

India Clamps Down On Kashmir After Separatist Leader's Death

By GERRY SHIH

NEW DELHI

Syed Ali Shah Geelani, a leader of Kashmir's separatist movement who vexed the New Delhi government for decades with his uncompromising politics, died Wednesday night (Sept. 1, 2021), prompting Indian authorities to deploy troops around the restive region and cut Internet access.

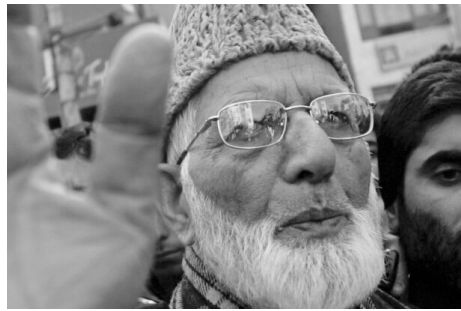
Geelani, who had been struggling with kidney disease and dementia, died at his home in Srinagar, where he had been under house arrest for years, said his son Naseem Geelani and Syed Omar, a family caretaker. He was 91.

After word of Geelani's death spread, local police sealed his street and whisked away his body in the early hours of Thursday morning. Geelani was not permitted to be buried at the martyr's graveyard, but was hastily interred at a local cemetery before sunrise and under close police watch, according to the family.

By early Thursday, rows of local shops remained closed on city streets patrolled by paramilitary troops, while cellphone service and roads between cities were cut off to private cars, according to local residents. Indian authorities often cut Internet access in Kashmir to forestall publicThe sensitivity around Geelani's death reflects the enduring tensions in Indian-administered Kashmir, a Muslim-majority region that has bristled under New Delhi's rule and lies at the heart of the explosive territorial dispute between India and Pakistan that has been unresolved since the 1947 Partition of India. Both countries control parts of the region but claim its entirety, and they have fought two wars and countless other proxy battles over it.

Geelani, who favored Kashmir's accession to Pakistan, became the face of secessionists, especially in the latter decades of his life. He led vast strikes and shutdowns that forced the region to a standstill and led protests against the Indian military presence and their alleged crimes against local civilians.

Revered in Kashmir, supported in



REUTERS/Fayaz Kabli/File Photo

Syed Ali Shah Geelani, chairman of the hardliner faction of Kashmir's All Parties Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference, talks to the media as Indian police detain his supporters after he addressed a news conference in Srinagar October 19, 2009.

Pakistan and reviled in India, he was elected to Jammu and Kashmir's legislative assembly in 1972, 1977 and 1987, served lengthy prison sentences and was charged with nearly 60 counts of political crimes over five decades in politics.

In the 1990s, as Kashmir became gripped by violent insurgency, Geelani helped found the Hurriyat Conference, an amalgamation of groups seeking autonomy in Kashmir. When the front's more moderate leaders advocated dialogue with the New Delhi government, he splintered off and continued to advocate a rigid stance that garnered adulation from a younger generation of Kashmiris but flustered his more pragmatic peers.

In 2001, Geelani was a rare public voice who objected to a proposal made by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf to Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to withdraw both Indian and Pakistani troops from Kashmir and loosen border controls. The attempt at a peace deal won approval from many Kashmiri leaders but not Geelani, who denounced it as a diplomatic "trick" between two countries. The proposal ultimately fell apart.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan announced Pakistan would observe a day of mourning. "We in Pakistan salute his courageous struggle and remember his words: 'Hum Pakistani

hain aur Pakistan Humara hai,' " Khan said Thursday on Twitter. The quote translates to: "We are Pakistani and Pakistan is ours."

Meanwhile in Indian-administered Kashmir, the region's police chief, Vijay Kumar, urged Geelani's supporters to refrain from gathering at his home and said the Internet would be cut and a curfew enforced. Local media organizations were also forbidden from publishing, said Tahir Bhat, an editor at Kashmir Life. Bashir Ahmad, a public school teacher in Kupwara near the Line of Control that separates Indian- and Pakistani-administered Kashmir, said police on the Indian side were not allowing cars to enter towns.

