



Ladakh's Protest for Sixth Schedule Status

For Prelims: [Sixth Schedule of the Constitution](#), [Scheduled Tribes](#), [Autonomous District Councils](#)

For Mains: Sixth Schedule and tribal autonomy in India, Governance challenges in autonomous councils

[Source:IE](#)

Why in News?

Ladakh has witnessed renewed protests demanding **statehood** and [Sixth Schedule status](#), highlighting discontent among its predominantly **tribal population** over the lack of **constitutional safeguards** since its reorganization as a **Union Territory in 2019**.

What is the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution?

- **About:** The Sixth Schedule, enshrined in **Articles 244(2) and 275(1)**, is based on the **Bardoloi Committee's recommendations** to safeguard **tribal governance**.
- **Provisions:** It empowers Governors to establish [Autonomous District Councils \(ADCs\)](#) and **Autonomous Regional Councils (ARCs)**, providing self-rule to tribal areas.
 - ARCs allow the Governor to divide an autonomous district into separate regions if it has **different Scheduled Tribes**.
 - Each ADC usually has up to 30 members (26 elected, 4 nominated by the Governor) serving a five-year term (Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam is an exception, it has more than 40 members).
 - Currently, the Northeast has 10 ADCs across Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura.
- **Purpose:** **The Schedule was designed to protect tribal identity, culture, land, and governance systems in areas where tribal populations are significant, while still keeping them within the broader framework of the Indian Union.**
- **Powers of ADCs and ARCs:**
 - **Legislative Powers:** Councils can make laws on subjects such as land, forests, agriculture, village administration, inheritance, marriage/divorce, social customs, and mining (with restrictions). All laws require the **Governor's assent**.
 - **Judicial Powers:** Councils can establish courts to try cases involving Scheduled Tribes, except for serious crimes.
 - **Executive Powers:** Councils can set up and manage schools, markets, dispensaries, roads, water bodies, and local infrastructure.
 - **Financial Powers:** Can levy and collect taxes, tolls, and land revenue within their areas.

Why does Ladakh Demand Sixth Schedule Status?

- **Loss of Representation:** After **Jammu and Kashmir's 2019 reorganization**, Ladakh became a **Union Territory without a legislature**, reducing local autonomy and representation.
 - Previously, it had four **assembly members** and a more empowered LAHDC. Now, decision-making is **largely bureaucratic**, causing fears of outsider dominance, creating a sense of distance from governance.
- **Land Protection and Tribal Identity Concerns:** Changed domicile policy in J&K has sparked fears over **land ownership, jobs, and demography** in Ladakh. Communities fear dilution of their **cultural and linguistic heritage**.
 - The **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)** in 2019 suggested including Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule, since **Over 97% of Ladakh's population is tribal**. Land ownership was already restricted to protect locals. The region's **unique culture and ecology** require special safeguards.
- **Limited Autonomy of Existing Councils:** Ladakh has **two Hill Councils** (Leh and Kargil), but they are **not under the Sixth Schedule** and have very restricted powers, mostly related to local taxation and land allotment.
- **Environmental Safeguards:** **Ladakh's fragile ecosystem is under growing pressure from mass tourism (5.25 lakh tourists in 2023) and large-scale infrastructure projects such as the proposed mega solar park and geothermal energy zones.**
 - Incorporating the Sixth Schedule could empower local councils to enforce sustainable development and protect traditional land-use practices.
- **Economic Concerns:** **Graduate unemployment rate ~26.5%**, much higher than the national average. Lack of local job creation and a Public Service Commission fuels frustration.
 - Greater autonomy in development planning could align policies with **local needs**.

What are the Challenges in Granting Sixth Schedule Status to Ladakh?

- **Constitutional Limits:** Sixth Schedule was meant for **northeastern tribal areas**, so applying it to Ladakh would need a **constitutional amendment**.
- **Security Concerns:** Ladakh is a **border region**, and giving more autonomy could make **coordination of security and administration harder**.
- **Administrative Issues:** Experience from northeastern states shows **Autonomous Councils often rely on state funds**, leading to **financial dependency** and may face **political interference**, reducing their effectiveness.
 - Local councils may lack **trained staff and governance experience** to manage new powers.
- **Balancing Development and Autonomy:** Managing **infrastructure, tourism, and projects** while protecting tribal lands and the environment is tricky.
- **Precedent Risks:** Granting this status could **encourage other tribal regions to demand similar powers**, complicating national policy.

Government Alternative Measures in Response to Local Demands

- **Employment Reservations:** 85% of government jobs reserved for locals (as per Domicile Certificate Rules 2025).
- **Political Representation:** One-third of seats in Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDC) reserved for women.
 - This is in line with the 33% reservation for women in panchayats introduced after the 73rd Amendment Act.
- **Cultural Protection:** Official languages include English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti, and Purgi, with support for promoting Shina, Brokskat, Balti, and Ladakhi.

How can Ladakh Balance Autonomy While Preserving its Culture and Ensuring Security?

- **Environmental Legislative Authority:** Empower LAHDCs to legislate on renewable energy projects, water resources, and eco-sensitive tourism, ensuring development aligns with Ladakh's fragile ecosystem.
- **Ensuring Security and Strategic Oversight:** Maintain central oversight on border management, defense, and strategic infrastructure, given Ladakh's sensitive location.
 - Develop mechanisms for **coordination between local councils and Union Territory** administration for quick response during security contingencies.
- **Cultural Territorial Zones:** Establish '**Cultural Heritage Zones**' where only locals can own property or operate businesses, safeguarding traditional communities and languages.
- **Local Resource Sovereignty:** Grant councils **exclusive rights over high-value natural resources** (salt, medicinal plants, sand, and minerals) with revenue used for local development and ecological conservation.
- **Youth & Innovation Hubs:** Set up **local innovation centers** focused on renewable energy, sustainable tourism, and handicrafts, giving youth employment while protecting culture.

Conclusion

- Ladakh's demand for the Sixth Schedule highlights the need to balance autonomy, identity, and security. Granting more powers to the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council**, while keeping central oversight on security, could be a practical middle path to rebuild trust and ensure development respects Ladakh's unique culture and ecology.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Discuss the challenges and opportunities in extending Sixth Schedule protections to 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. Why are the tribals in India referred to as 'the Scheduled Tribes? Indicate the major provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India for their upliftment. **(2016)**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/ladakh-s-protest-for-sixth-schedule-status>

