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Ladakh Seeks Belonging Through Representation

Context

- The debate surrounding Ladakh after its conversion into a Union Territory has raised important questions about **democracy, representation, and constitutional rights** in India.
- The Union government argues that Ladakh's sparse population, strategic sensitivity, and financial dependence make a legislature unnecessary, while presenting the creation of new districts as an alternative form of decentralisation.
- However, administrative decentralisation cannot replace genuine political participation.
- The demand for a legislature and **Sixth Schedule** protections is fundamentally a demand for **self-governance**, dignity, and democratic inclusion.

Administrative Decentralisation vs Political Representation

- **Creation of New Districts**
 - The announcement of new districts such as Nubra, Changthang, Sham, Zaskar, and Drass has been described as a major governance reform.

- In a region marked by difficult terrain, harsh winters, and scattered settlements, increased **administrative accessibility** is certainly necessary.

- **Limits of Administrative Governance**

- Despite these reforms, districts remain bureaucratic units rather than democratic institutions.
- A district magistrate implements policies decided elsewhere, whereas a legislature creates laws and determines developmental priorities.
- Districts cannot decide issues related to **land rights, ecological preservation, employment, education policy, or cultural autonomy**.
- Thus, no amount of administrative convenience can substitute for **political agency**. Democracy requires institutions that allow people to shape decisions affecting their collective future.

Colonial Echoes in the Debate

- **Paternalistic Arguments Against Self-Rule**

- The arguments used against Ladakh resemble the logic once employed by the British Empire against India.
- Colonial rulers claimed that Indians were too poor, divided, and politically immature for self-government.
- Sri Aurobindo responded with the ideal of **Purna Swaraj**, emphasizing that freedom and self-rule are essential to national dignity.

- **Representation as a Constitutional Right**

- Today, Ladakhi are indirectly asked whether they are sufficiently populous, profitable, or capable to deserve representation.
- Such reasoning reduces democracy to a privilege rather than a constitutional right. A frontier region cannot be denied representation simply because of its geography or population size.

Expendable Electoral Promises

- **Assurances After Article 370**

- Following the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 and the creation of the Union Territory, leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party repeatedly promised **constitutional safeguards** and protections under the Sixth Schedule.
- These promises appeared in election manifestoes during parliamentary and Hill Council elections.

- **Ethical Concerns**

- After electoral victories were secured, these assurances weakened considerably. This raises serious ethical concerns regarding democratic accountability.
- Trust in democracy depends not only on elections but also on the fulfilment of promises made to citizens, especially in sensitive frontier regions.

Lessons from the Northeast

- **Strategic Regions and Statehood**

- The government's argument regarding Ladakh's strategic sensitivity is contradicted by examples from the **Northeast**.
- Arunachal Pradesh shares one of India's most sensitive borders with China, yet it received full statehood in 1987.
- Its strategic importance was viewed as a reason for empowerment rather than restriction.
- **Integration Through Belonging**
 - Similarly, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Sikkim were granted statehood despite small populations and financial dependence on the Centre.
 - India recognised that frontier regions are integrated more effectively through **belonging, political participation**, and constitutional respect rather than military presence alone.

The Weakness of the Fiscal Argument

- **Financial Dependence and Federalism**
 - Another objection against Ladakh's legislature is its economic dependence on the Centre.
 - However, India's **federal structure** is based on redistribution through tax devolution and grants provided by the Finance Commission.
- **Examples from Other States**
 - Uttar Pradesh receives enormous financial support despite being India's largest state. Bihar, Assam, and several Northeastern states also rely heavily on central assistance.
 - Fiscal dependence has never been treated as grounds for denying democratic representation. Democracy is not a reward for profitability.

Ladakh and India's Developmental Future

- **Renewable Energy and Economic Importance**
 - Ladakh is increasingly central to India's **renewable energy**
 - Massive projects in the Pang region of Changthang are expected to generate nearly 13 gigawatts of power with investments worth thousands of crores.
- **Need for Local Decision-Making**
 - These projects involve critical questions regarding grazing rights, mining, tourism, solar parks, and environmental sustainability.
 - Decisions affecting local communities and future generations cannot be left solely to bureaucratic administration.
 - Such matters require a representative legislature accountable to the people.

Conclusion

- India's strength lies in its constitutional ability to accommodate diversity while preserving unity.
- The **Sixth Schedule** itself reflects the understanding that fragile frontier regions require special protections.
- **Uniformity** cannot ensure justice, and administrative control cannot replace democratic representation.
- Ladakh's demand is not a rejection of India but an appeal to belong more meaningfully within the Union.

- The demand for a legislature represents a desire for **constitutional recognition, political participation,** and the right to shape its own future.

Ladakh Seeks Belonging Through Representation FAQs

Q1. Why does Ladakh demand a legislature and Sixth Schedule protections?

Ans. Ladakh demands a legislature and Sixth Schedule protections to secure democratic representation, cultural autonomy, and political participation.

Q2. Why are new districts not considered enough for Ladakh?

Ans. New districts only improve administration, but they cannot provide legislative powers or democratic decision-making.

Q3. Why is Ladakh important for India's future development?

Ans. Ladakh is important because it plays a major role in India's renewable energy and infrastructure development plans.

Q4. What is the main weakness of the fiscal argument against Ladakh's legislature?

Ans. The fiscal argument is weak because many Indian states also depend heavily on central financial support.

Q5. What are necessary steps for true national integration?

Ans. True national integration requires political inclusion, constitutional respect, and a sense of belonging.