When reached by telephone on Thursday, Naseem Geelani, 52, said the police had pushed the family to bury his father before dawn to prevent a breakdown in law and order. "It was not an honorable way to treat him," said Geelani, a professor in Srinagar who has been repeatedly probed by Indian investigators for suspected ties to Pakistan-based terrorist groups but never charged.

Indian officials fear Geelani's death could provoke a response similar to that of Burhan Wani, a militant leader - and social media star - whose death in a July 2016 gunfight with Indian troops sparked a wave of violent protests across Kashmir that led to dozens of deaths and did not subside for months. Geelani was under house arrest during those months but continued to rally supporters by phone.

India shuts down Internet access in the name of public security more often than any other country in the world. In 2020, India accounted for 155 instances of intentional Internet disruptions, followed by Yemen, at six, according to the digital rights group Access Now.

Kashmir was again put under a lengthy lockdown without Internet access in 2019, when the Indian parliament revoked the region's long-standing semiautonomous status in a move that Indian officials said would bring greater stability and integration with the rest of the country.

THE WASHINGTON POST

Pollution Likely To Cut 9 Years Of Life Expectancy Of 40% Of Indians

NEW DELHI

Air pollution is likely to reduce the life expectancy of about 40% of Indians by more than nine years, according to a report released by a U.S. research group on Wednesday.

More than 480 million people living in the vast swathes of central, eastern and northern India, including the capital, New Delhi, endure significantly high pollution levels, said the report prepared by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC).

"Alarming, India's high levels of air pollution have expanded geographically over time," the EPIC report said.

For example, air quality has significantly worsened in the western state of Maharashtra and the central state of Madhya Pradesh, it said.

Lauding India's National Clean Air Program (NCAP), launched in 2019 to rein in dangerous pollution levels, the EPIC report said "achieving and sustaining" the NCAP goals would raise the country's overall life expectancy by 1.7 years and that of New Delhi 3.1 years.

The NCAP aims to reduce pollution in the 102 worst-affected cities by 20%-30% by 2024 by ensuring cuts in industrial emissions and vehicular exhaust, introducing stringent rules for transport fuels and biomass burning and reduce dust pollution. It will also entail better monitoring systems. (<https://reut.rs/3sZXYTE>)

New Delhi was the world's most polluted capital for the third straight year in 2020, according to IQAir, a Swiss group that measures air quality levels based on the concentration of lung-damaging airborne particles known as PM2.5.

Last year, New Delhi's 20 million residents, who breathed some of the cleanest air on record in the summer because of coronavirus lockdown curbs, battled toxic air in winter following a sharp increase in farm residue burning in the nearby states of Punjab and Haryana.

According to the EPIC's findings, neighbouring Bangladesh could raise average life expectancy by 5.4 years if the country improves air quality to levels recommended by the World Health Organization.

To arrive at the life expectancy number, EPIC compared the health of people exposed to different levels of long-term air pollution and applied the results to various places in India and elsewhere.

BY REUTERS

India Gives Biological E Nod To Study Its Covid-19 Vaccine In Children, Teens

BENGALURU

India has granted homegrown drugmaker Biological E permission to begin midstage studies of its COVID-19 vaccine in children and adolescents, according to an official statement on Friday.

The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) gave the approval to the Hyderabad-based pharmaceutical company on Sept. 1, the statement <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1751664> said.

The company will study the safety and tolerability of its vaccine, CORBEVAX, in this population, it added.

So far, six vaccines have been authorized for use in the country



REUTERS/Dado Ruvic/Illustration/File Photo

3D-printed toy figurines, a syringe and a vial labelled "coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine" are seen in front of India flag in this illustration taken May 4, 2021.

where only about 11.28% of the entire population has been fully vaccinated so far, according to Johns Hopkins data <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/india>.

Of these, the COVID-19 shots for adults by Bharat Biotech and Zydus Cadila have been indigenously developed.

In late August, India also approved Cadila's COVID-19 vaccine, the world's first DNA shot against the coronavirus, for emergency use in children aged 12 years and above.

Biological E. is also running a late-stage trial of its vaccine in adults.

BY REUTERS