**Two years of lockdown**

**[S A Khan](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/s-a-khan)**

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For many of us, coronavirus, lockdowns and the ‘new normal’ have changed our lives in more ways than one. But while life in Pakistan has resumed to a degree—even with the consistent threat of a rise in infections—there is a place, where a permanent lockdown has been a nightmarish reality for 8 million residents. Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir (IIOK) continues to suffer under the thumb of a repressive government, committed to ensuring that Kashmiris feel like pariahs in their own home.

The situation, of course, was not always like this. Before Articles 370 and 35-A were rolled back, things were a little better, even if this improvement was marginal. But at the same time, IIOK has always suffered at the hands of the Indian state and its brutal armed forces.

There have been mass murders, rapes and genocidal tendencies consistently on display by India in Kashmir, and this has only gotten worse in the last two years. A systematic effort to eradicate independent thought by targeting members of the intelligentsia has also been made.

[Pakistan reports 4,040 new COVID-19 cases in one day](https://nation.com.pk/09-Aug-2021/pakistan-reports-4-040-new-covid-19-cases-in-one-day)

It is unclear then, why the Indian government is surprised at the motivation of the Kashmiris to fight against this repression. An indigenous struggle is underway, and this is something the Indian state has been unable to eradicate even after unleashing years or abuse and torture on hapless residents. Amidst all of this, Indian political leaders have placed themselves in two camps—they either lie brazenly and continue to endorse the repression, or they stick their head in the sand and continue to ignore the issue. To be fair, there are leaders in the Congress who maintain that revoking the articles was a mistake that should be reversed, but there has not been much in the way of any serious opposition to the government’s decisions.

While all of this is taking place, India continues to blame Pakistan for the Kashmiri response. Even if we imagine for a second that India’s blind and unfounded accusations against Pakistan hold any water, the securitisation of IIOK has all but ensured that even families from this side of the border have a difficult time interacting with their loved ones in occupied Kashmir. Militants crossing over then becomes an unlikely possibility, given that India has installed high tech equipment such as motion trackers and infrared cameras to detect any and all movement on the Line of Control.

[10 passengers die as cylinder explodes in moving van near Gujranwala](https://nation.com.pk/09-Aug-2021/10-passengers-die-as-cylinder-explodes-in-moving-van-near-gujranwala)

The past two years however, have seen an uptick in the number of mentions of Kashmir by foreign leaders. This of course, is down to Pakistan’s consistent attempts to bring Kashmir back to the international agenda and get the situation resolved according to the UNSC resolutions accepted by both India and Pakistan—and the United Nations as a whole—to resolve the longstanding issue. India has been called out for its actions both publicly and privately. Its grand designs of becoming a regional power are under severe threat.

For us, as citizens of Pakistan and just as human beings with empathy, our responsibility to highlight the Kashmir issue must also be fulfilled. The state can only do so much. There must be greater efforts on part of the citizenry to engage with this issue and look to highlight this in our own capacity. Social media is one sphere where this can be done effectively. Instead of looking to engage in the troll warfare so commonly witnessed between users of the two rivals, we must look to make a cohesive knowledge base of the issue online. Victims, heroes, struggles, fairies and most importantly victories; all of this needs to be catalogued and highlighted to ensure that the world can no longer silently look the other way. The time has come for everyone to do their bit. IIOK cannot and should not spend another year in lockdown. Its citizens deserve better.