Source: **The Hindu**

Regulation, Not Bans, Can Protect Online Gamers

Context

- The **Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming (PROG) Act, 2025** was enacted to protect individuals, particularly youth and vulnerable populations, from the harmful social, economic, and psychological effects of online gambling.
- The Act aimed to reduce addiction, financial losses, and privacy-related concerns associated with online games involving money.
- However, instead of eliminating gambling activities, the law has unintentionally encouraged users to shift toward illegal **offshore platforms**, creating new concerns related to **cybercrime, money laundering,** and weak **consumer protection**.
- The growing evidence suggests that a complete ban may not be the most effective solution in the digital era.

Rise in Offshore Platform Use

- **Shift from Domestic to Illegal Platforms**

- Following the implementation of the PROG Act in October 2025, many users moved from regulated Indian gaming platforms to illegal offshore gambling websites.
- According to studies conducted by **CUTS International**, offshore participation increased significantly after the ban.
 - In **Delhi NCR**, offshore usage rose from 68.3% to 82%.
 - In **Tamil Nadu**, it increased from 67.8% to 83%.
 - In **Maharashtra**, the figure rose sharply to 91.7%.
- Instead of abandoning online gambling, users increasingly relied on foreign platforms operating outside Indian laws and regulations.

• Technological Challenges

- Offshore operators use advanced technologies such as **VPNs**, **proxy servers**, and encrypted applications like **WhatsApp** and **Telegram** to bypass restrictions.
- When one domain is blocked, users are quickly redirected to mirror websites with minimal interruption.
- The widespread use of these technologies weakens geographical restrictions and reduces the effectiveness of government bans.
- As a result, users continue to access illegal gambling services despite repeated enforcement efforts.

A Case for Strong Regulation

• Ineffectiveness of Blanket Bans

- Across industries, strict prohibitions rarely eliminate consumer demand. Instead, bans often push activities underground, where regulation and accountability become difficult.
- This challenge is even greater in digital markets because users can easily access global platforms through the internet.
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology informed the Lok Sabha that over **8,376 URLs** had been blocked to curb illegal betting networks.
- Despite this action, reports of financial fraud and gambling-related suicides continue to emerge, demonstrating the limitations of prohibition.

• Threats from Offshore Operators

- Offshore gambling platforms are associated with serious risks such as **financial fraud**, **terror financing**, and illegal money transfers.
- Since these platforms operate outside Indian jurisdiction, users have limited access to **grievance redressal** and legal remedies.
- A major gambling and fraud racket uncovered in Sivaganga, Tamil Nadu, illustrates these dangers.
- Fraudsters used Telegram groups to promote fake **Old Coin Purchase Task** schemes that promised high returns.
- Victims were persuaded to invest money, while villagers were encouraged to open **mule accounts** used to divert illegal funds.
- Such incidents reveal how offshore gambling networks exploit vulnerable communities and support organised financial crime.

Examples from Overseas

- **United Arab Emirates**

- The United Arab Emirates, despite maintaining strict gambling restrictions for years, introduced a tightly regulated federal licensing system in 2023.
- The framework includes compliance requirements, deposit limits, and strong harm-prevention safeguards to reduce illegal offshore activity while ensuring consumer safety.

- **Sri Lanka**

- Similarly, Sri Lanka is moving toward a regulated framework through the establishment of a centralised **Gambling Regulatory Authority**, expected to become operational by June 2026.
- The authority aims to regulate offshore gambling activities and bring online betting within a legal domestic structure.
- These international examples demonstrate that many countries are recognising the limitations of outright bans and adopting regulated systems to ensure accountability and oversight.

Need for a Balanced Regulatory Framework

- **Advantages of Regulation**

- A regulated domestic framework could provide stronger **consumer safeguards**, effective monitoring mechanisms, and improved accountability.
- Regulation would also enable authorities to track suspicious transactions and reduce illegal financial activities linked to offshore networks.
- Moreover, a regulated gaming ecosystem could generate significant **tax revenue**.
- These funds could be used to strengthen enforcement systems, improve offshore monitoring, and conduct public awareness campaigns about gambling addiction and financial risks.

- **Cooperation Between Governments**

- Addressing illegal online gambling requires coordination between the **Centre** and **State governments**.
- A balanced approach combining regulation, technological monitoring, and public awareness would be more sustainable than relying solely on prohibition.

Conclusion

- The experience following the implementation of the PROG Act, 2025, demonstrates that outright bans are often ineffective in controlling online gambling.
- Instead of eliminating gambling activities, the ban has encouraged the growth of illegal offshore platforms that operate beyond domestic oversight.
- The rise in **offshore gambling**, **cybercrime**, and **financial fraud** highlights the need for a more practical and balanced policy approach.
- In the long run, strong **regulation**, combined with technological safeguards and public awareness, is likely to be a more effective solution for addressing the challenges posed by online gambling in India.

Regulation, Not Bans, Can Protect Online Gamers FAQs

Q1. What was the main aim of the PROG Act, 2025?

Ans. The PROG Act, 2025 aimed to protect people from the harmful effects of online gambling.

Q2. What happened after the implementation of the PROG Act?

Ans. After the Act was implemented, many users shifted to illegal offshore gambling platforms.

Q3. Why are offshore gambling platforms dangerous?

Ans. Offshore gambling platforms are dangerous because they are linked to fraud, money laundering, and cybercrime.

Q4. How do users access banned gambling websites?

Ans. Users access banned websites through VPNs, proxy servers, and encrypted applications like Telegram.

Q5. Which countries have adopted regulated gambling frameworks?

Ans. The United Arab Emirates and Sri Lanka have adopted or are developing regulated gambling frameworks.

Source: **The Hindu**

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