**National Press Release – to be released across India**

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**Swarna Bharat Party calls upon the Modi government to protect human rights in Kashmir**

Mr Rahul Pandit, Working President of Swarna Bharat Party reiterated the party’s position on Kashmir: that Kashmir is an integral part of India and that we appreciate the very challenging task that the Indian Army and armed forces are performing in difficult circumstances in Kashmir.

However, Mr Pandit added that this is not *carte blanche*for the use of any extra-legal methods by the police or armed forces anywhere in India, including in Kashmir. Anyone who resorts to extra-legal force against Indian citizens in Kashmir is effectively an enemy of India, since any such actions directly strengthen Kashmiri separatists and Pakistan.

SBP notes that – like all other government employees – the armed forces are servants of the people. When deployed in Kashmir, their role is to protect the people of Kashmir, most of whom do not support the separatists.

Unfortunately, a perception has developed in Kashmir that rogue elements in the armed forces are perpetrating atrocities against innocents with impunity, without fear of being punished. Questions are being raised about the adequacy of the provisions for accountability under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). People are not confident that enquiries are evidence-based.

SBP notes that few, if any, have been punished for alleged human rights violations since the Kashmir insurgency erupted in 1989. Likewise, over the past four years, nearly a hundred complaints of human rights violations in Kashmir by the armed forces (including defence and paramilitary forces) have been received by the government. It is understood that these complaints constitute only a small proportion of the total alleged incidents.

Mr Pandit said that an open and transparent systems of accountability needs to be established to assure that ordinary Kashmiris are strongly protected, even as separatists are identified and punished. A first step is to ensure that any rogue elements within the armed forces are identified and punished, for such elements are costing India very dearly.

Mr Pandit asked the Modi Government to set up a well-resourced *public* inquiry and invite all allegations of human rights violations from the common Kashmiris. The inquiry should also review the operation of the AFSPA and assess whether its accountability provisions are adequate. In addition, the SBP manifesto should be implemented in full across the country, including in Kashmir, to ensure good governance and development.

**Notes for Editors**

SBP is India’s only liberal party, committed to defending liberty and promoting prosperity.

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