

#KashmirCOVID19

# Kashmir in the Age of Detention: What Changes for the Kashmiris pre and post-Pandemic?

Moderator: Dr. Rabia Akhtar

Panelists:

Sardar Masood Khan

Dr. Maleeha Lodhi

Victoria Schofield

Awais Raof

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CSSPR



## CSSPR Webinar Report

### Kashmir in the Age of Detention: What Changes for the Kashmiris Pre and Post-Pandemic?

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On May 5, 2020, the Center for Security, Strategy and Policy Research (CSSPR), University of Lahore, launched its Webinar Series by organizing its first webinar titled **‘Kashmiris in the Age of Detention: What Changes for the Kashmiris Pre and Post-Pandemic?’** Panelists invited were: Sardar Masood Khan, President Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Dr. Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan’s former envoy to the US, UK and UN, Victoria Schofield, a laureled historian with focus on South Asia, author of *‘Kashmir in Conflict’*, and Mr. Awais Raof, Chairman Board of Governors, University of Lahore. The panel was moderated by Dr. Rabia Akhtar, Director CSSPR, University of Lahore. The speakers gave their initial remarks, and then answered questions posed by the attendees. The platform for the meeting was Zoom Webinar and the event was live streamed on Youtube for the duration of 2 hrs which can be viewed here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WITd2qGtdvk>

### **Opening Remarks by the Moderator: Dr. Rabia Akhtar**

Dr. Rabia Akhtar gave her opening remarks to set the context for the webinar on the impact of COVID-19 on Kashmir and the lives of the Kashmiris by quoting one of the famous dictums of Socrates: “the unexamined life is not worth living”. Dr. Akhtar stated that examination is just the right thing to do when situations change and the ground shifts around us. She remarked that, COVID-19, in its quarantine and shifting preferences, has forced us to examine some fundamental questions related to our politics, society, culture and the international system. She iterated that tensions in understanding the societal and structural vulnerabilities are coming to the fore in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as countries and communities around the world continue to walk a tightrope in their fight against Coronavirus. She asserted that COVID-19 has changed circumstances to an extent where hunger might force people to shun voluntary detention, break free from social distancing to feed themselves, reducing isolation to be a mere privilege. While quarantine and isolation has voluntarily been adopted across the world, there is nothing voluntary about the detention of 8 million Kashmiris in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK).

Dr. Akhtar stressed the need for reminding the world that there is hardly any difference between the pre and post-pandemic world as far as Kashmiris are concerned. For the Kashmiris, this ‘double detention’ has only made their lives a lot worse given that India’s repression has increased, and that the gaze of the international community has turned farther away from those brutalities being perpetrated by India during the pandemic.

## **President AJ & K, Sardar Masood Khan**

### **Opening Question:**

**The increase in the intensity of COVID-19 has been equally matched by an increase in that of cross-LoC skirmishes and atrocities of the Indian security forces. The Handwara incident is just one case in point. Where do you see this headed? Is COVID-19 the cover that the BJP-RSS nexus needs to fulfill its Kashmir-agenda in full swing?**

**MK:** The President wished everyone health and safety from COVID-19, and thanked Dr. Rabia and Chairman BoG, University of Lahore, Mr. Awais Raouf for organizing the timely webinar on an all-important topic. At the outset, the President presented his six-point agenda for Kashmir:

1. Unity in ranks, do not speak in different conflicting voices
2. Go back to the international community and multilateral forums to reinvigorate the Kashmir cause from being eclipsed behind other issues.
3. Leverage strength of the diaspora
4. Use all tools of communication and resources to disseminate narrative
5. Make yourself strong economically, diplomatically and strategically
6. Engage with advocates of Kashmiri rights in India, and elsewhere

