

Editorial

Saturday, August 24, 2019

Threatened democracy

Thanks to Article 370 - a clause in the constitution which gave it significant autonomy, including its own constitution, a separate flag, and independence over all matters except foreign affairs, defence and communications - Indian-administered Kashmir has held a special position within the country. On August 5, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as the governing party had promised in its 2019 election manifesto, India revoked that seven-decade-long privileged status. The Hindu nationalist BJP has long opposed Article 370 and had repeatedly called for its abolishment. In what was described by many as a coup-like situation, telephone networks and the internet were cut off in the region in the days before the presidential order was announced. Public gatherings were banned, and tens of thousands of troops were sent in. Tourists were told to leave Kashmir under warnings of a terror threat. Two former chief ministers of Jammu and Kashmir, - the Indian state which encompasses the disputed territory - along with more prominent public figures were placed under house arrest. India's parliament also passed a bill splitting Indian Occupied Kashmir or, to use the more politically correct term - Indian-administered Kashmir into two territories governed directly by Delhi: Jammu and Kashmir, and the remote, mountainous region of Ladakh. Understandably China, which shares a disputed border with India in Ladakh, has objected to the reorganisation and accused Delhi of undermining its territorial sovereignty. Also, as expected, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan vowed to challenge India's actions at the UN security council, and take the matter to the International Criminal Court.

Looking a little further beyond the border, China is also playing out its own version of the process vis-a-vis Hong Kong which is facing a major political crisis as it heads into its 11th weekend of mass demonstrations. What started as a movement against a controversial law has expanded into something much bigger. Over the past few months, the demonstrations have evolved from millions marching through the streets, to groups of protesters in hard hats storming government headquarters and shutting down the city's international airport for two days. While the majority of protesters have been peaceful, frustration is building on all sides. Protesters are now demanding greater democracy and an inquiry into alleged police brutality during past demonstrations. And as unrest intensifies, Beijing's tone is becoming increasingly heated. Hong Kong belongs to China, but it has its own currency, political system and cultural identity. Many Hong Kong residents don't see themselves as Chinese, but rather as Hong Kongers. The city was a colony and territory of the United Kingdom for more than 150 years, until the British handed it back over to China in 1997. Today, Hong Kong's legal system still mirrors the British model, prizing transparency and due process.

To many political observers and analysts, the similar sequence of developments points to a deeper and more disconcerting agenda at work - a process that unfolds gradually and in which power is concentrated in the hands of one strong leader, who often claims to understand the "will of the people" and to govern in its name. Autocratisation.

According to a long term study by political scientists Anna Lührmann and Staffan Lindberg, director and vice-director respectively of the V-Dem Institute ("Varieties of Democracy") at the University of Gothenburg: the biggest international research project on measuring democratic quality; involving 3,000 researchers around the world, there has been three waves of democratisation, each followed by a wave of autocratisation - the overall story of global political development from 1900 to 2017.

According to the authors, the current third wave of autocratisation has new features: while earlier autocratisation took place in countries where such movements were already in progress, this one is happening mostly in democracies. In other words, while in earlier "classic" waves autocratic regimes came to power through foreign invasions or military coup, today the process is subtler and more gradual, and often camouflaged by legal changes and are often characterized by overriding civil liberties and bringing opposition, media, and civil society to heel after coming to power through democratic elections. "The third wave of autocratisation is real and endangers democracies," Lührmann and Lindberg conclude. According to them, almost every case of autocratisation in a democracy in the past has led to the countries turning into an autocracy. "Very few episodes of autocratisation starting in democracies have ever been stopped before countries become autocracies", they write.

Are we in the midst of a change, albeit subtle and gradual, is real and underway, while our elected leaders are too busy appeasing their political benefactors and masters to read the signs? A point we need to ponder upon in light of the present political and social developments.

Letters, Feedback and Suggestions to 'Imphal Times' can be sent to our e-mail : imphaltimes@gmail.com. For advertisement kindly contact: - 0385-2452159 (O). For time being readers can reach the office at Cell Phone No. 9862860745 for any purpose.

Trump and Kashmir: If It Sounds Like Mediation, It Is Mediation

India foiled US efforts to get involved in the '90s, when things were far worse in the Valley. Now through acts of commission, Modi has provided an opening for the US to enter.

