



Ladakh's Demand for Statehood & Sixth Schedule Inclusion

This editorial is based on “ [Mistrust in Ladakh: On the violence, legitimate aspirations](#)”, which was published in *The Hindu* on 26/09/2025. The article examines the September 2025 unrest in Ladakh, where protests over statehood, autonomy, and local rights turned violent, revealing tensions between regional aspirations and the Centre's security priorities.

For Prelims: [Ladakh](#), [Sixth Schedule](#), [Silk Route](#), [Pangong and Tso Moriri](#), [Union Territory](#), [Autonomous District Councils \(ADCs\)](#), [Article 370](#), [Article 35A](#), [National Security Act \(NSA\)](#)

For Mains: Main Arguments Supporting Ladakh's Demand for Statehood and Inclusion under the Sixth Schedule, Arguments Against Ladakh's Demand for Statehood and Inclusion under the Sixth Schedule

The recent **violent unrest in Ladakh** brought long-standing demands for [Ladakh's statehood](#), **recognition under the [Sixth Schedule](#)**, **local autonomy, and rights** to the forefront, exposing a critical tension between regional aspirations and national security, and underscoring the urgent need for **inclusive dialogue and effective governance** in this sensitive region.

What Makes Ladakh Significant for India?

- **Geopolitical Importance:** Ladakh is also known as “the Land of Passes” (La-passes, dakh-land).
 - **Strategic location** at the **crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and East Asia** gives it immense **geopolitical significance**.
- **Strategic Significance:**
 - Serves as a **buffer zone** between **India and neighbouring countries**, including **China and Pakistan**.
 - **Ongoing border disputes** with **China and Pakistan** underscore its importance in safeguarding **India's territorial integrity and sovereignty**.
- **Tourism Potential:**
 - Known as **Lama Land** or **Little Tibet**, it is at altitudes between **9,000 feet and 25,170 feet**.
 - A notable attraction is the **Hanle Dark Sky Reserve**, one of the **world's highest and most pristine sites** for **astronomical observation**, attracting **tourists** interested in **stargazing** and **astrophotography**.
 - Offers **trekking, mountaineering**, and **Buddhist tours of monasteries**.
- **Economic Importance:**
 - Possesses **vast untapped economic potential** in **tourism, agriculture, and renewable energy**.
 - Recent initiatives promoting **economic growth** in **Ladakh** include hosting the **first phase of the 2025 Khelo India Winter Games**, launching **women entrepreneurship schemes** under the **2025 Union Budget**, expanding **renewable energy projects**, and

developing **infrastructure** like **tunnels** and **4G connectivity**.

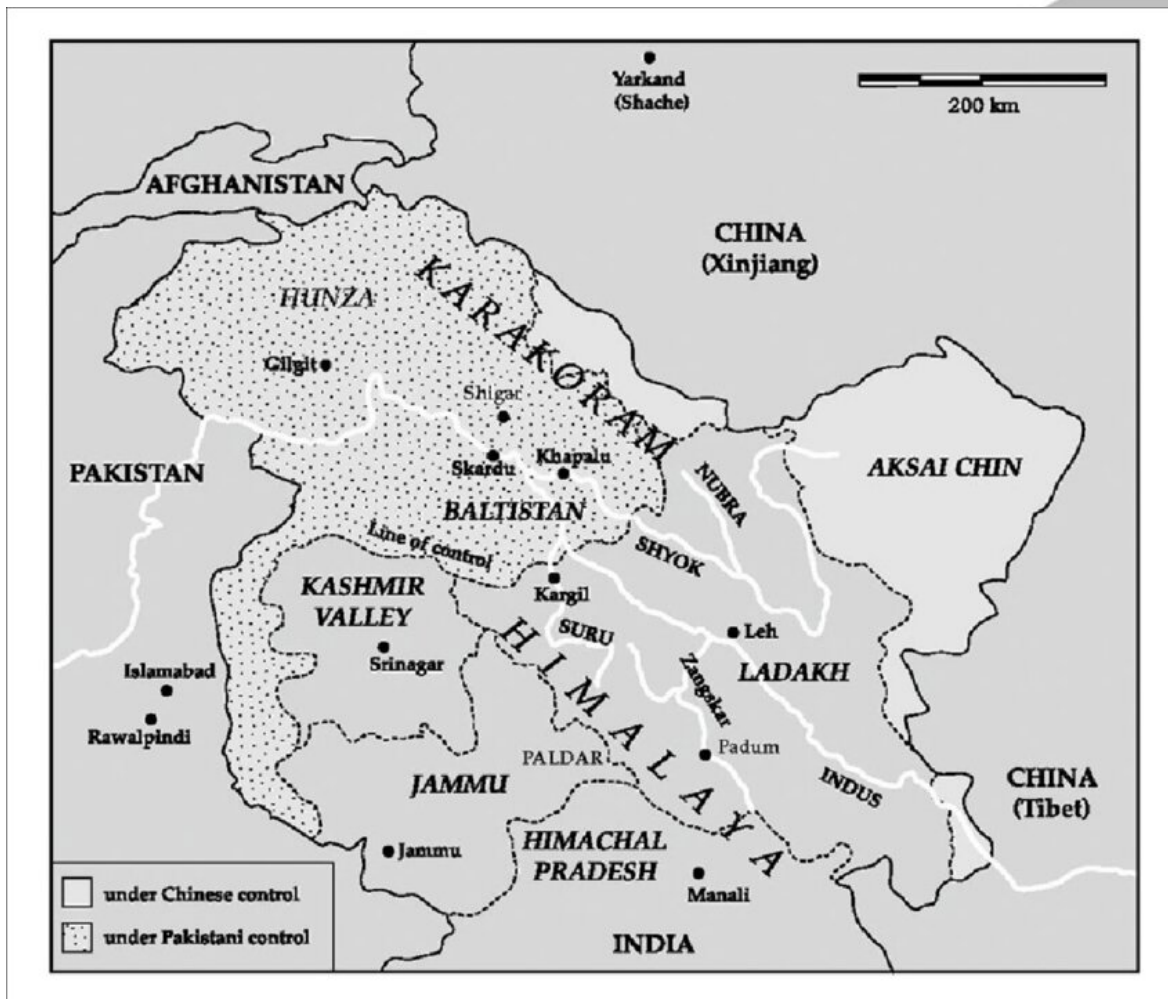
- **Pristine lakes** and **majestic mountains** of [Pangong and Tso Moriri](#) attract **adventure and leisure tourism**.

