

INTERVIEW Kashmiri Commander Speaks

Syed Salahuddin is the undisputed leader of the mujahideen struggling to liberate the territory of Kashmir from brutal Indian occupation. As the Supreme Commander of Hizbul Mujahideen, the largest organization involved in the Kashmiri struggle, and chairman of the United Jihad Council, a united front of all the groups involved in the struggle, Syed Salahuddin has led a vigorous and heroic struggle and quickly become a legend in the area over the years. He is one of the most wanted men in India and has been the target of several unsuccessful assassination attempts. He spends much of his time now touring the region in an effort to further the cause of Kashmir. Here he grants *The Message* an exclusive interview despite his busy schedule.

TM: Please provide us with a brief background of the Kashmiri struggle.

Syed Salahuddin: First of all, I am deeply grateful to your kind self for providing this opportunity to know from me my ideas and my perception about the ongoing struggle in occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The Kashmiri problem is as much as 50-years-old. It commenced from the time that the Indian subcontinent got divided into two dominions, India and Pakistan. At that time, the Indian states were given the option to accede to either of the two. The principle of division and affiliation designed at the time was that the Muslim-majority states would accede to Pakistan and the Hindu-majority states would remain with India. According to this basic principle, the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir was naturally to go and accede to Pakistan. But unfortunately, the Anglo-Indian conspiracy did not allow it, and Kashmiris were subjugated to India's illegal occupation against their wishes. Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, as far as its religion, cultural and geographical position is concerned, must accede to Pakistan because not less than a 700-kilometer border touches Pakistan, the rivers flow from Kashmir to Pakistan, and the culture, religion, language and historical relations and background provide ample base for accession to Pakistan.

When India literally and forcibly launched its forces on the 27 October 1947 on the territory of Kashmir, there was at that time resentment, and the people of Jammu and Kashmir rose up against this invasion. They launched an armed struggle, and as a result of it, a major portion of Kashmir (now known as Azad

Kashmir) was released from the Indian forces. Since that time until now, the suppressed people of Jammu and Kashmir have been fighting for their cause of

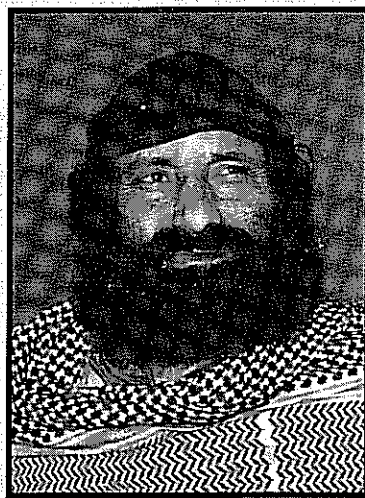
self-determination. They have been suppressed, oppressed, confined to concentration cells, subject to fracture and physical torture, molestation of women and burning of property. Despite the destruction and devastation enmassed during the last 50 years, they never surrendered and did not accept even for a fraction of a second accept this illegal occupation by Indian forces. The struggle of freedom remained constitutional and of a democratic pattern, both on political and diplomatic levels, until 1989, when the people of Jammu and Kashmir- the youth and the leadership got convinced that it is really impossible to get freedom from Indian occupation by these peaceful and constitutional means. Ultimately, after thorough discussion and analysis of the prevailing situation, the decision was taken to have a recourse to armed struggle, and a well-organized and well-planned armed struggle against Indian occupation forces was launched in 1989. This struggle has now gone into its eighth year.

TM: What is the current situation?

Syed Salahuddin: The situation by the Grace of Allah, is very optimistic and most encouraging. Presently, more than

750,000 Indian troops are at war with Kashmiri mujahideen and Kashmiri people. A direct confrontation is going on, in plain areas and hills, in forests, on water and land, in streets and bazaars, everywhere. Every inch, every street is occupied by Indian forces. And by the Grace of Almighty Allah, Kashmiri mujahideen

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have been vigorously engaging in open combat for the last seven years, resulting in the total loss of 20,000 troops of India, including four big generals, four to five brigadier-colonels, and more than 250 major and captain-ranking people. In addition to this manual loss, there has been the loss of millions of dollars in Indian army vehicular systems, their dumps, their reserves, ammunition depots and convoys. And this loss is still going on, both material and personal, especially during the last three years. The loss incurred to Indian occupation forces has increased three times more than it was in '93-'94, because mujahideen have introduced the latest technology of remote control systems and self-made improvised gunpowder. By the use of this latest remote control technology and improvised gunpowder, the mujahideen have, up to a satisfactory extent, been successful in preserving their own manpower and causing increasing loss- both manual and material- to the enemy forces. However, it is true that while getting disgraced and defeated at the hands of the mujahideen, the cowardly Indian forces have taken revenge from the innocent public. The general

public is being simultaneously subjected to mass killing, gang-raping of women and devastation of property. These three things have become a common-day phenomenon. The basic purpose of these human-rights violations and atrocities is to demoralize the Kashmiri people and mujahideen to the point that they will withdraw from this path of jihad. But by the Grace of Allah, the greater the suppression and oppression of the Indian forces, the greater is the hatred of the Kashmiri people and the greater the activities and actions of the mujahideen against the occupation forces. At present, face-to-face confrontation is going on with the Indian army from one corner of occupied Kashmir to the next. Very successful and destructive actions are going on against Indian army troops, including the regular army, infantry, black-cat commandos, mountainous divisions and the border security force. By the grace of Allah, the tempo of actions of the mujahideen is increasing day by day, both in its quality and in its quantity.