The President said that even before the COVID-19 induced lockdown, Kashmir was under siege and occupation. For the Kashmiris, the lockdown has completed 9 months. He said Kashmiris were put in concentration camps which Bipin Rawat termed ‘de-radicalization camps’. He emphasized that Indian forces and political pundits are indulged in genocide and ethnic cleansing. “Many international organizations and even domestic Indian audiences called out India’s atrocities but the most powerful, hamstrung by their economic interests, were tight-lipped.” The President reminded the audience that major international developments had already eclipsed the Kashmir issue and COVID-19 initiated a second lockdown allowing Indian forces to conduct extrajudicial killings in the name of exercising ‘peace and stability’. Commenting on the Domicile Rules introduced by the Indian government, President Khan said that they would open floodgates for the population in India to use and consume Kashmiri resources and territorial integrity. The President likened the ‘Saffronization’ of Kashmir through these rules to Hitler’s Nuremberg Laws which ended up with the Holocaust. While analyzing the rationale behind constant escalation of hostilities on the LoC, the President said: “Indian use of force and violation of ceasefire 850 times is a game that India wants to play at intimidating Pakistan to escalate beyond the current levels that raise the spectre of

nuclear confrontation.” He also ascribed cross-LoC skirmishes to India’s efforts to divert attention from its atrocities in IOK. He added that Kashmiris’ resilience and resistance has remained unchallenged with Indian forces struggling to coerce them. The President asserted that the Kashmiris would not capitulate, come what may unless freedom is attained.

The President stressed the need for Pakistan and Azad Kashmir to take advantage of their freedoms and spaces and cogently highlight the Kashmir issue. He warned that India would use COVID-19 to eclipse Kashmiris’ struggle and its atrocities. “Kashmir is now a clash of civilizations and cultures and this would be a long haul.” President AJK proposed an intensification of diplomacy on Kashmir and to bring about sanctions due to Indian aggression. He contended that Hindutva and this fierce drive by Indian government is aiming to exploit the volatility of global superpower struggle and India would use this atmosphere of a new world order to make its mark and further isolate the Kashmir issue. Global economic, political power positioning and social challenges would be the new norm and India would try its best to use this vulnerability to its advantage. Kashmiris are free from their soul and will continue their struggle. The President said that the post COVID-19 world will be marked by ethnic tensions, great-power rivalries and Islamophobia, shrinking the space for the Kashmiris. Hence, he reiterated the need for Pakistan and Azad Kashmir to keep the Kashmir issue in the limelight.

### **Dr. Maleeha Lodhi**

#### **Opening Question:**

**You have been a strong advocate of multilateralism for decades. Has COVID-19 amplified the role of multilateralism in South Asia? If yes, how can Pakistan lobby for and convince global fora to play an increased role in mitigating the conflict in Kashmir?**

**ML:** Dr. Maleeha Lodhi laid out the following points for further discussion during the event:

1. How long has Kashmir been under detention and lockdown/armed occupation? Has it not been so even before COVID-19 was discovered? The brutality has intensified for Kashmiris in this COVID-19 age.
2. The pandemic has given Indian forces the impetus to use more draconian force due to the engagement of international stakeholders in the COVID-19 crisis. Virus is being used as a communal campaign against Muslims and other minorities. Medical supplies, journalistic freedom and violation of fundamental freedoms are

being conducted without any international gaze which is exacerbated due to COVID-19.

3. Kashmiri populace is denied basic freedoms by BJP. COVID-19 lockdown is a manifestation of what it feels to be affected by a lockdown and being shut off
4. International community is not absolved of its responsibility. Kashmiris look to Pakistan and our response should not be left out to just tweets and mere statements

Dr. Lodhi explained the evisceration of Kashmir's autonomy by quoting from UNSC Resolution 38 of 1948 Para. 2: "Neither party can bring out any material change in the situation which occurs while the matter is under consideration by the Council". Dr. Lodhi went on to explain the push and pull at the UNSC when it comes to Kashmir. She recounted that it took a lot of effort and diplomatic parleys to organize a meeting of the Security Council on Kashmir, last year. She argued that the task was all the more difficult given that the last UNSC discussion on Occupied Kashmir was conducted in 1965, and that Indian lobbying was strong back then. The fact that the UNSC meeting even took place showed and highlighted the international nature of the conflict making the Indian narrative of *internal matter* redundant. She said that calls for plebiscite were validated and reaffirmed. The Indian diplomats in New York claimed that resolutions were old and expired but she used to retort by stating that: "Laws have no expiry date."

Dr. Lodhi elucidated upon the power politics at play in the UNSC. She asserted that the behavior of P-5 countries signalled that there was interference and blockading to check the plight of the Kashmiris. She recalled how both the U.S. and France opposed statements from UNSC and the draft was negotiated but never issued. Dr. Lodhi categorically said that non-implementation of not one but eleven resolutions was due to big power dynamics.

