

Deciphering Pakistan's Kashmir Lexicon

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Exploiting the Kashmir Protests

A cursory glance at Pakistan's current lexicon on Kashmir demonstrates both these above aspects. After the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen leader Burhan Wani on July 8 in Kokernag, Anantnag district, barbed references have been made by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his cabinet members eulogising Wani as a martyr and emphasising anti-Indian, anti-Hindu, sentiments in the Valley. Much of this was in fact underwritten by the InterServices Intelligence (ISI). The Pakistani cabinet, not so subtly, declared July 21 as Kashmir Black Day, to coincide with elections in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). The result was the ruling PML-N winning a landslide victory with 31 of the 41 seats. Nawaz Sharif, who was under a cloud due to his family connections with shell front companies allegedly involved in money laundering which had been disclosed in the Panama papers, and also under threat from a section of the

armed forces and public obliquely supporting Chief of Army Staff, General Raheel Sharif, seized the opportunity to proclaim his political relevance and resilience. The leitmotif of his victory speech at Muzaffarabad was “Kashmir banega Pakistan”, which was repeated in his Independence Day address on August 14. Pakistan’s President, Mamnoon Hussain, reiterated the message in his address to the nation. As did Pakistan’s High Commissioner to India, Abdul Basit, who emphasised Islamabad’s unswerving commitment to the Kashmir cause, testing the already strained relations with India.

These Independence Day speeches reflected the current reality in Pakistan, where the emphasis was primarily on terrorism; paeans of praise for the success of Operation Zarbe Azb, criticism of terrorist attacks from Afghanistan, and of course the Kashmir issue. There was no talk about economic growth, job creation, or any serious development agenda. The rhetoric on the Kashmir issue is now serving as an effective smokescreen for the flailing economy and fractured politics of the country.

Pakistan’s Diplomatic Campaign

At the multilateral level, Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary, Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, requested the Islamabad-based Ambassadors of the member countries of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir, which comprises Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Niger, to raise their voice against “the blatant human rights violations” affecting Kashmiri Muslims in the Valley. Subsequently, the Secretary General of OIC, Iyad bin Amin Madani, (former Saudi minister for Information and Hajj), going beyond the usual litany of the Kashmiri right to self-determination and a referendum as per UN resolutions, publicly stated on August 21 that Kashmir was not India’s internal problem but an international issue given humongous human rights violations. He exhorted the international community to raise its voice against alleged

Indian atrocities. And added that the OIC contact group would meet in New York in the run-up to the United Nations General Assembly session, where Nawaz Sharif would be delivering an emotive speech on the situation in Kashmir, and warned that several groups would be demonstrating against Prime Minister Modi there. The OIC Chairman's speech was uncharacteristically harsh, and indicative of the sustained campaign launched by Pakistan regarding Kashmir.

Later, the President of PoK, Sardar Muhammad Masood Khan, and Prime Minister of PoK, Raja Farooq Haider, in a statement issued on August 25 following the swearing in of the former, pledged that they would ensure that "the blood offered by the men, women and children in Kashmir in the current struggle will not go vain." Muhammad Masood Khan, a career diplomat, who was earlier Foreign Ministry spokesperson and Ambassador to China in addition to a successful stint as Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, has been nominated as PoK President to further Islamabad's Kashmir agenda in the UNGA. In his inaugural speech, Masood Khan emphasised that Kashmiris needed to increase their outreach and multiply their friends to influence powerful countries and multilateral agencies. He noted that "[t]he UN will not come to us, we will have to go to the UN to remind it of its seemingly forgotten commitments on Kashmir."¹ He also added that Islamabad needs to work on the UN Secretary-General and influence him to use his good offices and appoint a special emissary for Kashmir without waiting for consent from India, as New Delhi was not prepared to accept mediation. Significantly, Masood Khan has also spoken about the necessity of cultivating sympathetic sections of India's political class and civil society in order to put pressure on the Government for agreeing to bilateral talks on Kashmir with all stakeholders.²

It is interesting to note that Congress leader Saifuddin Soz has publicly asked for the revival of Pervez Musharraf's four point action plan for Kashmir, which contemplates:

(i) status quo on borders to remain, with people on either side of the Line of Control (LoC) allowed to move freely;

(ii) autonomous status (not independence) to Jammu and Kashmir along with Pakistanoccupied Kashmir for internal management;

(iii) troops to be withdrawn from the region in a phased manner; and

(iv) a joint mechanism, with Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri representatives, to supervise the implementation of such a road-map for Kashmir.

While the Musharraf plan has no legal basis either in the UN recommendations or the Constitution of India as regards autonomous status for Kashmir, Soz's statement provides a tailwind for Islamabad's international initiatives, given that such opinions are being voiced by members of mainstream political parties in India.