

MODI IN SRINAGAR – PEACE, DEVELOPMENT OR SHEER DECEPTION?

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



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As the 18th Lok Sabha elections in India are just around the corner, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been visiting various states to unveil development programmes as well as to address public rallies as part of his election campaign. In this context, Prime Minister Modi also decided to visit Srinagar in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK) on 7 March 2024. This was also Mr. Modi's first visit to Srinagar since the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A in August 2019.

Preparations for the Visit

No matter how forcefully India tries to convince the world that Modi's policies have brought peace and security to IIOJK, the security preparations for any high profile visit simply debunk all such tall claims. In this case also, prior to the visit, strict security arrangements were put in place. Drone surveillance was increased and the number of check posts and barricades was increased.¹ Ordinary commuters were frisked and sniffer dogs used to detect any banned substances.² Srinagar city was declared a 'Temporary Red Zone'³ for the operation of drones and quadcopters as prescribed in the

¹ Shweta Sharma, "Major Security Operation for Modi's First Visit to Kashmir in More than Five Years," *The Independent*, March 6, 2024, sec. Asia, <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/india/narendra-modi-kashmir-visit-election-rally-b2507686.html>.

² Muheet Ul Islam, "Security Tightened, Some Residents Detained Ahead of Modi's Kashmir Visit," *Voice of America*, March 6, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/security-tightened-some-residents-detained-ahead-of-modi-s-kashmir-visit/7516723.html>.

³ "PM Modi In Srinagar Today Amid Tight Security, His First Kashmir Visit Since Article 370 Move," *News18*, March 7, 2024, <https://www.news18.com/india/pm-modi-srinagar-first-valley-visit-since-370-abrogation-tight-security-latest-news-8805404.html>.

provisions of Rule 24(2) of Drone Rules, 2021.⁴ Violators were warned of strict action as per relevant laws. All entry and exit points of the venue were regularly checked by the Bomb Disposal Squads (BDS) along with sniffer dogs to foil any IED attack.

Modi in Srinagar

As part of his 'Viksit Bharat Viksit Jammu Kashmir' (Developed India, Developed Jammu Kashmir), Mr. Modi unveiled development projects worth around Rs. 6,400 crore equivalent to 723 million USD.⁵ While referring to Jammu and Kashmir as 'head of India' that is to be held high as symbol of development and respect, Modi announced a number of projects related to the tourism sector worth more than Rs. 1400 crore under Swadesh Darshan (Integrated Development of Theme Based Tourist Circuits) and PRASHAD scheme (National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive) that included the project for 'Integrated Development of Hazratbal Shrine' in Srinagar.⁶ The project includes site development of the entire area that includes construction of boundary wall of the shrine. Further, illumination of Hazratbal shrine area and improvement of ghats and Devri paths around the shrine; construction of Sufi interpretation center, car parking and tourist facilitation center are all included in the project.⁷

During his rally, Mr. Modi also announced 'Holistic Agriculture Development Programme' (HADP) worth Rs.5000 crores. HADP is an integrated program including three major domains of agri-economy - Horticulture, Agriculture and Livestock husbandry. This programme purports to equip about 2.5 lakh farmers in IIOJK with skill development via dedicated Daksh Kisan portal. Some 2000 Kisan Khidmat Ghars will also be established under the programme.⁸

Additionally, programs like 'Chalo India Global Diaspora Campaign', was also launched to urge the Indian diaspora to encourage their friends from host countries to visit India. Mr. Modi also called for 'Wed in India' where people may choose India as the destination for their wedding functions. A poll

⁴ "The Drone Rules, 2021" (Ministry Of Civil Aviation, July 15, 2021), https://www.civilaviation.gov.in/sites/default/files/migration/Draft_Drones_Rules_2021_Gazette_version_15_July_2021.pdf.

⁵ "PM Modi to Attend 'Viksit Bharat Viksit Jammu Kashmir' in Srinagar Today," *Business Standard*, March 7, 2024, https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/pm-modi-to-attend-viksit-bharat-viksit-jammu-kashmir-in-srinagar-today-124030700082_1.html.

⁶ "PM Addresses Viksit Bharat Viksit Jammu Kashmir Programme in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir," Narendra Modi, March 7, 2024, <https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-attends-viksit-bharat-viksit-jammu-and-kashmir-programme-in-srinagar-580259>.

⁷ Livemint, "PM Modi Inaugurates Hazratbal Shrine Development Project: All You Need to Know," *Mint*, March 7, 2024, sec. Politics, <https://www.livemint.com/politics/news/pm-modi-inaugurates-hazratbal-shrine-development-project-in-srinagar-the-initiative-and-its-significance-11709809168197.html>.

⁸ "PM to Visit Srinagar on 7th March and Participate in 'Viksit Bharat Viksit Jammu Kashmir' Programme," Press Information Bureau, Government of India, March 6, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=2011784>.

'Dekho Apna Desh People's Choice 2024' was also announced to understand people's preferred choice for tourism under five categories that includes Spiritual, Cultural & Heritage, Nature & Wildlife, Adventure, and any other category.

During the rally, Prime Minister Modi while seeking to convince the crowd that revocation of Article 370 has brought prosperity and development to the region also did not miss the chance to target his opponents. Taking a dig at the Congress party, Mr. Modi said that some families were misguiding not only the people of IIOJK but also the rest of India for their vested interests and political gains.⁹

Reaction by the Traditional pro-India Political Parties

Responding to Modi's visit to Srinagar and his attacks on Kashmiri political parties, particularly those who have traditionally inclined towards India, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) President Mehbooba Mufti said that Modi's visit to Srinagar was only meant to garner support for BJP in the rest of India in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.¹⁰ Similarly, National Conference (NC) leader Omar Abdullah said that the administration of IIOJK was making extensive efforts to gather a crowd for Modi's rally. Ms. Mufti as well as Omar Abdullah also posted a video on their Twitter accounts and alleged that government employees including both men and women were forced to assemble early in the morning in sub-zero temperature to be taken to the venue of Modi's rally. They highlighted that the government employees were not given a choice and it was compulsory for them to attend the rally to avoid disciplinary action by their respective departments. The Communist Party of India Marxist (CPIM) leader, M.Y. Tarigami, observed: "The forced mobilisation of employees and other sections of the society including the beneficiaries of various schemes for PM's rally is bound to contribute to both Dilli ki doori and Dil Ki doori."¹¹

Conclusion

Mr. Modi left no stone unturned to convince the world and his own countrymen of the falsehood that his policies, particularly those of 5 August 2019, have been widely hailed by the people of IIOJK as it ushered a supposedly a new era of development and prosperity. In reality, the rosy picture

⁹ "PM Modi in Srinagar: 'Congress Was Misguiding Jammu and Kashmir on Article 370'," *Hindustan Times*, March 7, 2024, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/narendra-modi-kashmir-speech-pm-in-srinagar-rally-bakshi-stadium-article-370-101709798725907.html>.

¹⁰ "'Visit Only to Drum Support': Former CM Mehbooba Mufti over PM Modi's Visit to Kashmir Ahead of Lok Sabha Elections," *Financialexpress*, March 7, 2024, <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/visit-only-to-drum-support-former-cm-mehbooba-mufti-over-pm-modis-visit-to-kashmir-ahead-of-lok-sabha-elections/3416761/>.

¹¹ "Employees Forced to Attend PM Modi's Srinagar Rally, Say Mehbooba, Omar," *The Hindu*, March 7, 2024, sec. India, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/employees-forced-to-attend-pm-modis-srinagar-rally-say-mehbooba-omar/article67924565.ece>.

that Mr. Modi presented during his Srinagar visit was nothing but an attempt to deceive his own people. If indeed Mr. Modi and his policies were that popular in IIOJK, the government employees in IIOJK would not have been forced to attend his rally. As for the economic and developmental incentives, the package and the projects announced seem impressive on the surface. However, it has to be kept in mind that such incentives have been offered in the past as well. In 2004, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had announced Rs. 24, 000 crore package which later increased to 37, 000 crore.¹² Similarly, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had announced two economic packages for IIOJK - Rs 8519.82 crore on May 23, 2002, and Rs 6425 crore on April 19, 2003.¹³ The sketchy implementation of these ‘packages’ notwithstanding, all such moves have failed to dissuade the people of IIOJK from demanding their right of self-determination.

From Vajpayee to Manmohan to Modi, the Indian leadership has failed to understand that quintessentially, the issue of IIOJK is not economic, but political. This is an issue that needs political approach if it is to be resolved. The hearts and minds of the people of IIOJK cannot be won by offering economic incentives. Economic packages, no matter how lucrative they are, cannot be a substitute for the denial of democratic and political rights to the people. The hearts and minds of the people can only be won if they are given what they have been demanding for the past more than seven decades – right to exercise self-determination under the auspices of the UN as promised by the world community and above all, India itself. Anything short of this, besides perpetuating illegal occupation of IIOJK, will be a guaranteed recipe for continuous turmoil and unrest.

¹² “PM Manmohan Singh Reviews Implementation of J&K Projects Ahead of Visit - The Economic Times,” *The Economic Times*, June 21, 2013, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/pm-manmohan-singh-reviews-implementation-of-jk-projects-ahead-of-visit/articleshow/20701470.cms?from=mdr>.

¹³ R S Gull, “Vajpayee’s Kashmir,” *Kashmir Life*, June 2, 2014, <https://kashmirlife.net/vajpayees-kashmir-vol-06-issue13-60255-160019/>.