

U.S. SEEKS 'ROAD MAP' TO RESTORE NORMALCY IN KASHMIR

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - USA

Easing tensions: The U.S. is concerned over the situation in the Valley where daily life has been hit, said Alice G. Wells. AP

The U.S. has sought from India a "road map" to political and economic normalcy in Kashmir and immediate release of all political detainees even as it asked Pakistan to take "sustained and irreversible" steps against militants and terrorists in its territory.

Most of the top-level and second-rung separatists of Jammu and Kashmir have been taken into preventive custody while mainstream leaders, including former Chief Ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, have been either detained or placed under house arrest in view of the Centre's decision to revoke special status to Jammu and Kashmir and splitting the State into two Union Territories.

"We continue to press for the release of detainees for the full restoration of everyday services, but most importantly, for road map to the restoration of political and economic normalcy," said Acting Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Alice G. Wells.

The U.S. remains "deeply concerned" about the situation in the Valley where the daily life of nearly eight million residents has been severely impacted since the decision to revoke Jammu and Kashmir's special status and to "detain without charge" political leaders and restrict communications, Ms. Wells said in an interaction with reporters at Foggy Bottom headquarters of the State Department. "We've seen progress, for example, four million postpaid mobile phone users have had service restored, but SMS and Internet is restricted," she said. The prepaid services continued to remain barred.

Access for reporting

Noting that journalists have extensively covered developments in Kashmir, Ms. Wells said the role of some of the international reporters had been particularly important, but journalists continued to face challenges in access while reporting due to the security restrictions.

Ms. Wells said terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Hizbul Mujahideen "obviously are the problem".

"In this vein, we welcome [Pakistan] Prime Minister [Imran] Khan's unambiguous statement in September that anyone who crosses from Pakistan to carry out violence in Kashmir are enemies of both Pakistan and the Kashmiri people," Ms. Wells said.

"The constructive dialogue that we'd like to see between India and Pakistan must be based on Pakistan taking sustained and irreversible steps against militants and terrorists in its territory," Ms. Wells said.

On August 5, India withdrew the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcated it into two Union Territories.

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