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K O V I E W

Release All Leaders

Government on Wednesday shifted the detained People's Conference leader Sajjad Lone and PDP youth wing president Waheed Parra to their residences from the MLA hostel. They will continue to remain under house arrest. Both leaders were placed in detention in the wake of the revocation of Article 370 in August 2019. Lone had strongly opposed centre's moves to tamper with J&K's status. On the eve of New Delhi's August 5 move, Lone was part of the all-party meet in Srinagar that had resolved to jointly fight the dilution of J&K autonomy.

After the shifting of Lone and Parra, thirteen political leaders remain under detention at the MLA hostel. Earlier on Tuesday, the J&K Government released two leaders — former PDP lawmaker from Wachi in south Kashmir Aijaz Ahmad Mir and Shaheel Ahmed Qalandar, a former president of the Federation Chamber of Industries, Kashmir. Since Sunday, a total of eight leaders have been released from preventive custody.

The successive release of the leaders reflects the growing confidence of the state government in the improvement of the situation in the erstwhile state. It sees the less likelihood of the situation tipping into turmoil.

At the same time, former chief ministers Dr Farooq Abdullah, Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti remain in detention. Senior Abdullah is the only mainstream politician against whom Public Safety Act (PSA) was slapped in September for a period of three months, which was renewed on December 16 last.

As things stand, Government shows little indication that it will free the three former chief ministers anytime soon. This has drawn severe international criticism. United States has time and again called for their release. But the government doesn't see their freedom in its interest and apprehends it might disrupt peace in the Valley. It would be interesting to see how long more the government waits before it takes a call on their release.

So far the leaders who have been released have maintained silence on Article 370, lending some credence to the reports that they have signed bonds to get their freedom. However, it is only when the top leaders are released that we can expect to get some sense of how they will respond to the altered state of affairs. But considering all these leaders have invariably called for peace in the Valley, the government should release them and let them put their point of view before the people. Not doing so, will only prolong the current uncertainty, no matter how normal the Valley might appear on the outside.

OTHER OPINON

Virus Across Borders

This week Kerala reported its third case of coronavirus, a student of a university in Wuhan, the Chinese city at the centre of the viral outbreak that has spread globally in less than a month. The student who hails from Kasargode is out of danger, and so are the other two Kerala residents who had contracted the infection in Wuhan. The state government, however, continues to be vigilant. It has placed more than 2,000 people under observation, most of whom are under home quarantine. Another 654 people, seven of them Maldivian nationals, have been placed under quarantine at Manesar in Haryana by the Union government. On Tuesday, the foreign ministry temporarily suspended the e-visa facility for Chinese travellers to the country. It also canceled visas for Chinese and foreigners who have visited the country in the last two weeks, eliciting criticism from the Chinese ambassador to India.

The WHO has recommended against any travel or trade restriction. However, at least eight countries, including Russia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, have imposed visa restrictions on people travelling to and from China. The US has announced a 14-day travel ban on all visitors from China, irrespective of their nationality. Public health experts, however, caution that such bans can prove counterproductive in containing viral outbreaks in the long run. They point out that in times when viruses increasingly cross national borders, travel bans could hinder sharing information, make it harder to trace the source of an affliction and fuel drug shortages — a warning that should be salutary for India, which imports more than 60 per cent of its bulk drugs from China.

According to the WHO, coronavirus belongs to a family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold and flu to SARS. The virus responsible for the current outbreak is not as lethal as the one that caused the SARS outbreak of 2002-2003 — it has a fatality rate of less than 2 per cent as compared to the SARS's mortality rate of nearly 10 per cent. But there is a growing consensus among scientists that it's more infectious than the pathogen that caused the 2002-2003 pandemic. A more accurate understanding of the virus will only emerge when its capacity to mutate is ascertained and knowledge about its potency across a variety of environmental conditions is shared. Sharing knowledge about the coronavirus's different genetic strains will be critical to the global efforts to develop a vaccine against the pathogen. In a globalised world, the urgency of such preventive steps cannot be overstated. Quarantines and travel bans can, at best, be short-term responses.

