

Protesters continue to defy Indian state violence in Kashmir

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India's Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government is resorting to increasingly desperate measures to quell the wave of popular protests that have engulfed Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, for the past ten weeks.

To "bring the situation under control," the government has dispatched an additional 4,000 Indian army troops to the state with a promise that more will be sent later. And for the first time since 2004, India's government has ordered the paramilitary Border Security Force (BSF), which has been waging a counterinsurgency war against separatists who operate from camps in Pakistan, to take up "law and order duties" in the state's summer capital, Srinagar.

On Tuesday, the first day of the Muslim festival of Eid, the government ordered all major Muslim holy sites in the state closed so as to prevent large congregations of people. Noting that this has "never" before "happened in our history," Omar Abdullah, a former BJP ally and ex-Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister warned of a "huge backlash." "People," said Abdullah, "are saying that it is the rule of Jan Sangh (the BJP's even-more stridently Hindu communalist forerunner) and that's why the doors of every major mosque and shrine have been locked by this government."

The mass protests—which have been focused in the state's northern, Kashmir Valley region, where the Muslim population is concentrated—erupted after Indian security forces on July 8 cornered and killed Burhan Wani, a 22-year old commander of the Hizbul Mujahideen, a separatist and Islamist group.

The popular eruption completely caught the BJP government, the state government—a coalition between the BJP and the People's Democratic Party (a party of the local Muslim elite which favors greater autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir)—and the entire Indian establishment by surprise.

With Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally setting the tone, the Indian authorities have characteristically responded with reaction, violence, and brutality. Modi and Home Minister Rajnath Singh have repeatedly issued statements vowing "no compromise" with those "indulging

in violence."

Willfully ignoring the evident mass disaffection of the Muslim population, the BJP has blamed the protests on the machinations of India's archrival, Pakistan, and ratcheted up tensions with Islamabad. At an "all party meeting" on the Kashmir crisis last month, Modi signaled a more belligerent stance against Pakistan by trumpeting India's claim to the Pakistan-held part of the former British Indian Empire princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, and by suggesting that India could support the anti-Pakistan insurgency in Baluchistan.

While large sections of the population of Jammu and Kashmir were risking life and limb to defy the Indian authorities, Modi declared, "Pakistan Occupied Kashmir is ours."

In suppressing the protests, Indian security forces have killed at least 85 people, most of them youth. A further 8,000 have been injured, with many of these suffering debilitating injuries such as damage to internal organs and loss of eyesight. To impose the writ of the Indian government, security forces have indiscriminately fired pellet guns and tear gas shells, regularly raided villages to preempt local demonstrations, and mounted nighttime raids to arrest alleged activists and terrify their families and neighbors.

Under the direction of the Chief Minister and PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti, the state government has imposed blanket curfews and news blackouts, suspended Internet and cell phone access and banned all gatherings. As a result daily life has largely been brought to a halt, further inciting anger at the authorities.

The protests are being fueled by the long pent-up popular discontent of the Kashmiri masses at the repression and daily indignities they have suffered at the hands of the half-a-million Indian security forces that have been garrisoned in the state for the past two-and-a-half decades. Mass disaffection with the Indian state is also being fed by mass unemployment, especially among the youth, chronic poverty, and the Hindu communalist agenda of the BJP. The

latter includes harsh legal penalties for beef-eating and abolishing Jammu and Kashmir's oft-violated special status within the Indian Union.

The Indian military forces in Jammu and Kashmir operate under the blanket legal immunity granted them under the 1990 "Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act." Secure under the protection provided by AFSPA, they have committed mass crimes and untold atrocities, all in the name of fighting terrorism. Thousands of persons have been kidnapped, tortured and disappeared over the past 25 years.

At the four-hour August 13 "all party" meeting, the Congress Party and the Stalinist parliamentary parties made a few perfunctory criticisms and suggestions, such as reduced use of pellet guns and restricting the AFSPA's writ. But otherwise they gave their full-throated support to the government's efforts to "restore peace" to the Kashmir Valley, i.e. to its brutal repression.

However, by late August, with the protests showing no signs of abating, pressure began to build within the Indian ruling elite for the government to make some gesture in the direction of Modi's hollow August 13 pledge to "win the confidence of the people in Jammu and Kashmir."

Reluctantly, the BJP agreed to send a 28-member parliamentary delegation, comprised of both government and opposition members, to meet with political leaders in the state, including separatist leaders under house arrest. The delegation traveled to the Kashmir Valley for a two-day visit in early September.

A notable aspect of the delegation was the prominent part played in it by Sitaram Yechury, the General Secretary of the Stalinist CPM [Communist Party of India (Marxist)] and a member of the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of India's parliament.

Yechury's role was to give the utterly discredited BJP and Indian state a "left face." All of the separatist leaders under the umbrella organization, the Hurriyat Conference, boycotted the official delegation, but a group of "moderate" separatists met a four-member team led by Yechury.

In an interview with the *Times of India* after the delegation's empty-handed return, Yechury praised the BJP government's "decision to use chili-based PAVA shells instead of pellets," while calling for "unconditional" dialogue with "all stakeholders" and urging the restart of the "peace process" with Pakistan, which has been effectively in limbo since 2008.

Yechury's actions underscore the CPM's role as an integral part of the Indian bourgeois establishment. While adopting a more moderate tone than the BJP, the Stalinists are no less committed to upholding Indian rule in Jammu and Kashmir. Moreover, they have provided pivotal support to the Indian elite in its reactionary military-strategic conflict

with Pakistan and in pursuing its great power ambitions, as attested by their support for India's rapid military expansion since 1998.

The Kashmir tragedy is an outcome of the national bourgeoisie's suppression of the anti-imperialist movement that convulsed South Asia in the first half of the 20th Century. This found its bloodiest and starkest expression in the Congress Party of Gandhi and Nehru joining hands with the Muslim League and the departing British colonial overlords to impose the 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent into a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India.

The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was coveted by the rival ruling elites of the new misbegotten states. In 1947-48, during the first of the three declared wars that India and Pakistan have fought, it was itself partitioned into an Indian- and Pakistan-held Kashmir, thereby dividing the Kashmiri people.

Kashmir has remained central to the conflict between the now nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, with both states claiming sovereignty over all of Kashmir while trampling on the democratic rights of Kashmiris.

The separatist organizations offer no way out of this nightmare. Most are politically aligned with Pakistan and steeped in a reactionary communalist perspective. They articulate the selfish class aims of sections of the local Kashmiri elite that calculate they can wield greater influence and have more favorable conditions for exploiting their "own" working class through the fusion of Kashmir into Pakistan or the creation of an "independent" capitalist Kashmir.

The only force that can overcome the foul legacy of partition, put an end to the threat of a catastrophic war between India and Pakistan, and fulfill the democratic and social aspirations of all working people is a united movement of the working class of the entire subcontinent committed to eradicating social inequality, capitalism, and its outmoded nation-state system and to forging the Socialist United States of South Asia.



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