

Western Powers Ignore Modi's Stalinist Approach to Kashmir

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Kashmir's New Status: Why the West Turns a Blind Eye to Democracy Deficit in India

On August 23 the New York Times [reported](#) that the Indian Ministry of External Affairs “won’t say why foreign journalists continue to be blocked from setting foot in Kashmir” but managed to obtain a compelling first-hand account of one of the thousands of arrests by the authorities. In this instance “Asifa Mubeen was woken up by the sound of barking dogs as policemen began pouring into her yard. Her husband, Mubeen Shah, a wealthy Kashmiri merchant, stepped out onto their bedroom balcony in the night air. The police shouted that he was under arrest. When he asked to see a warrant, his wife said, the police told him there wouldn’t be one. ‘This is different,’ they said. ‘We have orders.’ It was the start of one of the biggest mass arrests of civilian leaders in decades carried out by India, a close American partner that bills itself as one of the world’s leading democracies...”

The appalling situation in Indian-administered Kashmir has been created by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who announced on August 5 that he was annulling Article 370 of India’s Constitution, which since 1949 has given the territory (called a State by India) virtual self-government. It had its own Constitution and the most important thing was that the special status of the region allowed it to adhere to the ancient law prohibiting outsiders from buying land. The central government could not overrule the law — but with Modi’s repeal of Article 370 there is now direct rule by Delhi.

This means that the people of the territory have no say whatever in their own governance. It has also meant, thus far, the arrest and detention of some 4,000 people under the Public Safety Act which allows the authorities to jail anyone for up to two years without charge. That isn’t exactly democratic — and it is intriguing to think about how Donald Trump would regard such a law, were he aware of it.

Deficiency of democracy doesn’t stop there, because the Armed Forces Special Powers Act “grants the armed forces the power to shoot to kill in law enforcement situations, to arrest without warrant, and to detain people without time limits. The law forbids prosecution of soldiers without approval from the central government, which is rarely granted, giving them effective immunity for serious human rights abuses.”

The Public Safety and Special Powers Acts are in full swing in Indian-administered Kashmir, and the population is in effect under military occupation authorised by Modi’s ultra-right wing government in Delhi. It is, to all intents, occupied territory whose inhabitants have no say whatever in their own governance. (There were supposed to be elections this year, but with the invalidation of Article 370 these can no longer take place. It has all been carefully thought through.)

And the leaders of the US and Britain, these usually eloquent supporters of freedom for the peoples of the world, have made no critical statements about the mass arrests or cancellation of elections or total closure of means of communication, and they ignore the fact that India’s Constitution “explicitly declares that all citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression [Article

19(1)(a)].”

The New York Times managed to ascertain that in Kashmir, the thousands of detainees “have not been able to communicate with their families or meet with lawyers. Their whereabouts remain unknown. Most were taken in the middle of the night, witnesses said.” This smacks of dictatorship, for it is undeniable that detention and incarceration without trial is totalitarian rather than democratic.

It is barely credible that “Among the people who were rounded up were Mian Qayoom, president of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court Bar Association; Mohammed Yasin Khan, chairman of the Kashmir Economic Alliance; Raja Muzaffar Bhat, an anticorruption crusader; Fayaz Ahmed Mir, a tractor driver and Arabic scholar; and Mehbooba Mufti, the first woman elected as Kashmir’s chief minister. Shah Faesal, another politician, was arrested at New Delhi’s international airport, bags checked, boarding pass in hand, heading for a fellowship at Harvard. Several prominent state politicians have also been put under house arrest; they told Indian news outlets they had been ordered not to engage in any ‘political activity’.”

But there hasn’t been a peep of protest from Britain’s Boris Johnson, he who showed solidarity with the protestors in Hong Kong by declaring “I do support them and I will happily speak up for them and back them every inch of the way.”

There hasn’t been a squeak of remonstrance from Washington, either, where Trump’s Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, announced that the rule of President Maduro “is undemocratic to the core” and Trump committed his country to “stand with... all Venezuelans who seek to restore democracy and the rule of law.”

If Johnson and Trump are so supportive of democracy, why do they not protest about mass arrests and detentions and cancellation of democratic elections in Indian-administered Kashmir? Why do they not take Modi to task for his excesses? It was recorded on August 23 that in Indian-administered Kashmir, “Data obtained by Reuters showed 152 people reported to Srinagar’s Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences and Shri Maharaj Hari Singh with injuries from pellet shots and tear gas fire between Aug 5 and Aug 21.” It is regrettable that Trump and Johnson ignored the fact that on August 22 “UN human rights experts today called on the Government of India to end the crackdown on freedom of expression, access to information and peaceful protests imposed in Indian-Administered Kashmir this month.” It was also stated by the UN experts, headed by Special Rapporteur David Kaye, that “The shutdown of the internet and telecommunication networks, without justification from the Government, are inconsistent with the fundamental norms of necessity and proportionality. The blackout is a form of collective punishment of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, without even a pretext of a precipitating offence.”

The absence of any criticism by Trump and Johnson of the military rule excesses in Indian-administered Kashmir will encourage Modi and his far-right nationalist administration to extend their racist grip throughout India. Since Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in 2014 there has been a most marked increase in officially-endorsed communal violence, mainly against Muslims but also involving other minority groups. These outbreaks of Hindu-supremacy barbarity are sponsored largely by a militant organisation called the Bajrang Dal which as noted in the New Yorker “has either been banned or has lurked at the margins of Indian society. But [since 2014] the militant group has been legitimized and grown exponentially more powerful. In the past seven years, according to Factchecker, an organization that tracks hate crimes, there have been a hundred and sixty-eight attacks by Hindu extremists, in the name of protecting cows, against Muslims and other religious minorities.”

Indian democracy is under grave threat from racist Hindu supremacists, and the New York Times rightly considers it disquieting that Modi “seems intent on digging in, and he has the Indian public firmly behind him. Many Indians see Kashmir as an integral part of India, and this move has stirred up jingoist feelings. Indian news channels have referred to the detainees being flown out of Kashmir as ‘Pakistani terrorists’ or ‘separatist leaders,’ toeing the government line.”

The most appalling thing is that Modi’s India appears intent on eradicating Muslims and that the vast majority of Hindus are right behind him. In order for him to succeed, there has to be destruction of democracy — and that’s exactly what is happening.

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