



## Future State

Restoration of Statehood should be at the start of the revival of the democratic process in J&K.

### Highlights:

1. Political leaders from Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) who attended a meeting called by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday came away with a sense of optimism: restoration of Statehood is somewhere on the horizon, even if a total reversal of the withdrawal of the special status remains unlikely.
2. The meeting itself was a surprise and came at a time when expectations of any quick resolution were very low. But the fact that a spectrum of political leaders got the invitation from the Centre without any set pre-conditions had raised hopes of progress.
3. Eventually, the meeting gave reason to Kashmir's political class to believe in possibilities that did not seem to exist just a week earlier. But the restoration of Statehood to J&K, which was reorganised as two Union Territories, should be the first step in the revival of the democratic political process and not the culmination of some elaborate negotiation strategy.
4. Mr Modi described the meeting as an "important step in the ongoing efforts towards a developed and progressive J&K". While committing to strengthen grassroots democracy, he called for quick delimitation of constituencies, after which legislative polls could be held.
5. Home Minister Amit Shah insisted the restoration of Statehood will follow delimitation and elections. Not surprisingly, many participants were not convinced by this sequence suggested by the Centre.
6. But the positives are that the long meeting was freewheeling, without rancour and all parties were united in the demand for the restoration of Statehood.
7. Most participants also sought an assurance to return the domiciliary rights concerning land and State services, but considering the BJP's strident position, this might be difficult.



## Focus on the future:

1. As Mr Modi argued, the focus must be on the future, but this will have to be built on the trust and cooperation of the people of J&K. Decades of turmoil have created unique problems of governance and mistrust.
2. The NC and the PDP, with all their deficiencies, remain India's best messengers to the people of the Valley. In deciding to engage them, and other parties, the Centre has made a departure from its earlier position.
3. By seizing the opportunity, these parties also showed maturity. Global and domestic factors might have nudged the Centre towards what appears to be a tentative accommodation of other viewpoints.
4. But the political challenge to its decision to hollow out Article 370 is all but fading. The restoration of Statehood has been placed so far down the path that any discussion on special status is unthinkable in the near future.
5. In that sense, the Centre and the BJP have irreversibly reset the conversation on J&K. That success should not blind them to the resentment among the people.