The Indian Express

How Is Washington
'Liberating' Free Countries

ANDRE VLTCHKE

There are obviously some serious linguistic issues and disagreements between the West and the rest of the world. Essential terms like "freedom", "democracy", "liberation", even "terrorism", are all mixed up and confused; they mean something absolutely different in New York, London, Berlin, and in the rest of the world.

Before we begin analyzing, let us recall that countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the United States, as well as other Western nations, have been spreading colonialist terror to basically all corners of the world. And in the process, they developed effective terminology and propaganda, which has been justifying, even glorifying acts such as looting, torture, rape and genocides. Basically, first Europe, and later North America literally "got away with everything, including mass murder". The native people of Americas, Africa and Asia have been massacred, their voices silenced. Slaves were imported from Africa. Great Asian nations, such as China, what is now "India" and Indonesia, got occupied, divided and thoroughly plundered.

And all was done in the name of spreading religion, "liberating" people from themselves, as well as "civilizing them".

Nothing has really changed. To date, people of great nations with thousands of years of culture, are treated like infants; humiliated, and as if they were still in kindergarten, told how to behave, and how to think.

Sometimes if they "misbehave", they get slapped. Periodically they get slapped so hard, that it takes them decades, even centuries, to get back to their feet. It took China decades to recover from the period of "humiliation". India and Indonesia are presently trying to recuperate, from the colonial barbarity, and from, in the case of Indonesia, the 1965 U.S.-administered fascist coup.

But if you go back to the archives in London, Brussels or Berlin, all the monstrous acts of colonialism, are justified by lofty terms. Western powers are always "fighting for justice"; they are "enlightening" and "liberating". No regrets, no shame and no second thoughts. They are always correct! Like now; precisely as it is these days.

Presently, the West is trying to overthrow governments in several independent countries, on different continents. From Bolivia (the country has been already destroyed) to Venezuela, from Iraq to Iran, to China and Russia. The more successful these countries get, the better they serve their people, the more vicious the attacks from abroad are, the tougher the embargos and sanctions imposed on them are. The happier the citizens are, the more grotesque



the propaganda disseminated from the West gets.

In Hong Kong, some young people, out of financial interest, or out of ignorance, keep shouting: "President Trump, Please Liberate Us!" Or similar, but equally treasonous slogans. They are waving U.S., U.K. and German flags. They beat up people who try to argue with them, including their own Police Force.

So, let us see, how the United States really "liberates" countries, in various pockets of the world.

Let us visit Iran, a country which (you'd never guess it if consuming only Western mass media) is, despite the vicious embargos and sanctions, on the verge of the "highest human development index bracket" (UNDP). How is it possible? Simple. Because Iran is a socialist country (socialism with the Iranian characteristics). It is also an internationalist nation which is fighting against Western imperialism. It helps many occupied and attacked states on our planet, including Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia (before), Syria, Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Iraq, to name just a few.

So, what is the West doing? It is trying to ruin it, by all means; ruin all good will and progress. It is starving Iran through sanctions, it finances and encourages its "opposition", as it does in China, Russia and Latin America. It is trying to destroy it.

Then, it just bombs their convoy in neighboring Iraq, killing its brave commander, General Soleimani. And, as if it was not horrid enough, it turns the tables around, and starts threatening Teheran with more sanctions, more attacks, and even with the destruction of its cultural sites.

Iran, under attack, confused, shot down, by mistake, a Ukrainian passenger jet. It immediately apologized, in horror, offering compensation. The U.S. straightway began digging into the wound. It started to provoke (like in Hong Kong) young

people. The British ambassador, too, got involved!

As if Iran and the rest of the world should suddenly forget that during its attack on Iraq, more than 3 decades ago, Washington actually shot down an Iranian wide-body passenger plane (Iran Air flight 655, an Airbus-300), on a routine flight from Bandar Abbas to Dubai. In an "accident", 290 people, among them 66 children, lost their lives. That was considered "war collateral".

Iranian leaders then did not demand "regime change" in Washington. They were not paying for riots in New York or Chicago.

As China is not doing anything of that nature, now.

The "Liberation" of Iraq (in fact, brutal sanctions, bombing, invasion and occupation) took more than a million Iraqi lives, most of them, those of women and children. Presently, Iraq has been plundered, broken into pieces, and on its knees.

Is this the kind of "liberation" that some of the Hong Kong youngsters really want?

