

Liberty Watch India: September 2019

Issue #4

In Assam, the publication of the final National Register of Citizens (NRC) list has left [1.9 million people](#) one perilous step closer to being stripped of their citizenship. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has [condemned](#) the move as an “enormous blow to global efforts to eradicate statelessness”, and Genocide Watch has [renewed its genocide alert](#) for the state. The BJP government in Assam, however, has responded to these rebukes by speeding up its plans to construct [massive detention centres](#) eerily reminiscent of Nazi-era concentration camps. Meanwhile, senior politicians from across BJP-ruled states have continued to exhort the party’s central leadership to [extend the NRC process to the rest of the country](#), a move that could result in a humanitarian crisis of a scale the world has never seen before. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has already [confirmed](#) that this is indeed next in the BJP’s project to redefine India as a Hindu Rashtra.

In Kashmir, millions of people remain in virtual prison, locked away from the rest of the world, for the seventh week. Any form of dissent continues to be ruthlessly crushed, with thousands of Kashmiris - activists, journalists, political leaders, indeed anyone with the capacity to mobilise any sort of resistance - detained arbitrarily. [News reports](#) that have trickled out of the region have revealed stories of intimidation campaigns, night-time raids and widespread torture by the armed forces. In the face of intense criticism in the international media, the BJP government - emboldened by a cheering domestic populace - continues to [dismiss](#) these reports as baseless, insisting that the situation in Kashmir is “normal”. Genocide Watch issued another genocide alert, for Kashmir, giving India the rare distinction of being [one of only four countries](#) - along with Iraq, Syria and Myanmar - to have multiple active genocide alerts issued for its territory.

Meanwhile, in [Alwar](#), 100 miles from capital Delhi, where Pehlu Khan was lynched to death by ‘cow vigilantes’ two years ago, a Kashmiri Muslim student was [assaulted](#) by a mob and forced to walk around wearing women’s clothing. In New Delhi itself, a Hindu man named [Sahil](#) was beaten to death following an argument because, according to the victim’s parents, the attackers mistook him for a Muslim. Two more Muslim men - one in [Alwar](#), again, and another in Madhya Pradesh’s [Chhatarpur](#) district - were assaulted by mobs, in separate incidents, for transporting cattle. In Gujarat, PM Modi’s home state, a uniformed Muslim [police constable](#) was beaten up by a gang of Hindutva thugs who made it a point to remind him, “*Miya bao fati gaya chho* (Muslims have forgotten their limits)”. In Uttar Pradesh, ruled by BJP’s star Muslim-baiter, Yogi (monk) Adityanath, a Muslim family - including two women wearing burkas - were attacked in by a group of saffron-clad men while disembarking from a train in [Aligarh](#) town. In neighbouring [Agra](#), Muslim families were forced to flee their village after an angry mob - enraged by an alleged case of kidnapping - set fire to several Muslim-owned shops. But it is not just Muslims that are being targeted in ‘Yogi’s’ Uttar Pradesh - a Dalit man was taken hostage and [burned alive](#) for daring to fall in love with a woman from a higher caste. And in [Bulandshahr](#), where a policeman and a local youth were murdered last year while trying to stop ‘cow vigilantes’ rioting, seven people accused of the crime were released on bail and welcomed outside the jail premises with flowers and Hindutva slogans of *Vande Mataram* (‘Mother, I Praise Thee’), *Bharat Mata Ki Jai* (‘Victory to Mother India’) and “*Jai Shri Ram*” (‘Victory to Lord Ram’).

Alongside, in eastern Jharkhand state, during the period under review, there were [five incidents](#) of mob lynching in a single day, all of them triggered by false rumours of child-lifting. Two weeks later, a [70 year old man](#) was beaten to death in the same state. Within the next week, a [Christian tribal](#) was murdered - and another two seriously injured - in yet another brutal incident of mob violence, this time for allegedly slaughtering cattle. In southern Telangana, a pregnant [Dalit sarpanch](#) and her husband were assaulted by upper-caste villagers for daring to offer a coconut to the local temple deity. In a similar incident in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, a [Dalit woman MLA](#) from the ruling party was abused inside a temple and prevented from performing puja, lest she pollute the temple’s “sanctity”. In eastern Assam, a pregnant Muslim woman and her two sisters were [stripped and brutally tortured](#) inside a police station. The woman has lost her child after a policeman kicked her in the stomach. In Madhya Pradesh, exactly a week before Modi is due to declare the country “open defecation free” (ODF), two Dalit children aged 10 and 12 years old were beaten to death for [defecating in public](#).

The growing attacks on minorities, Dalits, adivasis and women - indeed all weaker sections - is enabled by the authoritarianism that has been setting in, since the ruling BJP took power in 2014. Since BJP returned to power in May this year, this tendency has taken a big leap forward, now verging on fascism. In an attempt to deflect attention away from the [crippling economic slowdown](#), Hindutva forces allied to the ruling BJP, have doubled down on their efforts to tear apart the country’s delicate social fabric. India’s civil institutions - courts, watchdog bodies, and media - have alongside been increasingly rendered ineffective to stop the slide towards state control. Opposition parties remain compromised by poor leadership and lack of resources and ideas, whilst being in the cross-hair of the BJP intent on rendering a body blow to multi-party democracy. And media houses have thought it best to buy peace with the ruling regime, often reduced to feeding

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their audiences a constant dose of majoritarian nationalism. Finally, the Supreme Court - the last defender of the Constitution - alternates between turning a blind eye to government's excesses, as in the case of the [abrogation of Kashmir's special status](#), and being an active aider and abetter, as it has been through the [NRC process](#). For those who dream of and fight for a just and progressive India, the light at the end of the tunnel seems to be getting dimmer by the day.

Citizens Against Hate

www.citizensagainsthate.org

IndianCAH@gmail.com