



Sansardeep S. Wanjara

Thanks to the progress in the field of communication, it has become so easy to lose track. Events and happenings move at such speed that most of us barely have time to jump from Obama's address to Muslim world to Pakistan fighting the Al Qaeda to Akali Dal becoming a mirror image of saffron BJP to anger exploding on the streets of Kashmir to a new wave of protests in Iran. This is a situation that most suits the rulers, particularly the variety that thrives on suppression of voices of self-aspirations and trouncing of minority concerns.

Something similar is happening in Kashmir. Just as the Indian nation state in the 1980s and early 1990s repeatedly tried to ensure that Punjab is viewed through the prism of terrorism across India, now Kashmir is projected as a territory where all terrorism emanates actually at the command of Pakistani masters.

No wonder, the print as well as the electronic media have failed in their duty in the last few weeks to keep a consistent focus on the Valley where Indian security forces are just not stopping their shameless routine of repression, firing, killings and where rape has been added as a new weapon. For more than a month now, the Valley is on fire, but after the initial burst of reporting, the mainstream media in India has become apathetic to the news.

"After all, for how many days can a newspaper keep publishing pictures of army men taking positions or lobbing tear gas shells?" a journalist friend asked me. Well, as long as there are people on the streets ready to take a bullet in the chest if that becomes necessary to demand that their women must not fall victims of rape by security personnel.

Harassment of local women has been a continuing story, be it the Punjab of 1980s, the North East or Kashmir. But finally, the Kashmiris have decided to take it no more. I have my doubts about the Kashmiris' capacity to put an end to it, not because I doubt their will to keep standing and throwing a stone at LMG-wielding CRPF jawans to make a point but because I have seen an entire nation unmoved even when women from the North East protested against a series of rape incidents and Armed Forces Special Powers Act by stripping in public.

India's media, except for a few honorable exceptions, failed humanity, and did not notice it. Not only Shopian had to explode but the unrest was to spread to Sopore, Bijnbehara and Pulwama, and gain momentum for the issue to even come to the front pages for a brief period.

Now the women are buried, the High Court has even talked of exhuming the bodies and a Commission has found that all allegations of Kashmiri leaders were indeed correct. But there is a move to put a lid on the entire affair by suspending a couple of cops and ordering some departmental action.

What about the root cause?

How we keep losing Kashmir?



Security personnel fight back Kashmiri protesters demonstrating against the Indian government in Srinagar all through the week. A protester on July 6.

"After all, for how many days can a newspaper keep publishing pictures of army men taking positions or lobbing tear gas shells?" a journalist friend asked me. Well, as long as there are people on the streets ready to take a bullet in the chest if that becomes necessary to demand that their women must not fall victims of rape by security personnel.

And what about the criminal apathy of a regime that tried to sweep the crime under a carpet? It is time India started demilitarizing the Valley. On his blog, J-K CM Omar Abdullah has written: "Omar Abdullah has had it with the security forces." So nice. Now stand up and say it, loud and clear, and every single day, from every forum, and every rooftop. Till you see that the people believe you enough to go back home assured that their women will be safe and that the patented Indian construct of killing young men in fake

encounters ends.

And ask your father to say it in Parliament. It is good to see Home Minister P Chidambaram talking about handing over law and order to the Jammu and Kashmir police, and CM planning to send the CRPF back. But what is important is to focus on the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

Rarely has a law been so hated. Indian media is good at drumming up a din about voter turnout hitting 63 per cent to muffle voices of the true leaders of the people.

Struck by the vehemence of the protests, Omar has now said his government would not give license for unwarranted use of force. The remarks followed a day after a youth died last Wednesday of the injuries he suffered in police firing. People are continuing to defy the curfew and CRPF men haven't stopped firing tear-gas shells and rubber pellets into the mobs.

On Monday, Omar Abdullah met Prime Minister Mamohan Singh and Chidambaram and in the presence of India's National Security Advisor M K Narayanan demanded that the CRPF be replaced. He also briefed them about the security situation in the state and the frequent law and order problem arising out of agitations.

The AFSPA was introduced in July 1990, a time that does not even

remotely resemble the present situation in the Valley.

(Sansardeep S. Wanjara regularly tracks Kashmir affairs.)



On his blog, J-K CM has written: "Omar Abdullah has had it with the security forces." So nice. Now stand up and say it, loud and clear, and every single day, from every forum, and every rooftop. Till people believe you enough.