**[Kashmir: facing multiple assaults](https://www.dawn.com/news/1730701/kashmir-facing-multiple-assaults)**

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Just about every aspect of life for Muslims in occupied Jammu and Kashmir is under assault by India’s ruling BJP.

The year 2022 saw Indian actions aimed at disempowering its Muslim population by [reshaping Kashmir’s demographic landscape](https://www.dawn.com/news/1688232) and measures to systematically erode Kashmiri culture, language and religious identity.

Properties were confiscated and new land laws were introduced that would seize land from locals and give it to outsiders. The media has been muzzled, and journalists jailed and prevented from travelling overseas. Human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and torture, continue with impunity while the entire leadership of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) remains in detention. More paramilitary forces were inducted into the world’s most militarised region.

A more egregious example of repression such as that in Kashmir can hardly be found anywhere in the world. Yet this grim situation is met by silence from countries that claim to be standard-bearers of human rights. Meanwhile, Pakistan’s international campaign to expose this is fitful at best, preoccupied as it is with multiple crises at home. Islamabad’s Kashmir diplomacy is now limited to just sending letters to the UN.

Although the occupied territory has seen violent oppression for over seven decades, Delhi’s [unilateral action](https://www.dawn.com/news/1498227) on Aug 5, 2019, opened a more brutal chapter in Kashmir’s tortured history. The Indian government illegally annexed the state of Jammu and Kashmir, bifurcated it, and integrated it into the Indian union. This was in blatant violation of UN Security Council resolutions. There are 11 resolutions on Kashmir. Specifically, it was a contravention of UNSC Resolution 38, whose para 2 clearly states that neither party to the dispute can bring about a material change in the situation in Kashmir.

A prolonged lockdown and communication blackout was imposed, the military siege tightened, public assembly was banned, the press silenced and Kashmiri leaders, including pro-Delhi politicians, jailed to prevent a popular upsurge against the move that robbed the Kashmiri people of virtually all their rights.

Since then, the BJP government has taken a number of steps —administrative, demographic and electoral — to disempower and disenfranchise Kashmiris and change the Muslim identity of Kashmir. Several actions mimic Israeli settler policies in occupied Palestine. In May 2022, India’s Delimitation Commission announced a plan to carve out new electoral constituencies, aimed at giving Jammu greater representation to reduce the political weight of Muslims in the J&K assembly and shift the balance to Hindus. Muslims constitute over 68 per cent of J&K’s population while Hindus represent around 28pc according to the (last) 2011 census. The BJP government wants through the delimitation plan to turn the Muslim majority into a minority.

India’s actions in the occupied region mimic Israeli settler policies in Palestine.

Demographic changes have also been set in train by new domicile rules introduced by Delhi. Over 3.4 million so-called domicile certificates have been issued to non-Kashmiri outsiders, who became eligible after abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution in 2019. In July 2022, the chief election officer in the occupied Valley announced granting voting rights to any Indian citizen, even temporary residents, in a brazen effort to change the region’s demography. This would add almost 2.5m additional voters, including non-locals, to the electoral rolls. It represents an increase of 30pc voters to the electorate. Like the delimitation plan, this announcement provoked anger and resentment in Kashmir. APHC leaders denounced it and as did traditionally pro-India former chief ministers and politicians. Farooq Abdullah’s National Conference said the “inclusion of non-locals” was a “clear-cut ploy to disenfranchise the people of J&K”.

None of this has deterred the Modi government from pressing ahead. Nor have its actions been limited to electoral gerrymandering. Last year, BJP authorities seized the J&K Waqf Board and thus all its properties across the region. This marked a drive to take control of all prominent places of religious significance for Muslims in the occupied territory, including shrines. Religious leaders and Islamic scholars were arrested and prayers have been barred in many mosques across Kashmir. In the guise of cracking down on Jamaat-i-Islami, banned in 2019, the authorities have more recently seized properties worth millions of rupees. This includes a home that once belonged to the iconic Hurriyat leader, Syed Ali Geelani, who was denied a proper funeral in 2021.

BJP’s attack on Kashmiri culture has also involved eroding the status of Urdu. For over 100 years, Urdu was the official language of J&K. But in 2020, Urdu’s exclusive status was ended by legislation that made Hindi, Kashmiri and Dogri official languages in J&K, in addition to Urdu and English. Moves are now afoot to change the script of the Kashmiri language from Nastaliq to the Devanagri script.

None of this has attracted much international attention. What has been denounced by international human rights organisations is the silencing of Kashmir’s media, the arrest of journalists under sedition and anti-terror laws and the atmosphere of intimidation that has been created especially in the wake of the new, harsh media policy of 2020. In February 2022, Human Rights Watch condemned the intensified crackdown on the independent media and noted the “increasing harassment, threats, and prosecutions of journalists and human rights activists” in Kashmir. In September 2022, Amnesty International detailed the clampdown on the media and sweeping curbs on the freedom of expression, noting that the Kashmir Press Club had been closed down.

The BJP government seeks to use intensified repression, demographic changes and changing the electoral map to set the stage for eventual elections in J&K. This aims to consolidate and ‘legitimise’ its August 2019 action and enable Delhi to claim that the situation in Jammu and Kashmir has been ‘normalised’. But its efforts to entice and enlist even pro-India Kashmiri leaders to support this plan have failed. In the face of overwhelming Kashmiri opposition to the delimitation plan and new voting rules, it is hard to see how elections can be held, and if they are, whether they will be credible. Delhi’s policies of force and fraud have long failed in Kashmir and only deepened the alienation of its people and strengthened their resolve to resist occupation. There is little reason to think this will change in the future.

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