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J&K before ...

Such inclusion must never be imposed for political convenience. It should be considered only where there is demonstrable public advantage, geographical and administrative logic, financial viability, protection of existing rights and clear public acceptance established through transparent consultation.

The present moment makes such an examination relevant. Jammu and Kashmir's Assembly has sought restoration of full statehood. Ladakh's representative organisations have campaigned for statehood, elected authority and constitutional safeguards; recent discussions also concern the powers of a proposed elected territorial body. These demands are not identical. They nevertheless reflect a common democratic concern: citizens want a meaningful voice in decisions affecting their land, livelihoods, culture, resources and future.

I support the aspiration for meaningful elected government while disagreeing with demands that make new constitutional exceptions a condition of it. J&K would offer a common democratic framework through which these concerns could be addressed within India's sovereignty and constitutional integrity.

A common State could bring civilian responsibilities for connected districts into one planning and budget process. It could coordinate winter medical preparedness, essential supplies, road maintenance, communications backup and disaster response through clearly assigned departments. National defence, external affairs and other Union responsibilities would remain with the Union Government.

Such coordination should support the ability of communities to withstand disruption. Schools need teachers who can remain through winter. Hospitals need staff, medicines and reliable referral arrangements. Local enterprises need transport and electricity that function beyond the tourist season. Families should be able to build their future close to home because services and livelihoods make that choice viable.

Reunification would have to demonstrate an advantage over effective cooperation between existing governments. It cannot be assumed that a larger state would automatically improve security, administration or public trust. The strategic case rests on whether common civilian institutions would deliver greater reliability, clearer responsibility and better outcomes at a defensible cost.

Statehood within the common Constitution

The constitutional route exists. Article 3 empowers Parliament to form states and alter areas, boundaries or names. A Bill requires the President's recommendation. A proposal affecting a state's area, boundaries or name must be referred to its legislature for its views; those views are not a constitutional veto. Article 4 provides for consequential arrangements. Reorganisation by itself does not require restoration of Article 370.

Constitutional power must be accompanied by constitutional responsibility. An enduring settlement requires a transparent process of consultation, public hearings, expert studies, legislative debate, legally enforceable provisions and a clear transition plan.

The proposed State should operate with the normal powers and responsibilities of Indian statehood, without a separate constitution or new regional constitutional exceptions. Wherever this proposal refers to safeguards, I mean protections available through the common legal framework, not Article 370, Sixth Schedule status or a new constitutional bargain for J&K.

Its governing principle would be straightforward: one accountable state government, one common constitutional framework, equal citizenship and effective protection of lawful rights.

The institutional benefit would be substantial if authority and responsibility were properly aligned. Under Section 32 of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, the present Union Territory legislature's powers exclude public order and police. Ladakh has no territorial legislative assembly under the 2019 arrangement.

Ordinary statehood would bring the usual state responsibilities, including policing and public order, within the elected state framework, subject to constitutional limits and Union powers. For citizens, this would create a clearer chain of accountability: representatives question ministers, ministers answer for departments, officials face legislative and legal scrutiny, and voters judge the government's performance.

That benefit must be reinforced by professional administration, transparent recruitment, independent oversight, effective legislative committees, strong local bodies and time-bound public services. Statehood provides the institutional opportunity; good government must deliver the result.

Representation that earns confidence

Representation would be the foundation of confidence in J&K. Article 170's general principle is broadly comparable population per Assembly seat, so far as practicable. The new arrangement would have to comply with applicable census and delimitation requirements. Seats could not simply be assigned to guarantee a preferred regional majority.

Jammu should receive a fair and effective voice. Ladakh's geographical difficulties must receive serious attention within the lawful framework. Kashmir's citizens must enjoy equal political respect. Every region should have credible avenues to challenge administrative neglect and unfair allocation of resources.

A lasting settlement therefore requires electoral fairness together with institutions that make government accessible. The J&K framework should include fair delimitation, lawful representation for remote communities, empowered district and local institutions, statutory support for languages and cultural institutions, consultation on major public decisions, and regular legislative scrutiny of development outcomes.

Regional development arrangements should have published responsibilities and audited budgets. Any inter-regional consultative forum should advise the elected government and legislature, with its proceedings made public. It should not become a parallel government, confer a regional veto or weaken the accountability of ministers.

These arrangements should protect legitimate interests within the common state. Their purpose would be to ensure that unity is experienced as fairness in daily government.