▪ **Environmental Significance:**

- **Fertile valleys** and **river basins** offer opportunities for **agriculture**, including **organic farming and horticulture**.
 - Key rivers in Ladakh include the **Indus, Zaskar, Shyok**, and **Suru** rivers, which support irrigation and sustain local ecosystems.
- **Abundant sunlight and wind resources** make it suitable for **solar and wind energy projects**, supporting India's [renewable energy](#) goals.

▪ **Cultural Significance:**

- Located on the **ancient Silk Route**, vital for **culture, religion, trade, and commerce** in the past.
- Home to diverse **ethnic communities**: **Ladakhi, Tibetan, and Balti**, each with **distinct traditions and customs**.
- Centuries-old monasteries like **Hemis, Thiksey, and Diskit** serve as **spiritual and cultural centres**, preserving **ancient Buddhist teachings and practices**.



What are the Main Arguments Supporting Ladakh's Demand for Statehood and Inclusion under the Sixth Schedule?

- **Political Autonomy and Democratic Representation:** Ladakh, as a **Union Territory without a legislature** since 2019, lacks **elected representatives** and **legislative power**.
 - When **Ladakh was part of the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir**, the [Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council \(LAHDC\)](#), an elected body that governed the region, **enjoyed significant autonomy**.
 - But with the region now under the direct rule of the central government, Ladakhi leaders

say the **LAHDC has been reduced to footnotes**, leading to a feeling of political dispossession.

- **Diminished representation** now has led to fears that outsiders will decide for Ladakh.
- **Statehood** would restore **full political representation** and **governance powers**, similar to **Jammu & Kashmir UT**, which has an **elected government**.
- **Sixth Schedule inclusion** would further empower local **Autonomous District Councils** with **legislative and executive authority**, ensuring **decentralised governance**.
- **Protection of Tribal Identity and Culture:** Over **97% of Ladakh's population** belongs to the **Scheduled Tribes**.
 - **As part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir**, Ladakh had enjoyed the privileges of special status under **Article 370** and **Article 35A**.
 - Inclusion under the **Sixth Schedule** provides **constitutional safeguards** to protect **tribal customs, land rights, and cultural identity**, crucial amid fears of **demographic dilution** after the abrogation of **Article 370**.
- **Preservation of Land and Natural Resources:** Ladakh's fragile ecosystem, **characterised by high-altitude deserts, glaciers, and alpine meadows**, is a hotspot of biodiversity and serves as a crucial habitat for rare and endangered species.
 - **Climate activists** have flagged concerns regarding **mining** in the **glacial ecology**.
 - Some critics argue that the people in **Ladakh** are concerned that **industries** will bring **lakhs of people**, and this **fragile ecosystem** cannot support such numbers.
 - **Careful management of water resources** within Ladakh is **vitaly important**, not only for the **livelihoods of Ladakhis** and the **ecosystems of Ladakh**, but also for the **health of the whole river system**.
 - **Sixth Schedule councils** possess powers over **land use, forest management, and resource regulation**, providing a mechanism **to ensure sustainable development** in ecologically sensitive areas.
- **Economic Development Focused on Local Needs:** **Statehood** combined with **Sixth Schedule status** promises **targeted development funds**, enhancing **infrastructure, education, employment, and healthcare** tailored to **Ladakhi priorities**.
 - The current administrative setup has limited capacity for **region-specific economic planning**.
 - **Ladakh does not have its own Public Service Commission**, hindering **efficient local recruitment** and exacerbating **youth unemployment**.
 - Ladakh faces a **severe unemployment crisis**, with **graduate unemployment at 26.5%**, more than **double the national average**, highlighting the urgency for **local employment opportunities**.
 - Locals demand **strict domicile-based job reservations** and greater **employment opportunities** to tackle **regional unemployment**.
 - **Constitutional recognition** through the **Sixth Schedule** can **institutionalise these protections**.
- **Ensuring Security and Strategic Autonomy:** Ladakh's position on **disputed borders with China and Pakistan** requires **sensitive governance** balancing **regional autonomy** with **national security**.
 - **Statehood** would allow focused **development and governance** while **Sixth Schedule councils** could manage **local affairs** without undermining **military logistics**.

