

Yes, You Can

Dear Friend,

India has always been a slow paced nation with little significance of deadlines. It takes decades to implement a policy, for a court case to be resolved and in some cases, even to pass a bill in Parliament. We have become so accustomed to this way of life that if something is done without years of deliberations and procrastination, it seems suspicious and even out of the line. This explains the criticism of opposition parties of Modi government's multiple fast paced decisions, with the latest being the abrogation of the essentials of Article 370. What multiple governments couldn't do for 70 years was done within 70 days of the second tenure of Modi government. Interestingly, even the harshest critics of the government aren't opposed to the decision to remove Article 370 per se, but are just 'concerned' about the decision being taken 'too quickly' or without deliberations. So lethargic has our attitude become that when a government takes a steadfast decision in a timely manner, we ask the question 'Why' instead of saying 'Why not?'

A 70-day solution to a 70-year old problem

All our governments since the first Union Government after independence have been battling with the 'Kashmir issue' without actually doing anything apart from passing it on to the successive governments as a tradition. While some had held talks, others had appointed special representatives; but none of them actually reached any conclusion. It reached a point where keeping the Kashmir issue alive was more useful than actually solving it. The cost of this sluggish attitude was thousands of lives and distrust amongst the Kashmiri people for their own national government. No lesser has been the financial burden on the government exchequer. According to the State budget for FY 2019-20 which was presented in December 2018, the State's gross expenditure was pegged at Rs. 88,911 crore, an increase of more than 10% over the previous fiscal. The Central Government's contribution in the form of transfers to the State and the State's share in the divisible pool will be equal to 55% of this amount. This heavy investment is considered necessary to foil the proxy war waged by Pakistan. During his Independence Day speech, the Prime Minister himself touched upon this point, saying "I urge businesses to come forward to develop the region, because we need to take its products across the world. Ladakh has a huge potential for eco and religious tourism, and it can also be a solar power hub."

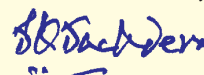
Article 370, which allowed the State to have its own constitution and make its own laws, could have been the key to the State's development since such autonomy gave a considerable free hand to the State to establish itself as an economic and tourist attraction, much like what Hong Kong and Singapore have been able to achieve. The humungous tourist potential of the State still remains untapped at large. Additionally, due to the hostile environment in the State, investments and employment opportunities have been missing. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) monthly time series data on unemployment, among all the States, Jammu & Kashmir had the highest monthly average unemployment rate of 15% between January 2016 and July 2019. It is more than double the national monthly average unemployment rate of 6.4% during the period. A declining investment scenario led to a drastic fall in the State's share in total new projects announced across the country from 4.3% in 2013-14 to 0.02% in 2018-19.

Problems require solutions and not just discussions

There is no denying the fact that the virtual abrogation of Article 370 alone isn't enough to normalise the situation in Kashmir. However, it is for the first time in over 7 decades that a government has shown the courage to take a concrete step in this regard, rather than just deliberating on the issue. Unless we take a decision and start moving in a certain direction, we would never know if we are right or wrong. Sticking to the starting line and deliberating on which road to take to reach the destination won't get us anywhere. What is even more appreciable is that a similar attitude has been shown by the Modi government on multiple other fronts. Be it the demonetisation decision, criminalising triple talaq, surgical strikes after Uri attack or the Balakot strikes, the Modi government has shown its strong resolve to take action, even if it means being criticised for not holding enough discussions with other political parties. The Prime Minister himself has been willing to lead from the front and present himself as the face of these changes rather than taking a back seat and wait for the things to play out themselves which is a welcome change in itself.

A lot still needs to be done to bring back normalcy into Kashmir. Winning the trust of the local people holds the key to bringing cheer in Kashmir. Although it won't be easy, it is reassuring to know that our elected government is determined to do what it takes to resolve difficult issues. Change takes place on the ground and not in conference halls or on the posh tables of discussion. It is time to get out of our rooms and hit the ground, as shown by our Prime Minister.

Yours sincerely,



(Surendra Kumar Sachdeva)



MODI PROVES 'WHERE THERE IS A WILL, THERE IS A WAY'