

Letter to Prime Minister from Intellectuals

Dear Modiji,

Namaskar !

We are pleased to inform you that we held a round table discussion on “Another Look At Articles 35A & 370: Statehood for & Elections in Jammu & Kashmir” among a cross section of people from J&K & other states at IIC on June 17, 2023.

We would like to bring to your attention the noteworthy views that emerged from the free discussion:

Constitutional Impropriety : The participants expressed concern that the abrogation of Article 370 & Article 35A was carried out without the involvement of the people of erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir & in the absence of their elected representatives. They described the action as Constitutional Impropriety that undermined commitments made by successive governments & the architects of accession without regard for history. They emphasized that the downgrading of the state & its division has led to marginalization & dissatisfaction among the people of J&K.

However one of the participants disagreed with the views & blamed regional parties for disregarding national interest & for having misused special status guaranteed under Articles 370 & 35A. She held them responsible for the communalization of J&K & abusing Constitutional instruments, which resulted in separatism & terrorism.

Denial Of Democratic Rights : The denial of Democratic Rights & the absence of Assembly elections were seen as disempowering factors, causing distress & deepening the existing trust deficit. The participants hoped that the Election Commission holds assembly elections soon, allowing the people of J&K to exercise their democratic rights freely & choose their representatives to restore faith in the democratic processes of the nation.

One of the participants differed again putting the onus on the mainstream regional parties & their approach, which led to the death & destruction of people & deferred democratic rights. She suggested that democratic processes in J&K will be either incomplete or meaningless until socio – economic rehabilitation including political empowerment of Kashmiri Pandits is ensured.

Security & Violence : There was near unanimity that peace continued to elude the region & violence still claimed innocent lives. This indicated lack of clear policy for sustainable peace & security.

Alienation, Fear & Deficit of Trust: Economic distress, denial of audience, political disempowerment, communalization of J&K, unfulfilled commitments made in Parliament, failure to acknowledge ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits, failure to compensate the community socially, politically & economically & failure to ensure their safe return & rehabilitation, excessive use of state power to suppress the voice of the people & the absence of dialogue were identified as contributing factors to a sense of alienation, fear & a deficit of trust among the populace.

Recommendations for Consideration:

1. Restoration of statehood : the restoration of statehood in J&K is essential to address the concerns raised by the participants.
2. Conduct early elections to Assembly : Holding elections at the earliest is crucial to regain the confidence of the people. It will be a significant step towards rebuilding democratic institutions for people – friendly governance in the region.

3. Facilitating legal disposal of cases on Article 370 & Article 35A : The pending petitions related to Article 370 & Article 35A in the Supreme Court should be given early disposal, considering their wider constitutional consequences.

4. Addressing Unemployment & Distressing Economy: Efforts should be made to address the issue of unemployment & revive the economy of J&K. Comprehensive measures, including skill development programs, promotional entrepreneurship & attracting investments, should be implemented to improve the overall economic well-being of the region.

5. Return & Rehabilitation of Pandits: Recognizing the urgency to address the long pending issue of the Pandits, the efforts for their return & rehabilitation should be expedited under a result oriented & sustainable policy.

6. Foster Dialogue & Reconciliation : Meaningful dialogues & reconciliation initiatives should be undertaken to address the grievances & aspirations of all stakeholders in J&K.

7. Focus on Sustainable Peace & Security: Efforts should be made to establish sustainable peace & security in J&K.

Honourable Prime Minister, some of us would like to meet you & brief you about all these critical issues, in-person. We request your office to grant us an appointment soon.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

O.P.Shah, Chairman,

Centre for Peace & Progress

Speakers :

1. ***Aadil Nazir Khan – Social Activist***
2. ***Aarti Tikoo - Journalist***
3. ***Angad Singh Khalsa – Social Activist***
4. ***Ashai Sheeban – Chief, J&K People's Party***
5. ***G.K. Mujju – Academician, Newspaper Editor***
6. ***Harsh Dev Singh – Former Minister (J&K)***
7. ***I.D. Khajuria – Political Activist***
8. ***Kapil Kak – Retired Air Vice Marshal***
9. ***Mani Shankar Aiyar – Former Union Minister***
10. ***Muzaffar Shah – Sr Vice President, Awami National Conference (J&K)***
11. ***Nandita Haksar - Advocate***
12. ***Nizamuddin Bhat- Former MLA(J&K), Journalist***
13. ***Tanvir Sadiq – Chief Spokesperson, National Conference (J&K)***
14. ***Tasleem Rehmani – Political Activist***
15. ***Waqar Bhatti – Political Activist***