

05 AUG: A RED LETTER DAY FOR JAMMU & KASHMIR

Webinar Summary Report

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Acknowledgements:

The Webinar “**05 Aug: A Red Letter Day for Jammu & Kashmir**” held on 05 August 2021 at 6pm IST was organised by The Current and Strategic Affairs Forum (CASA). We would like to thank our Moderator and Panelists for their comprehensive analysis and candidly expressing their views:

Panellists:

Lt General Satish Dua, PVSM, UYSM, SM, VSM (Retd)
Former GOC 15 Corps and CISC

Dr Ashok Bhan, IPS
Former Director General of Police, Jammu & Kashmir

Mr Touseef Raina
Chairman, Baramulla Municipal Corporation & Youth Leader

Special Invitee:

Lt General VG Patankar, PVSM, UYSM, VSM (Retd)
Former GOC 15 Corps and QMG

Moderator:

Lt General Syed Ata Hasnain, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM** (Retd)
Member NDMA, Secretary to Government of India and Former GOC 15 Corps

We would also like to thank the many other distinguished attendees including many senior veterans, business leaders, professors, think tank researchers, contributors, analysts and others who took time out of their busy schedules to attend and shared their inputs with views, including some very relevant Q&A and comments during the Webinar.

We would like to thank Lt Gen Gautam Moorthy, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC (Retd), Former DG Ordnance Services and founder of CASA, Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM** (Retd) for organising the panellists and excellently moderating the Webinar, Colonel Ravi Nair for comprehensively summarising the

Webinar in this report, Mr Mahadevan Shankar of CASA Core Committee with support IT team for coordinating support logistics, backend Q&A coordination and the live screening of the Webinar on the CASA YouTube channel.

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Presentation:

Lt Gen Gautam Moorthy welcomed the the eminent panellists on the Webinar and introduced them to the audience. He gave a broad overview of the key challenges impacting the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir and its significance in the current challenging geopolitical environment. General Moorthy also extended his warm welcome to each of the participants who had logged on. He emphasised on the importance of two dates in the J&K story- the accession of the state to the Indian Union on 26 Oct 1947 and 05 Aug 2019 when Articles 370 & 35A of our constitution were abrogated for all practical purposes.

Gen Hasnain having spent a considerable portion of his career in J&K from Coy Cdr right up to Corps Cdr of the prestigious 15 Corps in Srinagar, and one who still has his finger on the pulse as moderator invited Gen Patankar to give his opening remarks. While doing so, General Hasnain also made mention that it was Gen Patankar who started the humanising of army operations with initiatives like 'Maitri', 'Ujala', etc which sought to minimise collateral civilian damage during CI operations as well as in trying to get industrialists to invest in J&K as early as 2002 when he assumed command of 15 Corps.

Gen Patankar began by recalling that even though he is settled in Pune after retirement, Kashmir had never really left him as had been predicted by the then CM at his farewell dinner on being posted out from HQ 15 Corps. He advised that we must look back over the past two years not to find faults but to envision the future. In his opinion, despite the expected frictions between the Centre and states in India's form of federal democracy, J&K is special as everyone has an opinion on the state. However, whatever the policy, if the people are not centric to it, that policy was bound to fail. Currently, he felt that the people of J&K are at the centre of Government policies. He hoped for a clear roadmap with well-defined parameters for accountability & responsibilities for those entrusted with its implementation in both J&K and New Delhi. Commenting on politicians, the Gen also observed that whenever there was direct rule from Delhi, programmes and schemes were better executed and access to ordinary people to Government services was far better. He hailed the recent efforts to restart grassroots democracy by holding the Gram Panchayat & DDC elections that were largely devoid of the old established Kashmir political parties. He concluded his opening remarks with a wish that the ongoing delimitation of constituencies would progress rapidly so that Assembly elections too could be held.

