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One man in the Jahangir Chowk area near Lal Chowk described Article 370 as a 'mangalsutra' (sacred necklace worn by married women) symbolising a contract (analogous to the marital contract) between Kashmir and India.

Not all demanded restoration of Article 370. Many said that it was only the parliamentary parties who had asked people to have faith that India would honour the contract that was Article 370. The abrogation of Article 370 only discredited those "pro-India parties", and vindicated those who argued for Kashmir's "azaadi" (independence) from India, they felt. One man in Batamaloo said: "Jo india ke geet gate hain, apne bande hain, ve bhi band hain! (Those who sang praises of India, India's own agents, they too are imprisoned!" A Kashmiri journalist observed, "Many people are happy about the treatment the mainstream parties are getting. These parties batted for the Indian State and are being humiliated now."

"Modi has destroyed India's own law, its own Constitution," was another common refrain. Those who said this, felt that Article 370 was more important to India (to legitimise its claim to Kashmir) than it was to Kashmir. But the Modi Government had not only sought to destroy Kashmir, it had destroyed a law and Constitution that was India's own.

In some ways, people were more concerned about the effects of the abrogation of 35A than that of 370. It is widely recognised that Article 370 retained only nominal, symbolic autonomy and had already been diluted. With 35A gone, though, people fear that "State land will be sold cheap to investors. Ambani, Patanjali etc can come in easily. Kashmir's resources and land will be grabbed. In Kashmir as it stands now, education and employment levels are better than in the mainland. But tomorrow Kashmiris will have to compete for Government jobs with those from other states. After one generation, most Kashmiris won't have jobs or be forced to move to the mainland."

There is widespread anger against the Indian media. People are imprisoned in their homes, unable to communicate with each other, express themselves on social media, or make their voices heard in any way. In their homes, they watch Indian TV claim that Kashmir welcomes the Government decisions. They seethe with rage at the erasure of their voices. As one young man in Safakadal put it, "Kiski shaadi hai, aur kaun naach raha hai?!" (It's supposed to be our wedding, but it's only others who are dancing!) If this move is supposed to be for our benefit and development, why not ask what we ourselves think about it?" "Normalcy", Or "Peace of The Graveyard"? Is the situation in Kashmir "normal" and "peaceful"? The answer is an emphatic NO.

One young man in Sopore said: "This is *bandook ki khamoshi* (the silence at gunpoint), *kabristan ki khamoshi* (the peace of the graveyard)."

The newspaper *Greater Kashmir* had one (front) page of news and a sports page at the back: the two inside pages were full of cancellation announcements of weddings or receptions!

Between August 5-9, people had suffered for lack of food, milk, and basic needs. People had been prevented even from going to hospitals in case of sickness.

The Government claim is that only Section 144 has been imposed, not "curfew". But in reality, police vans keep patrolling Srinagar warning people to "stay safe at home and not venture out during the curfew", and tell shops to close their shutters. They demand that people display "curfew passes" to be allowed to move about.

All of Kashmir is under curfew. Even on Eid, the roads and bazaars were silent and desolate. All over Srinagar, mobility is restricted by concertina wires on streets, and massive paramilitary deployment. In many villages, *azaan* was prohibited by the paramilitary and people were forced to do *namaaz* prayers at home rather than collectively at the mosque as is usual on Eid.

In Anantnag, Shopian and Pampore (South Kashmir) on the day of Eid, we only saw very small kids dressed in Eid finery. Everyone else was in mourning. "We feel like we're in jail," said a woman in Guree (Anantnag). Girls in Nagbal (Shopian) said, "With our brothers in police or army custody, how can we celebrate Eid?"

On August 11, on the eve of Eid, a woman at Sopore told us she had come

the road.

We met two victims with pellet gun injuries in SMHS hospital in Srinagar. The two young men (Waqar Ahmad and Wahid) had faces, arms and torso full of pellets. Their eyes were bloodshot and blinded. Waqar had a catheter in which the urine, red with blood from internal bleeding, could be seen. Their family members, weeping with grief and rage, told us that the two men had not been pelting stones. They had been peacefully protesting.

On August 6, a graphic designer for the *Rising Kashmir* newspaper, Samir Ahmad (in his early 20s) had remonstrated with a CRPF man near his home in the Manderbag area of Srinagar, asking him to allow an old man to pass. Later the same day, when Samir opened the door to his house, CRPF fired at him with a pellet gun, unprovoked. He got 172 pellets in his arm and face near the eyes, but his eyesight is safe. It is clear that the pellet guns are deliberately aimed at the face and eyes, and unarmed, peaceful civilians standing at their own front doors can be targets.

