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# LADAKH 'S REAL STORY NEEDS TO BE TOLD

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## JK News Today Commentary

Ladakh has not been told its full story as yet, neither before nor after the grant of the Union Territory status in August 2019, which took its practical shape on October 31st same year. This fact needs to be told, especially to the youth, that what the current status of their land is and what all they can aspire within the realm of possibility and opportunities that have visited them in the recent years.

A deceptive curtain has been thrown at all the developments that have taken place in the vast region with its geography spread over to 59,146 Sq. Kms very, very small population of 300,000, since it became the UT. First two years – 2020 and 2021 were lost to Covid, and no development could take place. The real work started in 2022 summers and it is now only a little over three years that the work has picked up pace.

The developmental scenario of the past three years in Ladakh surpasses all the development works combined elsewhere, including the areas covered under the Sixth Schedule in North-Eastern states. What took them 30 to 40 years to achieve has been accomplished in Ladakh in just three-four years. Unfortunately, this aspect has neither been broadcasted in proper manner nor woven into the organic narrative. That is at the root cause of the problem within the cold desert region, the vested interests are taking advantage of absence of this narrative.

At the moment, the UT status of Ladakh, which was desperately wanted by the Buddhists, and not liked by Kargil Muslims to a large extent, is the outcome of decades-old struggle of generations. There were sound reasons for the struggle, though it were sought to be distorted with the political colours. That struggle carried on with the sacrifice of lives, cannot be brought to a naught simply because the things were happening the way some people wanted. It is true that the people always want something more than what they have, but that should not mean that the struggle and the status so achieved should be used as an argument that the UT status is a negative development. That is a self-defeating argument as it neutralises the entire struggle and sacrifice.

After what all happened in Leh on September 24- black afternoon, in which four young men were killed and several others injured, including police personnel, and huge loss of properties, was deeply disturbing. This unfortunate turn of events could have been avoided had the passions not been inflamed. There was certainly a design as the people were asked to gather in large numbers to mount pressure on the government to concede their demands.

That plan, if it was a strategy, obviously boom-ranged. The loss of lives and properties hasn't served any cause. The cause, if there was one, has got complicated and seeds of doubt have been sown. The very smooth trajectory of the dialogue between Ladakh's leadership- Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) has been pushed to wall. The Centre has responded to the situation in the most relevant fashion, as was expected to defuse the situation. It took stringent measures against all those who took law into their hands and led to the violence that consumed lives and properties, much worse they dented the image of Ladakh as a peaceful place in the country where nothing could deter the path to peace. And, at the same time, it reiterated its commitment to discuss all issues across the table.



## There are some genuine problems which must be taken note of.

The statehood demand has its perils. What will Ladakh gain if it is granted statehood? There is reasoning that it will politically empower the people and the region. The state would be entitled to a legislature and it would be able to frame its own laws this is ear-pleasing sound, and gives a sense of elevation. The number of the people and voters should also be taken into consideration, will it help resolve the issues or trigger new fault lines and communal tensions. It may be easy to ride this tiger but very difficult to mount. What will happen if the people again agitate for reversal of the things? It will be putting Centre and the country in a tight spot. Therefore, it is advisable that home work should be done in the national interest, for which Ladakhis have an impeccable reputation. They have stood with the nation through wars and difficult situation. The latest was their valour and forbearance for over four and a half years when Chinese troops inflicted military standoff in the eastern part of the region. And, during Kargil war of 1999, Ladakhis, assisted and helped Indian army to scale Himalayan victory against all odds. Their patriotism is unquestionable.

That being that. There are some genuine problems which must be taken note of.

Youth's growing frustration: since there are hardly any opportunities of jobs in the villages in Ladakh region, particularly in Leh district, the youth are moving to Leh city in the hope that they would be able to get work in a happening place. The city holds unbounded attraction to the youth, though the reality is that cities are not the paradise for job-seekers. Away from their homes, and struggle to get the jobs in city, adds to their frustrations. This frustration needs an outlet, and often it turns into anger.

A deep-dive into their migration from villages to city and frustration thereof should be undertaken. It is necessary. Yes, there is a reality that the Government of India has advertised 1800 posts and more are about to be advertised, added to that is 85 per cent reservation for the natives. But this requires broadcasting, connecting the youth with these prospects of jobs. Delay in filling vacancies will not help the matters. These prospects should be put in practice sooner than later.

Second, a team of the youth should be taken to north-eastern states where some areas are covered by the Sixth Schedule. What looks bright on papers is not as bright on the ground. The tribes have their own problems. They are short on population, and have little resources to preserve their culture and heritage despite constitutional safeguards. The quality growth of population is necessary which can create resources within their areas. Unless the villages are taken care of, employment opportunities should come to them in their land. That should be the main focus.

Here Home Ministry's vibrant villages should be implemented in letter and spirit. The villagers should be involved, their plans should be taken on board. The administration should act as facilitator.

Third, there is need to expose the leaders or the vested interest who despite having multiple profiles. How the UT status can be termed as little achievement. Their real intent should be brought in public domain not by the official broadcast system or BJP that has its own narrative. Its versions are seen as politically motivated even if that has ring of reality. The local youth who have the knowledge of the soil and know the country better than others, should be given their due role. At the same time, the elders who have seen the progress of Ladakh over the decades should be involved to tell the difference what region was and what it is now.