



“The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.”



—Winston Churchill

New Dawn for Ladakh

The approval for the creation of five new districts in Ladakh is a moment of deep political and emotional significance for a region that has waited too long to be heard. With Nubra, Sham, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass now added to Leh and Kargil, Ladakh will have seven districts. More importantly, it will have a governance structure that is closer to its people, its geography and its unique needs. Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena's approval fulfils a long-pending demand of the people of Ladakh. The decision also carries weight because it has been followed immediately by the appointment of deputy commissioners and superintendents of police for the five new districts. This means the move will not remain a paper announcement. Administrative work can begin without delay. Governance structures can become operational. People can start seeing the impact on the ground. For Ladakh, this matters immensely. This is a vast region, spread across difficult terrain, extreme weather and remote habitations. For decades, many citizens had to travel long distances for even basic government services. A file, a certificate, a welfare benefit or a police matter could mean days of travel and hardship. For a shepherd in Changthang, a teacher in Nubra, a mother in Zaskar or a young entrepreneur in Drass, the government often felt far away. That distance is now being reduced. Governance is no longer a distant visitor. It is becoming a neighbour. This is the real meaning of the new districts. It is not merely about offices, boards and buildings. It is about dignity. It is about being seen. It is about the state walking those last miles that citizens have walked alone for generations. Once pushed to the administrative margins of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh has today emerged as a powerful symbol of India's inclusive development and strategic foresight. Its journey from a forgotten frontier to a focused Union Territory is a historic course correction. The grant of Union Territory status in 2019 fulfilled an eight-decade-old aspiration. Since then, the effort has been to give Ladakh direct attention, stronger financial support and a clearer path to development. The creation of five new districts is another step in that journey. Each district carries its own hopes. Changthang has its Pashmina and pastoral economy. Nubra has its tourism and border importance. Zaskar has its remoteness and cultural richness. Drass has its strategic location and resilience. Sham has its own local identity and development needs. These areas deserve governance that understands their realities. This is how governance grows roots. It becomes local. It becomes relevant. It becomes accountable. The Modi government's Ladakh approach shows that when political will meets people's will, even the highest mountains can be bridged. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Union Home Ministry and the UT administration deserve credit for moving in step with Ladakh's aspirations. This is true nation-building. When the remotest citizen feels heard. When development carries belonging. When winter no longer means isolation and dignity no longer has to wait.

AAP Defections IDEOLOGY? PRINCIPLES? IT'S A JOKE

POONAM I KAUSHISH

Politics is the last refuge of scoundrels. This has once again been reinforced by the latest defection of 7 Aam Aadmi Party Punjab Rajya Sabha MPs to BJP, following the trajectory that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The explanation offered was familiar: AAP has lost its way....The leadership no longer serves the people. Conscience demanded a course correction. Sic.

True, the 7 of 10 MPs who effectively brought down AAP's strength to just three in Rajya Sabha crossed the two thirds threshold under the Anti Defection law. As have Congress, TMC, RJD, DMK, NCP leaders who transitioned into BJP with the same language, circumstances and timing.

However, when MPs spend years building their identity around opposing BJP "a goonda Party which whitewashes leaders by unleashing ED and CBI" and then join it, one wonders what changed overnight: Ideology or circumstances? One MP was removed as Dy Party leader in the House, another was raided by ED just a week prior to defection.

Clearly, this is not about one Party losing its ideological anchor. This is about a political ecosystem where ideology itself is becoming flexible, negotiable and at times, secondary. The pattern is time-tested that it no longer surprises: External pressure, internal friction, visible shift in tone followed by seamless political realignment.

The desertion from the only State it presently holds power ahead of the 2027 Punjab Assembly elections should be seen as a tipping point in AAP's journey. Recall, it stormed to power in Delhi aloft its calling card of corruption free India 2012, transitioned rapidly from protest movement to Delhi's ruling party.

But the Party's structure became more centralised. Decision-making increasingly concentrated within a narrow leadership circle, with strategic, electoral and organisational issues tightly controlled by Kejriwal. While this helped AAP maintain coherence and electoral power, it also reduced space for internal dissent.

It suffered its biggest setback February 2025 by losing power in Delhi to BJP due to hubris and ED-CBI's stranglehold on it, resulting in its top leadership abdicationist attitude to the loss. This raised questions about its future and exposed internal fault lines which could weaken its electoral position if not contained quickly.

When AAP came to Government in Punjab it further lost its zeal for clean Government, anti corruption and economic palliatives. This was accompanied by an ideology-lite attitude to politics where short term gains were pursued despite their problematic ideological connotations vis-a-vis majoritarian discourse.

