Demands from Leh and Kargil - Ladakh's Current Status

What is the issue?

- When Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated into two Union Territories on August 5, 2019, Ladakh was seen welcoming the reorganisation.
- But various demands and concerns have been raised from its two districts, Leh and Kargil, over the last two years.

What is the government's response?

- The government appears to be paying more attention to the concerns now, after two years of bifurcation.
- This happens parallel to the Centre's outreach to the Jammu and Kashmir political leadership.
- Reportedly, a committee under Minister of State for Home will seek to address these demands from Ladakh.
- If the committee with planned representation from Leh and Kargil is set up, it would enable leaders from both the districts to work out a common negotiating front.

What are the different concerns in Leh and Kargil?

- **Kargil** - Of Ladakh's two districts, the August 2019 changes were immediately opposed by the people of Kargil.
- The people of Kargil see themselves as a minority in Buddhist majority Ladakh.
- So, the leaders of the majority Shia population in Kargil demanded that the district should remain part of J&K.
- They also demanded that special status be restored.
- This was to safeguard the rights of Kargil people over their land and employment opportunities.
- **Leh** - Opposition from Leh came later.
- Leh believed that it was being marginalised in the larger state of J&K.
- So, a UT for Ladakh had been a long-standing demand in Buddhist majority Leh.
- But what Leh leaders did not bargain for was the complete loss of legislative powers.
- Earlier, Leh and Kargil each sent four representatives to the J&K legislature.

- After the changes, they were down to one legislator - their sole MP, and with all powers vested in the UT bureaucracy.
- Unlike the UT of J&K, Ladakh was a UT without an assembly.
- So, the Ladakh districts fear that alienation of land, loss of identity, culture, language, and change in demography would follow their political disempowerment.

What about the Hill Development Councils?

- Leh and Kargil have separate Autonomous Hill Development Councils (AHDCs).
- These were set up under the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils Act, 1997.
- The councils are elected.
- However, the AHDCs have no legislative powers.
- They have executive powers over the allotment, use and occupation of land vested in them by the Centre.
- They also have the powers to collect some local taxes, such as parking fees, taxes on shops etc.
- But the real powers are now wielded by the UT administration.
- Worryingly, the UT administration is seen as even more remote than the erstwhile state government of J&K.

What is the recent demand in this regard?

- Various groups in Ladakh are demanding for an autonomous hill council under the Sixth Schedule.
- The Sixth Schedule is a provision of Article 224(a) of the Constitution.
- It was originally meant for the creation of autonomous tribal regions in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.
- Notably, hill councils under this provision will have legislative powers.

- **Evolving demands** - There is no progress on Leh's demand for Sixth Schedule protections.
- So, the Leh leadership has now upped its demands asking for a Union Territory with an elected Assembly.
- Meanwhile, another delegation demanded full statehood to Ladakh, as well as restoration of special status with Article 35 and 370 of the Constitution.
- Other issues include protections for language, culture, land and jobs.
- Another long-standing demand is the route between Kargil and Skardu in territory under Pakistan in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Source: The Indian Express