[**Spectacles of abusive states**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1755212/spectacles-of-abusive-states)

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INDIA is going ahead this week with a G20 tourism officials’ meeting in the widely disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir. Countries have done worse. The US staged its first summer Olympics in 1904 when it embraced racial segregation big time and held three more Games before it would formally annul the despicable laws in 1965. Later it held its Winter Olympics in 2002, a year after launching the occupation of Afghanistan, but not before boycotting the Moscow Olympics of 1980 over exactly the same transgression by the Soviet Union. The story of the Führer hosting the Berlin Olympics to normalise Nazi rule in 1936 is all too well known.

Be that as it may, some of the invitees won’t be there at India’s Srinagar jamboree. China has expressed reservations about the meeting in a region where it has an unsettled boundary stand-off with India. Pakistan, though not a member of the G20 group, has actively opposed the venue, and it must be pleased that Saudi Arabia and Turkiye have heeded its opposition and decided to stay away. Egypt, a special invitee to the G20 meeting by India, has also reportedly backed out from the Kashmir leg of the meetings. It must be said of Egypt’s absence, however, that if it is really concerned for the Kashmiris, it should show some spine for the Palestinians too in its neighbourhood, whose homeland has been usurped by its strange ally.

Let’s pull back a bit for a wider view of the issue at hand for India. It is difficult not to see how Prime Minister Narendra Modi is making a huge production of hosting a routine G20 presidency this year. And Pakistan, instead of focusing on the violent political convulsions rocking the country, appears to be excessively distracted by the fanfare in the neighbourhood. Does anyone remember any fuss displayed by Indonesia when it held the G20 presidency last year? Or are the Italians going gaga over the prospects of being the hosts next year?

It has been said that by hosting an officials’ meeting in Kashmir, India is seeking to normalise a ‘might-is-right’ rule in the region. If it truly feels that everything was normal after the 2019 vivisection of the region and its brutal assault on human rights, on the Kashmiri media in particular, India should have considered hosting the G20 summit in Srinagar. How many countries would send their leaders is a moot point. Despite being the world’s most heavily militarised zone, India has thrown a further multilayered security blanket around the venue abutting Srinagar’s scenic Dal Lake. Hopefully, the meeting would pass without incident. But the security blanket and ceaseless raids on the homes of civilians is hardly evidence of all being hunky-dory for the abused and violated Kashmiris.

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Sprucing up its image with visitors is of course not a preserve of the current government alone. Yet, it could not be a coincidence that the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights has urged state governments to map the hotspots of street children and return them to their parents or send them to children’s homes.

Kolkata-based Telegraph newspaper quotes social activists as saying that the ‘ad hoc’ measure was meant to hide the pitiable condition of Indian street children from G20 delegates. Representatives of member countries and special invitees have been increasingly visiting India in the run-up to the G20 summit, scheduled in New Delhi in September. The 2011 population census counted 413,000 beggars and vagrants in India, with the northern states topping the chart. Two other excessive actions by the state come to mind.

A half-kilometre brick wall was hastily erected in Gujarat state ahead of a visit by Donald Trump. It was reported that the wall was built to block the view of a slum inhabited by more than 2,000 people. Trump was in Ahmedabad during a two-day trip to India to attend an event called ‘Namaste Trump’ at a cricket stadium. Authorities also served eviction notices to 45 families living in another slum area near the cricket stadium.

Under the Congress party’s watch, earlier, the staging of Commonwealth Games witnessed a similar assault on the people. Government bulldozers demolished countless homes and put up hoardings where they couldn’t, to hide shanties. A bulldozer came to a school after yoga and before English and Hindi lessons. The children and their teachers had three hours to clear the classrooms. By mid-afternoon, the Yamuna Riverbank school was rubble, the Guardian reported.

“They told us we were a security risk, so we had to go,” the head-teacher, Parminder Kaur Somal, told the paper. “All my children were crying. I don’t know how we can be a threat to anyone.”

Sheila Dikshit, Congress party’s chief minister of Delhi at the time, repeatedly claimed she wanted the city to be “world class”. There was even talk of trying to host the Olympics. The other day, reports said Mr Modi had planned to hold a Quad meeting, presumably on the margins of the G20 summit. If so, it would be interesting to see China’s reaction to the proposal. Time was when India stood for higher principles, and it spoke for the Global South rather than easing itself into the frame with the rich and powerful. One can recall how rather than being mealy-mouthed on a matter of principle, India wouldn’t refrain from speaking bluntly to its close friends.

As the Modi government looks for excuses to justify its questionable deals with a widely censured friend, sample how Indira Gandhi, a very close ally of Moscow did not baulk when speaking her mind in 1983 against the Soviet invasion of Moscow.

“We are particularly concerned at the vulnerability of small states to external attack and interference in their affairs.” That was Mrs Gandhi reading the declaration of the Commonwealth summit in Goa, a year before her death. And the Global South applauded.

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