Leaders who once operated in a consensus-driven movement framework increasingly found themselves in a command-driven political organization, reflected in departures over the years. Those who left often cited loss of internal democracy, limited consultation or ideological drift from the founding ethos.

The recent wave follows a similar logic, where internal realignments and leadership disputes escalated into public issues. Another recurring reason is AAP's strong personality-centric structure. The Party's identity remains closely associated with Kejriwal, which

has helped it maintain a unified public brand but has also limited development of alternative leadership centres.

Though, it ensures quick decision-making and electoral clarity, it also creates bottlenecks for ambition and disagreement within the Party hierarchy. Over time, this has contributed to periodic exits of leaders who either felt marginalised or disagreed

to move closer to power: BJP.

Certainly, defections and exits from AAP are not isolated events. The Party has seen a wave since 2015 but the latest exits can dent Kejriwal's strong central leadership image and raises questions about Party cohesion. The next 6-12 months, especially if more leaders jump ship, will decide if this was just turbulence or start of something bigger.

AAPs ability to thrive as a Party and keep its remaining house intact.

Certainly one can never write off a Party due to power loss and defection but as the it has changed from its core principles of graft-free India to freebies and welfarism, economic palliatives alone will no longer be enough to grant AAP the uniqueness it once had.

The recent wave follows a similar logic, where internal realignments and leadership disputes escalated into public issues. Another recurring reason is AAP's strong personality-centric structure. The Party's identity remains closely associated with Kejriwal, which has helped it maintain a unified public brand but has also limited development of alternative leadership centres. Though, it ensures quick decision-making and electoral clarity, it also creates bottlenecks for ambition and disagreement within the Party hierarchy. Over time, this has contributed to periodic exits of leaders who either felt marginalised or disagreed with strategic direction. The Party struggles to institutionalise a deep bench of leadership beyond Kejriwal's core circle. It also faces questions about internal democracy, succession planning and organisational stability. Each wave of departures reinforces the perception that AAP is internally efficient but dependent on Kejriwal's personal leadership. Some leaders have been uneasy with how tightly the Party revolves around Kejriwal and his small inner circle which can quickly become flashpoints. Alongside, its ambition to become a pan-India force hasn't fully materialised outside a few States. Topped by sustained scrutiny from ED-CBI vis-à-vis Delhi's excise policy case which creates uncertainty about the Party's future and hesitation among leaders who want political stability resulting in creating friction if leaders feel they have limited say. One could see more defections not just in Punjab but Delhi also, MLAs and MCD councillors looking to move closer to power: BJP. Certainly, defections and exits from AAP are not isolated events. The Party has seen a wave since 2015 but the latest exits can dent Kejriwal's strong central leadership image and raises questions about Party cohesion. The next 6-12 months, especially if more leaders jump ship, will decide if this was just turbulence or start of something bigger. Yet, AAP's story is defined by a paradox. It remains electorally stable in key pockets while experiencing repeated internal instability. Questionably, is AAP collapsing? No, but it's entering a stress phase. If it stabilises leadership, shows electoral resilience and stops the exit chain, it might recover. If exits continue across States it could start resembling a deeper structural crisis.



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Experts warn AAP could be facing an existential crisis. Unlike Delhi, where it can show a governance model, there is no comparable positive narrative emerging from Punjab. Its performance has faced constant criticism with allegations that Kejriwal acts as 'super Chief Minister' with Mann being sidelined. Add to this, there isn't much substantial growth.

Alas, post leaders exodus one expected a clamour for a more vibrant intra-party debate on understanding what went wrong and what should be done now, instead there is the usual finger pointing which raises doubts about

The core challenge for AAP going forward is not merely preventing exits but reconciling two competing identities of a movement-born organisation that once promised consensus politics and a mature electoral Party that relies on centralised control to function effectively. How it manages that contradiction will determine whether future exits remain episodic political events or erode the very organisation.

Ultimately, for AAP the defections are a sharp and immediate setback, though other Parties continue to experience this daily. The road ahead is particularly challenging for the next four years, if they lose Punjab AAP could still make a comeback in Delhi, but in 2030.

