

Destruction of Chrar-e-Sharief

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**Destruction of
Chrar-e-Sharief**

I

WE express our anguish at the destruction of Chrar-e-Sharief, the shrine of Sheikh Noor-ud-din, on the day of Id-ul-Zuha. At this moment of crisis we share the grief of the people of Kashmir. Burning down of the shrine means a permanent loss of a source of solace and strength to the Kashmiris in their times of despair.

The foremost responsibility of the government of India and its forces was to protect the shrine. In this task the government has proved to be a total failure. In fact it shows how far the rulers of India have moved from the values cherished by the people of the subcontinent. The presence of 50-60 militants at Chrar-e-Sharief could not have represented a mighty threat to the Indian state. The precipitating of a crisis which led to the destruction of the shrine of the most revered Sufi saint of Kashmir on the auspicious day of Id-ul-Zuha will only lead to further alienation of the people of the valley.

The first ever Pakistan-India People's Convention on Peace and Democracy had called for a peaceful and democratic solution to the Kashmir dispute. We fear that in the wake of the destruction of Chrar-e-Sharief anti-democratic forces and war-mongers in the subcontinent would gain the upper hand. We therefore appeal to the peace-loving people of India and Pakistan to press for a peaceful and democratic resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

TAPAN K BOSE

Co-ordinator,
Pakistan-India People's Forum
for Peace and Democracy,
New Delhi.

II

DESTRUCTION of Sheikh Noor-ud-din's shrine popularly known as Chrar-e-Sharief on May 11 reconfirms our worst fears. For the last six years we have been warning that the Kashmir situation can take calamitous turn if the government of India does not roll back its regime of tyranny. For weeks the government of India has been claiming that the militants who took shelter in the shrine had laid explosive devices. Even if the allegations were true the wooden structure of the shrine made it incendiary. Therefore, any firing on the shrine by the security forces was fraught with danger. This was all the more true since Chrar-e-Sharief was one of the holiest shrines of Kashmir.

The fact that the shrine was destroyed on the day Muslims celebrate as Id-ul-Zuha, that there was no pressing reason to act against the militants who had taken shelter in the shrine from March only go to confirm that the government of India remained unconcerned about the consequences of its policy and was determined to bring an estranged people to submission.

We denounce the militaristic approach of the government of India which offers no respite to a people rebelling against oppression. We believe that the approach of the government of India towards Kashmir has lent further legitimacy to the demand for the right of self-determination.

GAUTAM NAVLAKHA

Committee for Initiative on Kashmir,
New Delhi.

III

WE share the grief of the Kashmiri people at the wanton destruction of the 15th century shrine of Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani, known popularly as Chrar-e-Sharief. While armed militants desecrated the sanctity of the shrine by taking shelter there, it still does not absolve the government of India of its primary responsibility to protect the shrine.

There was no pressing need to free the shrine of the 45-50 militants who in any case did not pose a challenge to the might of the Indian state. What is more by denying access to Kashmiri leaders and journalists the government jeopardised its own claims. In the wake of the destruction, no Kashmiri is willing to accept the government's version. As a result, hardliners on both sides, in Kashmir and rest of the country, have gained the upper hand. Possibilities of a politically negotiated solution have receded. And after six years of repression the people of Kashmir are once again confronted with escalation of violence.

SUDESH VAID, MANORANJAN MOHANTY,

P A SEBASTIAN, JAGMOHEN SINGH,

K BALAGOPAL, MANAGER PANDEY,

SUMANTA BANERJEE AND 47 OTHERS.

New Delhi

IV

PEOPLE'S Movement for Secularism condemns the destruction of Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani's shrine, popularly known as Chrar-e-Sharief on May 11. While by seeking shelter there the armed militants

acted most irresponsibly, we unequivocally fault the government of India for failing in its primary responsibility to protect the people and places of public importance. Having disallowed journalists and Kashmir leaders access to Chrar-e-Sharief a week after the army moved in on March 8 to take up positions around the town there is no independent corroboration for any of the claims made by the officials. Furthermore, there had been no effort to resolve the issue along the lines of the Hazratbal incident. Not surprisingly there exists a sharp difference between the accounts of the residents and the officials about who is to blame for the burning down of the shrine. What undermines the official account of the sequence of events is the revelation that the army tried to pass off five bodies of villagers killed on May 11 as those of militants. This has rekindled memories of the destruction of Akal Takht in June 1984 by the army and of the connivance of the central and state governments in the demolition of Babri masjid in December 1992. What is more, the government has treated every criminal activity of the Hindutva brigade with kid gloves. Since parliament and the media have also made much about the desecration of the shrine by the militants there is need to point to the official double-speak. There is no single instance of government action against the misuse of religious places and gatherings by the various wings of Hindutva. As a result, the government of India is identified as an appeaser of Hindutva forces, especially their politics of hatred, and a persecutor of the cultural and political minorities. We therefore appeal to the democratic conscience of our fellow citizens not to allow the government to escape scrutiny and accountability under the guise of fighting terrorism or a proxy war.

SEEMA MUSTAFA

People's Movement for Secularism,
New Delhi.

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