This requires distinguishing representation from expenditure. Population informs electoral equality; terrain, remoteness, climate, border conditions and service costs also matter when distributing public resources.

A sparsely populated mountain district may need greater spending per resident because roads, hospitals, electricity networks, schools and communications are more expensive to provide. A published district-funding formula should recognise these costs alongside population, deprivation, infrastructure deficits, disaster vulnerability and strategic location.

Such a formula would give every district a defensible claim on resources. Annual accounts should show allocations, releases, expenditure, delays, contractors and completed outcomes. Independent audit and a public dashboard should allow citizens to verify whether promised funds have reached the intended communities.

Government closer to its people

A larger state must also bring routine government closer to people. I propose a common administrative system in which district and local offices receive clearly delegated powers, public services have enforceable deadlines, and delayed applications automatically move to an appellate authority.

Residents should be able to track an application through a single digital platform, while assisted service centres remain available for those without reliable internet access. Every district should have accessible grievance offices, legal-aid facilities and mobile administrative camps for remote settlements.

The practical gain would be fewer journeys, fewer unanswered applications and less dependence on personal influence. These reforms must accompany the proposed state from its beginning rather than being postponed until after reorganisation.

Healthcare offers another concrete opportunity. J&K could develop a shared referral network connecting local facilities, district hospitals and specialist centres. A patient's route to treatment should follow clinical need, travel time and available capacity rather than administrative boundaries.

Common procurement, coordinated ambulance arrangements, telemedicine, winter medical planning and agreements for specialist consultations could improve the use of resources. Their effectiveness should be measured through referral delays, staff vacancies, medicine availability, maternal and infant health outcomes and treatment access in remote areas.

Education could follow the same approach: coordinated planning of schools, colleges, technical institutions and skill programmes, with courses linked to identifiable employment opportunities. The aim should be to help young people participate in a wider economy while retaining the option to build their lives close to home.

A lasting settlement must also protect the right of young people to compete fairly. Recruitment should be transparent, merit-based and regionally accessible, with lawful reservations and protections for disadvantaged communities. Public employment data should be published regularly so that no region is left to rely on suspicion or political assurances.

Adjoining areas and the test of public benefit

The proposed adjoining areas deserve assessment on these practical grounds. Pangi, selected Jammu-facing border areas of Salooni and Churah, and Punjab's Dhar Kalan-Dunera belt are candidates for study. Pathankot district as a whole could be examined as a separate option, avoiding an arbitrary division of its existing administrative network.

No territory should be transferred merely because it appears geographically convenient on a map. The decisive test must be whether residents would receive better access to government, healthcare, education, markets, justice and infrastructure while retaining their existing rights and entitlements.

Pangi connects with the Kishtwar-side road system. Atal Setu on the Dunera-Basohli road already provides a physical connection relevant to the Punjab proposal.

A technical assessment should map village-level travel times to hospitals, markets, colleges, courts and government offices in both summer and winter. It should compare current access with the access realistically achievable after reorganisation and planned investment.

The assessment should also examine language, culture, land records, water rights, employment patterns, school affiliations, police jurisdictions, disaster response and the views of elected local bodies. This would identify where inclusion could help and where existing arrangements serve residents better.

Pangi requires particular legal care because it is already a Scheduled Area under the Fifth Schedule. That status cannot be ignored or assumed to disappear through a boundary change. Any study must address its lawful treatment openly. If inclusion cannot be reconciled with the proposed common framework and residents' interests, it should not proceed.

An expanded Jammu could gain population, economic activity and potentially additional legislative representation. That could strengthen its role within J&K. The additional seats, however, would depend on the territory included and the applicable constitutional and legal framework.

The communities concerned must gain something more tangible than a different administrative label. Their public-service access, opportunities, land rights, pensions, employment protections, educational benefits and existing entitlements must be explicitly protected during and after transition.

Connectivity as a source of resilience

New infrastructure strengthens the case for examining these relationships. The Chenani-Nashri and Banihal-Qazigund tunnels have improved important sections of the Jammu-Kashmir road corridor. The Sonamarg Tunnel, inaugurated in January 2025, has improved access to Sonamarg. The separate Zojila Tunnel remains under development and is intended to overcome a major seasonal obstacle towards Kargil and Leh. The whole network cannot yet be described as free from seasonal disruption.