Lt Gen Satish Dua was invited next to offer his opening remarks. He began with a disclaimer that his talk would mostly cover the security dimension and less on other issues concerning the state and the abrogation of Articles 370 & 35A. He hailed the Indian Government's actions in August 2019 as a bold step that broke the jammed status quo. He reflected on the visit of the Indian PM when he was the Corps Cdr in Srinagar, when an announcement of Rs 80,000 crores was made for development projects. Yet between the four years from 2015 to 2019 the State Government could only spend 37% of that central aid. The General quoted a lot of statistics ranging from industry, power & water supply to development projects. Despite this, he cautioned that one could not term the current situation as being hunky dory. Terrorism had declined by more than 60% while the Security Forces casualties declined by 30% at the same time. However, Gen Dua, who had recently visited the Valley, to meet ex-servicemen from his Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry (JAK LI) Regiment, observed that local people still felt resentment over the loss of statehood by Delhi's actions of 5 August 2019. The populace had no love lost for the leading political families of the State or the separatists like the Hurriyat who have been given their just deserts by the present Government in New Delhi. Gen Dua also felt that the unshackling of Ladakh from the rest of J&K was long overdue and a welcome step. He saw it as a fresh opportunity for the Central Government

to ensure development reached the grass roots. Restoration of statehood later could always be a bargaining chip for any Central Government. The international community was muted in its reactions as was China. However, in the past two years the security situation has worsened in the Af-Pak region and China in a bid to bolster its ally Pakistan, has started colluding with it and even more brazenly started 'salami slicing' through PLA operations in Eastern Ladakh. Yet unlike in the past, India has weathered these adversities on its own and with 63 battalions of the RR and a border fence with sensors keeping infiltration from POK down to a trickle, he stated that we are well poised to defend ourselves. The people of J&K too he mentioned are free from living in constant fear. For the future, he felt India must follow policies that remove the idea of 'Azadi' from the minds of the youth by effective counter psyops that reach them from across the LoC. An 'all of Government' approach must be adopted in dealing with J&K so that hope is regenerated in the people especially the youth who are the key to integrating the Kashmiris with the rest of the country. For the situation to descend into chaos before Aug 2019 took decades of mis-governance. Attempts to break the status quo are only two years old. He believed that we must give the new set up more time before passing judgement on it. In his opinion, at least two generations would be needed to change the mind sets of the Kashmiris.

Gen Hasnain commended the well stated views of Gen Dua that were largely in sync with what was stated by Gen Patankar. The key take away from the remarks of both Generals was that the Kashmiri people need to be the pivot of all policy measures taken by both Delhi & Srinagar. However, Gen Hasnain wondered if the Army-Police actions in Kashmir been only in isolation from the rest of the environment? Have the politicians really been able to exploit the experiences of the Army & police? He thereafter invited Dr Ashok Bhan to give his views.

Dr Ashok Bhan, IPS began by thanking both Generals Hasnain and Moorthy for having him on this programme of CASA along with respected senior army officers as well as leader representing the youth of J&K. He observed the change in direction effected by the Government following its actions of two years ago and said it would be naïve to expect any roll back of it. Though the reforms have been challenged in Court, he expected the ground situation to being the ultimate adjudicator over the future of the UTs. Dr Bhan recalled the years General KV Krishna Rao was the Governor of J&K (1989 to 1990 & again from 1993 to 1998), when it was opted to resume the suspended political process in the State. Many elections were held and the resumed political activity in the State, led to the period

2002 to 2007 being the most peaceful in a long time. He brought out the lesson that the SF can contain the situation but for lasting solutions, political CBMs must follow. Dr Bhan felt that the arrest and detention of Sheikh Abdullah (father of Farooq Abdullah & grandfather of Omar Abdullah) and abrogation of Article 370 have been the most resented actions of the central Government in J&K.

