

AIR Spotlight - PM's Meeting with Leaders of Jammu & Kashmir

AIR Spotlight is an insightful programme featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panelists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, the topic of discussion is the PM's recent meeting with Jammu & Kashmir leaders.

Participants:

- Ashok Tandon, Political Analyst
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Context:

Prime Minister Modi on 24th June 2021 chaired a crucial all-party meeting to discuss the prevailing situation in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the future course of action for the Union Territory (UT) with leaders from the Gupkar alliance as well as from other political parties of J&K.

Introduction:

- This was the first high-level interaction held between the central government and Kashmir's political leaders since 2019, when the former scrapped [Article 370](#) and 35A, which had given special status to J&K and its people.
- Prime Minister Modi was accompanied by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, and Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Manoj Sinha during the meeting. The 14 leaders from J&K were from eight parties, including the National Conference, the PDP, the BJP, and the Congress.
- The main focus of the meeting was to strengthen the democratic process. PM Modi said that "we are fully committed to the democratic process in J&K". He also stressed that holding Assembly elections just like the successful conduct of District Development Council (DDC) elections is a priority.
- This was the Centre's first major outreach since August 2019 towards political leaders who have been severely critical of the Article 370 decision. Many of the leaders attending the meeting had been detained as part of security measures to prevent any protests over the sweeping changes.
- The meeting which was conducted in a very cordial, constructive, and positive manner at the instance of the Prime Minister is a major breakthrough and is a positive indication.

Important takeaways from the meeting:

The important takeaways from the meeting are discussed below:

- **Delimitation Exercise:**
 - The issue of the ongoing delimitation exercise came up for discussion during the meeting.
 - The Prime Minister reportedly said the government wants the exercise to be completed at the earliest so that future steps towards holding assembly elections can be undertaken in J&K.

- **Assembly Elections:**

- In their speeches, leaders from Jammu and Kashmir demanded that the government should hold assembly elections at the earliest to restore a democratically elected government.
- They said while bureaucracy is an important part of the government, it cannot replace an elected government perpetually.
- J&K has not had a democratically elected government since June 2018 when the Mehbooba Mufti government fell after the BJP withdrew its support to her government.
- PM Modi stressed that holding assembly elections is a priority and that the polls can happen soon after the delimitation exercise.
- The Prime Minister stressed that an atmosphere of safety and security needs to be ensured for all sections of society in Jammu and Kashmir and he wanted to remove 'Dilli ki Duri' as well as 'Dil Ki Duri' (distance from Delhi as well as the distance of heart).

- **Statehood for J&K:**

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- Another demand that was prominently raised at the all-party meeting was the immediate restoration of statehood for Jammu and Kashmir. Congress leader and former Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad said the Prime Minister and the Home Minister had promised in Parliament that J&K's statehood would be restored once the situation normalizes.
- Union Home Minister, while tabling the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill 2019 in Parliament, had given an assurance that the Centre would grant full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir at an appropriate time.

Other outcomes of the meeting:

- The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) leaders who were part of this have their own sets of demands which they have presented in the meeting. This signals a shift in political engagement where political parties agreed to discuss various issues.
- Both Congress and BJP representatives made appeals for the rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits.
- The attitude of political parties was positive as they all willingly participated without pressing for restoration of Article 370 as a precondition for political engagement.
- Congress leader Mr. Gulam Nabi Azad stated that Congress and other political parties have left the question of restoration of Article 370 to the judgment of the [Supreme Court](#).
- The meeting has given much-needed legitimacy to the delimitation process, which is the first big milestone in the way of holding assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Leaders also demanded that political prisoners be released at the earliest.
- Such a cordial meeting will encourage the center to move forward to complete the delimitation process and try to hold elections as early as possible.

- The [Election Commission](#) has also held virtual meetings with all deputy commissioners of Jammu and Kashmir districts to discuss details of all electoral constituencies. Coincidentally, it took place at the same time as the meeting. This meeting was called to discuss the boundaries of all electoral constituencies, the intersection of these constituencies with other districts and tehsils.

Developmental measures in J&K:

- In the meeting with all political parties of Jammu and Kashmir, the Union Home Minister gave a detailed presentation of all the developmental works done in Jammu and Kashmir since August 2019.
- After the abolition of Article 370, 5 state laws have been repealed, 130 have been modified and 890 central laws have been made applicable to the [union territory](#) of Jammu and Kashmir.
- It tried to resolve the concerns of most of the people of J&K that most of the central laws were not applicable for the benefit of the people.
- Domicile laws have been changed, new certificates are being issued and refugees living since partition have been regularised.
- J&K now has a formal three-tier structure with elected panchayats and development councils.
- Lieutenant General of J&K Manoj Sinha has signed a district allocation grant of Rs.12600 crores. This will empower 20 elected DDCs, giving them a chance to make an impact.
- The Centre has been pumping a lot of funds to accelerate development works in the state.

Countering Pakistan's narrative:

- All sectors have contributed to creating a congenial environment in the state. That is why all political parties agreed to participate in the meeting to restore and resume the political process in the state.
- The meeting will also be a rebuke to the malicious propaganda of Pakistan over the abolition of Article 370.
- Pakistan has been falsely stating on various international forums that the people of Jammu and Kashmir do not want any kind of political dialogue with New Delhi. Now with this, Pakistan has been exposed.
- The Home Minister reiterated that the center is committed to restoring the statehood of J&K.
- Credit for the cordial meeting must be given to all stakeholders. There was no boycott or opposition to the meeting. Everyone presented their own sets of demands in the meeting.
- Through this meeting, India has sent a signal to the international community that India is committed to the development of the people of J&K.

Way forward:

- The meeting is a part of a larger political process. The final outcome is yet to be determined.
- The significance of the meeting lies in the fact that all participants described the meeting as very constructive.
- Even if there is any debate on any issue related to J&K, it will be under the framework of the Indian Constitution and through the democratic process.