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**Looking back at Pulwama**

Remember the 16th of February 2019, when news of a suicide attack near Pulwama on the Jammu and Kashmir National highway broke in which 40 Indian soldiers were confirmed dead. The Indian military convoy had thousands of paramilitary troops in 78 military vehicles that were being deployed in different parts of the erstwhile state.

It should be noted that there is a 24-hour strict military guard on this highway. Civilian traffic is altogether stopped for hours until the military convoy reaches its destination. Citizens and drivers have repeatedly demanded that the guard be relaxed for emergency vehicles, but no one has responded so far.

A few days before the Pulwama attack, the parliamentary election campaign was in full swing in India. Opinion polls had shown that the BJP's popularity had plummeted due to the economic downturn and the deteriorating law and order situation across the country. And the ruling BJP may not be able to get the seats it needed to return to power. Some analysts predicted a hung parliament that could again bring a weak coalition government at the centre. But the Pulwama attack changed the course and the BJP won with a landslide victory.

The militant outfit, Jaish-e-Muhammad, claimed responsibility for the attack in a newspaper message. The video of Adil Ahmed, a 20-year-old suicide bomber, went viral, as well as the collision of a car with a military truck. Watching this video of horror and carnage, everyone was on fire. It was highly publicized in the media, emotional speeches and statements came pouring in, and the demand for teaching Pakistan a tough lesson increased, thousands of hashtags surfaced on social media in response to the attack. Then the story of Balakot and the release of Abhinandan.....and so on.

I know you are familiar with this whole saga, but I wanted to remind you about the messages most Kashmiris had placed on social media which expressed serious concerns about the propaganda machinery. These same messages resonate now with the many political parties and the public today. Do you see any difference in the apprehensions Kashmiris had raised earlier? No! That's why it was feared at the time that such an attack would be impossible with so much security on the highway and that something big was brewing inside. It was demanded that an international agency must be made responsible for its investigation.

People in the valley had warned from day one that there would be something that would turn the BJP's defeat into a victory. It is becoming a global election phenomenon – ultra-nationalist conspiracies being hatched to provoke public sentiment to lure voters.

But, according to India's opposition parties, this is the first time in the history of India that "an attempt has been made to win votes with the blood of its soldiers".

The Pulwama attack came to the limelight lately when more than a thousand-page WhatsApp messages between Partho Das Gupta, former head of the Broadcast Audience Research Council, and an anchor of the media channel, Republic, got leaked. Arnab Goswami was arrested a few months before and soon released in connection with the suicide case of a designer, Anu Naik.

In these WhatsApp chats, Arnab purportedly writes about the Pulwama attack that "this attack we have won like crazy" and then, "India's response would be "bigger than a normal air strike".

It was also revealed through the chats that Arnab Goswami is close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and most of his ministers. The court has not yet commented on the messages nor ordered an investigation.

Arnab Goswami may not have guessed that a time would come when he would be arrested, and his mobile phone messages would be presented in court and then come into the public domain. After two years of the BJP's electoral victory, the question is: ‘was the Pulwama attack carried out under a plan?’

The question is not just raised by the opposition parties of India but by most of India's intellectuals, former army generals, thousands of students, NGOs, and millions of farmers who are protesting against the agriculture laws passed by the BJP government a few months ago.

Indian journalist Khalid Mustafa says, "The BJP has revived imperialism by undermining the Indian constitution, imprisoning the 22-year-old girl, Disha Ravi for issuing toolkits on social media in favour of farmer's protest plan. It has tortured dozens of young people on Republic Day and made them disappear without letting their parents know where they have been and has created religious hatred by calling thousands of farmers Khalistani or seditionists".

It is important to remember that Kashmiris are more familiar with the contours of India's political parties than the political parties themselves. Kashmiris had warned that those who remained silent on the policies of the Hindutva leadership in Kashmir should not think that they would be spared this torment.

The 12 million people of Jammu and Kashmir had time and again predicted that the physical, mental, political and economic subjugation they had been under for decades would be borne by every citizen of India one day.

Lockdowns, crackdowns, killings, prisons, sanctions, and economic hardship – this is what Jammu and Kashmir had been made to suffer under the pretext of ‘terrorism’. More than a billion people of India are only watching the trailer now; the actual film is yet to be released.

The writer is a Kashmiri activist and former journalist.