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Members of European Parliament Visit Kashmir

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Why in News?

- A delegation of European Union Members of Parliament (MEPs), comprising **27 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)** from Italy, Britain, France, Germany, Czech Republic, and Poland, visited Srinagar on 29th October, nearly three months after the **revocation of Article 370**, to see the situation there.
The non-profit organizations, **Women's Economic and Social Think Tank (WESTT)** and the **International Institute for Non-Aligned Studies (IINS)** invited and sponsored, this visit to Kashmir.
- The visit was undertaken just two days before the state of Jammu and Kashmir was divided into two Union territories (October 31st, 2019) of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

Significance of the Visit

- As per the government, the visit to Srinagar acquainted the MEPs with the development priorities of the region.
- The decision to allow the MEPs to visit J&K marked a significant turnaround in the government's policy after it faced considerable criticism in the EU and in the US over the Article 370 move.
- The Indian government presented the EU lawmakers' visit as an attempt to let the outside world see the ground situation in Kashmir, which Delhi has labelled as normal.
The visit also gave a better understanding of the cultural and religious diversity of the region of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh; apart from giving them a clear view of the development and governance priorities of the region.

Concerns

- This visit raises concern as **access to J&K is not available to national political leaders, journalists, and international diplomats.**

- The group comprises of MEPs, majority of whom belong to far-right, anti-immigration parties in the European Union.
- The European Union (EU) Embassy in Delhi has clarified that the MEPs were in India in their **“personal capacity”**, and **not as part of an official delegation**.
Since the European Parliament and the European Union hierarchy has not been involved, this raises some diplomatic doubts.

Source: IE