

**India's weary Kashmiris told - "Go see a movie".**By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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SRINAGAR, India, Aug 6 (Reuters) - A who's who of Indian Kashmiris turned out in their finest on Thursday to cheer as the state's leading politician urged the poor of this violence-scarred city to forget their woes and go see a movie.

Eight years after Moslem rebels fighting Indian rule imposed their own brand of Islamic purity on Kashmir, ordering all cinema halls, bars and beauty parlours shut, the opening of the Broadway movie hall in Srinagar on Thursday was hailed as a sign of returning normality.

The movie hall and an eponymous shopping mall were burnt down in 1992 during the height of the violence in the Kashmir Valley.

On Thursday, it stood in newly-built splendour.

Hemmed in by black-clad commando bodyguards, Kashmir's Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah arrived to cut a ribbon and cut straight to the irony marking his presence.

Abdullah was forced to cut short a vacation in London and return to Kashmir after the Himalayan state was rocked by a series of massacres of villagers along the tenuous frontier with Pakistan and a fierce artillery duel between troops of the two countries in which over 100 people have died on both sides.

"I know what the press will write," Abdullah said in a rambling speech to the audience at the cinema hall. "They will say Farooq was watching a movie while Kashmir burned. They will say Farooq was holidaying in London while Kashmir burned."

"But Farooq Abdullah has some responsibilities, to his health and to his children," the politician said. "We all suffer from a disease we Kashmiris call 'azarwun' (envy)."

Abdullah, who won power in state elections in October 1996, said the militants had deprived the poor Kashmiri of cheap entertainment by closing cinema halls.

"The horse-cart driver, the labourer, people who couldn't afford colour televisions, used to come here and pretend they were movie stars themselves," Abdullah said.

"This is where they will forget their sorrows for a brief moment and be cheered by this entertainment."

India has deployed at least 200,000 soldiers in Jammu and Kashmir. State officials say the revolt's back has been broken but much needs to be done by Abdullah's civilian administration to win the people's hearts and minds.

Official figures show at least 150,000 unemployed in the state of eight million people, but those numbers disguise the crippling blow suffered by the tourism industry in the once-idyllic territory famed for its poplar and willow forests and houseboats bobbing on placid lakes.

At the Broadway in Srinagar, meanwhile, the audience settled down to watch a movie named "Kareeb" (Near), a Hindi tearjerker about romance between a rich textile merchant's son and the daughter of the local schoolteacher.

Outside, Abdullah sparred angrily with local reporters who asked how his government had granted the movie-hall owners 3.2 million rupees (\$75,000). "Don't tell me how to spend our money," he said before storming off with his bodyguards.

