

Parties stage protests across J&K on anniversary of Article 370 dilution

Peerzada Ashiq

SRINAGAR

Amid heightened security, the ruling National Conference (NC) and the Opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) held street protests across Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday to mark the seventh anniversary of the dilution of Article 370, which had granted special status to the erstwhile State.

Recalling August 5, 2019, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said, "Seven years, we haven't forgotten, and we haven't reconciled, far less accepted our current circumstances. My party and I remain committed to reversing all that was done to J&K that took away our rights and threatens our identity..."

Several NC leaders and legislators held protests in their respective constituencies across the Union



Police try to stop National Conference leaders and supporters during a protest in Srinagar on Wednesday. IMRAN NISSAR

Territory. Senior Minister Sakina Itoo led a protest at the party headquarters in Srinagar, where NC leaders carried placards demanding the restoration of J&K's special status. "August 5 will always be observed by us as a Black Day," said NC legislator Ahsan Pardesi.

NC Minister Javed Rana said the emotions associated with August 5 remain as profound today as they

were then. "Time may have moved forward, but our resolve has only grown stronger... Our commitment has never been about confrontation; it has always been about restoring dignity, democratic rights, constitutional guarantees and the trust of our people through lawful and peaceful means," said Mr. Rana.

Following a call by the Opposition PDP, party

leaders held district-wise protests across J&K. The PDP alleged several of its leaders had been placed under house arrest. The party posted videos on social media of several party leaders detained at police stations, and others allegedly prevented from leaving their homes.

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti held a late evening protest on Tuesday and termed August 5 as "the first step towards erosion of the Constitution by the BJP".

Other regional parties, including the J&K Apni Party, the Awami Ittehad and the J&K Peoples Conference, also registered their protests over the Centre's decisions made in 2019.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha handed over appointment letters to the kin of civilian victims of terrorism in Srinagar on the occasion.

Rijiju meets Rahul in bid to end Parliament logjam

Parliamentary Affairs Minister says there is no proposal to hold Special Session to push through women's quota and delimitation Bills; Cong. presses for Shah's statement, debate on donation row

Sandeep Phukan

NEW DELHI

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju met Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday in an effort to break the deadlock in Parliament, with the two sides discussing the proposed delimitation Bill and the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment (FCRA) Bill, 2026.

Amid speculation that the government could convene a three-day session after Independence Day to push through the women's reservation Bill and the delimitation Bill, Mr. Rijiju told *The Hindu* that "there is no such proposal".

Sources said Mr. Rijiju did not raise any proposal to extend the ongoing



Congress MPs Rahul Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, and others protest against the Centre at Parliament complex on Wednesday. PTI

Monsoon Session or convene a Special Session during the nearly 50-minute meeting with Mr. Gandhi. Instead, he sought to know the Congress's stand on delimitation, they said.

'Non-negotiable'

According to sources, Mr. Gandhi conveyed to Mr. Ri-

jiju that a statement by Home Minister Amit Shah on the police action against students who protested against the NEET paper leak and a discussion on the alleged theft of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya were non-negotiable if the House was to function.

The meeting, held in Mr. Gandhi's Parliament office, was attended by Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal, deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi, and Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

The Congress leaders also reiterated their opposition to any constitutional amendment to carry out the delimitation exercise, sources added.

The government's outreach came on a day when Opposition MPs held a symbolic march within the Parliament complex, questioning Mr. Shah's continued absence from the House.

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Misri meets Lanka President, bilateral projects in focus

Shubhajit Roy
New Delhi, August 5

INDIA AND Sri Lanka have agreed to take forward the negotiations on updating the Free Trade Agreement and will sign the Social Security pact soon, as Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake in Colombo on Wednesday.

The discussions between Misri and Dissanayake focused on issues of "mutual interest and review of key bilateral projects, including assisted development projects in Sri Lanka".

Following the meeting, both sides exchanged agreements on INR-denominated Lines of Credit for USD 350 million, which form part of the USD 450 million reconstruction package extended by India in the wake of Cyclone Ditrwah. The LoCs will support reconstruction, infrastructure development, and procurement requirements that arose in the aftermath of the cyclone, the Indian High Com-

mission in Sri Lanka said.

The Foreign Secretary also "called upon the Sri Lankan leadership to implement their commitment to hold Provincial Council elections at the earliest and to fully implement the Constitutional provisions of Sri Lanka to meet the aspirations of the Tamil people", MEA said.

"He welcomed President Dissanayake's assurances as contained in the Joint Statement of December 2024 that Sri Lankan territory shall not be permitted to be used in any manner inimical to the security of India and conveyed that this provides a strong foundation to build a comprehensive and mutually beneficial development," the MEA said.

"There was also discussion on strengthening our partnership on economic matters. Both sides welcomed the initial discussions in June this year and the decision to take forward negotiations on updating the Free Trade Agreement between India and Sri Lanka. They also wel-



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri with Sri Lanka President Anura Kumara Dissanayake in Colombo on Wednesday. ANI

comed the successful conclusion of negotiations on India-Sri Lanka Social Security Agreement. The Agreement is expected to be signed soon following completion of necessary internal procedures," it said.

Misri, who arrived in Colombo for a day-long visit, held a meeting with Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath during which they reviewed ongoing cooperation in key priority areas. This

was his first stand-alone visit to Sri Lanka as Foreign Secretary. He also met Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Harini Amarasuriya and Leader of Opposition Sajith Premadasa and had separate meetings with leaders of Sri Lankan Tamil and Indian Origin Tamil community.

According to the MEA, both nations expressed satisfaction at the progress registered in the implementation of various pro-

jects, including under the reconstruction package of USD 450 million, announced following cyclone Ditrwah. In particular, they welcomed the conclusion of agreements on two INR-denominated Lines of Credit of USD 250 million for the railway projects and of USD 100 million for livestock and other priority requirements respectively.

"Both sides also noted that reconstruction of damaged houses and construction of permanent bridges under the Ditrwah Reconstruction Package and covered under a grant of USD 100 million will commence shortly... Both sides are also working towards earliest possible implementation of an Island wide disaster warning system for Sri Lanka... the work on rehabilitation of Northern Railway corridor under a grant of USD 5 million has been completed and train services have resumed," MEA said. It said that the two sides also discussed modalities for "expediting implementation of energy projects, including

electricity grid interconnection project, Sampur solar power project and development of Trincomalee as an energy hub".

They also agreed to work towards the earliest possible conclusion of the tender process for implementation of the Sri Lanka Unique Digital Identity project.

"They directed that discussions be initiated at the earliest to conclude an MoU on rehabilitation and modernisation of Kankesanthurai harbour project, to be implemented under a grant of USD 61.5 million. Recalling the commitment made during the visit of PM of India to Sri Lanka in April 2025, the two sides agreed that the MoU to implement the proposed expansion of the 1990 Suwa Seriya Ambulance service should be concluded at an early date. They also noted with satisfaction that the initiative on capacity building announced during the visit of the Prime Minister last year has also been implemented successfully....," it said.

RBI set to launch 'plastic' notes at start of 2027-28

Akash Mandal

Mumbai, August 5

THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) plans to launch polymer banknotes at the beginning of next financial year (FY28), and people will initially get hold of lower denomination "plastic" notes, that of Rs 10 and Rs 20.

"Polymer notes have two purposes. One, it enhances the durability. This is relevant especially for the lower denominated notes with higher velocity. These notes have been in circulation for more than 30 years in various countries, and one finds that the life is much more, around 2-4 times the life of the paper currency," Malhotra said at the central bank's post monetary policy press conference.

"The second purpose is to expand our capacity as the needs of the economy increase," he said. The new notes will be checked for durability and adaptability to Indian conditions before the RBI clears it for circulation. "We will test and check on how they perform in the Indian climate, conditions, and other infrastructure that we have put in place," Mal-



The project will start with the lower denomination notes of Rs 10 and Rs 20, that are prone to more wear and tear. REUTERS

hotra said. "We are targeting that circulation, if everything goes to plan, it starts from the beginning of the next financial year," he said.

The project will begin with the lower denomination notes of Rs 10 and Rs 20 which have "higher velocity" to change hands, and thus are prone to more wear and tear.

The RBI's trial of plastic notes will see 100 crore pieces of Rs 10 and Rs 20 notes each being introduced, totalling Rs 3,000 crore. The RBI's subsidiary Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Limited had last month floated a global

tender for 3.4 crore polymer sheets for the same purpose. The tender had deemed the sheets an "immediate requirement" and once field trials were successful, "we intend to go for procurement of larger quantities of substrate across different denominations". This would be the central bank's second attempt at introducing plastic notes, having attempted to procure 100 crore bank notes of Rs 10 each. These were to be tried across cities under various climates like Kochi and Shimla. However, the trial was not successful due to "certain technical infirmities".

TRUMP: TALKS MOVING NICELY... STRAIT WILL OPEN VERY SOON

Hormuz deal seeks to give Iran control over inbound ships

US army running low on long-range missiles: Report

Reuters

Dubai, Riyadh, August 5

A PROPOSED deal between Iran and Oman would give Tehran control over ships entering the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz, a senior Iranian source told *Reuters* Wednesday, in one of the biggest concessions yet to Iran.

Despite the apparent step towards yielding to Iranian demands, the sources pushed back against assertions by US President Donald Trump that a deal reopening the strait was imminent. "The concession has already been made regarding some form of control over Hormuz," the source said.

There were still details to be determined about how "control" would be defined, with Gulf negotiators insisting regional countries supervise inspections of ships, and that any payment of fees be voluntary.

