**Why did Indias Republic Day turn into Black Day?**

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January 29, 2021

January 26 is commemorated as India’s Republic Day, the date on which the Constitution of India came into effect in 1950 replacing the Government of India Act (1935) as the governing document of India. Every year, this day is celebrated with pomp and splendour with a great military parade in the capital New Delhi being the hallmark of the event. Each year, Kashmiris observe this day as Black Day since India’s illegal occupation, tyranny and oppression of Jammu and Kashmir continues unabated. Following Narendra Modi’s August 5, 2019 illegal action of abrogating Article 370 and 35A of its own Constitution, rescinding the autonomy given to Illegally Indian Occupied Kashmir (IIOK) and annexing Kashmir and Ladakh into Union Territories, caused the Kashmiris to observe the Indian Republic Day as a truly black day.  To stop the people of IIOK from protesting, Jammu and Kashmir has been in a state of lockdown since August 5, 2019. Its people are incarcerated in their homes with no access to internet and communications, limited movement and orders to shoot on sight if any protest rallies are organized.

To make matters worse, India shot itself in the foot by introducing the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) towards the end of 2019. The NRC demanded Indian citizens to register themselves but the Muslims of Assam and elsewhere were barred from it so that they remain outside the reach of registration, deprived of their basic rights and if deemed necessary, forced to leave India or detained in concentration camps.

The CAA, on the other hand, is an act, which has provided Non-Muslims, who entered India as refugees to become citizens, but the Muslims are being kept out of this fold. Throughout India, there have been massive rallies protesting the promulgation of both pieces of legislation, which were deemed as usurpation of human rights. Interestingly, it is not just Muslims, who are protesting the NRC and CAA but citizens of various faiths including Hindus. The rallies have been led by the student community, who have been fired upon and a number of them have been killed. Thus Republic Day 2020 saw sporadic protest rallies against the draconian NRC and CAA.

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This year, owing to COVID-19, the ceremony was scaled down but January 26, 2021 became a real Black Day because the various wounds India has inflicted upon itself are coming back to haunt it in the worst possible way.

While the Kashmiris continue to suffer incarceration, subjugation and cruelty at the hands of the Indian government, fresh protagonists picked up the baton of protest and remonstration. Indian Hindus and Muslims came out in the streets to protest the imposition of the NRC and CAA but the most prominent and vocal demonstrators were the farmers of Punjab and Haryana. Thousands of Indian farmers protesting against the new agricultural reforms, who were entrenched on the outskirts of the capital for the last two months, blockading the capital from UP, Punjab and Haryana, breached the barricades ad stormed the historic Red Fort complex in the capital and hoisted flags after clashing with police, who fired tear gas to scatter them. The farmers have been protesting the fresh legislation, insisting the laws enforced by Narendra Modi’s government, help large, private buyers at the expense of producers. The majority of the farmers are Sikhs, who are incensed by New Delhi’s attitude towards their community and pose the greatest threat to Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he came to power in 2014.

Ever since Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi launched an assault on the Golden Temple at Amritsar, one of the holiest places of worship for Sikhs and crushed the Khalistan movement led by SantJarnail Singh Bhindranwale in 1984, the Sikhs were deeply hurt. Two of Indira Gandhi’s Sikh bodyguards assassinated her, which led to a backlash by incensed Hindus, who massacred thousands of Sikhs. Many of the oppressed community sought asylum in Canada, UK and the USA, where by dint of hard work they rose to senior positions in their adopted country’s parliament and society. When the farmers’ protest erupted in late 2020, Canadian, British and US lawmakers urged the Indian government to let the Sikhs protest peacefully but the stubborn Modi government refused to budge.

It was no surprise that on the Indian Republic Day 2021, Sikhs launched a tractor rally and assaulted the Red Fort in New Delhi, symbolic of the Capital’s citadel of power and installed Khalistani flags. Tragically, instead of accepting its own shortcomings in mishandling the crisis, Indian hardliners are busy blaming Pakistan for sponsoring the Sikh’s protest rally.

Recently India has been shamed and named in a massive exposé by European Union DisinfoLab of a deception campaign, titled “Indian Chronicles.” The shocking disclosure revealed India’s clandestine operations using fake hardcore and social media platforms to denigrate Pakistan. On India’s Republic Day, a landmark development took place, when the first hearing in the EU about DisinfoLab was held. European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the EU, including Disinformation (INGE) held a hearing on disinformation activities and tactics originating from India at the European Parliament, Brussels. Executive Director of EU Disinfolab Alexander Alaphalippe and Managing Director Gary Machado briefed the Committee on India’s disinformation campaign, “Indian Chronicles.”

The gory images of the Sikhs being tear gassed and baton charged filled the media outlets internationally, bringing humiliation to the pretender of being the biggest democracy of the world.