

# KASHMIR SPECIAL STATUS NIXED

## 4 things you need to know

India govt proposes that the region be directly ruled by New Delhi

### NEW DELHI

**T**HE Indian government yesterday stripped Kashmir of the special autonomy it has had for seven decades, prompting a furious response from nuclear-armed rival Pakistan and raising fears of further violence in the Muslim-majority Himalayan region.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist party rushed through a presidential decree to scrap from the constitution the Indian-ruled part of the disputed territory's special status.

It also moved a bill proposing the Indian-administered part of Kashmir be divided into two regions directly ruled by New Delhi.

Ahead of the announcements, tens of thousands of extra Indian troops were deployed in the territory, and a security lockdown was imposed overnight on Sunday with all telecommunications

there cut.

Home Minister Amit Shah, an ally of Modi, told Parliament the president had issued a decree abolishing Article 370 of the constitution, which gives special autonomy to the Himalayan region.

The decree said the measure came into force "at once".

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry condemned the move as "illegal".

"As the party to this international dispute, Pakistan will exercise all possible options to counter the illegal steps," it said.

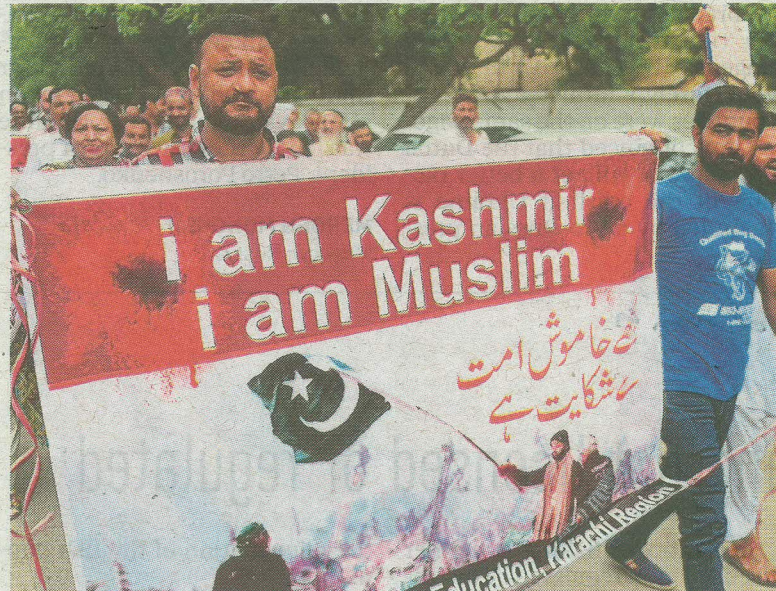
A senior Pakistani security source said a meeting of the Pakistani military's top commanders had been called for today.

Kashmir has been divided between Indian and Pakistan since their independence in 1947.

For three decades, the Indian-administered part has been in the grip of an insurgency that has left tens of thousands dead.

Armed Kashmiri rebels and many residents have fought for the region's independence or to join Pakistan.

There were already growing fears among Kashmiris that the special status would be ditched after Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party obtained a large parliamentary majority in recent elections.



Pakistani students and teachers marching during a protest rally in Karachi yesterday. AFP-PIC

His party had vowed to fulfil a long-held promise to scrap the laws, and many fear New Delhi wants to change the region's demographics by allowing non-Kashmiris, mostly Hindus, to buy land locally.

The move is set to exacerbate the already bloody rebellion in Kashmir and deepen the long-

running animosity with nuclear rival Pakistan which has fought two out of three wars with India over the territory.

"There will be a very strong reaction in Kashmir. It's already in a state of unrest and this will only make it worse," Wajahat Habibullah, a former senior bureaucrat in Jammu and Kashmir, said. **AFP**

**JAMMU** and Kashmir state will be divided into two Union Territories (UT) — Ladakh, and Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). While the Ladakh UT will be without a legislature, the J&K UT will be with legislature.

**ARTICLE 370** exempted J&K from the constitution and permitted the state to draft its own constitution. It restricted Parliament's powers in J&K, limiting it to matters of defence, external affairs and communications.

**ALL** major leaders of the valley, including People Democratic Party chief Mehbooba Mufti, National Conference's Omar Abdullah and Farooq Abdullah and J&K People's Conference's Sajad Lone, have been put under house arrest while mobile, Internet and cable TV services have been shut down.

**THE** Indian government increased security in the state, July 25 saw the deployment of 100 companies of Central Armed Paramilitary Forces in Kashmir. On Aug 1, an additional 25,000 paramilitary men were sent. Yesterday, there were reports of 8,000 paramilitary troops being airlifted to Kashmir from Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Assam and other parts of India. **Agencies**