



### MODI'S (PARTIAL) KASHMIR CONFERENCE: LITTLE HOPE AND MORE FEARS

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



On June 24, 2021, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a meeting with the partial and selected pro-India political leadership of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) in New Delhi. It was the first political engagement by the ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in nearly 2 years following the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution on August 5, 2019, and a strict lockdown and suspension of civil liberties that followed. The latter denied IIOJK of the autonomy and the special status guaranteed constitutionally. In the almost 3-hour long meeting, PM Modi was flanked by his close aide Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah, and the Lieutenant Governor of IIOJK Manoj Sinha. The selected pro-India leadership of the IIOJK comprised of 14 politicians including Mehbooba Mufti of the Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic party (JKPDP), Farooq Abdullah and his son Omar Abdullah of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC), and Ghulam Nabi Azad of the Indian National Congress (INC). Farooq Abdullah of the JKNC is also the President of the electoral alliance named as the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) which seeks the restoration of IIOJK's statehood. Regrettably, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC – an alliance of 26 socio-political parties seeking independence from illegal Indian rule) was completely, yet deliberately ignored,

**whose leaders are jailed.<sup>1</sup> PM Modi's meeting yielded nothing solid, but fake promises and false assurances.**

The intentional and remorseless disregard of the ruling BJP to not inviting leaders belonging to the 26-party APHC to the Kashmir Conference reveal that the Centre is not sincere in normalizing the volatile situation in the IIOJK. Also, the Muslim-politico-religious outlook of the APHC is not acceptable to the Hindu-nationalist BJP, which is in fact a question mark on the secular and pluralist position of the contemporary India. The situation in IIOJK is a matter of grave concern for the international stakeholders as Jammu and the Kashmir valley present a gloomy example of modern-day ghetto, only to be comparable with the Gaza strip under siege.

It is encouraging that Mehbooba Mufti of the JKDPD was the only one that raised the question about the fate of political prisoners belonging to the APHC. Mufti pleaded for the release of "all political prisoners." She argued that the "People of Jammu and Kashmir will struggle constitutionally, democratically, peacefully. Be it months or years, we will restore Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir as it is a matter of our identity."<sup>2</sup> Mufti expressed sorrow that "The way people are terrorised in Jammu and Kashmir, that needs to stop. These domicile orders need to be stopped. Prisoners should be released as a goodwill gesture. The siege on Jammu and Kashmir should be lifted. If these small steps are taken, then the all-party meeting will be more than just a photo opportunity."<sup>3</sup> She patronized dialogue with the neighbouring Pakistan and lauded the backchannel dialogue between the two South Asian arch-rivals.

### **Why has PM Modi changed its stance?**

The U.S. Department of State issued "India 2020 Human Rights Report" on March 30, 2021, which stated that "There were reports that the [Indian] government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings of suspected criminals and insurgents." The report is an eye-opening document which reported that the "Military courts are primarily responsible for investigating killings by security forces and paramilitary forces."<sup>4</sup> Such occurrences have now become quite normal in the IIOJK, especially after the revocation of its special status. The

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<sup>1</sup> Iqbal Kirmani, "Mohammad Ashraf Sehrai, Kashmiri Separatist, Is Dead at 77," *The New York Times*, May 10, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/10/obituaries/mohammed-ashraf-sehrai-dead-covid.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "Will Restore Article 370 In Jammu And Kashmir, Says Mehbooba Mufti After PM Meet," *NDTV*, June 24, 2021, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/told-pm-that-j-k-people-dont-accept-illegal-abrogation-of-article-370-mehbooba-mufti-2471758>.

<sup>3</sup> "Kaise Mitayenge Dil Ki Doorian? Mehbooba Mufti Says Focus on Confidence-Building Measures in J&K," *India Today*, June 26, 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/dil-ki-doorian-mehbooba-mufti-focus-confidence-building-measures-1819686-2021-06-26>.

<sup>4</sup> "2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: India," *United States Department of State*, March 30, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/india/>.

resignation of Indian Administrative Services' topper and senior bureaucrat Shah Faesal in January 2019 citing the unabated killings in IIOJK can be seen as the hard evidence and manifestations of gross human rights violations by the Indian occupying forces.

