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Israeli Aggression: ‘Another day of horror’

The UN Human Rights Office, OCHRC has condemned the increasing frequency of Israeli military bombardments on schools, where hundreds of thousands of forcibly displaced Palestinians have sought shelter, with the latest attacks killing dozens at a Gaza City school.

At around 4:30 am during fajr prayer on Saturday, a mosque inside Al Tabaeen School was struck by the IDF “at least three times”, the OHCHR in the Occupied Palestinian Territory said in a statement on Saturday, adding that the attacks were “conducted with apparent disregard for the high rate of civilian fatalities”.

An initial report showed the strikes killed at least 93 Palestinians, including 11 children and six women, but workers are still digging up bodies.

Between 7 October and 8 August, at least 39,699 Palestinians were killed and 91,722 were injured in the ongoing war, according to Gaza’s Ministry of Health.

More than 90 per cent of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million has been displaced, many multiple times, since 7 October.

Schools, UN facilities and civilian infrastructure should not be targets, Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN relief agency for Palestine refugees, UNRWA, reiterated in a social media post on Saturday.

“Another day of horror in Gaza, another school hit with reports of dozens of Palestinian killed among them women, children and older people,” he said, adding that parties to the conflict must not use schools and other civilian facilities for military or fighting purposes and must, at all times, protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

“It’s time for these horrors unfolding under our watch to end,” he said. “We cannot let the unbearable become a new norm. The more recurrent, the more we lose our collective humanity.”

The majority of fatalities resulting from the Saturday IDF strikes appear to have been inside the mosque performing their prayers, OHCHR reported. Dozens of others were reportedly seriously injured, mostly children, women and older people.

This is at least the 21st strike on a school, each serving as a shelter, that the UN Human Rights Office has recorded since 4 July. These strikes have resulted in at least 274 fatalities, including women and children.

“Despite IDF statements that all measures are taken to avoid civilian harm, the repeated strikes on shelters [for displaced people] in areas to which the populations have been forced to move and the consistent and predictable impact on civilians suggest a failure to strictly comply with obligations required by international humanitarian law,” OHCHR stated.

AJK Excels in Key Indicators Compared to IIOJK and Pakistan - I

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is a region administered by Pakistan, part of the larger Kashmir area, which has been a source of conflict between India and Pakistan since the partition of British India in 1947. Located in the Himalayan region, AJK borders the Indian illegally occupied Kashmir to the east, and the Pakistani provinces of Punjab to the south and southwest, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the west. AJK has its own president, prime minister, legislative assembly, and high court; however, Pakistan retains significant influence over defense, foreign affairs, and economic policies. The economy of AJK is mainly driven by agriculture, services, tourism, and remittances from Kashmiris living abroad, and the region holds substantial potential for hydropower generation due to its abundant water resources.

The primary issue concerning AJK is the broader Kashmir dispute. After India gained independence, the Maharaja of Kashmir chose to accede to India. This decision sparked an armed rebellion, leading to the intervention of Kashmiris with support of Pakistani forces. The 1949 ceasefire divided Kashmir into IIOJK and AJK. This dispute has resulted in several wars between India and Pakistan and continues to be a major point of disagreement. The people of AJK have their own visions for the future, with the majority supporting accession to Pakistan. The aspiration for self-determination and the right to shape their own destiny resonate strongly among Kashmiris.

The Kashmir region’s history is intricate, characterized by ethnic, religious, and political strife. India’s administration of IIOJK has faced oppo-

sition from various Kashmiri groups, resulting in decades of armed conflict. Human rights organizations and global bodies have reported significant human rights violations in IIOJK, with numerous civilians, including women and children, losing their lives at the hands of Indian security forces. Many Kashmiris have vanished without a trace, while detainees have faced severe torture and ill-treatment. A large number of Kashmiris remain in custody without fair trials, and rigid curfews and lockdowns have severely limited freedom of movement and expression. Allegations of sexual violence against women by Indian security forces also persist. The ongoing hostilities and human rights violations have inflicted substantial suffering, displacement, and economic challenges upon the Kashmiri people. The psychological impact of violence and uncertainty has further burdened the civilian population. The international community has raised significant concerns regarding the situation in IIOJK, with human rights organizations and governments calling for independent investigations into these violations. Nonetheless, India frequently dismisses these appeals, maintaining that the situation is a domestic issue.

