

Lend Lease 21 - India - Jan 26, 2020

- **India Overview:** Hindutva out of control, CAA, Kashmir, internet blackout, general strike
- <https://english.manoramaonline.com/news/kerala/2020/01/26/kerala-ldf-to-form-620-km-human-chain-against-caa.html>
 - CM Pinarayi Vijayan "Peaceful protests are possible when the entire population unites. We can take pride in this fact. The participation in the human chain has been overwhelming. The message is clear- we do not accept CAA
- <https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/16/asia/modi-protests-india-analysis-intl-hnk/index.html>
 - But one thing is for sure: over the past year, the BJP's political footprint has shrunk. At its peak in 2018, the BJP ruled 21 of the country's 29 states, either alone or with allies. After a series of blows in recent state elections, the BJP has been left with 15 states under its control.
 - Modi managed to secure a second term despite the economy growing at its slowest pace in six years, and rising unemployment. India's current unemployment rate **sits at 7.6%** -- up from 6.9% in January last year.
 - And people aren't happy. On January 8, thousands of workers linked to national trade unions took part in strikes across the country in protest against privatization and the impact of the economic slowdown on jobs.
 - A day earlier, **the government cut its growth forecast** for this financial year to 5% -- the slowest pace in 11 years -- which it blamed on lower demand and private investment.
- It was surprisingly hard to find articles from non-socialist/communist news sources about the Indian general strike, but the Italian publication Asia News reported 250 million workers on strike organized by 10 unions:
<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Worlds-largest-strike-stops-India:-250-million-workers-out-against-Modi-48969.html>
 - Also found an article from a newspaper in Kerala, the Indian state dominated for decades by democratically elected communists and powerful trade unions:
<https://english.mathrubhumi.com/news/kerala/all-india-general-strike-called-by-trade-unions-begins-1.4425987> they emphasize that it took all the way from September to January to plan and execute the nationwide general strike
 - A Pakistani newspaper freelance columnist noted that literally more people participated in the general strike than the number of people who voted for the BJP government
<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/599609-the-indian-general-strike> *"The January 8 strike was one of the greatest shows of strength, power and solidarity by Indian workers. The 24-hour strike shut down banking, transport, retail, public services, construction and industry in many parts of the country. Workers blocked highways and railroad tracks -- with their bodies, barricades, and burning tires."*
- https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/indias-iconic-democracy-feels-like-it-is-under-siege/2020/01/24/93e98e3e-3a49-11ea-a1ff-c48c1d59a4a1_story.html#comments-wrapper
 - But there still may be reason to hope that India, long a political role model for the developing world, has not lost its democratic backbone.
 - In recent weeks, the new citizenship rules have provoked spontaneous and widening protests by a cross-section of Indians, including students at the

country's leading university, in defense of both Muslim minority rights and India's tolerant democracy.

- Last week, news reports showed a young woman, her arm in a cast and her head bandaged after a beating by Hindu nationalists, defiantly addressing a crowd in New Delhi. "Even if you beat us, we won't step back," she cried. "Long live the revolution."
- Maybe the India I once knew is alive and kicking after all.
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-50670393>
 - Now there will be an exception for members of six religious minority communities - Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian - if they can prove that they are from Pakistan, Afghanistan or Bangladesh. They will only have to live or work in India for six years to be eligible for citizenship by naturalisation, the process by which a non-citizen acquires the citizenship or nationality of that country.
- <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/nrc-and-the-citizenship-bill-are-the-greatest-threat-to-indian-democracy-today/cid/1695315>
 - But the normalization of mob violence against minorities can only be a preliminary to the the real substance of a Hindu *rashtra*, namely the legitimization of formal discrimination against them. However satisfying the performative savagery of lynch mobs is to bigots, for showing Muslims their place, mob violence is, by its nature, episodic and imprecise. The killing and brutalization of Dalits and tribals in the course of such violence are a form of collateral damage that the saffron brotherhood would like to avoid, given its avowed aim of consolidating every section of Hindu society into a single Hindu nation.
 - The agenda of Modi's second term is the institutionalization of discrimination. Central to the *sangh parivar*'s project is the goal, beloved of all committed majoritarian leaders from Erdogan to Orbán, of reducing minorities to second-class citizens. In formally secular, constitutional democracies like India, this is a complicated business because you need special majorities in Parliament and the acquiescence of the Supreme Court in what would be a flagrant violation of the basic structure of the Constitution.
 - This is where the BJP's *brahmastra*, the citizenship (amendment) bill, comes into play. This bill, which was passed by the Lok Sabha but not the Rajya Sabha before the elections, sets up a religious test for citizenship. It seeks to give all illegal migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan amnesty and an accelerated path to citizenship, except for Muslims. This would be straightforwardly unconstitutional, but the bill dignifies this discrimination with the claim that India owes religious minorities refuge and since these three countries are Muslim countries, it stands to reason that their Muslims cannot claim to be persecuted religious minorities. Ergo, India doesn't owe them the same duty of care.
 - Couched in the language of refuge and seemingly directed at foreigners, the CAB's main purpose is the de-legitimization of Muslim citizenship. This is why Myanmar, a country bordering India, was left out of the group of nations specified in the bill and this is why Afghanistan, a country that doesn't share a frontier with India, was included. To include Myanmar, which the logic of the bill demands,

