

India's unprecedented lockdown of Kashmir in eleventh day

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India's disputed Kashmir region remains today for an eleventh straight day under an unprecedented security lockdown that is being enforced by tens of thousands of Indian soldiers and paramilitaries, as well as local police. Its 13 million people are subject to sweeping restrictions on their movements and all internet and cell and land phone use has been suspended.

India's Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has imposed the brutal lockdown to suppress anticipated mass opposition to its placing of Indian-held Kashmir under permanent central government trusteeship.

On August 5, the BJP government illegally and without consultation or even forewarning stripped Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), India's only Muslim-majority state, of its special, semi-autonomous constitutional status, then bifurcated it and downgraded the two successor areas into Union Territories.

The security crackdown in Jammu and Kashmir is entirely in keeping with the constitutional coup Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his BJP carried out in New Delhi.

According to Indian authorities, more than five hundred people have been taken into preventative detention. These include two former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Ministers, Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, and other prominent leaders of the traditionally pro-Indian faction of the Kashmiri Muslim elite.

Modi's National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval, has been personally supervising the implementation of the security lockdown from the region's largest city, Srinagar, since last week.

Prominent Indian political leaders have been prevented from visiting Jammu and Kashmir to consult with fellow party members on what is happening. When the leaders of India's two main Stalinist parties, the CPI and CPM, respectively Sitaram Yechury and D. Raja, arrived at Srinagar airport, they were detained, although both are members of parliament and forced to return to New Delhi.

On Tuesday, India's Supreme Court rejected a petition asking it to order the government to rescind its emergency

prohibitions or at least scale them back. Claiming that the BJP government should be given "some reasonable time ... to restore normalcy" and that "nobody can take even a one percent chance of violence," India's highest court suspended further consideration of the petition for two weeks.

Due to the Indian government's information blockade, the people of Jammu and Kashmir are cut off from the outside world and little information about what is happening there has leaked out.

But several things are clear. The government's boasts about their show of force having successfully smothered all opposition and intimidated the population are belied by the unrelenting clampdown, as well as reports of sporadic protests.

Last weekend, the authorities did briefly relax the curfew in some areas to allow people to purchase food and make preparations for the Muslim festival of Eid. But soon police with loudspeakers ordered people to return to their homes and shopkeepers to close up and announced that Section 144 restrictions on all gatherings of more than four people would be enforced.

The BBC has released a video that showed a huge crowd marching through the streets of Srinagar after people were allowed to attend prayers last Friday. They carried signs that read, "We want our freedom," and chanted, "Go back, go, India, go." The report said 10,000 people participated in the protest, which although peaceful, was attacked by security forces with tear gas and pellet-gun fire.

An Indian Home Ministry spokesman has dismissed the BBC report as "completely fabricated and incorrect." He said, "There have been a few stray protests in Srinagar/Baramulla and none involved more than 20 people."

However, *New York Times* reporters said that security personnel told them last Saturday that "large protests kept erupting," putting the lie to the photos that officials in New Delhi were circulating showing crowded streets and well-stocked markets.

One soldier in the city of Baramulla told the *Times*: “At any point day or night, whenever they get a chance, mobs of a dozen, two dozen, even more, sometimes with a lot of women, come out, pelt stones at us and run away.” He added: “People are so angry. They are unrelenting and not scared.”

Press reports indicate that the repression is having an increasingly disruptive impact on daily life. Shortages of food and medicine are widespread, and the blanket curfews have meant that people have been unable to reach hospitals or obtain medicine.

At the Lalla Ded Hospital in Srinagar, patients were lying on the floor, the *Times* found, awaiting doctors who were unable to get to work. “It’s living hell here,” declared Jamila, a doctor

Were it not for the state-imposed information blackout, it is all but certain that there would be reports of deaths attributable to the lack of access to proper healthcare.

Modi and his BJP government routinely cast any and all opposition to their rightwing agenda of pro-investor “reform,” rabid Hindu communalism and ever-deeper integration into Washington’s Indo-Pacific military build-up against China as unpatriotic, if not treasonous. In an interview yesterday, Modi denounced those who have criticized the illegal stripping of Jammu’s and Kashmir’s special status, saying that “their hearts only beat for Maoists and terrorists.”

In a speech to the nation last Thursday, Modi tried to present the central government’s subjugation of Kashmir as temporary, claiming that there will soon be elections to choose an Jammu and Kashmir assembly—albeit with vastly reduced powers and whose every action can be annulled by New Delhi—and that under the BJP’s guardianship peace and prosperity will be brought to the people of Kashmir.

This is all lies. The BJP’s assault on Kashmir is aimed at preparing the groundwork for a state offensive aimed at bringing a quick and bloody end to the thirty-year, Pakistan-backed anti-Indian insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir. It is also aimed at strengthening New Delhi’s hand against arch-rival Pakistan and against China, which borders Kashmir to the east, and at whipping up Hindu communalism and bellicose nationalism to divide and intimidate the working class.

The abrogation of Jammu’s and Kashmir’s special status is a longstanding demand of the Hindu right and a key element in its plan to transform Indian into a Hindu *rasthra* or state.

Modi’s assault on Kashmir has been strongly backed by India’s ruling elite, even as the major dailies conceded it is a high-risk gamble. On Tuesday Mukeshi Ambani, India’s richest billionaire and the head of Reliance Industries, told

the company’s annual general meeting that in response to the “call of PM Narendra Modi Ji” his company would soon announce a major investment in Jammu and Kashmir.

For their part, the US and other western powers have signaled their support for India by maintaining a steadfast silence both on the geopolitically provocative character of New Delhi’s actions and the sweeping and ongoing Indian repression in Kashmir. Washington and Tokyo, but also London, Paris and Berlin are all anxious to build up India as a military-strategic counterweight to China.

Russia, meanwhile, has issued a statement strongly supporting New Delhi’s right to regulate its “internal” affairs. Under conditions, where the US and NATO powers are escalating their military-diplomatic pressure on Russia. Moscow is anxious to preserve its longstanding military-security partnership with New Delhi.

Beijing finds itself in a quandary. Pakistan is amongst its closest international allies, but it also loathe to take steps that will further push New Delhi into Washington’s embrace. On Monday, India’s Foreign Minister S. Jaishanakar began a three-day pre-planned visit to China.

Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has claimed Beijing has promised to support Islamabad in bringing India’s actions in Kashmir before the UN Security Council.

In a bellicose speech that points to the grave danger that heightened tensions between South Asia’s rival nuclear-armed powers will spin out of control, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan charged yesterday that New Delhi has a plan to attack Pakistan-held Kashmir and that if it does Pakistan will hit back even harder. “If India commits any type of violation we will fight till the end,” declared Khan.

The Pakistan prime minister added that should war erupt it will be due to the inaction of the world’s powers.

The Kashmir dispute has been at the center of the strategic rivalry between India and Pakistan, since they were created by the reactionary 1947-48 communal partition of the subcontinent into a Muslim Pakistan and a mainly Hindu India.

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