Dr Bhan decried the use of national security as an excuse to manipulate politics or to put forward national interest as a cover for personal interests. Though the actions of two years ago have marginalised the Hurriyat and the separatists, local political parties have not replaced them. He believed that though 5 to 10% percent of the Valley will profess support for the idea of 'Azadi'- the bulk of the population would reconcile to remaining with India. However, the majority do set great store by dignity and hence resent the loss of statehood. The idea of people being the centre of gravity is good and Government needs to address the psyche of the people. He pointed out that the promised investments are not rolling in as expected and the gap between the people and Government persists as evinced by the thin trickle of citizens into the secretariat. Corruption has not been removed - only the beneficiaries have changed. No progress has been made to fill up over 50,000 Government job vacancies. Dr Bhan observed that the stoppage of the annual Durbar move from Srinagar to Jammu has not been well received. He felt that an opportunity for the intermingling of communities has been lost. He cited the example of the Crime Branch that had been shifted to Jammu from Srinagar on a permanent basis. Very soon all the Kashmiri Muslim officers got themselves transferred back to Kashmir. The remaining officers in the absence of Muslims spoke ill of their absent colleagues. Similar were the reactions in the reverse direction when Hindus were excluded from Muslim gatherings. The change from a unified state to two UTs has increased problems of integration and has left large sections of the stake holders like the Kashmiri Pandits, the people of Ladakh, Dras & Kargil dissatisfied. The communal hatred spawned during the Amarnath Shrine Board protests of June 2008 led to a war for civilizational survival waged between the Islamists and the Hindutva groups which still simmers on in a subterranean manner.

Commenting on the security situation in J&K, Dr Bhan spoke of the need to get out of the cycle of monthly killing of terrorists and numbers locally recruited. The numbers do not indicate any decline. Almost the same numbers are recruited as the numbers killed. Internationally, China that generally maintained neutrality has in the last two years projected itself as an aggrieved party in the J&K dispute

between India and Pakistan. Though he agreed with the other two speakers that the SF has been on top of the CI situation, the past two years he too believed is too short a period to assess the pros and cons of the Government actions of August 2019. He said that while the politics of entitlement and exclusivity has been sharply curtailed, the Government must start a credible electoral process at the earliest. He summed up his talk by stating that the situation will normalise only once the Tri Colour could be hoisted at Lal Chowk in Srinagar without police protection.

Mr Tauseef Raina started his presentation by recalling an incident when as first-year BA student, he approached Gen Hasnain to request him to change the army convoy timings since they caused a lot of traffic jams, when students were rushing to attend classes. He remembered that the convoy timings were changed as requested. He expressed his gratitude to the Government that organised and held the DDC & Panchayat elections recently without incident. He stated that fear was being removed from the minds of the public and more and more people come to him to get their problems resolved. People are talking freely- "*khul ke baat karte hain*" as he put it. The youth are pleased with the Government schemes which is fueling their desire to meeting their aspirations by launching start-ups like the youth in other parts of India. He appealed to senior politicians to discard hypocrisy and not play politics over the blood of the youth. He wanted the locals to realise that they, more than the Government in Delhi, were responsible for the unsettled state of affairs in J&K. Mr Raina's talk was a refreshing departure from the usual polemics one was used to hearing from young Kashmiris in recent times.

Q&A. The presentation and discussions by all four panelists were followed by a lively Question & Answer session moderated by Gen Hasnain. While replying to one of the questions, Gen Patankar clearly stated that there was no need for the same political party to be in power at the Center and in the State for the latter to develop & progress. Gen Dua felt that outreach programs like Sadhbhavna were simply outsourced by the Government to the SF. Had a whole of Government approach been adopted, the results would have been far better. The battle for the mind space was not being fought in an optimal manner and hence our foes were able to exploit exposed fault lines far better than us. Dr Bhan again stressed on communal harmony being important for J&K's progress and again called for the annual Durbar move practice to be restarted.

Summary

Gen Hasnain made a mention of the twinning of cities in J&K with other cities in India. Such an initiative at the level of professional bodies, Chambers of Commerce, etc would go a long way to integrate J&K with the rest of the country. He left the audience to ponder over whether a durbar move was the only way to harmonise inter- communal relations.

Gen Moorthy in his closing comments sincerely thanked the eminent Panellists, the Moderator and the audience for their incisive comments with diverse questions.

The Webinar closed at 8.15pm IST.