given its emphasis on giving refuge to religious minorities in India's neighbourhood, would mean granting amnesty to Rohingyas

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- In Assam, the NRC's processes have so far yielded four million residents who are deemed not to be citizens. A substantial part of this number is non-Muslim but were the CAB to be passed, these non-Muslim illegals would cease to be of concern to Indian authorities because the CAB would effectively amnesty them. It isn't hard to see why the BJP is enthusiastic about a process that would potentially focus on weeding out only Muslim illegals for internment or deportation.
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- So if the CAB becomes the law of the land, the immigration authorities, the police and every government institution would be legally justified in focusing on asking Muslims (and only Muslims) to prove that they were true citizens. Muslims as a class could then be legitimately profiled because the law of the land requires them to be. Would such a law survive the scrutiny of the Supreme Court? The obvious answer is no, because it sets up a religious test for citizenship, but the court has handed down strange decisions in the past — not least the 'Hindutva' judgment. The government will argue that the CAB doesn't discriminate against Muslims qua Muslims, that it is merely designed to separate real Indian Muslims from illegal Muslim foreigners masquerading as Indian Muslims.
- Should the CAB pass judicial muster, and once the NRC takes on an all-India aspect, this institutional pincer will result in an Indian Inquisition designed to tell true citizens from false ones. And since the rules of the game will have been rigged by the new citizenship law, only Muslims will potentially be false citizens. This destabilisation of Muslim citizenship, this onus on all Muslims, potentially, to prove that they are 'true' citizens, this opportunity for not just the state but every landlord, vigilante, employer and busybody to ask Muslims to 'prove' themselves, will make second class citizenship for Muslims, the sangh's holy grail, a reality. That will be the institutional inauguration of a Hindu *rashtra*, the firm foundation of an Indian fascism.
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- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/india-soul-protests-mark-republic-day-celebrations-200126140155387.html>
 - Indian President [Ram Nath Kovind](#) hosted his Brazilian counterpart [Jair Bolsonaro](#), the Republic Day chief guest this year, as they watched the annual parade aimed at showcasing India's military might and cultural diversity.
 - Blocking highway
 - "Our constitution which was adopted on this day 70 years ago is the soul of our nation and we are out to protect that soul," she

said. "It's shameful that after 73 years of independence, our focus should be on providing jobs to people, not to prove our citizenship."

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- <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/25/798858125/our-democracy-is-in-danger-muslims-in-india-say-police-target-them-with-violence>
 - On Dec. 15, Renna and hundreds of her classmates were marching and waving protest banners on the campus of Jamia Millia Islamia, a historically Muslim university, when they came under attack by police. They had avoided a barricade and taken another route "because we wanted to make it a peaceful kind of thing," she recalls. "But what we saw next was complete brutality. Police started chasing the protesters and beating them up."
 - [Video of those clashes](#) went viral. In one, Renna, wearing a maroon headscarf, is seen screaming "Back off!" at police and wagging her finger at officers as they beat a male student with batons. More than 100 people were injured that day.

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- https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-51203104?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.com/news/world/asia/india&link_location=live-reporting-story
- <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-citizenship-protests/indias-republic-day-celebrations-marked-with-protests-blasts-idUSKBN1ZP0J4>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/12/31/india-thousands-are-protesting-new-citizenship-law-here-are-things-know/>
- https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/modis-radical-move-on-kashmir-takes-india-into-uncharted-territory/2019/08/08/7a533130-b94a-11e9-8e83-4e6687e99814_story.html

In a single day this week, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi undid nearly seven decades of history.

