

Nearly 1000 unmarked graves discovered in Indian-occupied Kashmir

Likely victims of Indian Security Forces

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The Indian government is refusing to investigate credible reports that up to a thousand unmarked graves have been found in the north Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

Kashmiris and Indian and international human rights organizations have long maintained that India's security forces have systematically "disappeared" thousands of persons accused of supporting the anti-Indian insurgency in Kashmir, India's only majority Muslim state.

The grisly discovery of 940 unmarked graves was made public in a report published in late March by the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons. The APDP was formed in 1994 by a mother whose son vanished after being arrested in his home in the middle of the night by Indian security forces. It has campaigned against the Indian government's callous refusal to investigate the thousands of disappearances that have occurred over the past two decades at the hands of Indian security forces.

The APDP's call for an investigation into the unmarked graves has been supported by Amnesty International and has triggered demonstrations in Kashmir. But the Indian government has dismissed the demands for an investigation, saying that any bodies that have been uncovered are those of insurgents and "foreign militants" killed in fire fights with Indian security forces. Yet the APDP report, which is titled *Facts Under Ground*, cites testimonies from villagers that identify some of the dead as "disappeared" local residents.

On Friday and Saturday of last week, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh paid a two-day visit to Jammu and Kashmir to inaugurate a hydro-electric project and a "public-private" university. Predictably, Singh uttered not a word about the recently discovered unmarked graves. Nor did he make any statement of concern about the numerous and repeated human rights abuses committed by security forces in the state—abuses that have been well-documented by both domestic and international human rights organizations.

Singh contented himself with empty platitudes, stating, "I have often said that it is our common dream to build a Naya (New) J&K, symbolized by peace, prosperity and people's empowerment."

But rather than "peace, prosperity and people's empowerment," the Kashmiri people have been subjected to a long nightmare of violence, economic deprivation and high-handed rule by the Indian

bourgeoisie and its state.

So as to preempt mass protests against Singh's presence in the state, the police placed the leadership of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference (an amalgam of 26 Kashmiri political, religious and civic organizations that claims its goal to be Kashmiri "self determination") under house arrest during the prime ministerial visit.

This did not succeed however in stopping protests. A few hours after Singh's arrival in the state on April 25, thousands of people came out on the streets of Srinagar, the J&K state capital, braving a heavy police presence. As usual, police fired salvos of tear gas to disperse the protestors, who were denouncing human rights abuses by the Indian government and its security forces.

The unmarked graves were discovered in 18 villages near the Kashmiri Valley town of Uri, which lies close to the Line of Control (LOC) that acts as the de facto border between the Indian- and Pakistani-controlled regions of Kashmir. The existence of these graves was documented in a survey conducted by the APDP over the past year and a half.

Because of its proximity to the LOC, the area is under the authority of security forces and journalists are normally barred from visiting. But a BBC reporter, Altaf Hussain, was able to visit the village of Kichama, site of one of the unmarked graves identified by the APDP. A BBC report published April 1 says the Kichama villagers told Hussain that "the bodies were either charred, or their faces were mutilated beyond recognition."

It is a common practice for the security forces to mutilate the corpses of persons they have "disappeared," so as to prevent their ever being identified and their murderers traced.

According to the PDP, at least 10,000 persons have vanished at the hands of Indian security forces over the past two decades. While many were summarily executed, others have been tortured to death.

Beginning in 1989, the Indian government deployed its various military and paramilitary forces in the state en masse, so as to mount a no-holds-barred campaign to quell the separatist uprising in the state that arose after the Indian government rigged elections two years earlier.

Despite the Indian ruling elite's incessant claim that India is the "world's largest democracy," the authorities have maintained a deafening silence on the APDP report. Virtually all the major

corporate media have failed even to run an account of the APDP's charges.

According to the Reuters transnational news agency, "Indian authorities have denied the allegations, saying such reports were intended to malign Indian security forces."

