

Ladakh and Article 371K: What Is It and Why Does Ladakh Want It?

Ladakh is the cold, high mountain region north of Himachal Pradesh. Since 2019, its people have been asking for one thing: **a say in how their land, jobs and culture are protected**. In September 2026, the Central Government suggested a new answer — adding a new part to the Constitution called **Article 371K**. This guide explains it step by step, starting from the basics.

Step 1: Five basic ideas you need first

Idea	What it means
Constitution	The rulebook of India. It says who makes laws, who runs the government and what rights people have.
Article	One numbered rule inside the Constitution. Example: Article 14 gives equality before law.
Constitutional Amendment	A change to the Constitution. It needs a special majority in both Houses of Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) under Article 368.
State	Has its own elected Assembly (Vidhan Sabha) and Chief Minister. Example: Himachal Pradesh.
Union Territory (UT)	Run directly by the Central Government through a Lieutenant Governor (LG) or Administrator. Some UTs, like Delhi, Puducherry and Jammu & Kashmir, have their own elected Assembly. Ladakh does not have an elected Assembly — so its people have no MLAs, and this is the main reason for their demand.

Step 2: What is Article 371?

Normally, the same rules apply to every State. But India is very diverse — a tribal hill area and a big city have different needs. So the Constitution allows **special arrangements for special regions**. Article 371 is the main place where these arrangements are written.

- **Where:** Part XXI of the Constitution, titled 'Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions'.
- **Letters A to J:** Each time a new region needed special treatment, Parliament added a new letter — 371A, 371B, 371C and so on.
- **Ladakh's turn:** The next free letter is K, so the proposal is called **Article 371K**.

In simple words

Article 371 is like a list of 'special rules' for regions that need extra protection. Nagaland, Mizoram, Sikkim and others already have their own special rule. Ladakh may get the next one.

Key term: Asymmetric Federalism

Federalism means power is shared between the Centre and the States. **Asymmetric** means 'not equal'. So **asymmetric federalism** means some regions get extra or different powers because of their special history, culture or backwardness. Article 371 is the best example of this.

Step 3: Who already has special provisions? (371 to 371J)

Each row below shows one special rule, the State it covers, and the problem it solves.

Article	State	Added in	What it protects (simple)
371	Maharashtra, Gujarat	1956	Separate development boards so backward regions (Vidarbha, Marathwada, Saurashtra, Kutch) get a fair share of money
371A	Nagaland	1962	Laws of Parliament on Naga customs, religion, customary law and land do not apply unless Nagaland's Assembly agrees
371B	Assam	1969	A special committee of MLAs (Members of Legislative Assembly) from tribal areas
371C	Manipur	1971	A committee of hill-area MLAs; the Governor reports on hill areas to the President
371D	Andhra Pradesh, Telangana	1973	Fair share of government jobs and college seats for local people of each region
371E	Andhra Pradesh	1973	Allows a Central University in the State
371F	Sikkim	1975	Special terms when Sikkim joined India as the 22nd State
371G	Mizoram	1986	Like Nagaland — protects Mizo customs and land
371H	Arunachal Pradesh	1986	The Governor has special responsibility for law and order
371I	Goa	1987	Goa's Assembly must have at least 30 members
371J	Karnataka	2012	Development board and local job quota for the backward Kalyana-Karnataka region
371K	Ladakh (UT)	Proposed	An elected body for Ladakh with power over land, culture and nature

Easy pattern: Some provisions help *backward regions develop* (Maharashtra, Karnataka). Others *protect tribal culture and land* (Nagaland, Mizoram). Ladakh's would be the *first for a Union Territory*.

Step 4: How did Ladakh reach here?

When	What happened
Before 2019	Ladakh was part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and elected 4 MLAs to the J&K Assembly.
1995 and 2003	Two local councils formed — the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) for Leh and for Kargil. They handle local development but have limited power.
5 Aug 2019	Article 370 (J&K's special status) was removed. J&K was split into two UTs by the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019.
31 Oct 2019	Ladakh became a UT without an Assembly . People lost their elected MLAs.
2019	The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) recommended Sixth Schedule protection for Ladakh.
2023	The Centre formed a High-Powered Committee under the Minister of State (Home) to talk to Ladakh's leaders.
June 2025	New rules: 85% of government jobs reserved for local categories, official languages declared, one-third seats for women in local councils.
24 Sep 2025	A protest in Leh turned violent. Four people died. Activist Sonam Wangchuk was detained.
March 2026	The Centre released Wangchuk.
9 Sep 2026	The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) proposed Article 371K in talks with Ladakh's leaders.
Oct 2026	Next round of talks expected.