She emphasized that with three of the five P-5 countries lending support, of varying degrees, to India's position at the Security Council, it is time for bolstering diplomatic action on part of Pakistan.

Focusing on multilateralism, Dr. Lodhi said that it is imperative for Pakistan to continue engaging with the international community and at all multilateral fora, however imperfect they might be. She further talked about the effects of India's bellicosity in Kashmir. She said that Indian behavior in Kashmir has triggered many crises: human rights, health, social, ethnic and bilateral with Pakistan. She argued that a Modi-led India is not good news for Indo-Pak ties, that are likely to remain turbulent. This, she said, will add to the even-otherwise imposing foreign policy challenges for Pakistan. Dr. Lodhi said that the task for Pakistan to keep the Kashmir issue on the international radar would be a daunting challenge, especially at a time when the world is focused inwards as a result of the

pandemic. In order to grapple with these sets of challenges, Dr. Lodhi outlined the following responses on what needs to be done:

1. Evolve clarity in Kashmir policy in line with objectives we have with Kashmir
2. Consistency in diplomatic campaign, instead of an ‘on-off’ approach
3. Opinion mobilization is needed and an overseas approach is much needed due to the fact that this opinion needs to be disseminated beyond South Asia’s borders
4. Ministerial meeting at the OIC to keep Kashmir alive amid the issue of Islamophobia even if the meeting has to be virtual.
5. A Human Rights meeting at Geneva should be called
6. Mobilize and sustain a national consensus through a cross-party process with a national consensus approach.

She concluded her remarks with words of hope: “ the night of oppression is long for the people of Kashmir but might has never been right in history. It lasts for decades but finally, it gives way. The dawn of freedom from occupation for the Kashmiri people will come.”

### **Victoria Schofield**

#### **Opening Question:**

**You have long argued that maximalism from India and Pakistan has left little room for progress on the resolution of the Kashmir issue. Could COVID-19 that has hit both countries equally hard contribute towards further hardening of positions on matters related to their disputes or could it change the way both look at their rivalry in general and Kashmir in particular?**

**VS:** Victoria Schofield started her talk by saying that history, at times, works in extraordinary ways. Talking about the impact on COVID-19 on Kashmir, she argued that the double lockdown in Kashmir further highlights the fact that Kashmir issue is supposed to be even more highlighted but in this situation with COVID-19, it has been pushed back to a more self-centered approach by all states of the world. That said, Schofield expressed hope in the ability of technological connectivity that allows webinars like this to create a more vibrant information dissemination architecture, something that could help break logjams and rally support for Kashmir.

Schofield reminded the audience that Kashmir is now more of a humanitarian issue than a political problem. While dubbing lack of information and connectivity in Kashmir a basic yet most fundamental issue, she said COVID-19 can further enable a more stringent control leading to a more pronounced humanitarian dilemma for Kashmiris. She

acknowledged that Kashmir has always been a human rights issue, with or without COVID-19, and stalemate between interested parties is the single biggest hurdle. She lamented that many talks were conducted but all had failed to achieve an equitable resolution to show that bilateralism has failed. At the outset, she clarified that the Simla Agreement of 1972 did not preclude internationalization as a means to resolving the Kashmir dispute. She called for taking a leaf out of the United Kingdom's book when it was in a dire situation with Northern Ireland. There should be no shame in seeking international mediation, she said, while adding that nothing could be better for humanity if international players help break the stalemate.

Agreeing with Dr. Lodhi's views on multilateralism, Schofield gave weight to intensifying engagements with UNO, OIC and even the Commonwealth of Nations. She asserted that Pakistan needed to make itself heard at the highest offices so that the issue of Kashmir becomes more pronounced. Referring to the U.S. Congressional briefing on Kashmir which she attended, Schofield expressed hope that if the American Congress can discuss Kashmir as an issue after the events of August 5, 2019, so can other organizations.

In answering Dr. Akhtar's initial question, Schofield remarked that COVID-19's propensity to bring Pakistan and India together will be curtailed by this realist self-centered approach that responses to COVID-19 have already highlighted internationally. She said that it is likely that India and Pakistan might also develop further hardened views due to their stagnant, maximalist and inflexible stands.

