

LADAKH STATEHOOD ISSUE: POLITY

Ladakh Statehood: climate activist Sonam Wangchuk joins strike

The Ladakh statehood demand has intensified with political parties and civil society seeking full statehood and inclusion in the Sixth Schedule to protect tribal rights, land, and culture, while the Centre has assured constitutional safeguards but not statehood. Climate activist and Ramon Magsaysay Award winner Sonam Wangchuk joined protests demanding full statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. This highlights growing concerns about political representation, cultural identity, and land rights in the UT.

Historical Background

1. Part of J&K: Ladakh was earlier part of Jammu & Kashmir.
2. Political Marginalisation: Decisions were made in Srinagar, ignoring Ladakh's cultural and ecological uniqueness.

Post-2019 Reorganisation

After abrogation of Article 370, Ladakh carved out as a UT without legislature under the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019. Directly governed by Lieutenant Governor + MHA (no elected assembly like Delhi/Puducherry).

Loss of Protections: Removal of Article 35A left Ladakhis vulnerable to loss of land & employment rights.

Ladakh

Cultural & Demographic Identity

Leh: Buddhist-majority; Kargil: Shia-majority → distinct from Kashmir Valley.

Security Considerations

Strategic borders with Pakistan (PoK) and China (Aksai Chin) → central control vital.

Development Goals

UT status intended for faster administration, direct central funds, and infrastructure push.

Constitutional Basis for State Formation

Article 3: Parliament can create/alter states or UTs.

Procedure

Bill needs President's recommendation. If existing state boundaries affected → state legislature's views are sought (not binding). Thus, Parliament holds final power to decide statehood.

Sixth Schedule Safeguard

Currently applies to NE States: Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura.

Features

Autonomous District & Regional Councils (ADCs) with powers on land, agriculture, health, customs, culture. Legislative + Executive + Financial powers.

Relevance for Ladakh

97% tribal population → Sixth Schedule seen as mechanism to protect culture, land, & agrarian economy.

Institutional Steps

1. High Powered Committee (2023): Chaired by MoS Home, tasked with exploring safeguards for Ladakh.
2. NCST Recommendation: Suggested Sixth Schedule inclusion.

Concerns & Challenges

1. Political Representation, no elected legislature → local voices marginalised.
2. Cultural Identity, Distinct tribal/ethnic groups demand self-governance + protection of traditions.
3. Developmental Equity, Statehood could ensure greater financial devolution, institutions, job opportunities.
4. Employment & Representation, Demand for Public Service Commission, job reservation, fast-track recruitment.
5. Legal Hurdles, Sixth Schedule restricted to NE states → Ladakh's inclusion needs constitutional amendment.
6. Administrative Complexity, Existing Leh & Kargil Hill Development Councils need restructuring to fit Sixth Schedule model.

Measures Taken by Union Government

1. Job Reservations

85% jobs for Ladakhis (80% for STs, 4% for border residents, 1% SC, 10% EWS). Total = 95% reservation (among highest in India).

2. Domicile Criteria

Must show 15 years continuous residence since Oct 31, 2019. Exceptions: children of central staff/All India Services posted in Ladakh.

3. Women's Political Reservation

1/3rd seats in LAHDCs reserved for women (rotational basis).

4. Official Languages Recognised

English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti, Purgi → affirms linguistic diversity.

Regulatory Amendments (2025)

1. Ladakh Reservation (Amendment) Regulation
2. Civil Services Decentralisation & Recruitment Amendment
3. Official Languages Regulation
4. LAHDC Amendment Regulation

Road Ahead

1. Political Decision: Statehood requires Presidential recommendation + Parliament approval.
2. Safeguards: Possible extension of Sixth Schedule-like protections for Ladakh's tribal identity.
3. Balance Needed: Must align strategic security concerns with regional aspirations for autonomy.
4. Dialogue: Stronger Centre-Ladakh consultation platforms needed.
5. Learning from NE: Replicate models from Mizoram/Arunachal Pradesh for cultural & land safeguards.

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