He altered India's relationship with its only majority-Muslim region, revoking a measure of autonomy that had been in place since the 1950s and stripping Kashmir of its status as a state. His government instituted an unheard-of communications blackout in Kashmir, affecting millions of people.

For Modi, revoking the special status of Kashmir is the fulfillment of a [long-held demand](#) of Hindu nationalists, who view India as a fundamentally Hindu nation rather than the secular republic envisioned by its founders.

For the governing Bharatiya Janata Party, however, the move is viewed as a historic victory. For decades, members of the BJP and its predecessors have pushed against the unique status accorded to the state of Jammu and Kashmir by a clause in India's constitution known as Article 370.

Abolishing the powers of the clause is “one of the cornerstones of their ideology,” said Saba Naqvi, author of a book on the recent history of the BJP. The party has long opposed the notion of a “Muslim-majority state with special privileges.”

While the BJP has long opposed Article 370, this week’s moves went still further. The government lopped off Ladakh, a mountainous and predominantly Buddhist area of Jammu and Kashmir, into a separate territory. Then it stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its statehood, turning it instead into a “union territory” — a second-class status in which Kashmir has less power to run its own affairs. Experts said they could not recall any precedent for demoting an Indian state to a union territory.

- https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/top-indian-official-abruptly-cancels-meeting-with-congressional-leaders-over-kashmir-criticisms/2019/12/19/29b023ea-2291-11ea-9c2b-060477c13959_story.html

India’s external affairs minister abruptly canceled a meeting with senior members of Congress this week after U.S. lawmakers refused demands to exclude a congresswoman who has criticized the Indian government’s policies in Kashmir, said congressional aides familiar with the matter.

The decision demonstrates India’s sensitivity over the Kashmir issue as Prime Minister Narendra Modi defends moving in troops, imposing curfews, and [cutting off mobile phone and Internet access](#) in India’s only majority-Muslim state

The Internet shutdown entered its 134th day on Monday, making it the longest shutdown of its kind imposed in a democracy, [according](#) to the Internet advocacy group Access Now

Indian officials informed the committee that Jaishankar would not meet with the lawmakers if the group included Jayapal, who is sponsoring a resolution urging India to lift communications restrictions, restore the Internet and preserve religious freedom.

Engel refused, and the Indians pulled out, Jayapal told The Washington Post.

“My constituents care about the human rights situation, thousands of people detained without charges, and a communication crackdown that makes daily life more difficult,” Jayapal said. “It has been extremely brutal for families in Kashmir.”

- <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/scaachikoul/kashmir-hindus-muslims-india-revocation-modi>

- India and Pakistan have been fighting over Kashmir for my lifetime and my parents’ lifetimes. I’m not arrogant enough to think that it’ll get solved in 2020. What I’d actually like is for the unafflicted in this conflict, people like myself, young first- and second-generation kids, to recognize the legacy of trauma that we’re encouraging. I’m not asking for an answer or a definitive

explanation. All I really want, to close out this terrible, year, is for my family to acknowledge a hard, complex, and unfair fact: We may have been the hunted, sure, but now we're the hunters. We know better, but we're not doing better.

- <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/south-asian-americans-protest-india-s-citizenship-bill-n1118576>
 - “We are drawing a line in the sand: The diaspora will not be complicit with genocide,” Soundararajan said, fearing the Indian government’s law will cause even more violence among its citizens than it already has.
 - Activists have said that the Sept. 29 “Howdy Modi” event seemed to many Indian-Americans to be a clear endorsement of Hindu nationalism by the Trump administration. In turn, the event also appeared to be an endorsement on the part of Indian Americans in attendance of the anti-black and anti-immigrant rhetoric Trump employs, Soundararajan said.
- Any time the Modi government doesn’t like internet protests, they order companies to suspend internet services to large geographical areas, affecting millions of people, under Public Order laws: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-50819905>
 - The government also blacked out Kashmir’s internet for 8 million people for about half a year, only restoring partial access to 301 approved websites (with only 2G-level mobile speeds allowed) this weekend: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/26/world/asia/kashmir-internet-shutdown-india.html>
 - There were 134 internet shutdowns in India in 2019 alone
 - They also banned Uttar Pradesh internet to stop protests over the citizenship law and there are 200 million people in Uttar Pradesh alone: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/internet-banned-india-uttar-pradesh-anger-killings-191227060434667.html>
- RSS: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashtriya_Swayamsevak_Sangh
- Chris Hooks on the Howdy Modi rally in Texas: <https://www.texasmonthly.com/politics/houston-indian-american-community-modi-rally/>