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## **Arsonists burn 2 more schools on 123rd day of Kashmir unrest**

***On 7-11 November 2016, Kashmir Council-EU and Friends of Kashmir group of EU parliamentarians are holding their annual conference about the situation in Kashmir. The main session was chaired by His Excellency, President of Azad Kashmir, Mr. Sardar Masood Khan. The main objective is to enhance the awareness level and impact upon the EU policies regarding Kashmir while highlighting the grave human rights violations of the people of Kashmir.***

**Kashmir Observer (08.11.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2fean2H> - SRINAGAR: Two more educational institutions were gutted in two separate incidents of arson in the Kashmir valley where more than 30 schools were set ablaze during the past three months, even as authorities have claimed to have taken a number of steps, besides arresting about 25 persons.**

According to the official sources, fire broke out in a school at Badoora Anantnag in south Kashmir during the intervening night. Locals joined by fire brigade brought the flames under control, they said adding the building suffered massive damage.

In another mysterious fire incident a school was reduced to ashes at Bader Payeen in the frontier district of Kupwara.

More than 30 schools have been gutted fully or partially under mysterious fire incidents in the Kashmir valley, where Board of School Education (BOSE) is all set to hold 10th and 12th class examination from November 14 despite protests by some students, traders, separatists and main opposition National Conference (NC) who were challenging the government decision alleging students have completed just 40 to 50 per cent syllabus.

Meanwhile, police claimed to have identified 40 youths, allegedly involved in setting schools on fire. However, about 30 of them have been arrested, majority of them in south Kashmir after Special Investigation Team (SIT) was constituted by police.

However, locals contested the police claim alleging that police, under pressure, have now arrested innocent persons for face saving.

Meanwhile, barring three incidents of stone pelting, the situation by and large has remained peaceful.

The unrest that began after the killing of a young militant leader four months ago entered its 123rd day on Tuesday with shutdown continuing across the Valley.

The impact of the ongoing strike was felt less in Srinagar though routine shutdown continued in other major towns for the 123rd day on Tuesday in the Kashmir valley,

where several thousand people, mostly youths, were arrested for their alleged involvement in stone pelting during the past four months.

There was no curfew or restriction in any part of the Valley though adequate security deployment continued to maintain law and order.

However, gates of historic Jamia Masjid remained closed with security forces and state police personnel deployed to prevent anyone from entering the area.

Both the factions of the Hurriyat Conference (HC) and Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), spearheading the agitation since July 9, a day after Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) 'commander' Burhan Wani and two other militants were killed in Anantnag,, have already extended the strike till November 10.

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## **Gender violence, justice, & the media**

Greater Kashmir Press (04.02.2015) –

<http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2015/Feb/4/gender-justice-and-the-media-16.asp>

- In Kashmir, violence against women has become a routine affair. The heart wrenching stories of women being subjected to inhuman treatment unfold every other day. It has been observed that crimes against women are on a constant rise. Be it rapes, molestation, sexual harassment, domestic violence, female trafficking, eve-teasing or abduction, there is no end to woes of women.

While the situation is grim across the globe, Kashmir is no exception, where the situation is even worse. Over the past two decades, the Valley has witnessed unprecedented crimes against women, which many attribute to the ongoing political turmoil. Time and again women have been subjected to physical violence by military and paramilitary forces. And the story doesn't end here. Women in Kashmir have fell victims to domestic violence and sexual abuse by family members as well.

Media researchers argue that the political stalemate of India and Pakistan has led to the abuse and suffering of women in the Valley. The dispute over Kashmir and the consequent political instability has led to serious consequences for the Kashmiri population. Most vulnerable among Kashmiri people are women and children, who often become the targets of physical violence. Due to the weakened political state, perpetrators are seldom brought to justice, while victims live in constant fear of further violence and abuse.

The Jammu and Kashmir Police Crime Branch in 2012 revealed that over the past couple of years, 4,066 cases of crimes against women have been registered. These include 1,797 cases of molestation, 1,279 cases of kidnapping and abduction, 426 eve-teasing cases, 195 suicide cases, 187 rape cases, 1 gang rape, 177 cases of cruelty at the hands of husbands, 4 cases under the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, one case of dowry death, and two cases of immoral trafficking. However, only 1,832 such incidents were recorded in the women police station. As the number of silent sufferers increases with each passing day, it becomes more difficult to tackle the issue.

To look into the possible amendments in the criminal laws related to sexual violence against women in India, Justice Verma Committee was constituted on December 23, 2012. One of the recommendations of the Committee was that sexual offences by armed forces and men in uniform in conflict areas should be brought under ordinary criminal law. The Committee observed that rape and other forms of sexual assault were consistently deployed as an expression of power and must not necessarily be seen as crime of passion only. The recommendation had much relevance in the context of

Kashmir. However, much to the disappointment of women in Kashmir, the government of India rejected the specific recommendation of removing the requirement of sanction for prosecuting armed forces personnel accused of atrocities against women.