### **Awais Raof**

#### **Opening Question:**

**What could a young Kashmiri boy, caged, helpless and at the mercy of a brutal occupier, be thinking today? Who and what could be the beacon of hope for him? What role do you envision for Pakistan in giving hope to the Kashmiris?**

**AR:** Awais Raof started his remarks by informing the audience that he, under the auspices of the University of Lahore, is the patron of a Kashmir youth-led society, which inducted Kashmiris from both sides of the Line of Control as its members. Raof said that by the virtue of engagement with those students, he got to know of the troubles that the Kashmiris had faced post August 5th and are currently facing during the pandemic. He admitted though that it was only after experiencing quarantine in the past 50 days or so that Pakistanis like him have come to understand or at least realise the pangs of detentions and lockdowns that have gripped the Kashmiris for the past nine months. He

said that COVID-19-induced isolation compelled him to feel the misery of those who have soldiers standing outside their homes.

Awais Raooof said that it was imperative to talk about the youth of Kashmir. He gave the audience three questions to think about: will they have more hatred for the occupier post-COVID-19? will they lose all hope? how will they fare in the future? He enunciated that it is unreasonable to expect people to remain loyal and subservient if they are locked up for a long time. In addition to their physical suffering, psychological effects of the prolonged lockdown on Kashmiris will be colossal and long-term. In such a situation, Kashmiris are looking towards Pakistan for relief. Will they love us if we won't deliver?

He said the world must be apprised about the distress under which the Kashmiris live. Kashmiris are not only crippled due to Indian aggression but also due to COVID-19, a double jeopardy for them. Moreover, he delved on the mounting problems that lie ahead for the Kashmiris. Having launched COVID-19 testing lab himself and setting up a full fledged isolation center and wards at the UOL Teaching Hospital, Awais Raooof was appalled that for more than 8 million Kashmiris, there were less than 100 ventilators available. Expecting Kashmiris to remain steadfast against COVID-19 under these dire circumstances is a challenge. He expressed his concern about the fate of the Kashmiris affected by the Coronavirus, for they are occupied by a state that does not care about them, their health, their rights and their freedoms. Awais Raooof feared that given India's heavy-handed approach towards the Kashmiris, coupled with rising Islamophobia, the Kashmiri population would be specifically denied and kept more isolated. Awais Raooof wondered: considering that a COVID-19 patient is seen as a leper or as a danger, it is beyond understanding how the Indian population and government would treat the infected when the infected are the Kashmiris. Raooof said that this is why the world must be told about the trials and tribulations of the Kashmiris over and over again. He cautioned against letting the Kashmir issue fade away from the global scene amid pandemic-heavy news. He ended his introductory remarks by stating that there was some hope which he drives when he sees that even in India there is a sentiment rising that aims at consoling the Kashmiri population over the atrocities committed by their government especially after undergoing lockdown themselves. However, he said that things could be difficult because of the state-controlled narrative on Kashmir.

Before starting the Q&A session, Dr. Rabia Akhtar briefly summed up the discussion. She said that it is not only important to keep hope alive but also to talk about Kashmir. She said the idea is to mix optimism with the sense of ownership of the Kashmir cause not only on political but most importantly on humanitarian grounds. Dr. Akhtar also stressed the need for Pakistanis to talk about Kashmir and complement the efforts of the



government. Finally, Dr. Akhtar said that there is a need to go beyond rhetoric, and aim for a more consolidated narrative on Kashmir.

### **Q&A Session**

**Question to President AJ&K:** How many more losses of lives would be required for the international community to mobilize and realize the seriousness of the issue?

**MK:** Many organizations and institutions are creating piles of evidence against Indian aggression but the P-5 countries due to realpolitik are not responding. “We have damning evidence against India.” After the pandemic is over, there might be a change in this lackadaisical attitude of the international community. Despite a lack of substantive response by the international community to our evidence-based complaints against India, we must be steadfast in our efforts and engagements. Though Pakistan cannot have a war with India, it must prepare for one, primarily because India continues to threaten to wage war against Pakistan and AJ&K, and also to occupy Gilgit-Baltistan. India’s bellicose statements must not be taken lightly because Indians, in their ideological frenzy, often do what they say. Avenues of communication are available and accessible for all of us to exploit and create space for and project Kashmir globally.

**Question to Dr. Lodhi:** How can limelight be brought back to Kashmir in this COVID-19 situation? How do we go beyond information blockading?

