

Solidarity with Ladakh's 'Delhi Chalo' Yatra, Demanding Constitutional Safeguards

by
Vikalp Sangam General Assembly*

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We, 85 organisations and movements across India, express solidarity with the 'Delhi Chalo' footmarch that people of Ladakh have embarked on, on 1st September. This Yatra highlights continued neglect of the region's legitimate demands for special Constitutional status, enabling its people to protect their land, culture, environment and economic interests. It is in the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent marches against colonial injustice, such as the Salt (Dandi) March. We commit to join the Yatra on its route and in Delhi on 2nd October.

The primary demands by the citizens of Ladakh are inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, statehood, separate Parliamentary seats for Kargil and Leh, and a public service commission for Ladakh enabling its youth to get jobs. Such steps are crucial to safeguard Ladakh's ecologically and culturally unique and fragile status, especially against unrestricted and inappropriate land use, commercialisation, and excessive tourism. Protecting Ladakh's ecological integrity is also vital for the climatic and water security of South Asia as a whole.

The measures demanded are the bare minimum to enable genuine democracy, rather than centralised decision-making from New Delhi. And they are crucial for creating dignified employment opportunities for Ladakhi youth.

As elaborated in a previous (Feb 2024) statement we issued, Special Constitutional status to Ladakh should empower the Kargil and Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils to exercise control over land, natural resources including minerals, tourism, and development policy. Additionally, we urge that Ladakh also be included in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, if it is possible to include an area under both Schedules. This would include the application of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) to empower Gram Sabhas and enable meaningful local self-governance. Both the 5th and 6th Schedules are in principle applicable to Ladakh given that more than 90 percent of the population are of Scheduled Tribe status. Additionally, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 should be expediently applied, especially to enable pastoral and other ecosystem-dependent communities to secure their collective rights over landscapes essential for their livelihoods.

We are shocked at how the BJP, having promised 6th Schedule status when Ladakh was converted into a Union Territory in 2019, has gone back on this. We urge the Government of India to agree to the demands of Ladakhi people. We also urge the people of Ladakh to continue strengthening their own internal democratic processes, so that communities and institutions like the Hill Council are able to resist decisions that adversely impact them and their environment, as also construct viable alternatives for meeting basic needs, aspirations, and the goals of well-being.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Ladakh and wish the Delhi Chalo Yatra success!

Vikalp Sangam General Assembly

* The Vikalp Sangam General Assembly (VSGA) is the coordinating mechanism for the Vikalp Sangam process (www.vikalpsangam.org), which aims to network movements, organisations and individuals working on alternatives to unsustainable, iniquitous development. It contains about 85 organisations and networks across India, listed below.

VSGA has issued the following solidarity statements regarding Ladakh over the last few years:

February 2024: <https://vikalpsangam.org/article/statement-and-appeal-on-ladakhs-demands-for-constitutional-safeguards/>

February 2023: <https://vikalpsangam.org/article/statement-and-appeal-on-ladakhs-constitutional-status/>

December 2019: <https://vikalpsangam.org/article/statement-and-appeal-on-ladakhs-union-territory-status/>

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 Centre for Financial Accountability (CFA)
 Centre for Pastoralism
 Chetna
 CGnet Swara
 Dakshin Foundation
 Deccan Development Society (DDS)
 Deer Park
 Development Alternatives (DA)
 Desert Resource Centre (DRC)
 Dhaatri Trust
 Dharamitra
 Ektha
 Equitable Tourism Options (EQUATIONS)
 Forest Rights Coalition - JK
 Fridays for Future – India
 Gene Campaign
 Goonj
 Greenpeace India
 Ideosync Media Combine
 Inner Climate Academy (ICA)
 Margshala Foundation
 Jagori Rural
 Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP)
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 Kriti Team
 Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO)
 Let India Breathe (LIB)
 Local Futures Ladakh
 Maadhyam
 Maati
 Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM)
 Mahalir Association for Literacy Awareness and Rights (MALAR)

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)
 Movement for Advancing Understanding of Sustainability and Mutuality (MAUSAM)
 National Alliance of Peoples' Movements (NAPM)
 National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)
 National Coalition for Natural Farming (NCNF)
 National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW)
 Nirangal Charitable Trust
 Non-timber Forest Products Exchange Programme India (NTEP-EP India)
 North East Network (NEN)
 Organic Farmers Market (OFM)
 People's Resource Centre (PRC)
 Peoples' Science Institute (PSI)
 Pipal Tree
 Regenerative Bihar Collective
 reStore
 Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network (RRA)
 Rythu Swarajya Vedika
 Sambhaavna
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 Sahjeevan
 Sahodaya Trust
 Sangat
 School for Democracy
 School for Rural Development and Environment (SRDE)
 Shikshantar
 Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (SLC-IT)
 Sikkim Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association
 Social Entrepreneurship Association (SEA)
 Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM)
 South Asian Dialogue on Ecological Democracy (SADED)/ Harit Swaraaj Samvaad
 The Himalaya Collective
 Titli Trust
 TN Women's Collective
 Travellers' University
 Tribal Health Initiative (THI)
 URMUL Seemant Samiti
 Watershed Support Services and Activities Network (WASSAN)
 Women's Collective
 Youth Alliance
 Yugma Collective
 Yuva Ekta Foundation
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