Every time a heinous crime against women takes place, it is most likely to be reported in the press. Besides, there are many gender issues in the society that ought to get due space in the media, such as gender discrimination, female foeticide and violation of women's rights. It is in this backdrop that this study has been carried out, which aims at analysing the nature and amount of coverage given to gender issues by leading English dailies published from Jammu and Kashmir.

It has been found that crimes against women dominate the stories in gender beat. This category is in turn dominated by sexual violence against women that include rape and murders, followed by harassment and molestation.

The local dailies have been found to cover gender issues mostly in the form of hard news. Very rarely do the publications come up with soft and feature stories. It is, therefore, recommended that the publications should launch campaigns to fight against the crimes against women. They should come up with series of soft and exclusive stories on the issues. There are numerous cases awaiting justice for a very long time. The publications should bring those cases to fore so as to draw public and government attention to them and thus help them get addressed. Besides, they can also aware people about various laws pertaining to violence against women.

The stories based on gender issues do not receive any special treatment even though they are given due space. Such stories are mostly published on inside pages, except for a few occasions. The news of the death anniversary of 2009 Shopian victims Aasiya and Neelofar was carried on front page by all the publications probably because the issue turned out to be more of political in nature than a gender issue. On the other hand, some other incidents of similar nature are usually published on inside pages. The news related to crimes against women, suicides and other such grave issues spread over one to three columns in space on most occasions and rarely go beyond four columns.

Most of the news stories are based on press releases and wire agencies. A decent number of reporter stories are also carried by the publications, but not enough to depict their seriousness towards gender beat. The publications should assign stories regarding violence against women to reporters rather than relying on official handouts, press releases and agency stories. The publications need to be a little more serious about these issues.

The positive aspects of women have been found to be somewhat missing in the newspapers. Stories highlighting achievements of women, their role and rights are usually fewer in number. The publications should highlight women's positive side as well. They should draw attention to the achievements of women in different spheres and their role in the society by publishing series of success stories of women. Moreover, the publications should generate awareness among people about the rights bestowed on women by the Constitution as well as diverse religions.

(Research paper presented at two-day International Seminar on 'Gender Justice: A Way Forward' held at the University of Kashmir).

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## **Women in Kashmir key to rebuilding fragmented society**

By Vicki McKenna, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (17.04.2014) - The vital role of women in supporting their families and rebuilding Kashmiri society was emphasized at a conference in the European Parliament on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April. Women are often side-lined in Kashmir; nonetheless, in many cases it is women who hold back fragmented societies from the brink and get them back on their feet again. This was the message that was stressed during the event 'Women in Conflict Zones: Kashmir through Women's eyes,' sponsored by British MEP Sajjad Karim in collaboration with the International Council for Human Development.

According to Sadia Mir, a British human rights activist, vehicles of global governance, such as the EU and the UN, can help effect policy development and implement change. She further noted the need to impress upon MEPS, NGOs and civil society the difficult circumstances under which people live in oppressively patriarchal societies, such as women living in Kashmir.

Shumayla Mehmood, a researcher at Southampton University, explained that women have experienced great hardship on account of the Kashmir conflict. During the 1990s, men started to go missing and as a result, the term 'half widow' has been employed to describe women who find themselves alone, psychologically traumatised and financially insecure, while still not knowing whether they should continue waiting or already mourn their loss. Some Islamic scholars have recently decided that these women could marry after waiting a period of four years.

Khaoula Siddiqui, co-founder of the Student International League Kashmir, reflected on her personal experiences of living in such a militarised region, where crackdowns and curfews were commonplace.

'It's a society of fear, and those who suffer the most are often the women,' said Siddiqui. 'There are thousands of unreported cases of sexual violence in Kashmir, including institutionalised sexual violence. There is the shame and stigma attached to this in a society which is very patriarchal. The ripple effect is something we cannot ignore: what affects one individual affects the family and what affects the family affects the community and what affects the community affects the society at large.'

She called upon Kashmiri youth internationally to unite and take an active role in keeping the awareness these issues alive. She warned that uprisings could continue so long as human rights violations continued and so long as Kashmiri men and women lived without true political freedom.

Farzana Yaqoob, Kashmiri Minister for Social Affairs, detailed the social challenges confronting her country. People are faced with insecurity on a daily basis. She queried how women could be truly reintegrated into society when the people who made them suffer remain armed and free to operate in normal society.