



HC Directs Union Ministry to Reduce Toll Rates in J&K

Why in News?

[The High Court](#) of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh has directed **the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways** to reduce hefty toll fees in the Union Territory within four months, providing **major relief to commuters**, including pilgrims to [the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine](#).

Key Points

- **High Court Directives:**
 - The High Court directed that Lakanpur and Bann toll plazas charge only 20% of the previous toll rates (before 26th January 2024).
 - The reduced toll fee will remain in effect until **the Lakanpur-Udhampur national highway** becomes fully operational.
- **Background of the Case:**
 - A [Public Interest Litigation \(PIL\)](#) sought an exemption from toll collection on the **Jammu-Pathankot Highway (Lakanpur to Bann)** until the completion of the **Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway**.
 - The highway is being extended to connect with the expressway.
- **Concerns Raised by the Court:**
 - The court criticized the "mushrooming of toll plazas" in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, calling it a strategy to extract money from the public.
 - It noted that the Bann toll plaza charges excessive fees, and other toll plazas also have high rates.
 - [The National Highways Authority of India \(NHAI\)](#) and private contractors have accumulated thousands of crores of rupees through toll collection.

National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)

- NHAI was **constituted by an Act of Parliament in 1988** under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways** as a Central Authority to **develop, maintain and manage the National Highways** entrusted to it by the Government of India.
 - The authority, however, became operational in **February, 1995**.
- The Authority consists of a **full time Chairman, and not more than five full time Members and four part time Members** who are appointed by the Central Government.