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GHADC Term Extended — Sixth Schedule, Autonomous District Councils, and Tribal Governance

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GHADC Term Extended — Sixth Schedule, Autonomous District Councils, and Tribal Governance

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✎ WHY IN NEWS

The Meghalaya government extended the term of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) by six months amid controversy over delayed elections and regional unrest in the Garo Hills. The extension invokes the special governance framework of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

WHAT IS THE GHADC?

The **Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC)** is one of three **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** in Meghalaya, established under the **Sixth Schedule** of the Indian Constitution to provide self-governance to tribal communities.

Three ADCs in Meghalaya:

Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) — Western Meghalaya

Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) — Central Meghalaya (Shillong region)

Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) — Eastern Meghalaya

GHADC Headquarters: Tura (the largest town in Garo Hills)

Garó People: One of the major tribal groups of the Northeast; predominantly Christian; speak Garó (a Tibeto-Burman language); traditionally matrilineal society (property passes through the mother's line).

THE SIXTH SCHEDULE — CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The **Sixth Schedule** (Articles **244(2)** and **275(1)**) of the Indian Constitution provides for **autonomous administration of tribal areas** in four northeastern states.

States covered: Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram

STRUCTURE OF ADCS:

Autonomous District Councils (ADCs): Legislative, executive, and limited judicial powers over tribal subjects

Autonomous Regional Councils (ARCs): Where a tribe in a district has a separate identity (e.g., North Cachar Hills ADC in Assam now has Dima Hasao)

Legislative powers of ADCs include:

- Allotment, occupation, use of land
- Management of forests (other than reserved forests)
- Use of waterways
- Regulation of jhum (shifting cultivation)
- Establishment of village/town administration
- Money lending
- Social customs

Judicial powers: ADCs can constitute their own courts to try cases between tribals; their laws require **Governor's assent** to take effect.

Composition of GHADC:

30 members (29 elected + 1 nominated by Governor)

Term: **5 years** (like state legislative assemblies)

Elections conducted by **State Election Commission of Meghalaya**

Current CEM (Chief Executive Member): Dormonarth Ch. Sangma (NPP) — elected after previous CEM Albinush Marak resigned before a no-confidence motion

WHY WAS THE TERM EXTENDED?

The Meghalaya Cabinet extended the GHADC term from **April 18 to October 18, 2026** (6 months), postponing elections scheduled for **April 10, 2026**.

Root cause: A February 2026 GHADC notification mandated that all candidates must hold a **Scheduled Tribe (ST) certificate**. This triggered violent clashes between tribal and non-tribal communities in **West Garo Hills district**, leaving **2 people dead** and several injured.

The extension allows time for the new GHADC leadership (CEM Dormonarth Ch. Sangma) to consult stakeholders and possibly amend candidacy rules before fresh elections. ADC terms can be extended by the state government (with Governor’s approval) for up to 6 months at a time when elections cannot be held due to security or administrative reasons.

FIFTH SCHEDULE VS SIXTH SCHEDULE — KEY DISTINCTION

Feature	Fifth Schedule	Sixth Schedule
States covered	Most mainland states with Scheduled Tribes	Only 4 NE states (Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram)
Mechanism	Tribal Advisory Councils; Governor’s special powers	Autonomous District Councils with legislative/judicial powers
Exclusion from state laws	Governor can direct Central/State laws not to apply	ADC laws override state laws on tribal subjects
Article	Article 244(1)	Article 244(2)
Strength of autonomy	Advisory only	Much stronger — legislative + judicial

Why Sixth Schedule for NE? The Northeast tribes have distinct identities, customary laws, and governance traditions that required stronger constitutional protection than the Fifth Schedule advisory model.

MEGHALAYA — QUICK PROFILE

Capital: Shillong (also called “Scotland of the East”)

Statehood: January 21, 1972 (carved out of Assam)

Chief Minister (2026): Conrad Sangma (National People’s Party — NPP)

Major tribes: Khasi, Jaintia, Garo

Religion: Predominantly Christian (~75%)

Economy: Coal (though banned in certain methods), limestone, tourism

NGT order on coal: National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned rat-hole coal mining in Meghalaya in 2014

UPSC RELEVANCE

GHADC full form, Sixth Schedule (Articles 244(2) and 275(1)), states covered (Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram), ADC powers, GHADC headquarters (Tura), three ADCs of Meghalaya.

MAINS GS2:

Tribal governance, federalism in India's Northeast, Sixth vs Fifth Schedule comparison, autonomy within Union, decentralisation and local self-governance for tribals.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

GHADC — CORE FACTS:

Full form: Garo Hills Autonomous District Council
 HQ: Tura, Meghalaya
 Members: 30 (29 elected + 1 nominated by Governor)
 Term: 5 years
 Constitutional basis: Sixth Schedule, Article 244(2)

THREE ADCS IN MEGHALAYA:

Garo Hills ADC (GHADC), Khasi Hills ADC (KHADC), Jaintia Hills ADC (JHADC)

SIXTH SCHEDULE:

Articles: 244(2) and 275(1)
 States: Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram
 Powers: Legislative (land, forests, waterways, jhum), Judicial (tribal courts), Executive
 ADC laws need: Governor's assent

FIFTH SCHEDULE VS SIXTH SCHEDULE:

Fifth: Most mainland states; Tribal Advisory Councils; advisory only; Article 244(1)
 Sixth: 4 NE states; ADCs with legislative + judicial powers; Article 244(2)

MEGHALAYA:

Statehood: January 21, 1972 (from Assam)
 Capital: Shillong
 Major tribes: Khasi, Jaintia, Garo
 CM (2026): Conrad Sangma (NPP)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Garo society: Matrilineal (property through mother's line) — one of the few matrilineal tribal societies in India
 NGT ban on rat-hole coal mining in Meghalaya: 2014
 Meghalaya is one of three states (with Nagaland and Mizoram) with >75% Christian population
 PESA Act 1996: Extends Panchayati Raj to Fifth Schedule areas (does NOT apply to Sixth Schedule states)

Sources: [Constitution of India](#), [GKToday](#), [The Hindu](#)

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