Courtesy The Wire
By : Manoj Joshi

Donald Trump's latest remarks at the White House are the surest sign that the US president has no intention of backing off from his offer to mediate between India and Pakistan. But then the signs were already there, all around us.

Last Friday, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan spoke to US President Donald Trump for 12 minutes about the situation in Kashmir, in the wake of India's decision to withdraw J&K's special status under Article 370.

Three days later, on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Trump and in a 30-minute conversation, complained about his Pakistani counterpart's incendiary rhetoric which was destabilising the region. The day before, on Sunday, Khan had termed the Modi government as "fascist" and said they were a threat to Pakistan and Indian minorities.

Thereafter, Trump picked up the phone and dialed Khan, and told him that there was a need for him to tone down his rhetoric and reduce tensions. In his conversation, according to a White House readout, Trump "reaffirmed the need to avoid escalation of the situation and urged restraint" on both sides. Thereafter, Trump tweeted: "Spoke to my two good friends, Prime Minister Modi of India, and Prime Minister Khan of Pakistan... to work towards reducing tensions in Kashmir. A tough situation, but good conversations."

Now, if this does not sound like mediation, what does? All we have at present are readouts and press releases of the conversations, but you can be sure that given the rhetoric from New Delhi and Islamabad, there must be more happening in the deep recesses of the State Department and the Pentagon.

It stands to reason that the longer the situation takes to return to normality, the more India will be opening itself up to US involvement in the Jammu and Kashmir issue. As for Pakistan, it would be more than happy if the US gets involved. As



of now, the situation in the Valley is certainly not normal, especially since thousands of persons, mainly political leaders and activists are detained and communications restricted.

And no one knows exactly how things will unfold in the Valley, not just in the coming days, but also in the weeks and months ahead. You can safely dismiss the propaganda that everything is normal and that there is widespread support for the Centre's move in the Valley. Nothing could be further from the truth. Not only has the Union government's action added another layer of grievance to those already weighing down the Kashmiris, but it has egregiously also alienated those political elements and parties that had upheld the Indian flag through the thick and thin in the Valley.

We need not take either Pakistan or China's crocodile tears over the changes in the legal relationship between the state and the Centre seriously. The step is certainly legally and politically infirm, but neither Islamabad nor Beijing have a legal or moral right to complain. Pakistan had dealt whimsically with the areas of the state that it controls and has never given them even a fraction of the autonomy that J&K had prior to the Article 370 decision. As for China, "autonomous" has, and will always be, a fiction when it comes to its political system.

It is difficult to determine what the government has in mind for the future. The government is deluding itself if it thinks investment and development will now pour into the

region and take away the sting of recent events. Just why the population should tamely accept a political demotion for their state is not clear. J&K was never backward by Indian standards and the narrative that Article 370 or 35A were some kind of a hindrance is overblown. Investment could head to the Jammu region, but nothing is likely to go beyond Ramban and Nowshera. By itself, development has never moderated separatism, else we would not have the continuing Basque and Scottish separatism.

Since we are talking of another layer of grievance upon an already ongoing situation, the government has no doubt readied to double down on the "all-out" strategy it initiated in 2016. We are likely to see more repression, police action, arrests, not just of militants, but also their supporters.

We are now in for a longer haul in Kashmir than before the poorly thought-through actions of the Modi government. Pakistan retains the ability to make things difficult in the Valley. With New Delhi egregiously roiling the situation, Islamabad has an opportunity to encourage an escalatory cycle of violence.

Southern Kashmir was a tinderbox before August 5, and you can be sure it will remain one in the coming period. In recent years, Pakistan had sealed down its support for militancy in the Valley, but it may now shift gears again. Given New Delhi's signal that it will not tolerate this, the possibility of a wider conflict has increased.

And this is where the US comes in. Violence and prolonged disturbances, aided and abetted by Pakistan will paradoxically bring more, not less intervention. India successfully foiled US efforts to get involved in the mid-1990s, when things were far worse in the Valley by showing an improvement in the ground situation. Now through acts of commission, it has provided an opening for the US to enter.

