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Issue Brief

2016: A Year of Turmoil in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK)

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2016 ended with a violent note in Kashmir with martyrdom of 8 Kashmiris in December only. Curfews, information blackout and human rights violations marked by the barbaric use of pellet guns and extrajudicial arrests were the major trends in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) during 2016.

The year 2016 began in the backdrop of glowing tributes paid to the youth martyred in Pulwama followed by mysterious killing of Owais Bashir Malik, a 21-year old on January 13. Anger in IOK further brewed with controversial issues of Sainak colonies and Industrial policy. This led a widespread condemnation from all quarters.

These issues were yet to settle down when IOK faced martyrdom of, Burhan Muzaffar Wani, again a 21-year old freedom fighter along with his two associates on July 8. The Valley witnessed fierce anti-India demonstrations. Authorities imposed curfew across IOK, shut down mobile and internet services, banned newspapers for many days and took several news channels off air in an attempt to end the street protests, but, the demonstrations continued. All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) issued weekly protest calendars.

The street protests and clashes between protestors and Indian Occupational Forces (IOF) across the Valley over the next five months martyred more than 150 people, injured over 16000 and blinded over 150 as IOF fired pellet guns to quell the protests, leading to calls from various quarters to ban its use.

IOF in their unabated acts of state terrorism have martyred around 303 people including 9 women and 42 teenagers during 2016.

| Martyred | Tortured | Arrested | Children Orphaned | Widowed | Women Disgraced |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|-------------------|---------|-----------------|
| 303(39 custodial Killings) | 19,011 | 12,604 | 58 | 25 | 658 |

Source: Kashmir Media Service

More than 8,000 people were arrested since July 8 on the charges of stone-pelting or incitement to violence. About 500 were booked under Public Safety Act (PSA). Curfew and shutdowns brought life in the Kashmir Valley to a standstill as schools remained closed, businesses shut and transport off the roads.

As the Valley was going through its worst unrest in 26 years, there was an increase in hostilities along the Line of Control (LoC) and Working Boundary (WB) between armies of India and Pakistan. India troops violated the ceasefire along the LoC and WB.

There were more unprovoked firing by Indian troops that resulted in exchange of fire between the two sides till December, leading to fears among people of outbreak of full blown war between the two countries.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Total Ceasefire Violations by India | 379 |
| Pakistani Civilian Martyred | 46 |
| Indian Soldiers Killed | 40 |

Source: ISPR

In IOK, heavy IOF concentration and their physical injuries to people left behind mental scars also. Apart from occupational stress, psychological impact of seeing dear ones blinded and bloodied devastated many families. With sever clampdown, people of IOK are feeling frustrated being caged inside. According to a report released by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in May 2016, about 1.8 million (that makes 45% of the adult Kashmiri population) suffer from mental distress. A majority - around 93% have experienced conflict-related trauma.

Over the past few years, huge burden of mental illness has been reported in IOK which is in dire need of prevention, care and treatment programmes in order to address increasing level of mental distress due to perpetual suppression by IOF.

Like many other years, the year 2016 has not left any good memories for people in IOK and departed on a sad note with heart wrenching and bloody stories.

In September 2016, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif took the floor at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and made a speech far more direct than most in the audience expected. This was not the only time that Pakistan has raised the Kashmir issue. Pakistan has always emphasized and highlighted the importance of a sustained and resilient dialogue process with India aimed at resolving all outstanding territorial and other disputes, including the Kashmir dispute. However, there was no forward movement in terms of strengthening and sustaining the dialogue process by India.

The year 2017 bring bigger challenges for the people of IOK in general and the international community in particular. One of the crucial challenge is rehabilitation of thousands of people injured by the use of pellets, as well as trauma affected people. Over the past five months, neither any international Humanitarian or Non-Governmental Organization, nor any country has come up with any elaborate scheme for the rehabilitation of those injured and blinded.

In 2017, brutal Indian violence in IOK would not end, but the "2016 Kashmir Intifada" has renewed the debate on resolution of the Kashmir dispute and brought the Indian atrocities to world notice.