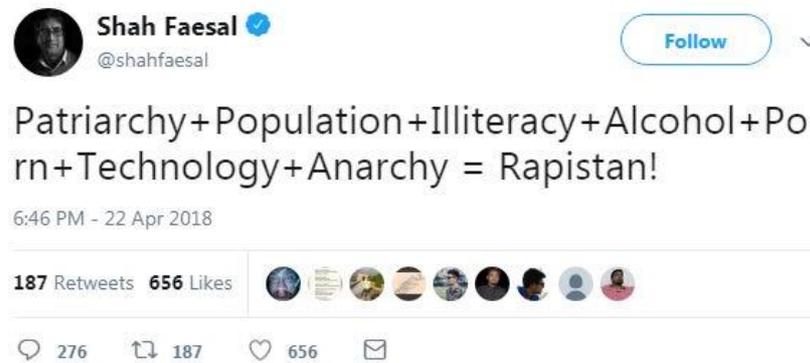


Figure 1: The “Rapistan” tweet depicting IIOJK’s dilapidated situation.<sup>5</sup>

Later, in June 2021, a top US-official Dean Thompson, the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, made startling remarks during a Congressional hearing that “some of the Indian government’s actions have raised concerns that are inconsistent with India’s democratic values.”<sup>6</sup> Such observations are timely and need serious considerations, not only by Pakistan but also the international community.



Figure 1: Indian Minister for Home Affairs Amit Shah called PAGD as “Gupkar Gang.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> “Centre Asks JK to Take Action against Shah Faesal for His ‘Rapistan’ Tweet,” July 10, 2018, <https://www.thekashmirmonitor.net/centre-asks-jk-to-take-action-against-shah-faesal-for-his-rapistan-tweet-2/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Some Indian Govt Actions Raised Concerns Inconsistent with Its Democratic Values: Top US Official,” *The Times of India*, June 12, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/some-indian-govt-actions-raised-concerns-inconsistent-with-its-democratic-values-top-us-official/articleshow/83454835.cms>.

<sup>7</sup> Amit Shah, “The Gupkar Gang Is Going Global!,” *Twitter*, November 17, 2020, <https://twitter.com/AmitShah/status/1328602174889275393>.

It is noteworthy that previously the BJP leadership labelled the PAGD as the “Gupkar Gang” and painted them as traitors and alien forces; nonetheless, now their stance is softening up. However, the latter is a tactical deceptive move aimed at misleading the international community and using the conference as a smoke screen.

### **Analysis and Afterthought**

PM Modi's meeting with the selected Kashmiri political leadership reveals that the situation in IIOJK is worrisome and it is not sincere in restoring the Articles 370 and 35 A of the Indian Constitution. Its utmost objective is to emphasise the continued effort in maintaining the status-quo in IIOJK.

However, in hindsight, PM Modi is fully cognizant of the fact that his August 2019 actions are unsustainable and with every passing day the situation is becoming unfavourable for India internationally, and his political party in domestic politics. Recently, on June 2, 2021, BJP leader Rakesh Pandita, a municipal councillor in IIOJK, was killed by unknown gunmen for the party's continued drive to frustrate the people from their constitutional rights.<sup>8</sup> Contrastingly, Modi's counterparts in Indian National Congress are relatively more pragmatic and are considering to “relook”<sup>9</sup> the revocation; however, such wishful endeavours are slandered by the ruling Hindu-nationalist BJP.<sup>10</sup> Majid Hyderi, a political commentator, argued that “the Muslim majority people in Jammu and Kashmir are feeling alienated.”<sup>11</sup>

An Indian commentator rightly noted about Modi's action to revoke the Articles 370 and 35 A of the Indian Constitution and after almost 2 years a patch-up attempt as:

“Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall

All the king's horses and all the king's men

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<sup>8</sup> Aditya Sharma, “India: BJP Politician Shot Dead in Kashmir,” *Deutsche Welle*, June 3, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/india-bjp-politician-shot-dead-in-kashmir/a-57765868>.

