

**High Commission of India
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Press release

Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir: One Year of Unprecedented Development

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The past year has been one of remarkable journey for the Union Territories (UT) of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir. The momentous decision by 1.3 billion people of India, represented through two-thirds majority in Parliament, to reorganize the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir had as the fundamental objective delivering development and governance to the people who had suffered seven decades of violence thrust upon them from abroad.

To recap briefly, the Parliament of India decided on 5th August 2019 to make inoperative the archaic and anachronistic provisions of the Indian Constitution responsible for keeping the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir, which had voluntarily acceded to India in 1948, away from national mainstream. The same provisions had also allowed self-serving politics and nepotism by a few to overshadow aspirations of the people of the State for development. The State of Jammu and Kashmir was reorganized subsequently into two Union Territories – Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir, and their administration was made the *direct responsibility of the Government of India*. It was a decision completely internal to India. No external boundaries were changed, nor were intended to be changed.

The creation of UT of Ladakh – famous as a leading Buddhist spiritual centre and a globally popular tourist destination, was immediately welcomed, including in Sri Lanka. Recently, the plan to establish the first central university in Ladakh with a Centre on Buddhist Studies was approved. Momentous achievements in development and governance in the UTs of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir truly befit the Himalayan attributes of these integral and inalienable parts of India.

An objective assessment of the ground realities in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir shows that the departure from the stale past was not only justified but also acutely needed. As a result of the changes ushered in by the bold decision of the Indian democracy, the true potential of the northern most regions of India is finding expression in the form of unprecedented progress in every sphere of human activity for the first time since the suffocating hands of colonialism relaxed their grip on the Indian sub-continent over 70 years ago.

Rapid development of the region's economy and improvement in the quality of lives of the common people are among the most significant achievements in the past year. The Government of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir organized the first ever pre-summit meet of a global international summit, during which the policy and regulatory framework and investment opportunities in 14 focused sectors were highlighted. As a result of this and with the help of road shows organized across India, nearly 170 Memorandums of Understanding worth INR 13,600 crore (about US Dollar 1.9 billion) were finalized.

To give another example, in the face of terrorism supported and sponsored from across India's borders targeting poor Kashmiri apple farmers, a dedicated scheme was conceptualized and implemented for the procurement of these apples by the government. In less than 5 months, till the end of January this year, more than 15,000 metric tonnes of apples valued over INR 70 crores (about USD 10 million) were directly purchased from farmers in the Kashmir valley. This is when terrorists were busy shooting down and intimidating those very farmers. In another move which added both glow and pride to the Indian tri-colour and indeed all right-thinking people around the world, the Kashmiri saffron, grown at an altitude between 1600 and 1800 meters, was given the Geographical Indication tag.

Reflecting the determination of the entire country, 36 Union Ministers traveled to more than 50 locations in the Union Territory to hear and see for themselves the ground realities and also inaugurate over 200 projects. Modernization of urban and rural infrastructure, universalisation of electricity access and robust projects for dealing with flood mitigation has been carried forward. An online agricultural market platform and the first ever winter games of the country were conducted in Jammu & Kashmir this past year.

A unique programme launched in November last year called "back to village" ensured that Government officers reached out to the farthest parts of the Union Territory and spent two days and one night to study the development requirements. As a result, more than 20,000 development works were identified by the people. Of these, more than one-third (7000) have already been executed.

In order to consolidate these efforts, affirmative action and transparency in the process of government jobs have been introduced. The world-renowned Indian Institutes of Technology have entered into internship initiatives for the final year students of Jammu & Kashmir. At the same time, interface between industries and academia is set to be strengthened with the establishment of two Centers for Invention, Innovation, Incubation and Training.

Looking further into the future, the local government has sanctioned INR 1.2 crore for 12 selected startups for product research, development and marketing. Two IT parks-one each in Jammu & Srinagar - are also in the pipeline. On the educational front, in what is considered the largest addition in seven decades, 50 new institutions with 25,000 vacancies have been established. New health infrastructure worth INR 7,500 crore (over USD 1 billion) - that includes two new All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (Vijaypur in Jammu and Awantipora in Kashmir), seven new medical colleges, five new nursing colleges and a state cancer institute are planned.

Another area of remarkable achievement is infrastructure development. Bottlenecks for projects spanning various sectors under the Prime Minister's development package have been removed. With 190 projects worth INR 7000 crores the aim is to develop Jammu & Srinagar as modern, sustainable and smart cities with facilities such as Light Rail Transit System, which will be complemented by housing, slum development rehabilitation and township policies. Transgender were included as beneficiaries for the first time under Jammu & Kashmir integrated social security scheme. Jammu & Kashmir completed the first phase of launch of one nation one ration card scheme.

The strides in socio-economic development have been matched by sincere steps by the administration and the people of Jammu & Kashmir in the all-important area of participative democracy.

For the first time ever, elections to block development councils, the second tier of Panchayati Raj Institutions (lowest layer of governance) were held in October last year. They saw an unprecedented 98% voter turnout. All central laws have been extended to the Union Territory including those made for protecting the social, economic, and political rights of women, children, under-privileged sections, and ensuring transparent and accountable governance.

In order to support the panchayats, more than INR 1500 crores were transferred. Every panchayat is equipped with drop boxes to strengthen grievance redressal.

No wonder the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir has notched up a number of achievements in such an enabling environment.

Even in as daunting and unprecedented a challenge as the fight against the COVID pandemic, Jammu & Kashmir is among the best performing States/UTs in India, thanks to the empowering framework and access to national resources. Its COVID testing rate is almost 4 times that of national average. Jammu & Kashmir was among the first states/UT to setup Covid-19 dedicated hospitals. Srinagar was among the 16 districts selected in India for its best practices to tackle Covid -19. The Central

Government sanctioned a relief package of INR 350 crores (USD 50 million) to assist the tourism sector, business as well as construction workers.

The experience of the last one year shows that the people and the Government of the Union Territory will not rest on their laurels. Irrespective of the continuing negative propaganda and support to terrorism from across India's borders, they are determined to march along the road to development, peace and prosperity in step with the rest of India, and shoulder to shoulder with their other Indian brothers and sisters.

If only those perpetrating and promoting mass violence and terrorism and creating cacophony of concocted and conceited narratives could pay heed to the voice of the people, listen to hard facts, and have the moral courage to replicate them in the territories under their illegal and forcible occupation!

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