What is the Sixth Schedule?

- **About:** The **Sixth Schedule** under **Article 244** provides for the formation of **autonomous administrative divisions- Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)**, that have **legislative, judicial, and administrative autonomy** within a **state**.
 - The Sixth Schedule contains **special provisions** for the **administration of tribal areas** in the four **north-eastern states** of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram**.

| | |
|---|--|
| MEGHALAYA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council ● Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council ● Garo Hills Autonomous District Council | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mara Autonomous District Council |
| MIZORAM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chakma Autonomous District Council ● Lai Autonomous District Council | TRIPURA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council |
| | ASSAM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dima Hasao Autonomous Council ● Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council ● Bodoland Territorial Council |

- **Autonomous Districts Council:** The **tribal areas** in these four states have been constituted as **autonomous districts**. The **Governor** is empowered to **organise and reorganise** the autonomous districts.
 - Each **autonomous district** has a **district council** consisting of up to **30 members**, of whom **4 are nominated by the Governor** and the remaining **26 are elected** on the basis of **adult franchise**.
- **Powers of the Council:**
 - The **district and regional councils** administer the **areas under their jurisdiction**.
 - They can make **laws** on specified matters like **land, forests, canal water, shifting cultivation, village administration, inheritance of property, marriage and divorce, social customs**, etc., but all laws require the **assent of the Governor**.
 - They can constitute **village councils or courts** for trial of **suits and cases between the tribes** and hear **appeals** from them. The **jurisdiction of the high court** over these suits and cases is **specified by the Governor**.
 - The **district council** can **establish, construct, or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, ferries, fisheries, roads**, etc., in the district.
 - They are empowered to **assess and collect land revenue** and to **impose specified taxes**.

What are the Arguments Against Statehood & Inclusion of Ladakh in the Sixth Schedule?

- **Concerns over Statehood:** While **statehood** would provide **full legislative powers** and **greater autonomy**, it could also **complicate administrative and security coordination** in the **sensitive border region**, with some fearing it may affect **India's strategic control** and **diplomatic posture** regarding **China and Pakistan**.
 - **Ladakh's status** as a **Union Territory** reinforces **India's sovereignty** over the region, strengthening its **diplomatic position** in **negotiations with China** over **border disputes**.
- **Legal and Constitutional Hurdles:** The **Sixth Schedule** of the **Indian Constitution** is explicitly intended for **tribal areas in the Northeast**, while other **tribal areas** are governed under the **Fifth Schedule**.
 - Extending it to **Ladakh** would require a **constitutional amendment**, posing significant **legal and procedural challenges**.
- **Increased Administrative Complexity and Delays:** Inclusion could add **bureaucratic layers** and **complexities**, potentially slowing down **decision-making processes** essential for **effective governance** in a **strategically sensitive and remote region**.
 - With **Ladakh** directly governed by a **Lieutenant Governor** appointed by the **central government**, there is a **clear chain of command** for **security operations** in the region.
- **Existing Developmental Support:** The **Union Territory administration of Ladakh** already receives substantial **funds** and **developmental assistance**.