<sup>9</sup> “Digvijaya Singh Says Congress Will Have ‘Relook’ at Art 370 Revocation, BJP Hits Out,” *The Indian Express*, June 12, 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/digvijaya-singh-says-congress-will-have-relook-at-art-370-revocation-bjp-hits-out-7355882/>.

<sup>10</sup> “Even Ambedkar Would Have Been Slandered as Pro-Pakistan by BJP: Mehbooba Mufti,” *The Economic Times*, June 13, 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/even-ambedkar-would-have-been-slandered-as-pro-pakistan-by-bjp-mehbooba-mufti/articleshow/83481579.cms>.

<sup>11</sup> Rifat Fareed, “What to Expect as Kashmir Leaders Meet India's Modi in New Delhi,” *Al Jazeera*, June 24, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/24/what-to-expect-as-kashmiri-leaders-meet-indias-modi>.

Couldn't put Humpty together again."<sup>12</sup>

It is noticed that the IIOJK Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, his predecessor G. C. Murmu, and other BJP leaders quite often celebrate the efficacy of post-August 2019 unprecedented lockdown in minimizing the efforts of the Kashmiri resistance. Recently, Lieutenant General D. P. Pandey of the Indian Army argued that "Militancy-related violence has reduced by over 50 per cent in Jammu and Kashmir and the Army's role in the valley is diminishing."<sup>13</sup> However, how the Kashmiri resistance could oppose the occupying Indian forces when not a single bird is allowed to move freely in the IIOJK. Such claims of victory by the Indian political and military echelons are tactical in nature and absolutely unsustainable in strategic terms.

### Is Modi fearful of visiting the IIOJK?

It is worth probing that why PM Modi's (Partial) Kashmir Conference was held in New Delhi, instead of Srinagar? The very venue of the conference reveals that PM Modi is fearful of visiting the IIOJK, as he was fully cognizant of the fact that his visit could have triggered massive protests and possibly bloodshed. Also, the media observers could have a first-hand chance to witness unprecedented lockdown in the IIOJK, which could have made Modi look bad. To prevent such a happening, the conference was held in New Delhi, which is a perfect example of solving problems, while sitting in lavish conference rooms and hundreds of kilometres away from ground realities. This is the level of PM Modi's sincerity in restoring the faith of the people of IIOJK in Indian (sham) democracy.

In May this year, the Indian Chief of Army Staff General Naravane visited the IIOJK; however, his visit was kept somehow secret, and later a press release was issued along with a few photographs.<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusions

Undoubtedly, PM Modi's (Partial) Kashmir Conference was merely a "drama" and an "unsuccessful and pointless" attempt of a "public relations exercise."<sup>15</sup> However, while keeping in view India's strategic use of such dramas, it likely will project the exercise as the first step towards returning to

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<sup>12</sup> Manoj Joshi, "A Patch-Up Attempt on Kashmir Will Not Restore What Is Lost," *The Wire*, June 25, 2021, <https://thewire.in/politics/narendra-modi-amit-shah-kashmir-article-370>.

<sup>13</sup> "Militancy-Related Violence Has Reduced by over 50 Percent in Jammu and Kashmir: Army Officer," *The Economic Times*, June 24, 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/militancy-related-violence-has-reduced-by-over-50-percent-in-jammu-and-kashmir-army-officer/articleshow/83809624.cms>.

<sup>14</sup> "Indian Army Chief on 2-Day Visit to IIOJK," *Kashmir Media Service*, June 2, 2021, <https://www.kmsnews.org/kms/2021/06/02/indian-army-chief-on-2-day-visit-to-iiojk.html>.

<sup>15</sup> "Modi's Meeting with Kashmiri Leaders a 'PR Exercise' That Achieved Nothing: FM Qureshi," *Dawn*, June 25, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1631407>.

normalcy. Alternatively, we can well assume that PM Modi's (Partial) Kashmir Conference is likely to yield little hope and more fears, as it has done nothing to bring peace and stability in the lives of the people of the IIOJK but reiterated the mantra of fake promises and false assurances.