

# Kashmir in a cage

Subjugating an entire people wasn't enough for India's prime minister.



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**LAHORE, PAKISTAN** Pakistani kids are taught in and out of school that Kashmir is our “shah rug” (jugular vein). Indians believe that Kashmir is their “atoot ang” (indispensable body part). Urdu and Persian poetry is full of paeans to the beauty of Kashmir. If there is paradise on earth, “it is this, it is this, it is this,” the 14th-century poet Amir Khusro wrote. Since the time of Partition, 72 years ago, India and Pakistan have been fighting wars over Kashmir and calling each other the occupier and the oppressor of the Kashmiris.

Occasionally, there have been half-hearted pledges that the Kashmiri people should probably get to do what they want with their paradise. In 1948, the United Nations Security Council called for a plebiscite so that Kashmiris could decide their own fate. No such thing has happened. I have a couple of friends from both sides of the Kashmir dispute, and they have always said that more than freedom, any special status or merging with India or Pakistan, they

have wanted, I am certain they didn't want what they got this week: Kashmir's special status, and relative autonomy, under India's Constitution revoked. Some 35,000 more soldiers in the world's most militarized region, schools shut, offices shut, the internet snatched away, landlines dead. Local political leaders — even those happy to collaborate with the Indian authorities in New Delhi — locked up. A former chief minister of the region said, hours before being arrested, that it had been a mistake to side with India at Partition. And now India is taking us back to Partition all over again by annexing Kashmir and throwing millions of its citizens in a cage.

Many Indians are cheerleading this imprisonment. The actor Anupam Kher tweeted with glee that the “Kashmir solution” had gotten off to a great start. Experts are writing that the Kashmiri people have enjoyed too many privileges all the while questioning their affiliation with India: You see, young men in the Kashmir Valley sometimes chant pro-Pakistan slogans and celebrate the occasional victory of Pakistan over India in cricket matches by waving Pakistani flags.

Before Article 370 was scrapped this week, Kashmiris had the notional privi-

leges. Thousands of Kashmiris have been made to disappear; some who were detained by Indian soldiers said they were forced to eat their own flesh. Kashmir has also seen the largest mass blinding with pellet guns in human history.

But subjugating Kashmiris was not enough. The cheerleaders for Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India are cheering for Partition redux, a world-class massacre, ethnic cleansing. The brute power of Hindu supremacy has its own logic, and it requires not only that Kashmiris be denied a future but also that they be humiliated and punished for their past sin of not being grateful Indians. While individual

Indian Muslims across the country are being lynched for trading beef or forced to chant Hindutva slogans, Kashmiris are locked up en masse. Thank you, we don't need collaborators anymore.

When some years ago a leader of Mr. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party said during an election rally that Muslim

sounds like one more action point on a Hindu nationalist's to-do list. Early this week, there were videos of young Hindus claiming that now they can get themselves Kashmiri girls. Many victims of the original Partition were women who were raped or who jumped into wells to avoid being raped. Now young Indian men seem to think another historic opportunity has opened up.

There is no dispute about the disputed territory of Kashmir, India announced this week. Your land, Kashmiris, is our land, it said. Pakistan's jugular vein has been slashed.

Yet Pakistan didn't seem to have many options except to throw its hands up in the air and say it would complain before international forums. The Pakistani Army said it would go to any extent to help its Kashmiri brothers. But the limits of that resolve were clear when Imran Khan, Pakistan's prime minister, spoke in Parliament. What do you want me to do, he said? Go to war with India?

We have already done that four times, and we are not in the mood.

Pakistan is appealing to the conscience of the world, but the world's conscience is distracted. The United States has already hinted that what

likely to help restore the internet or the dignity of Kashmiris.

China, Pakistan's oldest ally, has been training its Muslim Uighur population to dance and smile for the cameras in detention camps. Russia and Israel are India's close allies. The first prince of the world's Muslim community, the Saudi Mohammed bin Salman, has called Mr. Modi his brother. Pakistanis who are genuinely outraged by the Indian government's move this week also sound as though someone had confiscated *their* land. “Kashmir is ours” is all over social media.

I follow one bit of paradise on Twitter. Sabbah Haji is the director of the Haji Public School in Breswana village, up in the Jammu mountains. She posts about the progress of her students, and the health of her horses and dogs. On Saturday, as online connections started to disappear, she wrote, “When our internet is killed, don't forget we're still in here.”

The next day: “Out of the blue, one company of Army in my village today. Arrived this evening. We are at 7,500 feet up in the middle of nowhere.”

And then there was silence.

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