

Congressional Briefing reported by India West on October 30, 2003

Washington D.C: A leader of a Hindu Kashmiri group related to a conference here stories of violence and ethnic cleansing in Kashmir by Pakistan backed Jihadis, mostly sent across the Line of Control.

In 1990, 300,000 Kashmiri Pandits, Sikhs and moderate Muslims had to flee Kashmir to neighboring parts of India, and several have been forced to live in wretched camps in subhuman conditions, Jeevan Zutshi, national Director of Indo-American Kashmir Forum, told the Oct. 30 conference sponsored by Congressman Frank Pallone, and the Congressional Caucus on Indo-Americans.

The past 14 years have taken a great toll on people in these camps; several have developed psychological, mental and reproductive disorders, resulting in a birth-to-death ratio of 1:4, Zutshi added.

The killing of over 1000 Kashmiri Pandits in the valley, Zutshi said, has been documented. Their ancestral, cultural and spiritual roots are in Kashmir and they have every right to live in the valley without fear of persecution and they should not become the "forgotten people of Kashmir," he said.

Pakistan, contended Zutshi, tried to take the valley through battle but when that failed, it resorted to terrorism. He charged Pakistan with churning out 10,000 jihadis every year from its madrasas to kill people they consider infidels.

"So long as these schools are not shut down, there is very little hope of change,"Zutshi said.

B.Raman, former head of Indian counter intelligence, spoke in depth about Pakistan's complicity in Kashmir and its link with global terrorism. "Thousands of Taliban fighters reside in mosques and madrassas with the full support of a provincial ruling party and militant Pakistani group," Raman charged. "Taliban leaders wanted by the U.S. and Kabul governments are living openly in nearby villages."

IAKF President Dr. Vijay Sazawal focused on "inside the Kashmir valley" and the situation following state elections in Jammu and Kashmir. He said the improved security has led to a substantial increase in tourism and short visits by Pandits. Yet, "what has not changed is the status of exiled Kashmiri Pandits and continuing lack of any initiatives to provide "political and economic space" for their aspirations,"he added.