At least 600 political leaders and civil society activists are under arrest. There is no



A checkpost in downtown Srinagar on August 10.

PHOTO: FACT-FINDING TEAM

to the bazaar during a brief respite in the curfew, to buy a few supplies for Eid. She said: "We were prisoners in our own homes for seven days. Even today, shops are closed in my village Langet, so I came to Sopore town to shop for Eid and to check on my daughter who is a nursing student here."

"It's Army rule not Modi rule. There are more soldiers here than people," said a young baker at Watpura near Bandipora. His friend added, "We're afraid, because the army camp nearby keeps imposing impossible rules. They insist we have to return within half an hour if we leave home. If my kid isn't well, and I have to take her to the hospital, it may take more than half an hour. If someone visits their daughter who lives in the next village, they may take more than half hour to return. But if there's any delay, they will harass us." The CRPF paramilitary is everywhere, outside nearly every home in Kashmir. These are clearly not there to provide "security" to Kashmiris—on the contrary, their presence creates fear for the people.

Protests, Repression, and Brutality
Some 10,000 people were protesting in Soura (Srinagar) on August 9. The forces responded with pellet gun fire, injuring several. We attempted to go to Soura on August 10, but were stopped by a CRPF barricade. We did see young protestors on the road that day as well, blockading

clear information on what laws are invoked to arrest them, or where they are being held.

A very large number of political leaders are under house arrest—it is impossible to ascertain how many. We tried to meet CPIM MLA Mohammed Yusuf Tarigami—but were refused entry into his home in Srinagar, where he is being held under house arrest.

In every village we visited, as well as in downtown Srinagar, there were very young schoolboys and teenagers who had been arbitrarily picked up by police or army/paramilitary and held in illegal detention. We met a 11-year-old boy in Pampore who had been held in a police station between August 5 and August 11. He had been beaten up, and he said there were boys even younger than him in custody, from nearby villages.

Hundreds of boys and teens are being picked up from their beds in midnight raids. The only purpose of these raids is to create fear. Women and girls told us of molestation by armed forces during these raids. Parents feared meeting us and telling us about the "arrests" (abductions) of their boys. They are afraid of Public Security Act cases being filed. The other fear is that the boys may be "disappeared"—i.e. killed in custody and dumped in mass graves of which Kashmir has a grim history. As one

neighbour of an arrested boy said, "There is no record of these arrests. It is illegal detention. So if the boy "disappears"—i.e. is killed in custody—the police/army can just say they never had him in custody in the first place."

But the protests are not likely to stop. A young man at Sopore said: "*Jitna zulm karenge, utna ham ubharenge.*" (The more you oppress us, the more we will rise up). A familiar refrain we heard at many places was: "Never mind if leaders are arrested. We don't need leaders. As long as even a single Kashmiri baby is alive, we will struggle."

The Gag on Media

A journalist told us: "Newspapers are printing in spite of everything. Without the internet, we do not get any feed from agencies. We were reduced to reporting the J&K related developments in Parliament, from NDTV! This is undeclared censorship. If government is giving internet and phone connectivity to police but not to media houses what does it mean? We had some people come to our offices, speaking on behalf of Army and CRPF, asking "Why are you publishing photos of the curfew-affected streets?"

Kashmiri TV channels are completely closed and unable to function. Kashmiri newspapers that carry the barest mention of protests (such as the one on Soura) are made to feel the heat from the authorities. Foreign press reporters told us that they are facing restrictions on their movement by the authorities. Also, because of the lack of internet, they are unable to communicate with their own main offices. When we visited Press Enclave in Srinagar on August 13, we found the newspaper offices closed and the area deserted except for a few stray journalists, and some CID men. One of the journalists told us that papers could not be printed till at least August 17, because they have run out of newsprint which comes from Delhi.

Conclusion

The whole of Kashmir is, at the moment, a prison, under military control. The decisions taken by the Modi government on J&K are immoral, unconstitutional, and illegal. The means being adopted by the Modi government to hold Kashmiris captive and suppress potential protests are also immoral, unconstitutional, and illegal.

We demand the immediate restoration of Articles 370 and 35A.

We assert that no decision about the status or future of J&K should be taken without the will of its people.

We demand that communications—including landline telephones, mobile phones, and internet—be restored with immediate effect.

We demand that the gags on the freedom of speech, expression and protest be lifted from J&K with immediate effect. The people of J&K are anguished—and they must be allowed to express their protest through media, social media, public gatherings, and other peaceful means.

We demand that the gags on journalists in J&K be lifted immediately.

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