The completed Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link, including the Chenab and Anji bridges inaugurated in June 2025, adds another important connection with the national economy. Its practical value depends on reliable services, freight handling and links between stations, towns and production centres.

On the Himachal side, Atal Tunnel has improved access between Manali and the Lahaul valley. The Border Roads Organisation connected the Nimmu-Padum-Darcha road in March 2024, creating another strategically significant approach towards Ladakh. These developments do not establish that every adjoining road is dependable throughout winter.

The proposed Chattergala Tunnel, the Sudhmahadev-Dranga tunnel project and the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway being developed in sections add further possibilities. Their anticipated benefits must be assessed against actual completion, reliable approach roads and effective local connections.

The economic opportunity is to connect these investments through a common development programme: transport services, agricultural collection centres, cold storage, tourism routes, industrial facilities, renewable energy, digital services and training institutions.

A grower benefits when produce reaches buyers with less spoilage. A small hotel benefits when visitors can travel reliably across several destinations. A manufacturer benefits when freight movement and approvals become more predictable. A student benefits when connectivity makes higher education and employment accessible without forcing permanent migration.

A J&K government could coordinate such investments through one state planning and budget process. Cooperation across existing boundaries can also achieve many of these benefits; the reorganisation study must demonstrate where a common government would add measurable value.

Connectivity must also be tested against disruption. Civilian planning should identify vulnerable routes, alternative supply arrangements, emergency medical capacity and the departments responsible for restoring essential services. Joint exercises with the relevant Union agencies should establish who acts when a critical link fails, within each authority's lawful responsibilities.

Every major project should include maintenance funding, emergency response, local employment, environmental protection and last-mile access. A frontier becomes more resilient when its residents can rely on these systems in difficult months as well as in favourable weather.

Financial credibility and ecological responsibility

Financial credibility is essential. A merger would not automatically produce more central assistance, lower taxes or large administrative savings. An enduring settlement cannot be built on unverified promises.

Before legislation, a five-year and fifteen-year fiscal plan should account for revenues, Union transfers, salaries, pensions, debt, utilities, ongoing projects, maintenance obligations and transition costs. It should assess the consequences for Himachal Pradesh and Punjab if any territory were transferred.

The plan should identify the cost of establishing institutions, integrating departments, harmonising service conditions, maintaining remote infrastructure and protecting existing benefits. It should also specify the sources of revenue and the limits of borrowing.

Assets, liabilities, water and power arrangements, employees, contracts and existing legal rights would need explicit treatment. The 2019 reorganisation legislation itself illustrates the importance of providing for such matters.

Shared procurement, specialist expertise and compatible digital systems may reduce duplication. Any savings should be established by a costed assessment and directed towards frontline services. Transition arrangements should protect employees from arbitrary displacement and ensure that public institutions continue functioning without interruption.

Water, power and natural resources require special attention. A lasting settlement must establish transparent rules for allocation, conservation, pricing, dispute resolution and emergency use. No region should fear that reorganisation will weaken its access to essential resources.

Environmental responsibility must be equally concrete. Improved access can increase pressure on water, land and waste systems. Tourism and construction plans should therefore be tested against local capacity, disaster risk, carrying capacity and ecological limits.

A state ready for the future must be able to develop without consuming the foundations of its prosperity. Environmental impact assessments should be independent, publicly available and followed by enforceable mitigation measures. Mountain ecosystems cannot be treated as an unlimited source of land, water or construction material.

Earn the confidence of every region

Ladakh's confidence remains central to the proposal. Its campaign for greater elected authority is not evidence of support for reunification. A J&K model would have to earn acceptance through effective representation, accessible administration, dependable services and credible protections under ordinary law.

The proposal should therefore not ask Ladakh to surrender its identity in exchange for promises. Its distinct geography, culture, environment and development needs must receive serious attention within the state government and the common legal framework.

Ladakh should have strong elected local institutions, meaningful participation in state decision-making, dedicated development planning, transparent budgetary allocations and a formal mechanism for consultation on matters directly affecting its land, environment and traditional livelihoods. These are responsibilities of good government, not a case for new constitutional exceptions.

The preference for a common constitutional framework places a greater responsibility on its advocates to show that ordinary institutions can respond adequately to remote communities. Existing constitutional rights, lawful reservations and institutional arrangements must be addressed openly through the proper legal process.

The same principle applies to Jammu and Kashmir. Its people must not be asked to accept a new arrangement without clarity on political representation, security, development, land, employment, rehabilitation, justice and the protection of democratic rights.