**ML:** Bringing Kashmir back to the fore is indeed a challenge. Lack of global cooperation, coupled with a rejection of multilateralism has added to the troubled environment. Despite this tough milieu, Pakistan must not stop its diplomatic campaign, and look to improvise and find new ways of engaging governments and all stakeholders. The international environment is tough but given that law, morality and UNSC Resolutions are on its side, Pakistan must show perseverance and make its diplomatic efforts more robust and cohesive.

**Question to Victoria Schofield** Why is India’s annexation of Junagadh and Hyderabad not part of Pakistan’s narrative on Kashmir? How do you comment on Pakistan’s treatment of pro-independence groups in Azad Kashmir?

**VS:** Hyderabad and Junagadh are over and settled, and hence are not part of Islamabad’s narrative.

**Question to President AJ&K:** Can and should Pakistan withdraw from the Simla Agreement?

**MK:** Simla Agreement does not outlaw internationalization nor bilateralize the dispute. Article 103 of the UN Charter overrides all bilateral agreements in case two parties are unable to resolve their differences. India's intransigence over the Simla Agreement, is geared towards keeping the Kashmiris and the United Nations out of the process of negotiations on Kashmir, if and when it comes to that. All this dilly-dallying was done by India to bide time and consolidate its position in the occupied territory.

Pakistan has more room for dissent than in India where violence of the heinous kinds are rampant. Nothing of that sort happens in Azad Kashmir. Despite the fact that there are only two options for the Kashmiris under the UNSC Resolutions, there is great space and tolerance for pro-independence voices in Azad Kashmir. There is contrast in how India and Pakistan treat the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), a pro-independence party. While JKLF's leader in IOK is languishing in Indian custody, its leader in AJK is free to move around and participate in politics.

**Question to Dr. Lodhi:** How does the Kashmir issue persevere in this COVID-19 issue particularly at the OIC forum?

**ML:** Even though the OIC is a divided house, it is a bloc, nonetheless, which can be utilized. Public diplomacy is necessary to bring Kashmir back into the spotlight. Engagements with civil society and media outlets as well as social media fora are integral to highlighting the Kashmir issue not just as a personal state-based issue but also as a humanitarian issue. Leveraging public opinion through favorable policy is needed in the age of digitalization and information. Pakistan needs to integrate new tools of diplomacy in its repertoire. There is a need for focusing on public diplomacy as means of harnessing the biggest superpower in today's world: **public opinion**. The Foreign Office must keep abreast with the shifts in the means and conduct of diplomacy in order to better respond to the demands of the digital age.

**Question to Awais Raouf:** How can academia help make a difference on policymaking on Kashmir?

**AR:** The best way academia can make a difference is by generating conversations, research and discourse. Current government's initiative of involving academics in its policymaking processes, is something new and appreciable. We, at universities, can contribute to policymaking by creating an information and knowledge landscape for the state to take advantage from. Engagements with critical voices among the Indian academicians and scholars to bridge the gap in understanding state policy and future discourse on the issue is a critical need of the hour.

**Question to Victoria Schofield:** What is the authenticity of the bioterrorism narrative and how would it affect South Asia? Does Pakistan have enough momentum to

internationally mobilize the international community on pushing the resolution of Kashmir?

**VS:** The world is not ready for bioterrorism and if COVID-19 is an act of bioterrorism/biowarfare (which remains unsubstantiated until now) then it would have serious and devastating consequences. Pakistan needs to engage organizations and institutions to maintain a stance which requires coherence in narrative. Not bothering about issues and volatilities is something that can, in the longer run, affect the global equilibrium causing further damage. The world must care for what happens in Kashmir because all are and could be further affected by this continued conflict, since the world is losing out on the advantages of better utilization of resources. There is a need for world leaders to improve their understanding and knowledge of the nuances of the Kashmir dispute.

**Question to President AJ&K:** What would be the effect of demographic disturbance initiated by Indian government through Domicile Law after rescinding Kashmir's status in its constitution?