TM: Do you see any conclusion to your struggle in the near future?

Syed Salahuddin: Yes, Inshallah, we are very hopeful that India will not sustain much longer in Kashmir because it costs India more than 410 million rupees to sustain 750,000 forces each day. And it is beyond the capacity of the Indian economy where more than 360 million people live below the poverty line. Simultaneously, there are other secessionist movements disintegrating India and destabilizing it very bitterly. And simultaneously, so many centrifugal forces disintegrating Indian stability have weakened India too much to sustain the pressure of jihad in Kashmir. We are hopeful, Inshallah, within a couple of years we will be able to see our goal of complete freedom from Indian occupation.

TM: Are you ready for discussions with Indian authorities should the opportunity arise?

Syed Salahuddin: Yes, we are ready to have bilateral talks subject to two conditions: that they will first accept Jammu and Kashmir as a disputed area, and secondly, accept that there are three parties to the case. - India, Pakistan, and the people of Jammu and Kashmir. These are the two pro-conditions to be accepted before we are ready to be a party to any

talks.

TM: What are your comments on the hostage-taking situation that has emerged in Kashmir at the hands of the unknown group al-Faran?

Syed Salahuddin: I have made it clear, the political leadership of Kashmir has made it clear, and the combined council of Kashmiri mujahideen (United Jihad Council) has also made it repeatedly clear that al-Faran is nothing but a fictitious name designed by the Indian RAW [Indian's espionage agency] in order to deprive this Kashmiri freedom struggle from the way of sympathy which has been brewing in Western circles and secondly, to designate a label of terrorism on this justified movement. But by the Grace of Allah, this hostage situation has itself entangled India, and it is not in a position to get rid of it. The West has come to know that by kidnapping Western visitors or killing them, there was little benefit to the Kashmiri mujahideen. If there is any benefit at all from this action, it is for the Indian government. One advantage for them is to deprive the Kashmiri movement from Western sympathy and secondly, to level a charge of terrorism on this movement. But the West has come to know that it was all done and designed by the Indian RAW. The Kashmiri mujahideen and the people of Kashmir have observed so many demonstrations and protests and calls against this wrong action.

TM: What is your relationship with other groups involved in the Kashmiri struggle, such as Lashkar at-Tayyiba and Harakat al-Ansar?

Syed Salahuddin: All Kashmiri groups, small or big, actively involved in the ongoing Kashmiri struggle have been brought under one umbrella- the United Jihad Council, of which I am presently the chairman. There is mutual understanding, mutual cooperation, united planning and designing of action plans, and a common strategy against the common enemy. Al-hamdulillah, there is a complete atmosphere of mutual brotherhood, mutual understanding and mutual cooperation by the grace of Allah.

TM: Can a situation like Afghanistan ever arise in Kashmir?

Syed Salahuddin: Never, Inshallah, because no such symptom or cause seems to be present in Kashmir. The situation

in Kashmir is directly opposite to that of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the privately built organizations were, firstly, having separate personal, ideological, tribal and regional basis. In Kashmir, there are no separate lingual, regional, tribal or personal differences. All outfits, big and small, are just like the different regiments of one army. Secondly, in Afghanistan, all outfits, big or small, were in possession of particular land areas used as a base by those organizations, and every organization used to have a great potential of arms and ammunition in its possession. While in Kashmir, not even a single inch of land is in occupation of any military outfit, and nor is there any store of arms and ammo in possession of any military organization with which they can fight each other.

TM: How much help are you receiving from the rest of the Muslim world?

Syed Salahuddin: Unfortunately, the suppressed people of Jammu and Kashmir are bitterly feeling themselves to be isolated. Whatever moral or diplomatic support is given by Pakistan, which is really a party to the case, is nothing as compared to the need in the field. Regarding the Ummah, it has observed, so far, criminal silence. We can say that the Ummah has not so far recognized the historic and heroic struggle of Kashmir, and this is very unfortunate and discouraging. This is a struggle which has a historical basis and background, and the world community has itself committed to Kashmiris thru two unanimously passed resolutions still standing in front of the Security Council of the United Nations. Thru these two resolutions the world has promised to the Kashmiris' that they will be given the ultimate right to decide the final status of their state. But unfortunately, none of the Muslim states of the world have so far committed themselves to our cause.

TM: What do you see as the greatest need of the Kashmiri people?