Like all countries, the US will act along what it considers are its national interests. Foremost among these, at present, is to prevent the two South Asian neighbours getting involved in a nuclear war and poisoning the global atmosphere. Then comes the need to balance relations with Pakistan, a country that is not only nuclear-armed, but occupies a strategic location in relation to its two-and-a-half adversaries - China, Russia and Iran - and holds the key to peace in Afghanistan.

India is important as a market and also a key to offsetting Chinese power in the Western Pacific, but that only underscores the importance to the US to maintain friendly ties with both India and Pakistan and seeking to mediate between them. This, in fact, has been the leitmotif of US policy to the region since the time of Eisenhower.

Manoj Joshi is a distinguished fellow, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.

Note: The article has been updated to include a reference to Donald Trump's remarks at the White House on August 20, 2019.

Union Home Minister presides over the Passing out Parade of the 70th Batch of Indian Police Service Probationers

PIB Feature

Union Minister for Home Affairs, Amit Shah presided over the Passing out Parade (PoP) of the 70th Batch of Indian Police Service (IPS) Probationers at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy (SVPNPA), in Hyderabad today. The event was also graced by Governor of Telangana, Shri E. S. L. Narasimhan and Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, G. Kishan Reddy, along with senior officers and family members of the probationers. During the PoP ceremony, the Home Minister inspected the parade and awarded the best performing probationers, amongst a total of 103 officers that included 15 lady officers, 6 Royal Bhutan Police and 5 Nepal Police Service officers. Shri Shah congratulated all the probationary officers, especially the lady officers, and gave best wishes for their bright careers.

He expressed pride that the young officers would soon be joining the distinguished tradition of Indian Police Service in serving the Nation with utmost dedication.

Saluting the 'Iron Man of India', Shah said that this academy is

established in Hyderabad, a place that saw a historic police action under the leadership of Vallabhbhai Patel in 1948 that resulted in the merger of the erstwhile Hyderabad state into the Indian union. He paid tributes to Sardar Patel for integrating over 600 princely states and giving shape to the Indian Union. The Home Minister stated that the only state that remained from truly integrating into the Indian union was Jammu & Kashmir (JK). It has also now been integrated by the bold step taken by Government of India under the decisive leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi by abrogating Article 370. Today, Sardar Patel's vision of a unified India has been realized in true spirit, he added.

Addressing the probationers, Shah said that the IPS was envisioned as the forerunners of preventing corruption in India by Sardar Patel. He stated, "Your aim must not end by getting selected in Civil Services, but the path to make India free from corruption and become safe and secure from external and internal threats, starts from here on. The future would present a lot of challenges and hardships. You are becoming a part of the legacy of

those 33000 officers who have laid down their lives in service of the Nation. You have to always work dedicatedly to ensure security and integrity of India. You would have to remember the oath taken here today and keep treading on the path of committed service to the Nation all your life. Your life must be dedicated to uplifting the lives of thousands of fellow citizens who have not got this opportunity".

Motivating the young probationers to become team leaders and lead from the front by example, Shah said, "Sampark (Connect), Samvaad (Communicate) aur Samanvay (Coordinate) are the core principles of team building and achieve success in challenging situations". He emphasized on reaching the people, communicating constantly and building a connect, in order to serve them in the most successful manner. Shah gave the example of his own political career and how he has been able to successfully build a connect with the grassroots and serve the people of the country. He said politicians only get elected for five years but civil servants get the opportunity to serve the country for whole life, which must not be wasted. Being free from fear and

taking decisions for the betterment of masses, while abiding by the tenets of the Constitution, is the hallmark of an officer and only by following this principle can one become a successful police officer, he added.

Shah stated, "Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi has given a vision of a SMART Police (S - Sensitive and Strict; M - Modern with mobility; A - Alert and Accountable; R - Reliable and Responsive; T - Trained and Techno-savvy). The police forces must continuously remodel on this vision to successfully face the challenges in the future". Further, he stated that PM's vision of a 5 trillion dollar economy can only be achieved when the law and order situation in the country is stable and peaceful. A SMART police force is the flag bearer of achieving PM's vision of a 5 trillion dollar economy, he added.

Concluding his address, the Home Minister expressed confidence that all probationers would maintain the high traditions of the police services and dedicate their lives to the service of the Nation. He also saluted the sacrifices of the parents of the probationers for giving the Nation the new batch of dedicated police officers.