However, for voters it raises a more serious concern: If leaders can move across political lines with ease while claiming a moral high ground, then what are we voting for? A belief system? Or a moment in a larger negotiation of power? What ideology? What principles? Or does the wind simply tells us which way to blow. What gives? ---- INFA

A New Arc of Hope: India–New Zealand FTA in an Age of Uncertainty

LALIT GARG

The global landscape today is marked by uncertainty, conflict, and geopolitical tensions. Escalating strains in West Asia, disruptions in supply chains, and intensifying competition among major powers have raised serious questions about the stability of the world economy. At such a critical juncture, the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed between India and New Zealand on April 27, 2026, in New Delhi emerges not merely as a bilateral economic document, but as a powerful symbol of hope amid global pessimism. It reaffirms the belief that cooperation, dialogue, and partnership remain the most reliable pathways to sustainable prosperity.

This agreement is historic on multiple counts. Finalized within just nine months, it reflects the strong commitment and pragmatic diplomacy of both nations. At a time when the effectiveness of multilateral institutions is being questioned and countries are increasingly turning toward bilateral and regional agreements; this FTA signals a new direction. The slow pace and complexities of the World Trade Organization have prompted nations to seek more flexible and purpose-driven frame-

works—an approach embodied in this agreement. One of the most significant features of the deal is New Zealand's decision to grant duty-free market access to nearly all Indian exports. This opens up unprecedented opportunities for Indian industries, particularly labor-intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, engineering goods, and plastics. The agreement is expected to boost exports, generate employment, and further strengthen India's growing global economic presence.

On the investment front, the commitment by New Zealand to invest \$20 billion in India over the next 15 years is more than a financial figure—it is a reflection of trust. Such investments, especially in infrastructure, agriculture, technology, and services, will inject fresh momentum into India's development. Moreover, when a developed nation makes a long-term investment of this scale in an emerging economy, it sends a strong positive signal to global investors. This agreement could thus act as a "trigger point" for a new wave of foreign investments into India. The services sector stands to gain significantly as well. Enhanced cooperation in IT, education, financial services, tourism, and AYUSH will benefit both countries. Expanded work visa opportunities for Indian professionals in New Zealand will facilitate global talent mobility, fos-

tering not just economic gains but also cultural and intellectual exchange.

Another important dimension of the agreement is agricultural cooperation. New Zealand is globally recognized for its advanced agricultural technologies and high productivity, while India possesses vast land resources and diverse climatic conditions. Collaboration between the two countries can unlock new possibilities in products such as kiwi, apples, honey, and more. Indian farmers will gain access to modern technologies, improved productivity, and global markets. Importantly, India has also safeguarded its dairy and other sensitive agricultural sectors, reflecting the balanced nature of the agreement. From a global perspective, this agreement comes at a time when the world is exploring new models of trade. Earlier, global trade was largely driven by centralized institutions, but today nations are opting for flexible and strategic partnerships tailored to their interests. In recent years, India has signed several key trade agreements, demonstrating its proactive economic diplomacy. This FTA is another crucial link in that chain, deepening India's integration into global value chains.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assertion that the agreement will benefit farmers, youth, women,

artisans, and entrepreneurs reflects its broad socio-economic potential. It reinforces the idea of inclusive growth, where the benefits of economic progress reach all sections of society. The agreement also sends a strong strategic message: India is moving beyond dependence on any single country or region. Amid delays in trade negotiations with major economies like the United States, India is actively diversifying its trade partnerships. This approach strengthens its economic resilience and strategic autonomy. However, certain challenges remain. Indian industries must prepare for increased global competition by improving quality, innovation, and cost efficiency. The government must also ensure that the benefits of the agreement are widely distributed, especially among small and medium enterprises.

Despite these challenges, the India–New Zealand FTA stands out as a positive and inspiring initiative in today's turbulent global environment. It not only elevates bilateral economic relations but also injects fresh energy into the global trading system. It reflects a world where cooperation complements competition. As India moves steadily toward becoming the world's third-largest economy, this agreement represents not just an economic deal but a strategic leap forward. It has the potential to

enhance India's trade dynamism, export capabilities, and credibility in global markets. Sectors such as MSMEs, agriculture, and services will gain new momentum, strengthening India's presence in global value chains.

Looking ahead to 2047, when India will celebrate 100 years of independence, such agreements signal a bright and promising future. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, India is advancing toward multidimensional development, self-reliance, and global partnerships, positioning itself as a strong, influential, and leading nation. These agreements are not merely tools of economic growth but instruments that prepare India for a decisive role on the global stage. Clearly, the coming years are full of opportunities for India—not only economically but also diplomatically and strategically. This agreement transcends trade and investment; it represents a broader vision of economic progress, social inclusion, and global cooperation. In an era marked by war and uncertainty, the India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement sends a powerful message: peace, partnership, and mutual trust are the true foundations upon which a prosperous world can be built. For India, it opens new doors of opportunity while reinforcing its emergence as a responsible and visionary global power.