

**NEXT IAS**

**DAILY EDITORIAL  
ANALYSIS**

**TOPIC**

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**A battle to save Ladakh, and  
all of humanity**

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## A BATTLE TO SAVE LADAKH, AND ALL OF HUMANITY

### Context

- Recently, it was found that Ladakh is currently at the forefront of a battle that concerns not just its own survival, but the survival of all of humanity.



- Ladakh is a land of high passes, snow-capped mountains, and serene monasteries nestled between Pakistan and China.
- It was established as a Union Territory of India in 2019, following the passage of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act.
  - Prior to that, it was part of the Jammu and Kashmir state.

### Geographical Features:

- Ladakh is located at a height of 11,500 feet and is home to 97% indigenous tribes.
- It is bordered by the **Tibet Autonomous Region to the east**, the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh to the south.
- Both the **Indian-administered Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir** and the **Pakistan-administered Gilgit-Baltistan** to the west, and the **southwest corner of Xinjiang** across the **Karakoram Pass** in the far north.

### Economy and Lifestyle:

- The economy of Ladakh is largely dependent on domestic and foreign tourism, and agriculture.
- Many of its residents lead simple pastoral lives and depend on farming and animal rearing for a livelihood.

### Cultural Heritage:

- The main religious groups in the region are *Muslims (mainly Shia) (46%), Buddhists (mainly Tibetan Buddhists) (40%), and Hindus (12%)* with the remaining 2% made of other religions.
- The region is known for its festivals, traditional music, and folk dances.

### What are the key issues ahead of Ladakh?

- **The Fragile Ecosystem of Ladakh:** The Himalayan region faces the damaging effects of climate change through floods, drought, landslides, greenhouse gases, and other pollutants.
  - ♦ There are **about 15,000 glaciers** in the Himalayan region, often referred to as the **Third Pole**.
  - ♦ These glaciers form an important part of the hydrological process by releasing meltwater to the **Indus, the Ganga, and the Brahmaputra**.
- **The Threat of Climate Change:** The Himalayan glaciers, like those in the rest of the world, are at risk of melting due to global warming and climate change.
  - ♦ It will affect both residents of the mountain region and those living downstream.
  - ♦ According to a study published in 2021, glaciers in the Pangong region retreated around 6.7% between 1990 and 2019.
- **The Role of Infrastructure Development:** In the name of development, several mega infrastructure projects were launched at a rapid pace in Ladakh.
  - ♦ These included the construction of bridges, widening of roads, tunnels, railway lines, mega solar projects, a state-of-the-art airport terminal and wayside amenities to boost tourism.
  - ♦ However, these developments have upset the fragile balance in the Himalayan ecosystem and its biodiversity.

### Other Issues Faced By Ladakh

- **No decentralisation of power:** There had been four MLAs from the region in the erstwhile J&K Assembly; the administration of the region is now completely in the hands of bureaucrats.
  - ♦ To many in Ladakh, the government now looks even more distant than Srinagar.
- **Changed domicile policy in Jammu and Kashmir:** It raised fears in the region about its own land, employment, demography, and cultural identity.
- **Limited Finances:** The UT has two Hill councils in Leh and Kargil, but neither is under the Sixth Schedule.
  - ♦ Their powers are limited to collection of some local taxes such as parking fees and allotment and use of land vested by the Centre.

### Related Key Recommendations

- **Climate Change Mitigation:** Sonam Wangchuk, a climate activist, has highlighted the larger issue of the fragility of the Himalayan ecosystem.
  - ♦ In response to these threats, he addressed a 30,000-strong crowd at Leh, Ladakh to announce his fight is not just about Ladakh and its people. It is a battle for all of humanity and its future generations.
- **Sustainable Infrastructure Development:** The rapid pace of infrastructure development in Ladakh, including the construction of bridges, roads, tunnels, railway lines, and solar projects, has disrupted the fragile Himalayan ecosystem.
  - ♦ There is a need for sustainable development that takes into account the environmental impact.
- **Empowerment of Local Bodies:** The local bodies known as the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils had a key role in decisions related to healthcare, land, and other local issues.
  - ♦ There is a need to empower these local bodies and give them more say in developmental projects.
- **Protection of Cultural Identity:** There is a growing concern among locals about the loss of their tribal identity due to the influx of outsiders and industrialists.
  - ♦ Measures need to be taken to protect Ladakh's unique culture and language.
- **Constitutional Safeguards:** The people of Ladakh have been demanding constitutional safeguards to protect their land, culture, language, and environment.
  - ♦ These demands need to be addressed to ensure the protection of Ladakh's unique identity.
  - ♦ Recently, the Union Government has agreed to examine whether the provisions of the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution** can be implemented in Ladakh's context.

### Sixth Schedule

- It comes under **Article 244** that provides for the formation of **Autonomous Administrative Divisions – Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** — that have some legislative, judicial, and administrative autonomy within a state.
  - It applies to the Northeastern states of **Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram (three Councils each), and Tripura (one Council)**.
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- **Carbon Neutral Strategy:** The National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE) under the Ministry of Science and Technology has been tasked with developing a capacity to scientifically assess the vulnerability of the Himalayan region to climate change.
    - ♦ A carbon neutral strategy for Ladakh is needed to address potential environmental challenges.

### Other Recommendations

- **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST):** In September 2019, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes recommended the inclusion of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule.
  - ♦ The Commission took note of the fact that the newly created Union Territory of Ladakh is predominantly a tribal region in the country.
- **Report highlights of the Parliamentary Standing Committee:** The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs recently tabled a report in the Rajya Sabha.
  - ♦ The report stated that, according to the 2011 Census, the tribal population in the Union Territory of Ladakh is 2,18,355, that is 79.61% of the total population of 2,74,289.
  - ♦ **Special Status:** The committee recommended that special status may be granted to the Union Territory of Ladakh considering the developmental requirements of the tribal population.

### Daily Mains Practice Question

**[Q]** How do you think the efforts of individuals like Sonam Wangchuk can influence policy changes and public awareness regarding environmental issues in regions like Ladakh?

