

Press release: A year of remarkable progress for Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir

1. One year ago today, on the 5th of August 2019, the Parliament of India took the historic decision to reorganise the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir into the two new Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir. With the support of an overwhelming majority in both the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament, representing the will of over a billion Indian citizens, a landmark law was passed repealing the temporary but discriminatory provisions in the Constitution of India, thereby making Kashmir a truly integral and inalienable part of India.
2. A year on, the Government has made every concerted effort to bring the people of Kashmir into the mainstream by promoting socio-economic development that was denied to them for over seven long decades. The positive changes during the past year in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir are evident for all to see.
3. The most apparent change is that all Central laws, which were previously inapplicable, have now been extended to the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. These include progressive, affirmative legislation relating to the right to education, empowerment of women and other under-privileged sections of society, as well as laws ensuring better governance.
4. Immediately after the new Union Territory was formed, local level elections (*elections to block development councils*) were held for the first time in October 2019, with a voter turnout of close to a hundred percent. The women of Kashmir, for the first time since India's independence, could avail of reservation to participate in mainstream politics. With this, the people of Kashmir were able to fully exercise their democratic rights in electing their local representatives.
5. In an unprecedented development, 50 new educational institutions, catering for 25,000 candidates, were established. This is in line with the Government's key vision of providing skills to the youth for better access to employment opportunities.
6. Furthermore, with the introduction of reservation in government jobs, people from under-privileged sections could finally overcome the socio-economic injustices of the past and be represented in the public sphere.
7. In pursuance of the Government's bold decision to fully integrate Jammu & Kashmir into India, over half the Union Council of Ministers visited the Union Territory to interact directly with the people and launch over 200 developmental projects, including new roads, electrical infrastructure, sports structures, and educational buildings.
8. Over the past year, various government schemes were successfully implemented in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. The immediate benefits included electrification of 300,000 households, providing access to running water to about 300,000 homes, completion of the initial phase for flood mitigation of the River Jhelum, integration of transgender persons into the social security scheme, and extension of health-care coverage to almost a million school children.
9. A key objective for introducing the new law last year was to integrate the economy of the erstwhile State of Jammu & Kashmir with the rest of the country. Indeed, after its reorganisation, over 150 agreements have been signed for investing close to INR 14,000 crore (US\$ 2 billion approx.) in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir to boost manufacturing and employment generation.
10. In a remarkable achievement, the Government organised India's first ever winter games in the scenic hill-station of Gulmarg in north Kashmir. About 1000 athletes from across the country participated in the event, competing in winter sports such as snow boarding and skiing.
11. Kashmiri products have been given a significant boost with the introduction of a special market intervention scheme for Kashmiri apples and acquiring of the Geographical Indication [GI] tag for Kashmiri saffron. These developments will not only provide direct commercial benefits to the people involved in the production and marketing of such products but also give greater recognition for these unique products of Kashmir.
12. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir emerged as one of the best performing regions in India, with a testing rate of about 45,000 per million, which is almost four times that of the national average. Jammu & Kashmir was among the first in the country to establish COVID-19 dedicated hospitals, with 17 such hospitals, equipped with 60,000 new beds. In order to ease the economic impact of the lock-down due to COVID-19, the government sanctioned a relief package of INR 350 crore (over US\$ 45 million) to help those adversely affected primarily in the tourism, handicrafts, and construction sectors. The Government facilitated the return of over 250,000 residents of Jammu & Kashmir, who were stranded across the country and overseas as well.
13. The above are examples of only the beginning of a slew of developmental initiatives that the Government of India is undertaking to bring back the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir into the nation's mainstream.

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