Step 5: Who is talking to whom?

- **The Centre:** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), which looks after Union Territories.
- **LAB — Leh Apex Body:** A group of religious, political and social organisations of Leh district.
- **KDA — Kargil Democratic Alliance:** A similar group from Kargil district.
- Leh is mostly Buddhist and Kargil mostly Muslim, yet both groups have joined hands on this demand — this unity is itself important.
- **Sonam Wangchuk:** Engineer, education reformer and climate activist from Ladakh, a leading public face of the movement.

Step 6: Why are Ladakh's people worried?

- **No elected government:** Since 2019, Ladakh is run by the Lieutenant Governor and officers appointed by the Centre. People feel they have no voice.
- **Land:** Earlier, J&K's special laws stopped outsiders from buying land. Those laws ended in 2019. Ladakh has a very small population, so people fear outsiders may buy land and change the region.
- **Environment:** Ladakh has glaciers, fragile pastures and little water. Big mining, industry or unplanned tourism can harm it quickly.
- **Jobs:** Young people waited years for government recruitment after 2019.
- **Culture:** Most people belong to Scheduled Tribes, with their own languages and traditions they want to protect.

Real-life example

A shepherd family in Changthang (eastern Ladakh) has grazed Pashmina goats on the same open pastures for generations. Suppose that land is given to a large project. Who decides? Today, officers who were not elected by the people. Ladakh's demand is simple: **the people who live with the result should have a say in the decision.**

Step 7: What does Article 371K propose?

According to Ladakh's leaders after the 9 September 2026 meeting, the Centre said:

- **An elected body for all of Ladakh:** People will vote directly to choose its members.
- **Power to make laws** on land, culture and language, forests, environment and natural resources (water, minerals, pastures).
- **Power over other UT subjects** that the President can regulate for Ladakh under **Article 240**.
- **Some money and planning powers** — but how much is not yet clear.
- **Needs Parliament:** It can happen only through a Constitutional Amendment.

In simple words

Ladakh would not become a full State, but it would get its own elected body — like a small Assembly — that can make laws on the things Ladakh cares about most: land, culture and nature.

Key term: Article 240

This Article lets the **President make rules (called Regulations)** for some Union Territories that have no Assembly — like Ladakh, Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. These rules work like laws made by Parliament. The 2025 job and language rules for Ladakh were made this way.

Step 8: What is still not decided?

Question	What Ladakh's leaders want	Where it stands
Written draft	The full proposal on paper before the next meeting	Only a slide presentation was shown
Police and law and order	Under the elected body	Not decided
Government officers	Power over their posting, transfer and yearly performance report	Not decided
Money	Real control over Ladakh's budget	Mentioned, no details
Until then	The LG should avoid big decisions on land and administration	Pending
Timing	Pass the law in Parliament's Winter Session	Pending
Bigger demands	Full Statehood and Sixth Schedule	The Centre prefers Article 371

Interesting contrast: In Arunachal Pradesh (Article 371H), the *Governor* — appointed by the Centre — has special power over law and order. Ladakh's leaders want the opposite: police control with *elected* local leaders.

Step 9: Three options for Ladakh — compared

Key term: Sixth Schedule

A part of the Constitution for tribal areas of four North-Eastern States — **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**. It creates **Autonomous District Councils**: elected local bodies that can make laws on land, forests, customs and marriage for tribal people. Ladakh wants this protection because most of its people are tribal.

Point	Sixth Schedule	Article 371K (proposed)	Full Statehood
What Ladakh gets	District-level tribal councils	One elected body for whole Ladakh	Own Assembly and Chief Minister
Where used now	Tribal areas of 4 North-East States	Nowhere yet — Ladakh would be first	All 28 States
Land protection	Strong	Depends on final text	State can make its own land laws
Police control	With the State	Not decided	With the State
Status for Ladakh	Recommended by NCST in 2019; not accepted	Proposed by MHA, Sept 2026	Demanded; not accepted

Facts vs Allegations — know the difference

- **FACT:** Four people died in Leh on 24 September 2025. The Centre announced an inquiry by a retired Supreme Court judge on 17 October 2025.
- **FACT:** In September 2026, the Ladakh administration approved about ₹1.52 crore as compensation for the families of those killed and the injured.
- **ALLEGATION (by authorities):** Sonam Wangchuk provoked the violence. He was detained under the **National Security Act (NSA)**, a law that allows detention without trial to prevent a threat to public order. He has denied the charge, and it was never tested in court.
- **CLAIM (by LAB and KDA):** The 9 September meeting only repeated old discussions. The MHA has not publicly answered this.