A lasting settlement must be inclusive without being vague. Its institutions must be strong enough to uphold the common framework and responsive enough to respect the different needs of its citizens.

Put the proposal to public examination

I therefore propose a time-bound public examination conducted by an independent commission established through law. The commission should include constitutional experts, administrators, economists, infrastructure specialists, environmental scientists, representatives of women and youth, and members from Jammu, Ladakh, Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab.

Its work should include village-level transport and service-access mapping; fiscal and economic analysis; representation and delimitation studies; environmental and disaster-risk assessments; examination of water, power and land arrangements; and protection of employee and pension rights.

It should consult elected bodies, civil society, business groups, farmers, students, women and border communities; publish draft recommendations; allow a defined period for public objections and responses; and compare J&K with restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood, separate statehood or other elected arrangements for Ladakh, and stronger cooperation across existing boundaries.

The commission should publish a final report explaining what it recommends and why other alternatives were rejected. Every affected community should be able to see the evidence on which the decision is based.

The final settlement should include a transition authority with a fixed mandate and sunset clause. Its purpose would be to implement the reorganisation, not to become a permanent unelected government. Elections should be held within a clearly defined period after the new state is constituted, subject to the constitutional and legal framework.

The settlement should also include a review mechanism. Parliament and the state legislature should periodically examine whether representation, regional development, public services and statutory protections are functioning as intended. Review should enable correction of failures within a stable democratic framework.

Restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood need not wait for agreement on this wider proposal. The immediate democratic aspirations of the people should not be held hostage to a larger territorial or administrative debate.

At the same time, any broader J&K proposal must proceed through constitutional law, public consultation and democratic acceptance. A durable settlement cannot be built by bypassing the people whose lives it will govern.

A stronger frontier through a stronger democratic state

J&K deserves consideration because it connects democratic aspirations with the infrastructure and economic possibilities of a changing Bharat. It asks how a common state could make government more accountable, representation more credible and opportunity more widely available across a strategically important frontier.

Its success should be measured in journeys saved, services delivered, enterprises established, employment created, disputes resolved, ecosystems protected and public confidence earned. Its strategic value would lie in institutions that keep essential services functioning, communities connected and public responsibilities clear during periods of strain.

An enduring settlement gives disagreement a constitutional, democratic and peaceful place within the system. Every region must have effective ways to challenge injustice. Every citizen should be able to obtain basic services without political patronage. Each generation should inherit institutions capable of resolving disputes rather than merely postponing them.

Reuniting Jammu, Ladakh and Kashmir would be a consequential choice. It must earn support through evidence and consent, and it must deliver through competent government. The national interest is served when citizens can see their own future improving within the Union and trust that their rights will remain protected beyond the politics of the present.

That is the strategic case I place before the country: J&K as a full Indian state, without Article 370, Sixth Schedule conditions or new regional constitutional exceptions; a state capable of turning shared citizenship into shared progress and modern connectivity into dependable public capacity.

Jammu, Ladakh and Kashmir: a new beginning, fresh hopes, and a stronger Himalayan frontier for Bharat. The strength of that frontier should be visible in the confidence of its people, the reliability of its institutions and the opportunities available to its next generation.

Environmental Credibility ...

where water is scarce and agriculture depends on carefully managed irrigation channels, the availability of a traditional water-course can be critical to sustaining crops and rural livelihoods. Any diversion affecting that supply therefore warrants an impartial examination by the competent authorities.

The society had also welcomed the cancellation of the allotment of approximately 1,076 kanals of land to HIAL, calling the earlier allotment to a private institution rather than a public enterprise unfortunate for the village. It urged the administration to consider allotting the land to reputed government institutions, including Sainik School, Eklavya School or Sindhu Central University, so that the land can serve a wider public purpose.

The land allotment was cancelled in August 2025 on grounds cited by the authorities concerning non-establishment of the proposed university and other lease-related requirements. HIAL subsequently challenged the cancellation, and the Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh High Court issued an interim direction in September 2026 restraining the administration from creating third-party interests in the disputed property while the case remains pending.

Separately, the society alleged that 174 kanals of land within the same fencing or boundary wall had been illegally encroached upon by HIAL, citing a certified copy obtained from the Revenue Department. It has requested that the land be reclaimed and used for government development works. This allegation, too, requires verification from official land records and the concerned authorities.