Such a response is the standard refrain of an Indian ruling elite that over the decades has used ruthless repression to stamp out secessionist movements that have sprung up in J&K and elsewhere in response to the Indian state's political repression and economic neglect.

Angered by the latest atrocity discovery and the scornful attitude of the Indian government, Kashmiris came out in protest across the state on April 11. In Srinagar the police mounted a tear gas attack against a demonstration of hundreds of people, injuring several, including three persons from the press. As usual the police claimed they were responding to "violence."

The leader of the APDP, Pervez Imroz has stated: "We are only demanding that there be an investigation, as 1,000 graves have been unearthed. If there have been investigations in other conflict areas—Bosnia, Chechnya—the same should also happen in Kashmir. Secondly, a very serious concern is this: If 1,000 bodies were discovered from just 18 villages, these abuses might be widespread if you consider the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir, where the army is present everywhere—there are between 600,000 and 700,000 troops in the region.' "

Amnesty International has joined the call for the Indian government to initiate a proper investigation. Its statement reads in part, "Amnesty International urges the Government of India to launch urgent investigations into hundreds of unidentified graves discovered since 2006 in Jammu and Kashmir. The grave sites are believed to contain the remains of victims of unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, torture and other abuses which occurred in the context of armed conflict persisting in the state since 1989."

The roots of the Kashmir tragedy can be traced to the 1947 communal partition of South Asia, when India's departing British colonial overlords joined forces with the bourgeois Indian National Congress and the Muslim League to create a Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India.

War soon broke out over the fate of Jammu and Kashmir, a princely state with a Muslim majority adjacent to Pakistan, but whose Hindu princely ruler and largest political party favored accession to India.

In the six ensuing decades, both India's and Pakistan's rulers have turned Kashmir into a murderous playground of intrigue with the Kashmiri people paying an incalculable price.

While Pakistan had long attempted to fan popular opposition to India's rule over Indian-occupied Kashmir, a popular insurgency only broke out in 1989, two years after the Indian authorities yet again rigged a state election. This was at a time, it should be added, when a crisis-ridden Indian ruling class had increasingly turned to whipping up Hindu chauvinism. During the 1980s, the Congress government of the day had mounted a ruthless and increasingly communally-charged campaign to crush a Sikh separatist insurgency in the neighbouring state of the Punjab, and the Bharatiya Janata Party had come to the fore with charges that India's Muslims are a coddled minority and by agitating for the

razing of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya..

The Indian ruling elite reacted to the Kashmir insurgency with great brutality. Security forces were given legal *carte-blanche* in the form of *The Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act of 1990*. This act is one of the most draconian pieces of legislation ever adopted by the Indian Parliament. It gives security forces unrestricted and unaccounted power to carry out their operations once an area is declared "disturbed." Even a non-commissioned officer is granted the right to shoot to kill based on mere suspicion that this is necessary to "maintain the public order." Similar legislation has been utilized by the Indian government against separatist movements in India's northeast with the same murderous results.

The various Pakistani governments that have come to power over the past two decades have actively and continuously fanned opposition to the Indian government, seeking to manipulate the Kashmir struggle to further the Pakistani elite's own predatory geo-political ends by promoting reactionary secessionist movements based upon fundamentalist Islam.

The Indian government, in turn, has pounced upon the rise of Islamic fundamentalist militias in Kashmir to unleash a murderous campaign against any and all opposition. Most of the at least 60,000 people who have died in Kashmir during the past two decades of insurgency have been the victims of India's security forces.

Instead of addressing the root cause of the Kashmiri secessionist sentiment, that is India's political repression, promotion of Hindu chauvinism, and the widespread economic devastation and consequent alienation of the youth, the Indian government has proclaimed, in a fashion similar to that of the Israeli regime or the Bush administration, that the problem it faces is "jihadi terrorism," full stop.

Given the long and bloody history of atrocities against Kashmiris by Indian governments and their armed henchmen it is highly probable, to say the least, that the bodies in these unmarked graves are indeed victims of kidnapping, torture, and summary execution at the hands of India's security forces.



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