

G20 MEETINGS IN DISPUTED TERRITORIES

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



The G20 released the calendar of events scheduled for the summit taking place in India and other activities around the world. The calendar included two events envisaged to take place in ‘disputed’ territories – something that has flared up regional tensions again. The first event was a so-called ‘Youth-20’ (Y-20) meeting on 26-28 April in Leh, Ladakh.¹ This is a ‘disputed’ territory and China has already boycotted the meetings in Arunachal Pradesh and Leh. India timed this event in such a manner as to coincide it with completion of three years since the border clashes of May 2020 between India and China in Galwan Valley, Ladakh. The location of the meeting in Leh was approximately 218.6 km from the site of the border skirmishes. The second event on ‘disputed’ territory is the ‘3rd Tourism Working Group’ meeting scheduled for 22-24 May in Srinagar, Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir.² India has arranged this meeting approximately 142 km from the site of the so-called Balakot ‘strike’ of February 2019, which was befittingly responded to by Pakistan. Clearly, these are provocative actions as India has not only designed to hold these meetings in ‘disputed’ area but also chosen locations close to the site of the latest clashes with both neighbours. By organising these

¹ Calendar, *G20 India 2023*, <https://www.g20.org/en/g20-india-2023/calendar/>.

² Ibid.

events in close proximity to the Line of Control (LoC) and Line of Actual Control (LAC), New Delhi sought to buttress its illegal control of the areas,³ but has only managed to stoke further tensions with Pakistan and China.

Pakistan reacted to the provocative Indian move by expressing “strong indignation” at New Delhi for holding the events in disputed territories. The statement by the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that the ‘Youth-20’ meeting in Leh and the ‘Tourism Working Group’ meeting in Srinagar were equally disturbing. Such steps underscored India as an irresponsible and irrational state in the region. The statement added that the move was in a total “disregard of the United Nations Security Council resolutions and in violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law. Pakistan vehemently condemns these moves.”⁴ Indeed, the move further exposed India’s self-serving agenda and its failure to act as a responsible member of the G20 and the international community.

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) came up with a stock response to the serious concerns raised by Pakistan, which the G20 must take cognizance of. The MEA regurgitated its oft-repeated, legally-untenable stance that, “Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are an integral and inalienable part of India.”⁵ This statement betrayed complete disregard for the consequences of provocative Indian actions and how these would further accentuate frictions in the region. Specifically, while India has invited G20 (primarily an economic grouping) to participate in activities in disputed territories, it has further vitiated the environment for conducive economic development in the region. Furthermore, the prospects of peace and prosperity in the region have been off-railed, once again, by India’s ill-conceived and ill-considered measures.

Despite India’s desperate attempts to create an image of ‘normalcy’ in the disputed region, it would be hard for New Delhi to conceal the brutal realities. Since India’s illegal and unilateral measures of 5 August 2019, the people of Occupied Jammu and Kashmir have suffered intensified repression, the various aspects of which are highlighted below:

³ Suhasini Haidar and Peerzada Ashiq, “Unfazed India to hold G-20 event in Leh,” *The Hindu*, 11 April 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/three-years-after-lac-stand-off-began-india-to-hold-g-20-youth-meet-in-leh/article66725706.ece..>

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, “India’s Plans to Hold G-20 Meetings in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir,” press release, 11 April 2023, <https://mofa.gov.pk/indias-plans-to-hold-g-20-meetings-in-indian-illegally-occupied-jammu-and-kashmir/>.

⁵ “J&K and Ladakh inalienable part of India: New Delhi,” *Kashmir Reader*, 8 February 2023, <https://kashmirreader.com/2023/02/08/jk-ladakh-integral-inalienable-part-of-india-new-delhi/>

- a) **Human Rights Violations:** Amnesty International has consistently reported grave human rights violations and sufferings of civil society, human rights activists, lawyers, and ordinary civilians.⁶ The Indian government has put in place draconian laws and harassing policies and practices in order to intimidate these segments of society. This has created an environment of dread, panic and deep mistrust towards the Indian government.
- b) **Internet/Media Censorship:** The Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir has experienced more Internet censorship than any other region in 2022, according to Surfshark.⁷ Indian authorities justified these actions as ‘preventive’ measures to counter misinformation; however, journalists and civilians reported that such steps were meant to prevent critical reporting.⁸ The people of Occupied Jammu and Kashmir testified that they had been offline for 18 months, which felt like living in the stone age.⁹ Indeed, a systematic crackdown on the media and targeted actions against dissenting voices under draconian law such as UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act) have been the hallmark of this period.
- c) **Religious suppression:** A Muslim-majority region, the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir - - being demographically transformed after the revocation of Article 35A -- is facing serious restrictions in terms of practicing religious freedom. This is manifested, inter alia, in shutting down of mosques on important nights of Ramzan, the Muslim holy month. The management of Jamia Masjid Srinagar stated that the administration probed to lock the mosque as “Jumaat-ul-Vida prayers will not be allowed at the mosque.”¹⁰
- d) **Demographic changes:** The Hindutva-driven BJP regime, after the revocation of Article 35A, is attempting to alter Occupied Jammu and Kashmir's demographic structure and cultural identity. As per the reports of Kashmir Media Service, around 185 outsiders have purchased