The water dispute presents a broader challenge for environmental initiatives in Ladakh: their success cannot be judged solely by innovation, visibility or the promise of climate resilience. Their impact on existing water rights, farming practices and the livelihoods of local communities also matters.

Ice Stupas have been promoted as a means of storing winter water in the form of ice for use during the agricultural season. But when a project draws upon a traditional stream, its benefits and costs must be assessed across the entire water-sharing system, including downstream users.

The Phyang Welfare Society's allegations call for a transparent investigation into the present watercourse, the implementation and continuing applicability of the 2017 order, and the impact of the alleged diversion on farmers in Phyang and Phey. The administration should establish the facts on the ground, hear the affected villagers and the institution concerned, and ensure that any lawful irrigation entitlements and binding orders are respected.

For the farming communities of Phyang and Phey, the immediate concern is not the public image of any individual or institution, but access to the water on which their fields and livelihoods depend.

The fundamental question is straightforward: if a project is intended to address environmental challenges, can its benefits be considered sustainable without first ensuring that the traditional water needs of the local community are protected?

PM to ...

geothermal energy to enhance energy efficiency and reduce its carbon footprint, the facility reflects the importance of sustainable infrastructure in Ladakh's ecologically sensitive environment. Blending modern passenger amenities with elements of Ladakh's rich cultural heritage, the terminal will improve passenger convenience and strengthen air connectivity with the rest of the country.

Prime Minister will dedicate to the nation the 298-km-long Nimmu-Padum-Darcha Road, constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO). Connecting Nimmu in Leh with Darcha in Himachal Pradesh through the remote Zaskar Valley, the road provides an alternative connectivity corridor to Ladakh, supplementing the Srinagar-Leh and Manali-Leh highways.

Traversing challenging Himalayan terrain, including the high-altitude Shinkun La Pass, the road marks a significant engineering achievement. Its strategic importance lies in enhancing operational mobility and strengthening logistical support for the Armed Forces. It will also benefit residents of Zaskar by improving access to healthcare, education, markets and essential services.

As part of efforts to strengthen energy security and harness Ladakh's renewable energy potential, Prime Minister will inaugurate the 9 MW Hanu Small Hydroelectric Project and the 66 kV Double-Circuit Dah-Hanu-Khaltsi Transmission Line. The projects will strengthen power evacuation infrastructure and improve the reliability of Ladakh's electricity network. They mark an important step towards harnessing the region's hydropower resources and strengthening its energy infrastructure.

Recognising the importance of preserving Ladakh's ancient archaeological heritage, Prime Minister will inaugurate India's first Petroglyph Conservation Park at Sindhu Ghat, Leh. Ladakh is home to hundreds of prehistoric rock art sites featuring carvings of wildlife, human figures and symbolic representations that offer valuable insights into thousands of years of human history.

These petroglyphs are an irreplaceable record of the region's cultural and civilisational past. The conservation park will provide a dedicated space for protecting these vulnerable archaeological remains, raising public awareness and encouraging responsible heritage tourism.

Prime Minister will also inaugurate 40 water bodies developed across 40 villages under Project Him Sarovar, an initiative aimed at addressing Ladakh's unique geographical and climatic challenges through water conservation, in line with the objectives of Mission Amrit Sarovar. Agriculture in Ladakh faces a seasonal imbalance between water availability and demand.

Farmers often experience water scarcity during the crucial sowing season, even as snowmelt and glacial runoff provide substantial water resources during other periods. Project Him Sarovar seeks to address this challenge by conserving water when it is available and ensuring its availability when required, thereby supporting irrigation, sustaining agricultural livelihoods and strengthening long-term water security in the region.

India, Russia...

India as a "natural option" for Russia as Moscow increasingly turns towards Asia amid strained relations with Europe.

Speaking in a conversation with John Micklethwait, Editor-in-Chief of the Bloomberg New Economy Forum, Jaishankar said Russia's relationship with Europe had deteriorated following the Russia-Ukraine war, prompting Moscow to strengthen its engagement with Asian countries.

He emphasised that India-Russia relations had remained steady over the past 75-80 years and that maintaining these ties served the interests of both countries.

"We are a natural option in that regard because we've had very decent relations with Russia from pretty much the early start," Jaishankar said, adding that India wanted Russia to maintain meaningful relationships across Asia.

The External Affairs Minister also highlighted the strategic significance of the partnership, stating that it had contributed to the balance of power and the overall status quo in Asia.