Syed Salahuddin: The Kashmiris need concrete military and material support, and also the support of the Muslim Ummah, especially, on diplomatic and political levels. The world community is morally and legally bound to threaten its diplomatic and foreign relations with India in order to control the human rights violations and mass killings in the

territory of Kashmir. We need both types of support, military/material and diplomatic/political.

TM: What do you say to those who claim that the Kashmiri struggle is not a true jihad?

Syed Salahuddin: My reaction against those people is very bitter, and rather unbearable. They must know that when the oppressed stand up against their oppressors, this itself is jihad. The people of Kashmir have been subject to the slavery, illegal occupation, humiliation and deprivation of all kinds of human rights by Indian imperialism for the last 50 years by the dent of force. So why is this not jihad? Especially when the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) has categorically stated that Allah has made hell haram (forbidden) for two groups of people: one group which will support Isa (Jesus) when he will reappear in the world, and the second, the group which will fight against Indian imperialism. There is a hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra in which the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) has given glad tidings to those people who will fight with their life and their property against Indian forces. And Abu Hurayra aspires to be alive at that time and to participate in that jihad with his life and property. He says, "If I am killed in that jihad, then I will be the best of martyrs, and if I return (alive), then I will be Abu Hurayra Muharrar (Abu Hurayra with a certificate of salvation from hell)."

And there are many other ahadith in which the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) has specifically mentioned the name of Hindh (India), making it crystal clear that fighting the Indian forces is one of the most virtuous jihads. Now an imperialistic power subjugating an innocent nation into slavery and depriving them of all kinds of human rights- moral, political, social- subjugating them to cultural aggression, and dismantling their Islamic identity, if this isn't an aggressor or zalim then who is an aggressor or zalim? And to rise up against that aggressor and fight against his aggression, if that is not jihad then what is jihad? The people whose view is that the Kashmiri situation is not a jihad are fully mistaken.

TM: Tell us something about your personal background, education, family, why you joined the struggle, etc.

Syed Salahuddin: My name is Salahuddin, date of birth Jan 1948. I have completed my post-graduation in 1970 from Kashmir University, and during this academic era, I got much impressed and influenced by the work of the Islamic movement. The Islamic movement through its schools, by the circulation of its literature, and by its preachings educated the Kashmiris about their Islamic identity, their Islamic culture, their Islamic future and against India's illegal and barbaric occupation. I was very much stricken when I saw how the Indian occupation forces are humiliating the Kashmiris. The miserable condition of Kashmiris, their helplessness, their deprived status of life, their economic backwardness, their educational backwardness, their political deprivation, and all other related things, opened my eyes, stimulated my feelings, and prepared me- rather, compelled me- to join this struggle, and not only to join, but to prepare the youth of Kashmir for this heroic armed struggle

By the grace of Allah, before joining this armed struggle, I have for years preached in the mosques, in public congregations, rallies and gatherings. I have been confined three times to concentration cells under the Public Safety act by Indian army authorities and interrogated so many times. My family, my relatives, my big brother, my parents were time and again repeatedly beaten, subject to physical torture, and compelled to migrate from one place to another. I have joined this movement with the full of my conscience and wisdom because the miserable condition of my suppressed nation has stricken the depth of my heart.

TM: Is there any work being done on your behalf in America?

Syed Salahuddin: No. I don't have any organizational contacts, but there are brothers who belong to the subcontinent, Kashmir and Pakistan as well as brothers from the rest of the Ummah who have sympathy with the suppressed Kashmiris. They wish to support us, but unfortunately, they are living in such a system that they are not allowed to give any concrete material support to our heroic struggle. Their moral and diplomatic support continues to be with us, but they are not in a position to exert it on an international level in a manner which can bring any relief or rescue to our people. But, organizationally we don't have any branch

in the United States nor any such link.

TM: Finally, do you have any message for the Muslims in America?

Syed Salahuddin: Our message for the brothers in America and the outside world is in terms of the Holy Qur'an: "And why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who being weak are ill-treated (and oppressed)? Men women and children whose cry is: "Our Lord! rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from Thee one who will protect; and raise for us from Thee one who will help!" (4:75)

About 750,000 Indian troops have started killing en masse, gang-raping, engaging in massive destruction, human rights violation, and unprecedented atrocities in the paradise of Kashmir. The world community, the Muslims especially, are morally and legally bound to take notice of it and do the best they can to stop it. I think the Muslims in America have the privilege to be the citizens of a highly developed state that claims to be the sole super power of the world. They can garner the attention of the American authorities and human rights institutions and can gain and win the public feeling in favor of Kashmiris. At the same time, in the name of relief, they can raise a massive movement for the mobilization of resources for the relief and rehabilitation of the devastated people of Kashmir. Thousands of families are homeless, suffering for a mouthful, thousands of orphans, thousands of disabled people, thousands of widows are at present in need of support in the name of relief. ■

Say "If the whole of mankind and Jinns were together to produce the like of this Qur'an they could not produce the like thereof even if they backed up each other with help and support"
The Qur'an 17:88