

Indian authorities remove beggars ahead of Ivanka Trump's trip

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Police in Hyderabad, the state capital of Telengana in southern India, have rounded up and removed hundreds of beggars from the city ahead of the Global Entrepreneurship Summit (GES) on November 28–30. The GES is hosted by NITI Aayog, a leading Indian think tank, in partnership with the US government, and will be attended by 1,500 entrepreneurs from 170 countries.

The event will be addressed by Ivanka Trump, the US president's daughter and one of his "advisors." She leads the US delegation and was invited by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his US visit in June. Modi will also address the summit.

Expulsion of the poor from the city began on November 7, after Hyderabad Police Commissioner M. Mahender Reddy issued a prohibition notice under Section 144 of criminal procedure code 1973. It will ban begging on city streets till January 7. Police immediately began rounding up hundreds of beggars from bus terminals, railway stations and other public places, transporting them to shelters or so-called "rehabilitation centres."

According to the Associated Press (AP), an estimated 6,000 beggars would be shifted to these centres for fingerprinting and "told they could face jail if they are found begging again." A homeless shelter spokesperson told AP that Hyderabad had about 13,000 beggars.

The *Indian Express* reported that the Telengana state government wanted the city presented as a "global capital" which meant ensuring that "no beggars are seen around." In other words, the visible presence of the poor would discourage entrepreneurs from attending the GES and undermine the efforts of India's central and state governments to attract investment.

According one estimate, there are over 400,000

beggars in India, a figure that underscores the disastrous situation facing millions of workers and the poor. Unable to find any progressive solution, the Indian ruling elite is desperately trying to hide the social catastrophe.

According to the GES website, the summit will highlight India's "enabling environment for innovation and entrepreneurship, including actions by the government to increase the ease of doing business, eliminating unnecessary regulations, and supporting startups."

Not surprisingly, Hyderabad Police Commissioner Reddy attempted to cover up the fact that the expulsion of beggars was directly related to preparations for the GES. Announcing the ban, he claimed that the poor were "begging in an indecent manner" and that children and handicapped people were blocking road junction traffic. This was "dangerous to the safety of the vehicular traffic and the public in general," he declared.

Hyderabad director general of prisons V.K. Singh, however, made clear that the police operation was "a permanent drive" against beggars and that the state government had been "trying to figure out what to do about them" for the past 30 years. He noted that begging has been a "criminal act" in Andhra Pradesh since 1977.

Singh even claimed the anti-begging measures were about fighting crime. "There is a mafia or a network behind this who force people to beg or kidnap some children and force them into begging," he declared.

The theme of the Hyderabad summit is "Women First, Prosperity for All," which, according to the event website, places "special emphasis on empowering women entrepreneurs and the role they play in making communities more prosperous and secure through

enterprise.”

The enormous social gap between Ivanka Trump, as well as the scores of government officials and other business delegates, and the vast majority of Hyderabad city dwellers is reflected in the high security preparations for her GES visit.

On November 21, the Times Now news channel reported that the Hyderabad police have stepped up security measures throughout the city. Times Now noted that Washington has told local authorities not to disclose “even the smallest details” relating to Ivanka Trump’s schedule because the “threat perception” to her “is very high.”

Deputy Commissioner of Police of South zone Hyderabad, V. Satyanarayana, told the ANI news agency that “there is the five-tier security system. The inner cordon will be looked after by US Secret Service and SPG [Special Protection Group, which provides security to the Indian Prime Minister], followed by Telengana intelligence wing, while the outer cordon will be looked after by law and order police.”

Local police have reportedly conducted a cordon and search operation against residents living in and around the Falaknuma Palace where Trump’s daughter is expected to have dinner with international delegates. Police have ordered nearly 3,500 residents in the area not to allow strangers or their relatives and friends to come to their homes during the summit.

These measures are not new. Hyderabad police conducted a similar operation in 2000, when then US President Bill Clinton visited the city. Prior to the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi, slums were demolished and thousands of beggars pushed to the outskirts of the metropolis.

Some sections of the Indian media have raised concerns about the extent of the latest police operation.

A November 12 editorial in the *Hindustan Times* entitled “Concealing Hyderabad’s beggars during Ivanka Trump’s visit is insensitive, meaningless,” made the obvious point that forcing beggars from streets would not “address urban poverty.”

These measures are “not even a temporary solution,” the editorial declared, but “insults human dignity and tries to mask the real reasons why people are on the streets.” It concluded by calling on the government to address the “root cause” of the problem by giving people “alternative forms of work so that they will not

have to demean themselves by asking others for sustenance.”

Such measures will never be implemented by the Indian capitalist class and its political elite, which, after more than seven decades of national bourgeois rule and nearly three-decades of pro-market reforms, has produced staggering social inequality and pushed millions into extreme poverty.

A recent report by French economists Lucas Chancel and Thomas Piketty entitled *Indian income inequality, 1922-2014: From British Raj to Billionaire Raj?* ” has revealed that the top 1 percent of income-earners in India capture 23 percent of all income while the top 10 percent garner 55 percent of all income. At the other end of the scale the poorest 50 percent of Indians receive just 15 percent, with an average annual income of just \$US705.



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