**MK:** The Indian government is aiming to flood Kashmir with nationalists and ex-servicemen as well as religious fanatics to change the Kashmiri population indices. Their second aim would be to reintroduce religious/ideological signposts and highlights via reestablishment of shrines and temples to undermine and deride religious signature of Kashmir. India has violated several international legal codes to bring Kashmir to this point and this needs to be highlighted so that an appropriate response can be prepared and given. Credible public opinion of an international nature cannot be taken without bringing Kashmiris on the negotiation table or from a weak stance position. The Irish were not excluded during Good Friday Negotiations; Taliban were not excluded during Afghanistan peace talks but Kashmiris are eschewed, signals that they are not considered as a stakeholder. The United Nations was brought in the mix for State stakeholders, Kashmiris are not considered as a stakeholder. Pakistan's lacklustre academic and scholarly input on Kashmir is something that has allowed India to craft and shape a narrative of its choice. Arab countries are responding to the Islamophobic sentiments in India, and there is a need to pounce on this great potential of internationalizing the Kashmir issue. Working in silos and compartmentalized environments sans synergy is an anathema to the Kashmir cause. Webinars such as this create synergies. We must work towards this model to internationalise the Kashmir issue and keep it alive.

On bioterrorism, the debate is not on bioterrorism per se but state parties deploying bioweapons. What needs to be considered is inadvertent pathogen leak, laboratory compromise, lone wolf activity or intentional deployment of virus without attribution, all of which are necessary to understand because the world is not yet ready to deal with any

of it. Post-Pandemic world will be a Hobbesian world order which is on the rise with primordial instincts and hyper-realist concerns on the surge. In this environment, there is a need for an academic and coordinated response to internationalize the Kashmir issue on an unprecedented scale. But we must be cautious – reactionary and ad hoc policies to deal with a proactive India will not work. **Kashmir is about the security and completion of Pakistan, it is about the security of Pakistan. Pakistan is incomplete without Jammu & Kashmir, and Jammu & Kashmir has no identity without the state of Pakistan.**

**Question to Awais Raouf:** What would happen once the curfew restrictions are lifted from Kashmir by India? How do you envision the future of the freedom movement?

**AR:** I am not optimistic about the future. I envision that protests and other forms of resistance would restart immediately once the curfew is lifted, with more zest, zeal and enthusiasm. The psychological pressure and impact caused by the Indian lockdown will lead to chaos once restrictions are eased. The immediate future post-lockdown would be marked and marred by mass violence, protests and defiance and perhaps this is what the Indian government fears.

**Question to Victoria Schofield:** What are the prospects of third-party mediation and its realistic future pre and post nuclearization when both conflicting parties, India and Pakistan, are not confident and trustworthy due to their experiences with third-parties in crises pre and post-nuclearization?

**VS:** India and Pakistan with a representative selection of Kashmiris could choose a mediator who has no vested interest because they have just not worked out things by themselves. I fear that human rights abuses would continue unabated if there is no resolution of the dispute. Considering that India and Pakistan are locked in a web of distrust, acrimony and maximalism, asking for a facilitator is a viable option provided that the mediator has confidence of all stakeholders to the conflict. At a time when the international political order is not exceptionally different, the change induced by COVID-19 would do little to address the gargantuan task of resuming pending issues with a new or similar pace.

**Question to Dr. Maleeha Lodhi:** What should be Pakistan's short, medium and long-term priority responses in dealing with the Kashmir issue?

**ML:** Pakistan must dust its policy options and toolkits available to it in this new pandemic-induced environment. The importance of getting our own house in order and making a coherent and firm policy based on national consensus cannot be emphasized enough. Islamabad must have a sustainable, proactive and dynamic policy that calls for innovative, out-of-the-box course of action involving various stakeholders. Pakistan must **only** exercise diplomatic options. The kinetic route would give an opportunity to our

adversaries to undermine our narrative. There is a need for ramping-up the country's public diplomacy mix, so as to supplement diplomats and FO in extending our foreign policy options, clout and policy responses to strengthen our narrative on Kashmir.

### **Conclusion**

In her vote of thanks and concluding remarks, Dr. Rabia Akhtar said that this great discussion on Kashmir by some of the very best and authoritative voices on Kashmir has helped us predict what is in store for Kashmir and the Kashmiris. COVID-19 is not likely to change things for the better in Kashmir and for the Kashmiris. Great power insularity, coupled with hardening of positions of the conflicting parties is a recipe for more trouble for the Kashmiris. Dr. Akhtar also added that the political will to join heads and resolve outstanding disputes all around the world is least likely to be generated by the outbreak of the pandemic. But in all of this, she reiterated, we must have hope, for without hope, there is no life. Things might appear dismal but on a spectrum, between total optimism and total pessimism, Pakistan could be that hope that Kashmiris need at this time more than ever.