Step 10: Why should Himachal students care?

- **Himachal faced the same fear earlier:** To stop outsiders from buying up land, Himachal made **Section 118 of the HP Tenancy and Land Reforms Act, 1972**. Under it, a person who is not an agriculturist of Himachal needs government permission to buy land. Ladakh wants similar protection — but written in the Constitution itself.
- **Himachal's tribal areas:** Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti, Pangi and Bharmour are 'Scheduled Areas' under the **Fifth Schedule**, with a Tribal Advisory Council to advise on tribal matters. Ladakh is asking for the stronger Sixth Schedule.
- **Neighbours:** Lahaul-Spiti and Ladakh share Buddhist culture, the Bhoti language, cold-desert land and the Manali-Leh road.

Key term: Fifth vs Sixth Schedule

Fifth Schedule: Used in tribal areas of many States (including Himachal). The Governor and a Tribal Advisory Council protect tribal interests, but there is no separate law-making council.

Sixth Schedule: Used only in 4 North-Eastern States. Elected tribal councils can **make their own laws**. So the Sixth Schedule gives more self-rule.

Key Terms and Full Forms

Term	Full form and meaning
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs — Central ministry that handles internal security and Union Territories
UT	Union Territory — area governed directly by the Central Government
LG	Lieutenant Governor — the Centre's representative who heads a UT like Ladakh
LAB	Leh Apex Body — joint platform of organisations from Leh
KDA	Kargil Democratic Alliance — joint platform of organisations from Kargil
LAHDC	Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council — local council for Leh and for Kargil
NCST	National Commission for Scheduled Tribes — constitutional body that protects tribal rights (Article 338A)
NSA	National Security Act, 1980 — allows preventive detention without trial
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly — elected representative in a State Assembly
J&K	Jammu and Kashmir
LAC	Line of Actual Control — the working border between India and China, which passes along Ladakh
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	Tribal communities listed by the President for special protection under Article 342
Bhoti, Purgi	Local languages of Ladakh; made official languages in 2025 along with English, Hindi and Urdu

Exam Angle: UPSC and HPPSC

UPSC — Union Public Service Commission; HPPSC — Himachal Pradesh Public Service Commission; HPAS — Himachal Pradesh Administrative Service; GS — General Studies.

Prelims — remember these

- Article 371 is in **Part XXI**. Articles 371 to 371J cover **12 States**.
- 371A — Nagaland (1962) • 371G — Mizoram (1986) • 371H — Arunachal Pradesh (1986) • 371J — Karnataka (2012).
- 371E is the only one about a university (Andhra Pradesh).
- Ladakh became a UT on **31 October 2019**; the President makes rules for it under **Article 240**.
- Official languages of Ladakh (2025): English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti, Purgi.

Mains — practice questions

- GS Paper II*: "Article 371 shows India's asymmetric federalism." Explain with reference to the proposed Article 371K for Ladakh.
- GS Paper II*: Compare the Sixth Schedule and Article 371 as ways of giving self-rule to tribal and backward regions.
- HPAS GS Paper II*: How do Section 118 and the Fifth Schedule protect land and tribal interests in Himachal Pradesh?

Useful words for answers

Asymmetric federalism • Democratic deficit (people without an elected government) • Constitutional safeguards • Fragile ecology • Border security • Tribal identity • Trust-building



Conclusion

India has always believed in *one Constitution, but different arrangements for different needs*. Nagaland got protection for its customs; Karnataka got help for its backward districts. Now Ladakh may get Article 371K. But the name alone will not solve the problem. What matters is the fine print — **who will control land, jobs, police and money?** Until the Centre shares a written draft, that question remains open.

Sources: The Indian Express (Sept 2026); The Hindu; The Tribune; Outlook; Ladakh regulations notified June 2025; Constitution of India. Details of Article 371K are based on statements after the 9 September 2026 meeting and may change when the official draft is released.