⁶ Amnesty International, “India: The Government Must End the Repression of Rights in Jammu and Kashmir,” 2 September 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/india-the-government-must-end-the-repression-of-rights-in-jammu-and-kashmir/>

⁷ Surfshark, “4.2 billion people experienced internet censorship in 2022,” 17 January 2023, <https://surfshark.com/blog/internet-censorship-2022>

⁸ Bilal Hussain, “Kashmir Registers Highest Number of Internet Restrictions Globally,” *Voice of America*, 11 February 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/amp/kashmir-registers-highest-number-of-internet-restrictions-globally-/6958516.html>

⁹ Mehran Bhat and Rina Chandran, “‘Living in the stone age’: Offline for 18 months in Indian Kashmir,” Reuters, 29 September 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/india-internet-shutdown-idINL8N2YZ245>

¹⁰ “Jamia Masjid Locked, ‘Jummat-ul-Vida’ Prayers Disallowed,” *Kashmir Observer*, 14 April 2023, <https://kashmirobsrver.net/2023/04/14/authorities-bar-jumma-tul-vida-prayers-at-jamia-masjid-srinagar/>

land since 2020.¹¹ In addition to land grab, the Indian authorities have also issued millions of domicile certificates to non-locals. This is in complete violation of the international law, including the 4th Geneva Convention, which forbids the altering of demographic structure of occupied territory.

- e) **Encroachment:** Most recently, the BJP government has started retrieving areas it considered ‘encroached government land.’ An ‘anti-encroachment drive’ has also been launched to evict Kashmiris from their land. These measures aim to deprive ownership rights to Kashmiris and disempower them economically.¹²

The renovations, rebuilding and restructuring of the outlook of Kashmir for the G20 meeting cannot put a gloss over the longstanding disputes in the region. New paint, cycling paths, gardens and lakes cannot hide the brutal realities that the Kashmiri people suffer on a daily basis. Such sentiments were also echoed by the All Parties Hurriyat Conference leaders, who raised their concerns regarding the RSS-BJP regime trying to mislead the international community on the grim situation in the territory.¹³ For the G20 meeting, the Indian authorities deployed additional troops (in excess of 900,000 soldiers) who employ brutal tactics to suppress the freedom struggle of Kashmiris.¹⁴ Any attempts to portray ‘normalcy’ under the circumstances are at best delusional and desperate attempts to deceive the international community.

Conclusion

India’s Presidency of G20 and scheduling of G20 activities in disputed territories, despite appalling catastrophes in IIOJK, cannot be overlooked. The Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir is tattered with a legacy of atrocities. New Delhi’s attempt to project a ‘transformed’ reality and seek to legitimise its illegal occupation are devoid of any credibility. Moreover, it reflects India’s misuse of a multilateral platform to advance its narrow, self-serving national agenda. Due to these factors, the Kashmiri people have called upon the G20 leaders to boycott the events in the UN-recognised ‘disputed’ territory of Jammu and Kashmir. They instead demand that the international community take tangible steps to impress upon India the need to resolve the over seven decades-old dispute in

¹¹ “Revocation of Articles 370, 35A aims at settling outsiders in IIOJK: Report,” *Kashmir Media Service*, 6 April 2023, <https://www.kmsnews.org/kms/2023/04/06/revocation-of-articles-370-35a-aims-at-settling-outside-in-iiojk-report.html>

¹² Mahwish Hafeez, Issue Brief: Homeless on Home – Kashmiris in IIOJK Face Eviction, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, 5 April 2023, <https://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-homeless-in-home-kashmiris-in-iiojk-face-eviction/>

¹³ “India wants to mislead world by holding G20 meeting in IIOJK: APHC leaders,” *Kashmir Media Service*, 12 April 2023, <https://www.kmsnews.org/kms/2023/04/12/india-wants-to-mislead-world-by-holding-g20-meeting-in-iiojk-aphc-leaders.html>

¹⁴ Ibid.

line with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Kashmiris believe that attending meetings in 'disputed' and occupied territory will be detrimental to the reputation of G20 members and raise serious concerns regarding the established international norms espoused by them.¹⁵ G20 must heed their calls.

¹⁵ Ibid