[**Kashmir alive**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1631553/kashmir-alive)

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THE [conference of Kashmiri parties](https://www.dawn.com/news/1631327) convened by the Indian government in New Delhi on June 24, 2021, proves once again that Kashmiris cannot be crushed into obedience. Jawaharlal Nehru imprisoned Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah for 11 years only to invite him to New Delhi as his guest for talks. In between, he had sent his Dr P. Subbarayan to the Jammu Central Jail to sound out Sheikh sahib. He discovered that the prisoner had not changed his convictions.

In 1965-66, Jayaprakash Narayan sent his emissaries to Kodaikanal to sound out Sheikh sahib who was in internment there with Mirza Muhammad Afzal Beg. Nothing came out of it. Released in 1968, it took prime minister Indira Gandhi seven years to conclude an accord with her former friend Sheikh Abdullah whose imprisonment in 1953 she had opposed vehemently.

Those who criticise Sheikh sahib for the 1975 accord with Indira Gandhi should rem­ember that the ground had been cut under his feet by the Shimla Pact of 1972. It congealed the status quo but also provided for talks on Kashmir to which she never agreed.

Insurgency erupted in 1989. At its peak, prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao said that the sky was the limit if violence was eschewed. On the India-Pakistan plane, two major developments took place. The Agra summit was aborted by L.K. Advani for spurious reasons. An agreed draft was ready but was rejected by India at the very last minute.

What does India have to offer to Kashmiris after it wronged them?

At the domestic level, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference was wrecked by its foremost leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani. His was an impossible formula — all or nothing. Coupled with this was the personal angle. He wanted to be the leader and was foolish enough to declare this ambition twice. On each occasion sharp reactions by his colleagues compelled him publicly to withdraw his demand. In truth, he wrecked the Hurriyat. Sadly, he is now a broken man in poor health and has all but withdrawn from politics. Two presidents of Pakistan discovered his limits. Farooq Laghari was taken aback at the residence of Pakistan’s high commissioner to India in New Delhi by how Geelani reportedly offered him sharp criticism of the apparel of Pakistan TV’s anchors. President Pervez Musharraf reprimanded Geelani when he took up Balochistan and North Waziristan.

On the wreckage of the Hurriyat, a diminutive Joint Resistance League was formed comprising Geelani, Yaseen Malik and Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, the most sensible of the lot. He is under house arrest still and was not invited to New Delhi.

Why has New Delhi taken the initiative now and what has it to offer to the Kashmiris after it wronged them in 2019?

Restoration of statehood had been offered by India since 2019. Restoration of Article 370 of the constitution, which was supposed to guarantee Kashmiris special autonomous status, is a different issue. Its abrogation had been demanded by the BJP. The government received public support in 2019 when it [abrogated Article 370](https://www.dawn.com/news/1498227) though its action was shamelessly unconstitutional and the reasons for it were patently dishonest.

The Congress chief Sonia Gandhi has her ears transfixed to the ground and her eyes fi­­x­­ed on Hindu voters. She is desperate about retaining her diminishing flock. It is difficult to see how any Kashmiri with self-respect can possibly support the abrogation of Article 370.

**Read:** [*Modi’s Kashmir moot*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1631549/modis-kashmir-moot)

But apart from Article 370, New Delhi’s real concern is with fresh determinations of assembly constituencies so that Jammu acquires a majority in the assembly. This is Narendra Modi’s game — settle the Kashmir dispute once and for all ‘on the ground’, as they use the expression. Next confront Pakistan with a fait accompli — ‘see it is all over. We have nothing to talk about now’.

There is a fatal flaw in this cynical reasoning. There is a powerful pro-Pakistan constituency in Kashmir. Mufti Mohammed Sayeed could not resist [paying tribute to Pakistan](https://www.dawn.com/news/1166786) the day he took the oath of office as chief minister in December 2014 in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He was riled because Mufti Sayeed thanked Pakistan for allowing elections to be held in Kashmir. This revealed a lot more than he intended.

The question is: what result can an open conference of 14 parties possibly yield? The centre has consistently kept its stooges in Kashmir well supplied with funds. Among the invitees to the New Delhi conference were at least two who are notorious as New Delhi’s paid agents.

It may be recalled that the cruel blow which New Delhi inflicted on Kashmir had three dimensions — abrogation of Article 370, wipe out of Kashmir’s identity and delimitation of assembly constituencies.

It is the last which lies at the core of New Delhi’s foul deed. On June 22, Mehbooba Muf­­ti, president of the People’s Democratic Party said: “Delimitation is part of the same process used to break the state. This wasn’t reorganisation, it was disorganisation. That way it is illegal and done with a certain purpose.”

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