

# IN A FIRST, U.S. LAWMAKERS TAKE A STEP AGAINST INDIA ON KASHMIR

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Senator Chris Van Hollen visited Delhi this week as a part of a delegation that discussed the Kashmir situation. Bloomberg Andrew Harrer

In what could become the first step towards legislative action by American lawmakers against India on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations has added an appeal to end what it calls a “humanitarian crisis” in Kashmir in its report ahead of the annual Foreign Appropriations Act for 2020.

The amendment was proposed by Senator Chris Van Hollen, who visited Delhi this week as a part of a congressional delegation that discussed the Kashmir situation as well as India-US bilateral relations, trade ties and defence purchases with key officials.

## ‘Restore communication’

According to the report, which was submitted to the Senate by Lindsey Graham, senior Senator and key Republican leader known for his close ties to President Donald Trump, the committee on Appropriations “notes with concern the current humanitarian crisis in Kashmir and calls on the Government of India to: fully restore telecommunications and Internet services; lift its lockdown and curfew; and release individuals detained pursuant to the Government's revocation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution.”

What makes the report as well as the tough language on Kashmir more startling is that the document was submitted on September 26, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi was still in the US, and came just a few days after his joint address at the ‘Howdy, Modi!’ event in Houston with Mr. Trump, as well as their bilateral meeting in New York.

## Expression of concern

“This amendment, which was accepted unanimously by the bipartisan committee, is a strong expression of concern by the Senate about the situation in Kashmir and sends the signal that we are closely monitoring the human rights situation there, and would like to see the Government of India take those concerns seriously,” Mr. Van Hollen told *The Hindu* here, adding that he had “hoped to share his concerns privately” with Prime Minister Modi, but had not been able to meet him.

Mr. Van Hollen had met with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in Washington last week and Senator Bob Menendez, also a part of the delegation, met with Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal this week in Delhi. Both Senators have made public statements in the last two months on the Kashmir situation.

## Denied permission

While it is unclear whether their concerns over Kashmir elicited any responses from the government, *The Hindu* has learnt that Senator Van Hollen was rebuffed when requested permission to visit Srinagar in an effort to assess the situation on the ground.

When asked, MEA officials said the Ministry of Home Affairs handled such requests. No diplomat or foreign journalist has yet been given clearance to visit Kashmir since the government's decision on Article 370 on August 5.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum's India Economic Summit in Delhi on Friday, Mr. Jaishankar said many key decision-makers in the US had been "misinformed by their media" and that he had spent considerable efforts in the past few weeks to clear misconceptions on the government's decision to drop the "temporary" Article 370.

*(With inputs from*

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