

LETTER

'Collective Punishment'

People's Union for Democratic Rights strongly condemns the September 13, 2010 bloodbath in which 17 persons were shot dead by security forces and 131 injured in different parts of the Kashmir valley. Although, the protests were organized in response to the alleged burning of the Koran in the United States, it is clear that all protests in Kashmir, in the recent times, are hammering out the same message to the Indian State : *Azaadi*. The fact that no less than 89 persons have died (with two more deaths, today, i.e. September 14) and 1600 are injured (many grievously) since June 11 this year, confirms the brutality of the State machinery which continues to hurt, kill and maim the people of Kashmir.

A form of 'collective punishment' is being meted out to the entire civil society across Kashmir. Hundreds of young people are being 'rounded up' and arrested. People are forced to live under very long spells of daily curfew and are fired upon if they venture out of their houses to get provisions. They can also be fired upon (as it happened near SMHS hospital in Srinagar on September 13) when they respond to calls from mosques for blood donations as there are severe shortages in hospitals. Most recently, electricity has been cut off in downtown areas in Srinagar. Needless to say, these acts of 'punishments' directly violate article 4(b) of Protocol Additional II, 1977 (relating to protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts) of the Geneva Convention (12 august 1949) which prohibits collective punishment.

Thus, all that the Indian Government is doing is to carry on with its policy of military suppression by labelling all protests as "agitational terrorism". The argument about demoralisation of the security personnel has been given premium and the UPA government refuses to withdraw AFSPA and, it refuses to recognize that what Kashmir is witnessing is not another phase of militancy but people's anger and agitation over non-fulfilment of their long standing and eminently democratic demand for right to self-determination.

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