Ladakh – Protest for Statehood

Mains: *GS II – Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure*

Why in News?

Recently, there was a violent protests erupted in Leh city which led to the death of four people and injuries to around 150 people, including security personnel.

What is the background?

- **Abrogation of Article 370** – The special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 was read down by Parliament on August 5, 2019.
- **Split of state** – The State was split into two Union Territories
  - **J&K** – With assembly
  - **Ladakh** – Without an Assembly.



- **Apprehension of people** – The fear of big businesses and conglomerates taking away land and jobs from the local people led to this demand.

As per the 2011 Census, ***the total population of Ladakh was 2,74,289****.*

What is the ongoing issue?

- **Detain of protestors** – On September 26, prominent educationist and climate activist of Ladakh, Sonam Wangchuk, was detained under *the National Security Act (NSA), 1980* for disrupting public order.
- **Hunger strike** – On September 10, Mr. Wangchuk, on behalf of the *Leh Apex Body (LAB)* and the *Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA)*, announced a 35-day hunger strike.
- They demanded the resumption of talks with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- **Demands of the protestors** – They had 4 demands
    - Inclusion of Ladakh in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution (tribal status),
    - Statehood for ladakh
    - Separate Lok Sabha seats for Leh and Kargil,
    - Filling of existing government vacancies.
- **Formation of high powered committee** – The government formed a High-Powered Committee (HPC) headed by Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai on January 2023.
- The HPS was formed as a result of campaigns by groups in Kargil and Leh demanding constitutional safeguards, protection of land, preservation of culture and demand for employment opportunities.
- The committee comprised members of LAB and KDA and civil society representatives, who rejected the HPC, saying only pro-government members appeared to have been picked.
- The HPC was reconstituted on November 30, 2023
- **The terms of reference of the committee** – It includes
    - Measures to protect the region's unique culture and language taking into consideration its geographical location and strategic importance
    - To ensure protection of land and employment for the people of Ladakh
    - To discuss measures for inclusive development and employment generation in the region
    - To discuss measures related to the empowerment of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill District Councils of Leh and Kargil and to examine constitutional safeguards for the measures.
- **Breakdown of talks** – The talks between the members of the committee broke down in March 2024.
- On October 6, 2024, Mr. Wangchuk sat on an indefinite fast in Delhi to draw the government's attention to their demands, following which the MHA agreed to resume talks.
- The HPC, including leaders from Leh and Kargil, met on December 3, 2024, followed by another meeting on January 15, 2025.
- The committee last met on May 27.
- The members also met Home Minister Amit Shah at his residence the following day.

What happened since the last round of talks?

- **President's notification** – Following the meeting, on June 3, President Droupadi Murmu notified 4 Regulations for the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- **New policies** – The notification defined new policies on reservation, languages, domiciles and composition of hill councils for Ladakh.
- **Reservation** – The Regulations paved the way for *85% reservation for resident Ladakhis* in government jobs.
- **Rejection of the talks** – The Ladakh groups allege that their core demands of Statehood and inclusion in the Sixth Schedule have not been met.

What is the government's stand?

- **Government's assurance** – Union Home Secretary on his visit to Ladakh on July 1 had assured the protestors a discussion on the 2 points.
    - The MHA had informed a parliamentary standing committee in 2022 that the objective for inclusion of a tribal population under the Sixth Schedule is to ensure its overall socio-economic development.
    - It said the UT administration had already been taking care of this aspect and that sufficient funds were being provided to Ladakh.
- **Engagement with civil societies** – After the violent protests, the MHA said in a statement that it had been actively engaged with LAB and KDA and a series of meetings were held.
- **Increased reservation** – The process of dialogue through this mechanism has yielded phenomenal results by increasing reservations for Ladakh's Scheduled Tribe[s] from 45% to 84%.
- This also provides one-third reservations to women in the councils and declaring Bhoti and Purgi as official languages.
- With this process of recruitment, 1,800 posts opened up for tribals," the MHA said.

Reference

The Hindu| Protest in Ladakh

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering