

Ladakh bodies reject Centre's draft, say region turned into 'testing lab'

Naveed Iqbal

Srinagar, October 24

THE KARGIL Democratic Alliance (KDA), one of two bodies negotiating with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) over Ladakh's future, on Saturday termed Centre's draft governance proposal for the Union Territory an "empty draft" and rejected it, accusing it of "murdering democracy" in Ladakh.

This comes a week after a subcommittee comprising members of the KDA and Apex Body Leh (ABL) met MHA officials to discuss greater democratic representation for the region. Talks have since stalled, with both sides blaming each other for the lack of progress.

Addressing a press conference on Saturday, KDA co-chairman Sajjad Kargili reiterated the allegations, saying: "We were hoping that the MHA would form its draft based on the minutes of the meeting that we had signed. We were promised a sui generis model that would be more empowered than the J&K assembly".

The draft presented after the meeting, he said, did not represent the aspirations of Ladakh's

people, "but in turn, it represents the concerns of the UT administration more than the people". Both the KDA and ABL have sent their comments on the draft to the MHA.

Since the meeting, the Ladakh administration has announced panchayat polls, imposed the Model Code of Conduct, announced hill councils for each of the newly created districts and dissolved the Kargil hill council. The decisions have drawn criticism from the representatives.

"It seems like the UT administration is consumed with pushing notifications," Kargili said. "They've announced 100 constituencies for Ladakh through new LAHDCs, but whether it is 100 or 200, it doesn't make a difference if they do not have appropriate powers."

Rejecting the Centre's draft, the KDA leadership called it an "attack on the rights of the people of this region".

"We have seen the allegations of 'vote chori' in other parts of the country. Ladakh has been turned into a testing lab, and they have stolen representation from here. The decisions being taken unilaterally are a clear dis-



The decisions being taken unilaterally are a clear display of murder of democracy in Ladakh"

SAJJAD KARGILI,
KDA CO-CHAIRMAN

play of murder of democracy in Ladakh," Kargili said.

KDA co-chairman Asgar Ali Karbalai said the KDA and ABL had been negotiating with the MHA for six years on their four-point agenda. Statehood and constitutional safeguards under the Sixth Schedule have been the key demands in their agenda document since 2023, he said.

He said the two issues had been discussed extensively, including at a key meeting on May

22 this year. "In the meeting held on May 22, in principle agreement was reached on important concerns raised by us," he said.

On July 7, the MHA sent the minutes of that meeting, which were signed by KDA and ABL members, including Ladakh MP Mohammad Hanifa Jan.

"This agreement includes two main points, including the fact that the ultimate aspiration of the people of Ladakh is statehood. In the agreement reached, we were promised a unique governance body with legislative, executive and financial powers. It also promised special constitutional safeguards for Ladakh. This is part of a signed document," Karbalai said. However, when the group met again on October 15, the draft presented to the subcommittee proposed a "North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) type model", contrary to the discussions and the document signed by the members on July 7, he said.

The KDA said the draft did not address constitutional safeguards or legislative powers, placing everything under Article 240. "Under this, all powers exist with the LG by the President of India," Karbalai said.

Neha Bora refuses to sign peace bond, calls it a move to curb democratic dissent

Suruchi Kumari

NEW DELHI

All India Students' Association (AISA) president Neha Bora on Saturday refused to sign a peace bond, saying it would amount to surrendering the right to democratic dissent, a day after the Delhi High Court dismissed her plea challenging a police notice directing her to provide a personal bond of ₹10,000 with one surety.

The Special Executive Magistrate (SEM) court fixed October 29 as the next date of hearing in the case.

Ahead of her appearance before the SEM at 2 p.m., Ms. Bora said the use of peace bonds to prevent protests was an attempt to curb democratic dissent.

Issued on October 17 under Section 126 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), the notice required Ms. Bora to appear before the SEM on Oc-



Neha Bora

tober 19 and show cause as to why she should not execute a personal bond of ₹10,000, with one surety, to maintain peace during the inquiry.

However, Ms. Bora then moved the Delhi High Court to challenge the notice. The court dismissed her plea on Friday.

"This fight against the misuse of peace bonds is part of our fight against the SIR and for Gyanesh Kumar's resignation," the AISA leader said, referring to the ongoing agitation

against the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and the demand for the removal of the Chief Election Commissioner.

"As we take this movement forward, it is important for it to sustain and fight so that peaceful demonstrations are not declared a breach of peace. The peace bond, as it has been executed and interpreted today, will not be signed by the AISA. It will not be signed by me," Ms. Bora said.

Threats at police station

The AISA alleged that a group of over 50 people gathered outside the Mandir Marg police station, raising slogans against Ms. Bora and threatening violence as the student leader arrived for the hearing. According to the organisation, the group occupied the entrance, prompting the police to escort Ms. Bora inside under protection, after about an hour.

Mob torches police station, vandalises State BJP chief's house amid protests in Arunachal

Press Trust of India

ITANAGAR

Amid protests against the proposed 11,200-MW Siang Upper Multipurpose Project in Arunachal Pradesh, a mob torched a National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) office and a police station and vandalised the residences of three political leaders, including that of the State Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) chief in East Siang district, a senior officer said on Saturday.

Several police personnel were injured after protesters allegedly hurled stones at them in Pasighat, the officer added.

The agitators vandalised the residences of BJP State unit president and former



Security personnel deployed after a protest turned violent in Pasighat, East Siang district, on Saturday. ANI

MLA Kaling Moyong and Pasighat West legislator Ninong Ering. The house of MLA Oni Panyang was also ransacked.

Expressing concern

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu described the incidents as re-

grettable and called upon all sections of society to maintain peace.

According to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), Mr. Khandu said a 12-hour bandh in Siang, Upper Siang and East Siang districts over the power pro-

ject remained largely peaceful on Friday. However, violence erupted in Pasighat after the bandh ended and continued until 3.30 a.m. on Saturday.

On concerns surrounding the power project, Mr. Khandu reiterated that the State government remained open to discussions with all organisations and associations.

In the wake of the violence, the East Siang district administration has imposed restrictions on public gatherings, processions and the carrying of weapons in Pasighat, Mebo and Ruksin amid apprehensions of further vandalism, arson and a possible breach of law and order, officials said.

INDIA bloc to hold 'public impeachment proceeding' of CEC

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said on Saturday that the INDIA bloc is set to hold a "public impeachment proceeding" of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar on October 30. Mr. Venugopal's post on X comes as the Opposition is stepping up its demand for the removal of Mr. Kumar from the post.

Article 324 (5) of the Constitution deals with the removal of the CEC in a like manner and grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court while the term impeachment (Article 61) is reserved for the President's office.



K.C. Venugopal

"After this Public Impeachment, we will hold a Dilli Chalo march against Vote Chori culminating at Ramlila Maidan on November 1, where at least a million concerned citizens will participate," said Mr. Venugopal. He added that Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has reached out to all INDIA bloc parties and requested their leaders and members to be present in Delhi.

Ethanol procurement tender triggers feedstock concerns

As rice gains ground over maize, the competing concerns highlight the challenge facing the ethanol procurement framework: balancing the availability and cost of different feedstocks.

M. Soundariya Preetha

COIMBATORE

The Oil Marketing Companies' (OMCs) latest ethanol procurement tender for Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2026-27 has triggered concerns among grain-based ethanol producers and sections of the sugar industry over feedstock pricing, allocation priorities and the potential implications for the sector.

The tender sets procurement prices at ₹60.32 a litre for surplus foodgrains (SFG), with a stated cap of 108 crore litres for the first three quarters; ₹64 a litre for damaged foodgrains (DFG); and ₹66 a litre for maize, plus an additional



According to industry estimates, DFG-based ethanol allocation during ESY 2025-26 was approximately 60 crore litres. REUTERS

₹2.79 a litre. While ethanol produced from sugarcane juice, sugar syrup and B-heavy molasses has been excluded, C-heavy molasses-based ethanol remains eligible for procurement.

The Grain Ethanol Manufacturers Association (GEMA) has argued that

the tender places a disproportionate burden on rice-based feedstocks, particularly SFG and DFG, while potentially weakening maize's role as an industrial feedstock.

The pricing differential has also created uncertainty over how procurement

demand will be distributed among the different feedstock categories.

According to industry estimates, DFG-based ethanol allocation during ESY 2025-26 was approximately 60 crore litres. For ESY 2026-27, the industry anticipates that the allocation could exceed 700 crore litres. C.K. Jain, president of GEMA, said a balanced ethanol policy must support viable production from both maize and rice, with procurement prices reflecting their different cost structures and allocations providing reasonable visibility to producers.

He added that the government and OMCs should review the pricing and allocation framework.

Iran vows 'apocalyptic war' if U.S. strikes again

U.S. will not be allowed to enter Persian Gulf and any attack will 'decide the fate' of other nations in the region, says Iran; the warning comes amid Washington's purported plan to resume strikes

Stanly Johnny

Iran said on Saturday that U.S. warships would not be allowed to enter the Persian Gulf and warned that any attack by the U.S. and Israel would have repercussions beyond the country, amid reports that Washington was considering resuming air strikes.

"Preserving the country's [territorial] integrity and safeguarding its national and religious identity are among the most important responsibilities of the Iranian nation today," Brig. Gen. Hossein Mohebbi, a spokesperson for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), said in Tehran.

If attacked, Iran "will achieve absolute victory in this apocalyptic war", he



U.S. Navy aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln* arrives at Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego, California, on October 8. AFP

added, according to the state-run *Press TV*. He also said the war would "decide the fate" of other nations in the region, referring to Persian Gulf monarchies.

In the first and second phases of the war, Iran had retaliated by striking U.S. bases and energy facilities in Gulf kingdoms.

In a separate statement, Maj. Gen. Ali Abdollahi, Chief of the General Staff of Iran's Armed Forces, said U.S. naval forces are no longer capable of approaching the Persian Gulf waters. "The U.S. President [Donald Trump] must only dream of their military and army entering the

Ghalibaf to skip BRICS meet amid medicine row

NEW DELHI

Amid a row between India and Iran over air route for transport of medicines, the Iranian Embassy here said on Saturday that Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the Islamic Republic's Speaker, will not participate in BRICS Parliamentary Forum meeting next week. » **PAGE 11**

Persian Gulf again. They will take this wish to their graves," Gen. Abdollahi said. "We will under no circumstances and at no time allow rusty U.S. military vessels to enter the Persian Gulf."

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Iran vows 'apocalyptic war' if U.S. strikes again

Mr. Trump, who, along with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, started the war against Iran on February 28, 2026, had said on several occasions that the U.S. had destroyed Iran's military capabilities. "If Iran's military capabilities have been eliminated, then why have U.S. warships and military forces not dared approach the Strait of Hormuz or Iran's maritime and land borders," asked Gen. Abdollahi.

The comments by Iranian military officers came after U.S. and Israeli media reported that both countries have drawn up plans to resume strikes against the Islamic Republic. On Friday, U.S. Ambassador to Türkiye, Tom Barrack, said in an interview that the U.S. could strike Iran within days. "Could there be a strike this weekend? Absolutely," said Mr. Barrack.

The U.S. has imposed a blockade on Iranian ports preventing the country from exporting oil, its major source of revenue. Iran has closed the Strait of Hormuz, but U.S. officials have claimed in recent weeks that the southern transit route through the strait, protected by the U.S. Navy, is open for commercial traffic. But despite the U.S. claims, Brent crude prices jumped on Friday to hit \$117 a barrel.

Iranian officials have warned in recent days that they would retaliate by targeting Persian Gulf countries in the event of renewed attacks. Mohsen Rezaei, Secretary General of Iran's powerful Security Council, told *Press TV* last week that fibre optic cables in the Gulf that carry Internet traffic could be targeted if Iran is attacked. At least seven important undersea data cables run through or near the Strait of Hormuz, connecting countries in the Gulf and South Asia.

DEMONSTRATIONS ALSO RATTLE NEIGHBOURING BELGIUM AND ITALY

Violence flares in Paris after largely peaceful protests across France

Over 4 lakh people took part in stir across the country: Interior minister

Reuters

Paris, October 24

HUNDREDS OF thousands of demonstrators marched in France on Saturday, with largely peaceful rallies giving way to clashes in Paris and Marseille as night fell despite a huge security operation aimed at preventing a repeat of last week's unrest.

The Interior Ministry said 4,10,000 people took part in protests nationwide, though unions said the true figure was twice as high. The main demonstration took place in Paris, where around 1,10,000 people marched on the southeastern fringes of the capital, denouncing rising living costs and growing inequality.

The atmosphere deteriorated sharply after the rally ended. Riot police fired tear gas and water cannon to disperse a group of around 500 hooded youths who hurled stones at officers, a security official said.



Police stand guard amid clashes during a demonstration organised by labour unions across France, in Marseille on Saturday. REUTERS

In Marseille, youths dragged large metal sheets to block a street, set fire to rubbish bins, and hurled rocks and bottles at riot police.

Clashes also flared in Lyon, Bordeaux and Grenoble, while police fired volleys of tear gas at demonstrators in Clermont-Ferrand, Lille, Nantes and Nice.

However, the violence was still less intense than a week

ago, when looters and vandals went on the rampage in a number of French cities.

Authorities deployed 70,000 police officers and gendarmes, 10,000 more than a week earlier, after conceding they had underestimated the scale of the unrest on October 17.

"We have to be ultra, ultra responsive," Interior Minister Laurent Nunez told reporters

on Saturday, accusing far-left activists and criminal gangs of seeking to foment violence.

Business groups urged retailers to remain closed after thousands of shops and businesses were damaged or looted across France last weekend.

"There are hardly any customers, so it's not really worth staying open," said Oskar, manager of a Kiton boutique in Paris.

On Saturday Belgian police used tear gas and pepper spray as they clashed in Brussels with anti-government demonstrators, while protests took place in a number of Italian cities for a second weekend.

Leftist leaders in France denounced a government move to limit the number of authorised marches in many cities, as well as a last-minute decision to shift the Paris event to the southeastern fringes of the capital.

Hard-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon, who joined the Paris rally, hailed what he called a "magnificent mass display of collective discipline and self-restraint".

He predicted the protests would continue until President Emmanuel Macron, whose mandate expires next year, addressed the social malaise in France, one of the world's richest nations but with a growing debt mountain that has alarmed investors.

"Given the current situation, I think he will come to understand that this will happen again every week. There is still time for (Macron) to give in. After that, the only thing left to him will be the exit door," Melenchon told reporters.

17 killed in Saudi strikes, say Houthis; coalition intercepts 2 missiles: Riyadh

Agence France-Presse

RIYADH

Yemen's Houthis launched fresh attacks on Saudi Arabia and the seat of Yemen's internationally recognised government in Aden on Saturday after blaming the kingdom for strikes that the Iran-backed group said killed 17 people.

The Saudi-led coalition said it had intercepted two missiles targeting cities Taif and Yanbu in the kingdom's west.

Over the past 24 hours, the Yemeni fighters said they targeted three Saudi airports, energy installations, and an air base.

Airports targeted

Military spokesman Yahya Saree said the group



Amid debris: The site of an airstrike, reportedly carried out by Saudi Arabia, in Yemen's Houthi-held capital Sanaa. AFP

launched missiles at King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, the airports in Dammam and Najran.

The group launched attacks on the Khamis Mushait air base as well as "crude oil pumping stations and the crude oil pipeline from east to west".

The Saudi civil defence agency said it had also responded to falling debris in the Mecca and Medina regions on Saturday after intercepting two Houthi missiles.

The Houthis denied targeting the cities, the two holiest in Islam, calling the

Saudi claim a "huge lie". The Houthis also fired at the Yemeni city of Aden, the interim seat of the Saudi-backed government, saying they targeted a naval base and military camp overseen by Saudi forces.

The fresh attack claims came after the Houthis' Al-Masirah TV channel accused the kingdom of deadly strikes in Yemen.

The broadcaster said a strike on a house in Sanaa killed at least four people, another at a residential building killed eight and another outside the city of Hodeida killed five from the same family.

Saudi Arabia has come under attack from Yemen's Houthis in recent weeks as part of the latter country's revived civil war.

Palestinians flee Hebron as Israel launches 'collective punishment'

Around 1,200 Palestinians displaced in Hebron after the IDF launched a major military offensive following the killing of two soldiers, says official; NGO says Israel has made 70 arrests; Netanyahu says Palestinian Authority in for a 'big surprise'

Reuters
JERUSALEM

The Israeli military forced around 1,200 Palestinians to leave their homes in Hebron in the occupied West Bank, a Palestinian official said on Saturday, a day after a Palestinian attack killed two Israeli soldiers.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday had said the military would launch a large-scale operation after the soldiers were killed when two Palestinian gunmen opened fire at a military checkpoint near the city.

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said the gunmen were shot dead. They also



Ghost town: A photo of empty buildings after Palestinians were forced to leave the Ein Deir Baba neighbourhood in Hebron. AFP

said the operation in the Al-Jaladah and Ein Deir Baba neighbourhoods near the military checkpoint at the entrance of Hebron was to search for militants and weapons.

In a statement, it also

said the military would carry out demolitions.

The Palestinian Authority criticised the operation as a "collective punishment".

Yousef Zouhair Al-Jabari, the head of Hebron's

municipality, said around 1,300 faced losing their homes in addition to the 1,200 already displaced.

Motivated by polls

He also said the Israeli operations were motivated by parliamentary elections on Tuesday when Mr. Netanyahu's right-wing coalition may lose his majority, opinion polls show.

"Mr. Netanyahu and the radical Ministers in his government are trying to win as many votes as possible from the settlers, Mr. Al-Jabari said.

The non-governmental organisation the Palestinian Prisoners' Club said Israeli forces had arrested around 70 Palestinians.

Mr. Netanyahu declined to answer directly when he was asked if he would dismantle the Palestinian Authority but said he favoured "ruse and surprise".

"We transformed the Middle East [West Asia]. I said that we would change things and we have," he told i24News in an interview conducted late Friday.

"There is a very big surprise for the Palestinian Authority as well."

There is no evidence that the Palestinian Authority had any involvement in Friday's attack. Mr. Netanyahu has linked the assailants to Hamas.

(With inputs from AFP)

Amid row over air route, Iran Speaker to skip BRICS meet

Statement follows reports that India did not allow Iran Air to transport medicines to Tehran; India says Iran can take delivery via a third country; humanitarian aid not subject to sanctions, says Iran

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

The Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, will not participate in the BRICS Parliamentary Forum meeting to be held here on October 26 and 27, the Embassy of Iran announced on Saturday. This comes in the wake of reports that India refused to allow a shipment of medicines to be transported to Tehran by Iran Air.

India insists that Iran is free to take delivery of such medical consignments through a third country like Armenia, as Indian airports and air operators would otherwise face U.S. sanctions.

Iranian officials, however, argued that “humanitarian assistance” is not under any international sanction and that India should operationalise the bilateral air route “on priority basis” for humanitarian support to a fellow BRICS member country. They also claimed that some temperature-sensitive medication had become unusable after transport through third



Iran Air managing director Taher Abdolhay said that the airline had failed to get permission to fly medicines from India. FILE PHOTO

countries.

“The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in New Delhi wishes to inform that, due to certain unforeseen circumstance, H.E. Dr. Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran, will be unable to attend the Meeting of Speaker of the Parliaments of BRICS Member Countries in New Delhi,” the Embassy said in its statement, adding that an Iranian parliamentary delegation would participate in the event.

“As one of the members of BRICS, Iran reaffirms its commitment to active and effective participation at

the highest levels in the summits and meetings of the grouping,” the Embassy of Iran said on Saturday.

The problem initially came to light on October 19 when Iran Air managing director Taher Abdolhay revealed at a press conference in Tehran that the airline had failed to get permission to fly medicines from India and Singapore.

Fear of U.S. sanctions

Official sources in Delhi, however, argued that the cancellation of Mr. Ghalibaf’s visit was not connected to the bottlenecks facing the supply of Indian medicines to Iran. Officials said that Indian pharma-

ceutical companies have been sending medicines to Iran through third countries like Oman and Armenia.

“Even during the peak of the conflict, medicines from the Indian market were flown to Armenia and from there they were driven to Iran in trucks,” a source said, indicating that most major Iranian airlines are facing U.S. Treasury sanctions and that Indian airport operators could face difficulties if they were found hosting sanctioned Iranian airlines.

The Hindu was told that the best option for Iran is to fly Indian medicines and pharmaceutical items to countries like Armenia from where they can be driven over the Iranian border. “It is for Iran to decide how they want to get the deliveries. On our end, we are fully ready to supply,” the official said.

Responding to *The Hindu*, an Iranian official source said that there are challenges in sending perishable items like medicines through a combination of long haul flights, road transit through conflict zones, and multiple heavy cargo loading.