

### 3. Ladakh Protest – Polity

Leh violence highlights – Govt cancels FCRA licence of organisation founded by Wangchuk over financial 'irregularities'. Protests in Ladakh are demanding full statehood and inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to protect the region's unique tribal identity and ensure local self-governance. These demands arise from a perceived loss of autonomy and democratic rights after Ladakh became a Union Territory without a legislature in 2019.

#### Background and Core Demands

Following the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, the former state of Jammu & Kashmir was divided into two Union Territories. While Ladakh initially welcomed its separation from J&K, the new administrative setup without a legislature has led to widespread discontent.

The primary demands of the protestors are –

**Full Statehood** – To restore legislative powers and ensure local self-governance.

**Inclusion in the Sixth Schedule** – To protect the unique cultural and tribal identity of the region, where over 90% of the population belongs to Scheduled Tribes.

**Job Security** – Establishment of a separate Public Service Commission for Ladakh to address rising unemployment among graduates.

**Enhanced Representation** – An increase in parliamentary representation from the current single Lok Sabha seat to two Lok Sabha seats (one for Leh, one for Kargil) and one Rajya Sabha seat.

#### Drivers of the Protest

Several key factors are fueling the ongoing agitation –

**Loss of Autonomy** – The Hill Development Councils of Leh and Kargil are seen as having diminished powers under the direct administration of a Lieutenant Governor.

**Democratic Deficit** – The absence of a legislative assembly means locals have limited participation in their own governance, which is now centrally administered.

**Environmental Concerns** – There is widespread fear that the fragile Himalayan ecosystem could be harmed by unregulated industrialization and mining.

**Border Security and Livelihoods** – Chinese aggression along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has led to the loss of crucial grazing lands for Pashmina shepherds, impacting traditional livelihoods.

**Job Shortage** – Since being delinked from J&K's recruitment boards, employment opportunities have shrunk. A government survey indicates that 26.5% of Ladakh's graduates are unemployed, the second-highest rate in India.

#### Understanding the Sixth Schedule (Article 244)

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution provides a framework for the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram through the creation of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs).

**Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** – These councils are the primary feature of the Sixth Schedule.

**Composition** – Each ADC can have up to 30 members, with a maximum of 4 nominated by the Governor and the rest elected through adult suffrage. Members hold office for five years.

**Governor's Role** – The Governor has the power to create, reorganize, or alter the boundaries of these autonomous districts.

**Legislative Powers of ADCs** – Councils can make laws on subjects like land, forest management (excluding reserved forests), agriculture, inheritance, marriage, and social customs. They can also regulate money-lending and trading by non-tribals. All laws require the Governor's assent.

**Judicial Powers** – ADCs can establish Village and District Council Courts to adjudicate disputes between members of Scheduled Tribes. However, these courts cannot try cases involving punishments of death or imprisonment for over five years. The jurisdiction of the High Court over these matters is determined by the Governor.

**Financial and Developmental Powers** – Councils can collect land revenue and impose taxes on professions, trades, vehicles, etc. They have the authority to grant licenses for mineral extraction within their jurisdiction. They can also establish and manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, fisheries, and roads.

**Applicability of Laws** – Acts of Parliament or state legislatures do not automatically apply to autonomous districts; they may be applied with modifications or exceptions as specified by the ADCs and the Governor.

### Government Response and Way Forward

The central government has been reluctant to grant the demands, citing strategic concerns given Ladakh's proximity to the contested border with China. The government maintains that the creation of a UT was a long-standing demand and that the existing Hill Councils provide sufficient safeguards.

To resolve the impasse, the following steps are suggested –

**Strengthen Hill Councils** – Grant greater legislative and financial autonomy to the existing Leh and Kargil Autonomous Hill Development Councils.

**Provide Safeguards** – Introduce special job reservations and legal protections for land to secure tribal livelihoods and prevent alienation.

**Explore Incremental Autonomy** – Consider a model of enhanced UT status, similar to Delhi or Puducherry, which allows for a legislature while keeping key areas under central control.

**Resume Dialogue** – Restart talks with the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) to build trust and find a middle path that balances national security with local aspirations.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ladakh-statehood-protests-leh-violence-highlights-september-25-2025/article70091700.ece>