- The **Union Territory administration of Ladakh** has **increased reservation support** significantly in **2025**.
- According to the **Ladakh Reservation (Amendment) Regulation, 2025**:
 - The **overall reservation cap** was raised from **50% to 85%**.
 - **Reservation for Scheduled Tribes (ST)** was sharply increased to **80%**.
- **Potential Hindrance to Economic Growth: Restrictions on land use and resource exploitation** inherent in the **Sixth Schedule** may deter **investments** and **infrastructure projects** crucial for **Ladakh's socio-economic development**, especially given its **strategic location** and need for enhanced **connectivity**.
 - While some **groups** strongly demand **Sixth Schedule inclusion**, others prefer strengthening existing **local bodies** like the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDC)**, which they see as more **practical** and less **disruptive to governance structures**.
- **Risk of Setting Precedent:** Granting **Sixth Schedule status** to Ladakh might prompt similar **demands** from other **regionally distinct tribal communities** across **India**, potentially complicating **federal governance** and **constitutional balance**.

What Measures can be Adopted to Address Ladakh's Governance and Autonomy Challenges?

- **Expand Powers of Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDCs):** Strengthen **legislative, executive, and judicial authority** of LAHDCs in **Leh and Kargil** over **local governance, resource management, and cultural preservation**.
 - This builds on **existing institutions** without requiring **constitutional amendments**, fostering **grassroots democracy** and addressing **autonomy demands**.
- **Special Legislative Status with Limited Autonomy:** Introduce a **dedicated Act of Parliament** under **Article 240** to grant Ladakh's representatives **law-making powers on local matters**, while maintaining **central control over defence and security**.
 - This hybrid model balances **regional aspirations** with **national strategic interests**.
- **Constitutional Amendment for a Tailored Sixth Schedule Model:** Explore a **modified Sixth Schedule framework**, inspired by **tribal autonomous councils in Northeast India**, tailored for Ladakh's **ethnic, geographic, and security context**.
 - A **joint committee of local leaders and central authorities** can draft safeguards, ensuring **autonomy with accountability** and preventing **misuse of powers**.
- **Enhanced Financial Devolution and Development Grants:** Increase **direct financial transfers** and **central grants** for **infrastructure, healthcare, education, and renewable energy**.
 - Use **centrally sponsored schemes** and **international climate finance mechanisms** (e.g., [Green Climate Fund](#)) to promote **sustainable development** in Ladakh's **fragile ecology** and generate **local jobs**.
- **Create a Ladakh Public Service Commission (LPSC):** Establish a **separate Public Service Commission** to ensure **domicile-based recruitment** and **reservation policies**.
 - With **youth unemployment at 26.5%** (double the national average), this would enhance **local employment equity**, prevent **economic disenfranchisement**, and empower **Ladakhi youth participation** in governance.
- **Institutionalised Dialogue and Conflict Resolution Platforms:** Create a **permanent consultation forum** involving **Leh Apex Body (LAB), Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), the central government, and security agencies**.
 - Regular dialogues would build **trust, conflict resolution, and inclusive planning**.
 - Models from **Northeast India's autonomy councils** provide practical **governance lessons**.
- **Fair Trials and Judicious Application of Laws:** To maintain **local goodwill**, ensure **fair judicial processes, transparency, and judicious use of laws** like the [National Security Act \(NSA\)](#) to avoid **alienating the local population** and **escalating tensions** amid the **demand for statehood and autonomy**.
 - **Sonam Wangchuk**, a prominent voice advocating for **statehood** and **Sixth Schedule safeguards** for Ladakh, has led hunger strikes and protests since 2023, but recently became **controversial**, accused by the Government of **inciting unrest** during the 2025

protests and detained under the **National Security Act (NSA)**.

- **Protection of Cultural Heritage and Environmental Sustainability:** Adopt **legal safeguards** to protect **languages, traditions, and fragile ecosystems** from **commercialisation** and **extractive industries**.
 - Drawing from **Bhutan's Gross National Happiness** and **Nepal's community forestry programs**, policies can ensure **balanced development, cultural preservation, and ecological resilience**.

Conclusion:

Ladakh's demands for **statehood, Sixth Schedule status, and greater autonomy** reflect the need for **inclusive governance, cultural preservation, and sustainable development** while safeguarding **national security**. A **phased, consultative approach**—strengthening **LAHDCs**, ensuring **local employment**, and promoting **ecological balance**—offers the best way forward, echoing Gandhi's words: ***"The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not enough for everyone's greed."***

Drishti Mains Question:

The call for Sixth Schedule status in Ladakh reflects the tension between tradition and modernity. Evaluate whether replicating Northeast India's tribal autonomy models is constitutionally, politically, and administratively feasible in Ladakh.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Which of the following provisions of the Constitution of India have a bearing on Education? (2012)

1. Directive Principles of State Policy
2. Rural and Urban Local Bodies
3. Fifth Schedule
4. Sixth Schedule
5. Seventh Schedule

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3, 4 and 5 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 5 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans: D

Mains

Q. To what extent is Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, bearing marginal note "Temporary provision with respect to the State of Jammu and Kashmir", temporary? Discuss the future prospects of this provision in the context of Indian polity. (2016)