No? But if not, is there any other performed by the West, in modern history? Washington is getting more and more aggressive, in all parts of the world.

It also pays more and more for collaboration.

And it is not shy to inject terrorist tactics into allied troops, organizations and non-governmental organizations. Hong Kong is no exception.

Iran, Iraq, Syria, Russia, China, Venezuela, but also many other countries, should be carefully watching and analyzing each and every move made by the United States. The West is perfecting tactics on how to liquidate all opposition to its dictates.

It is not called a "war", yet. But it is. People are dying. The lives of millions are being ruined.

China Daily

Doomsday Clocks and Apple Watches

JOHN ESKOW

When I was a kid in the 1950s, the clichéd way for magazine cartoonists to portray a "crazy man" was to show him carrying a picket sign that proclaimed The World Is Coming To An End!

Nowadays that same picket sign could signify the exact opposite—a sane person, soberly confronting our moment in history.

Apocalyptic visions are a glut on the market; mass culture might as well be one gigantic outlet mall along the highway called DYSTOPIAS 'R' US! And the price is always right, because the banners in the windows advertise a perpetual FIRE SALE; in dripping scarlet letters, they scream that EVERYTHING MUST GO!

We opiate ourselves with visions of Armageddon so that we don't have to see Flint, Michigan.

The zombies on TV seem "amazingly lifelike" compared to the ones on MSNBC.

And the dystopian fantasies beaming out from HBO are a relief from the dystopian realities beaming out from CNN.

Nuclear scientists and Rapture-ready preachers may not agree on much, but they'd both advise you to set your Doomsday Clock and your Apple watch to the same time—two minutes to midnight. Synchronize all devices to Dystopia Savings Time! It's obvious that the Lord Jehovah is about to do some serious smiting—He's warming up in His



celestial bullpen, getting ready, as the fastball pitchers say, to bring the heat—and though He doesn't really need our help, Mike Pompeo is happy to hurry things along. While the slack-jawed Democrats, trapped in their Russiagate Groundhog Day scenario, wake up every morning only to fall, yet again, for the endless three-card-monte game—doh, I was SURE the real bombshell was the one in the middle!—Pompeo, Pence & the rest of the Christian Salafists keep doing their best to wrestle the minute hand of Doomsday ever closer to midnight. Move the American embassy to Jerusalem? Absolutely! We have to bring on that last and glorious Tick of The Big Clock, when their Jewish homosexuals get what's comin' to them. "It's a never-

ending struggle, until The Rapture," big Mike told a Kansas congregation last year. "Be a part of it. Be in the fight."

I mean, for Christ's sake—literally—it's all been prophesized in The Book of Revelation. The Pencos and Pompos of this world see Donald Trump as a latterday King Cyrus, the sixth-century BC Persian emperor who liberated the Jews from Babylonian captivity. Last October, 1,200 movie theaters in America screened a film called The Trump Prophecy, which laid it all out. God, speaking through a retired firefighter, said: "I've chosen this man, Donald Trump, for such a time as this." Lance Wallnau, the self-proclaimed prophet and star of the movie, called Trump "God's Chaos Candidate".

And we've all heard Trump modestly acknowledge that he is, indeed, "the chosen one."

"Cyrus is the model for a nonbeliever appointed by God as a vessel for the purposes of the faithful," said Katherine Stewart, who writes extensively about the Christian right.

"She added that they welcome his readiness to break democratic norms to combat perceived threats to their values and way of life."

"The Christian nationalist movement is characterized by feelings of persecution and, to some degree, paranoia – a clear example is the idea that there is somehow a 'war on Christmas'," Stewart said. "People in those positions will often go for authoritarian leaders who will do whatever is necessary to fight for their cause."

So as the Lord works His many wonders via Trump/Cyrus, Mike Pence, and Mike Pompeo, sometimes even us heathens yearn for the End Times: how comforting to envision going out in one red-hot flash of Pompeii-an brimstone, a Rapture of volcanic power, instead of this long, slow slide into nothingness—a gray hell, engineered by morons.

And yet...
And yet...

We have to keep reminding ourselves:

They're stupider than we are.
And we have no choice: to quote Mike Pompeo himself, "be part of it. Be part of the fight."

Counterpunch