The senior Iranian source said the text of an agreement already on the table envisioned Iran having control of ships heading into the Gulf through the strait, and one of the main sticking points was what role Iran would also have over ships



Shiite worshippers carry a portrait of late Iran leaders Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Ayatollah Khomeini in Karbala, Iraq, on Tuesday. AP

heading in opposite direction.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei described the negotiations between Tehran and Muscat as "professional" and "moving forward". "The two sides had reached a mutual understanding on the geographical parameters of the route under discussion," he said.

He said if third parties did not obstruct the process, a joint statement between the two countries was in the final stages of review and drafting.

US officials have repeatedly insisted that they would never accept any arrangement that lets Iran control access to the world's most important trade route for energy supplies. But Trump and senior officials in his administration have said in recent days that a deal is imminent to end war.

There was no immediate reply from Washington about any proposed agreement.

US commanders advised Trump in July that they were running low on supplies of some munitions. *Reuters* reported Tuesday the US Army had used up nearly all of its long-range precision missiles.

Trump told *Fox News* talks were "moving along nicely" and "an all-day negotiation" had taken place on Tuesday. The Strait of Hormuz "is going to be open very soon", Trump added.

Meanwhile, Baghaei said there was no plan for the foreign minister or the parliament speaker to travel to Qatar or Pakistan during the weekend, adding Tehran continued to stay in contact with the two countries that are "continuing their efforts to reduce tensions".

New Hormuz route agreed, to be managed jointly with Oman: Iran

The geographical coordinates of the route envisaged by the two countries have been agreed upon, and a joint statement, containing the main considerations and points of agreement, is in the final drafting stage, says Tehran's Foreign Ministry

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran and Oman have agreed to a route for ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz and are putting the final touches on arrangements for jointly managing the passage, Tehran's Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday.

Iran has seized *de facto* control of the strait, a strategic waterway for the global energy trade, since the U.S. and Israel launched their war against the country on February 28.

U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly insisted Tehran is keen to do a deal to reopen the route



Motorists drive past a large billboard pledging revenge against Donald Trump along Jomhuri Street in central Tehran. AFP

to shipping, but Iran denies this and says it will instead make arrangements with its neighbour across the strait, Oman.

"The geographical coor-

dinates of the route envisaged by the two sides have been agreed upon and, if certain third parties do not obstruct the process, the joint statement of the two

countries, containing the main considerations and points of agreement, is also in the final review and drafting stage," spokesperson Esmail Baqaei said, according to state news agency IRNA.

According to the report, Mr. Baqaei told presspersons that talks with Oman were moving forward, but that even if an understanding was reached, it would not mean that the strait had become safe for all passing vessels.

"The factors making the Strait of Hormuz insecure still exist on the part of the United States, particularly the naval blockade and other aggressive and threa-

tening actions against Iran and its interests," he said.

Mr. Trump had said Tuesday a deal with Iran to reopen Hormuz could happen "tomorrow or the next day," telling reporters in California that negotiators "had a very good day".

"The strait is going to be open very soon, or they're going to get hit very hard – and then the strait's going to be open," Mr. Trump said in an interview with Fox News.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Tuesday that the United States was involved in negotiations between Oman and Iran on increasing traffic through the Strait of Hormuz.

Dhaka turns Hasina's official residence into memorial museum

Press Trust of India

DHAKA

Amid tightened nationwide security, Bangladesh on Wednesday inaugurated a memorial museum at the official residence of ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to commemorate the victims of violence during the anti-government protests in 2024 that toppled her government.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman inaugurated the 'July Mass Uprising Memorial Museum' at Ganabhaban, Prime Minister's official residence during Ms. Hasina's regime, coinciding with the day she left to India on August 5, 2024.



Sheikh Hasina

Mr. Rahman announced that government institutions would be named after slain activists of the uprising and those who were killed during the rule of Ms. Hasina's Awami League since 2009.

According to a UN report, up to 1,400 people were killed between July 15 and August 15 last year.

China announces countermeasures against Washington

Associated Press

BANGKOK

China announced a series of economic measures on Wednesday against the United States, including controls on exports of drones to the U.S. and a ban on dealings with six American entities, in response to recent restrictions imposed by Washington.

Tensions are simmering between the world's two biggest economies ahead of an expected visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to the U.S. in September, despite signs of warming ties during his meetings with U.S. President Donald Trump in Beijing in May.

The Commerce Ministry

said the sanctions are in response to recent moves from the U.S., including a ban by the U.S. Federal Communications Commission on imports of Chinese drones, and the Department of Homeland Security's decision to add 43 Chinese companies to the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act entity list to prevent imports of goods made with forced labour.

The "measures seriously violate the important consensus reached by the two heads of state and severely damage China's legitimate rights and interests. China has no choice but to take necessary countermeasures in response," the Ministry said.