

# Our poor public diplomacy

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If there is one telltale evidence of our poor public diplomacy it is how the American Press practically ignored the recent Washington Conference on Kashmir. The conference was organised by the Kashmiri American Council and the Association of Human Rights lawyers. The theme was "Beyond the Blame Game, Finding Common Ground for Peace and Justice in Kashmir". Amongst others, it was addressed on the first day, by Senator Harkins (Democrat) and Congressman Pitts (Republican) who called for the start of a dialogue between India and Pakistan.

According to a detailed report published in a local daily, the Conference "failed to earn even a line of notice in the American Press."

As against the theme of the conference, the reporter found much blame lying around. He describes the meeting as a "talkathon" and wonders how it had brought the search for a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir dispute any closer. As reported by him there was no official representative from India; even the invited Hurriyat leadership could not come. No representative of any major Pakistan political party barring the official Muslim League was present except for a PPP self-invited Senator and "if the US media was invited it was conspicuous by its absence". The scribe however has made a detailed reference to the points raised by the Indians (mostly non-resident) Pakistanis and Kashmiris.

The fact remains that holding a well-attended Conference in Washington was a good initiative. The presence of the Pakistani Ambassador and his deputy who also spoke on the occasion suggests that the meeting enjoyed the cooperation if not the outright support of the Pakistani government.

If only Pakistan had had a credible and competent external publicity apparatus, surely there was a possibility of the Conference becoming a noticeable event in Washington and might, if its projection had been well handled, have evoked a little more interest in the media, academia and

the political circles.

Hopefully the organisers of the meeting and our Embassy will follow-up the ideas and suggestions aired in it and build up a process for pursuing the case and cause of the hapless Kashmiris.

The observations of the Amnesty International representative at the Conference are significant enough to be picked up by the Foreign Office to highlight the non-stop state terrorism unleashed in the occupied state. To quote the AI rep: "Impunity — the exemption from the judicial consequences of unlawful actions, is systematic in Jammu and Kashmir. The general climate of impunity in the state may be seen as both facilitating and encouraging further abuses of human rights in the state and the perpetrators of thousands of alleged human rights abuses, which have taken place since 1989 remain unpunished". He added: "AI's most important recommendation at this time is that human rights concerns are placed where they should be — namely at the centre of any attempt to resolve this long-running conflict...in 2001, an average of 100 civilians died every month as a result of either targeted or indiscriminate violence."

India keeps on harping on "cross-border terrorism", day in and day out. No statement or speech by the Indian political leaders and the officials of the External Affairs Ministry is without such accusation against Pakistan. This single point has been exploited astutely to line up the world opinion against the "villain" Pakistan. And we keep parroting off denials and disclaimers (which no body believes). We fail to realise that there is a perfect case for the strengthening of international military monitoring entrusted to UN Military Observers Group. Because of Indian defiance of the UN Resolution, this group cannot function properly. If allowed to function freely, it will be able to report if there is any alleged infiltration across the Line of Control and if so to what extent. We merely mention the need for it in passing and do not pursue the argument forcefully enough. And thus because of this questionable act of omission on our part we weaken our case and let the Indians have a free hand.

Again the state terrorism in the occupied state practically goes unnoticed. The violation of human rights and the atrocities have to a large extent been documented by AI and the US Human Rights Watch. A recent book with the title 'Did They Vanish In Thin Air' has been published in Srinagar by one Ziauddin which was recently reviewed in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, Mumbai. Ziauddin has listed 4000 disappearances ranging from age 8 to 70 years. He has given details of hundreds of such persons district-wise and with pictures. Zia has also provided an analysis of the UN Declaration on the Protection of All Persons From Forced Disappearances of which Article I, II and III read as under:

1. Any act of enforced disappearance is an offence to human dignity. It is condemned as a denial of the purposes of the charter of the United Nations and as a grave and flagrant violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed and developed in international instruments in this field.
2. No state shall practice, permit or tolerate enforced disappearances.
3. Each state shall take effective, legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent and terminate acts of enforced disappearance in any territory under its jurisdiction.

The weekly then cites countries like Mexico, Argentina, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Philippines where governments have set up Commissions to probe into the disappearances. Why can Kashmir not have a commission of inquiry modelled on the Sri Lanka commission, asks the weekly. Is the Government of Pakistan listening?

To get to know more about the atrocities, *The Tribune* (India) carried an eye-opening report under the caption the Militancy Toll. Extracts: "Srinagar, July 10. The police claimed that more than 94000 persons including 60,000 militants, were killed in militancy-related incidents in Kashmir while official records said at least 35,000 persons lost their lives in 56,041 incidents across the state from January 1990 till December 2002. It said more

than 30,000 civilians were killed during the 14-year long militancy while 60,000 militants died during the same period".

*The Tribune* adds that the "security forces in a bid to showcase their successes against militancy pick up some (Kashmiris) and kill them — the killing of 5 villagers in Pathribal in the aftermath of Chittisingpora massacre in March 2000 is a case in point. The possibility of similar unreported cases cannot be ruled out."

It is time, late as it is, for the Foreign Office as also the Government of Pakistan to wake up and go proactive in educating the world about the flagrant and inhuman terrorism let loose by the Indian security forces in clear violation of UN codes and convention of behaviour. Why can't Pakistan get a Special UN Rapporteur visit the benighted vale of Kashmir? Why couldn't the High Commissioner for Human Rights be persuaded to see things for himself in the occupied state? Why is Pakistan so very deficient in getting the International Red Cross to do its duty in Kashmir in accordance with its charter? Why doesn't Pakistan raise the issue of the Chairman of the Amnesty International who has been refused a visa to visit India and Kashmir? The unimaginative and weak-kneed approach of our Foreign Office in matters of vital relevance to our case on Kashmir is baffling if not depressing.

Because of our lack of planning and strategic preventive moves, we are increasingly finding ourselves in a perplexing (and losing) situation on our western front also. Where India is operating full stream to create trouble for us in Kabul and at the borders. Routine diplomatic meetings and visits no longer are enough. These need to be supplemented by hard-nosed analyses, vital continuing contacts at various levels, use of updated intelligence, think tanks, lobbying and above all through the media and in particular by television and radio networks. One only wishes our Foreign Office will take note of these points and do some thing by way of achieving results.

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