Conversely, in AJK, the population enjoys the freedom to live and work throughout Pakistan without fear for their safety and property. Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is a key component of Pakistan. The country has consistently offered political, diplomatic, and economic assistance to the people of Kashmir, grounded in historical, political, and humanitarian reasons. Pakistan has actively raised the Kashmir issue on international platforms, advocating for the Kashmiri people’s right to self-determination.



Analysis

Abdul Basit Alvi

Explanation Sought from Teachers Regarding Poor 9th Grade Results

The District Education Officer for Secondary Schools in Layyah issued a letter numbered 4535 yesterday, demanding an explanation from the heads of government high and higher secondary schools regarding the poor results of the recent 9th-grade examinations. The letter stated, “The higher authorities have taken serious notice with great concern of your school’s 9th-grade results for 2024, which are very poor, while the overall Board percentage is 52.78%. You have completely failed to improve the quality of education, which has adversely affected the reputation of the Education Department, especially the image of public schools.” The letter further mentioned that if you do not clarify your position with a proper explanation within two days, by August 12th, disciplinary action will be taken against you under the PEEDA Act, 2006.

Various opinions have emerged regarding these 9th-grade results. When we gathered information about these results from Layyah district and other districts, certain factors surfaced that suggest headmasters or government school teachers should not be held solely responsible for these outcomes. A senior citizen remarked that parents of the old-fashioned mindset, like myself, still exert some control over their children, but from my observation, most parents have lost control over their children. As a result, students are out of control both at school and at home. They are being drawn to easy ways of earning money through TikTok and other social media sites, which has diverted their attention

away from education.

Following the recent 9th-grade results, government school teachers have come under heavy criticism, with their poor performance being blamed for the students’ poor results. Even the government is of the same opinion, and the district administration is demanding explanations. No one is considering that teachers, in addition to teaching,

are also assigned other duties. The government frequently assigns teachers non-teaching duties on an emergency basis, keeping them occupied for days and causing disruption to students’ education. The Chief Justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, ruled in R. P. 37/2012 that “teachers’ duties should be confined to the school only,” but this practice continues nonetheless. In civilized countries, teachers’ duties are confined to the school, and they are not entangled in non-teaching matters, ensuring that students’ education is not disrupted. In our country, the situation is the opposite. If there is any issue in the country, government employees are the first to be assigned duties. They are given duties for polio campaigns, elections, census, house-to-house surveys, private school surveys, and even agricultural surveys in rural areas. They are deployed for dengue and other clerical activities or election duties. Then, if the educational results deteriorate due to the examination system or national circumstances, fingers are

pointed at the teachers.

If one looks beyond the lens of criticism and blame, one finds that almost half of the high schools in District Layyah, for both boys and girls, do not have headmasters. The headmaster posts are either vacant, or staff members are acting as in-charge heads. The remaining staff is in an even worse state. For instance, where there are science teachers, there are no arts teachers, and where there are arts teachers, there are no science teachers.

Overall, the number of teachers is also insufficient, and there are delays in their appointments, causing problems for students. When one teacher is burdened with multiple classes and a large number of students, how can they possibly do justice to their work?

Having been associated with the education sector, I can say from experience that in foreign countries, when a child is taken for school admission, they are first given a test. However, in our government schools, there is no such practice. According to government policy, it is mandatory to admit all students. Students who fail to perform well in private schools’ 5th and 6th grades are expelled and turn to government schools for admission. Government schools are bound to admit these students, and when these students are enrolled in government educational institutions, they are unable to produce good results in board exams.

