

Modi Crosses the Rubicon in Kashmir


New Delhi Upends the Status Quo in the Disputed Territory

By Sumit Ganguly August 8, 2019



Activists from the student wing of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) celebrate after the government scrapped the special status for Kashmir in New Delhi, India, in August 2019

Anushree Fadnavis / Reuters

 n August 5, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in New Delhi announced the

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government planned to strip Jammu and Kashmir of its statehood, creating instead two “union territories” (one in the Buddhist region of Ladakh and another in the regions of Jammu and Kashmir, which have Hindu and Muslim majorities, respectively). Both the lower and upper houses of the Indian Parliament passed legislation enacting these changes the following day.

If the government of Narendra Modi can follow through on its plan, Kashmir will cease to be an autonomous state within India. The abolition of Article 370 has long been a staple of the Hindu nationalist BJP’s political platform. In its 2014 election manifesto, the BJP repeated its old ambition of getting rid of the article, but promised to “discuss this with all stakeholders.” That commitment to consultation vanished in its 2019 manifesto. With another clear-cut majority in Parliament, the party is emboldened to make good on its electoral promise.

Article 370 governed India’s relations with its only Muslim-majority state. The article had limited the application of India’s constitution in Jammu and Kashmir and also prevented non-Kashmiris from easily becoming permanent residents of the state. Its abrogation upends the status quo in the disputed territory and will lead to a major transformation of conditions on the ground.

A PRINCELY INHERITANCE

The articles that preserved Kashmir’s special status predate Indian independence and hark back to the time when Kashmir was a nominally independent princely state. In 1927, Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, passed an ordinance that prohibited non-Kashmiris from acquiring property in the state. This move was precipitated by an influx

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