**Doppelgangers of wayward states**

BY J A W E D N A Q V I 2021-12-07

THERE was a time in the 1980s and 1990s, one can recall, when the official spokesmen for the Indian and Pakistani governments would cite Amnesty International`s reports to snipe at each other for violence against ethnic minorities or assorted brutalities in the other`s patch. On the flip side, they would slam the agency`s censure of their own abuse of civilians as Western propaganda.

There is no more need for this dual policy for the doppelgangers of unbridled travesty. The late poetess Fahmida Riaz would have a hard time figuring out the original from the image if she were to revisit her poem about a growing likeness between the two otherwise strained neighbours.

A right-wing government has forced the winding up of the Amnesty`s offices in India alleging they broke the rules. And, if there was still hope of Pakistan being slightly more deferential to the internationally respected organisation, the idea was banished by the military court`s conviction of Idris Khattak who it found guilty of espionage.

According to a Dawn report, the rights and political activist could appeal his conviction after a military court found him guilty of espionage. He was handed a 14-year rigorous jail term. The verdict was pronounced this weel( after the trial concluded in Jhelum. Three retired military officers were jailed for espionage in a separate trial.

Amnesty International wants the authorities to give Khattak access to lawyers, and to produce him before a civilian court. Working with Amnesty, Khattak investigated enforced disappearances in the erstwhile tribal areas and Balochistan. He was picked by an intelligence agency in November 2019. Following a six-month long public campaign, the defence ministry last year admitted he was in the military`s custody, charged with treason.

The doppelganger across the border has been similarly busy subverting civil society groups and their constitutional rights. The New York Times said in a report from Srinagar in September last year that Amnesty had wound up its operations in India afterlaying offits entire staff. The decision followed a series of government reprisals including the freezing of its bank accounts.

Amnesty says the right-wing government had targeted the organisationfor years in response to its work exposing human rights violations inIndia. Among its other works that appeared to annoy the state, the group had published reports on the Delhi police`s alleged role in fomenting anti-Muslim violence and on the use of torture in Kashmir. The Indian government said the allegations from Amnesty were `exaggerated and far from the truth`.

The targeting of Amnesty`s India operations presaged an emboldened assault on human rights groups, not least in Jammu and Kashmir. The assaults were also in keeping with the stepped up use of anti-terror laws to jail noted civilians, human rights lawyers and well-regarded academics.

The latest to fall victim to the emboldened state`s attacks on human rights groups wasKhurram Parvez whose work in the documentation of the rights abuse in Jammu and Kashmir has been lauded internationally for probity and diligence. His arrest is seen as part of the Modi government`s policy to use tough measures to curb dissent. In 2015, Khurram helpe d prepare an 800-page report titled Structures of Violence. It documented the extrajudicial killings of 1,080 people and enforced disappearances of 172. The document identified 972 alleged perpetrators, which include d 464 army personnel, 161 paramilitary personnel, 158 Jammu and Kashmir Police personnel and 189 government gunmen.

Khurram`s arrest on Nov 22 followed a day of extensive searches at his residence and ofHce in Srinagar. He is accused of waging war against India together with a clutch of harsh terror-related charges.

The UN slammed the arrest. `Pm hearing disturbing reports that Khurram Parvez was arrestedtoday in Kashmir & is at risk of being charged by authorities in #India with terrorism-related crimes. He`s not a terrorist, he`s a Human Rights Defender,` Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, tweeted.

As coordinator of the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, Khurram has worked on documenting abuses allegedly committed both by security forces and armed resistance in Kashmir.

His last report, Kashmir`s Internet Siege, focuse d on the mass detentions and the reported breakdown of the judicial system in the state after the reading down of Article 370. Khurram, 44, is partially disabled, having lost a leg in a landmine blast that hit his car while monitoring the parliamentary elections in 2004. His colleague, Asiya Geelani, a journalist, was killed in the explosion.

As the political climate deteriorates in India, and the government has tasted defeat at the hands of a mass movement led by farmers, the state is seen as moving into a counter-attack mode.

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval recently turned his hostile gaze on civil society, a strategy that doesn`t look dissimilar to the one being practised in Pakistan, against outspoken media and rights activists.

`The new frontiers of war, what you call the fourth-generation warfare, is the civil society, Doval warned. `Wars have ceased to become an effective instrument for achieving their political or military objectives ... but it is the civil society, thatcan be subverted,thatcan be suborned, that can be divided, that can be manipulated, to hurt the interests of a nation. And you are there to see that they stand fully protected,` he told newly inducted police cadets.

Former civil servant turned RTI activist Aruna Roy saw Doval`s fulminations as a threat to the constitutional oath they both took as batchmates.

`In targeting us as potential threats to the Indian nation, Doval has urged the entire new batch of the Indian Police Service to view `civil society` as the potential enemy, with whom a new fourth generation `warfare` has to be fought,` Roy wrote.

To begin with, civil society organisers are being targeted as anti-national, something that`s beginningtohappen on bothsides ofthefence.m The writer is Dawn`s correspondent in Delhi.

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