The heads of educational institutions and headmasters in our country receive

reasonable salaries, yet they prefer to be occupied with office work and examination duties rather than teaching students themselves. As a result, their focus on teachers diminishes, and during this time, teachers also engage in activities of their choice and do not pay attention to the students, which leads to poor exam results. The government needs to devise a system that makes the heads of educational institutions accountable for ensuring 100% results from their schools.

One teacher (U) from a government school suggested that if educational boards recruit part-time staff to conduct exams, it may lead to an improvement in government school results. Otherwise, it is unlikely because when the academic session is at its peak, all SST teachers, who teach board classes (9th, 10th, 11th, 12th), are sent off for examination duties. After they leave, there are no additional teachers in the school to guide and teach the students. Furthermore, when the academic session starts, these same teachers are busy conducting practical exams. Teachers receive substantial compensation for board duties, and this lure of money has brought government school results and standards to such a low point that district officers are sending letters demanding explanations. The teacher suggested that, given the high unemployment rate, with millions of master’s degree holders available, if the compensation currently given to teachers for examination duties is instead provided to these educated individuals by hiring them part-time, it would ensure transparent exams, keep teachers in school, achieve educational targets, and prevent disruption to students’ education.



Analysis

Zain-ul-Abideen Abid



Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

Empowering Future Generations - I

Dr. Muhammad Shahzad Ashfaq

Education is the cornerstone of any nation’s development, and in Pakistan, it holds even greater significance. The country is home to a burgeoning youth population, with over 60% of its citizens below the age of 25. This demographic dividend presents both an opportunity and a challenge. To harness the potential of its young people, Pakistan must invest in education that not only imparts knowledge but also equips them with the skills, values, and attitudes necessary to navigate the complexities of the 21st century. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a critical component of this effort, as it empowers future generations to lead the way in addressing the country’s socio-economic and environmental challenges.

Pakistan faces numerous development challenges, including poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. The country’s education system has traditionally focused on rote learning, neglecting critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. However, ESD offers a transformative approach that integrates social, economic, and environmental dimensions to foster a more sustainable future. Incorporating ESD into its education policy, Pakistan can equip its students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to address the country’s development challenges.

ESD is not merely about imparting knowledge about sustainability; it is about empowering students to become active participants in the development process. It encourages critical thinking, creativity, and innovation, enabling students to develop solutions to complex problems. Moreover, ESD promotes values such as social justice, equity, and environmental stew-

ardship, which are essential for building a more sustainable and equitable society. By integrating ESD into the curriculum, Pakistan can produce a generation of leaders who are equipped to tackle the country’s development challenges and create a better future for all.

The benefits of ESD extend beyond the classroom. By empowering students to become active participants in the development process, ESD can contribute to the achievement of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs, adopted by Pakistan in 2015, provide a roadmap for achieving sustainable development by 2030. ESD can play a critical role in achieving these goals by fostering a culture of sustainability, promoting social justice, and encouraging community engagement. Pakistan has made significant progress in integrating ESD into its education policy.

The National Education Policy 2017 recognizes the importance of ESD and encourages the integration of sustainability themes into the curriculum. Moreover, the government has launched several initiatives to promote ESD, including the Green Schools Program, which aims to create environmentally friendly schools and promote sustainable practices among students. However, more needs to be done to ensure that ESD is mainstreamed into the education system. Investing in ESD can have a profound impact on Pakistan’s economic development. A well-educated and skilled workforce is essential for driving economic growth, reducing poverty, and improving living standards. By providing high-quality education that focuses on sustainable development, Pakistan can produce a workforce that is equipped to compete in the global economy. Moreover, ESD can foster entrepreneurship, innovation, and creativity, leading to the creation of new jobs and opportunities that can drive economic growth and development.

To be continued

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