercise their right to self-determination. India has ignored the partition plan, the promises it made to Kashmiri people and the United Nations Security Council. He said that the ideology of RSS is dangerous not only for the minorities but for India itself also. He also stressed that there are 3 million Kashmiris living in the UK and therefore, the UK government cannot dismiss the Kashmir issue as a bilateral conflict between India and Pakistan.

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman Board of Governors, ISSI, highlighted that Kashmir is one issue that is close to every Pakistani's heart. India has been trying different mechanisms and arguments to convince the world that the Kashmiri people have exercised their right to self-determination. India also claims that the UN resolutions on Kashmir have been outdated which is far from reality. The Secretary General has categorically stated that these resolutions still stand valid. India also tried to portray this indigenous struggle as terrorism. Today, there is lot more awareness regarding this issue in the world and Pakistan need to build upon this and sustain its pressure on India.