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Ladakh to Get Autonomous Hill Councils for All Seven Districts

14 July 2026 ·

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Ladakh to Get Autonomous Hill Councils for All Seven Districts

14 July 2026 · 4 min read ·

Source: ujjyari.com — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped

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WHY IN NEWS

On , the **Ladakh administration** announced that an **Autonomous Hill Development Council (AHDC)** will be constituted in each of Ladakh's seven districts. This adds elected councils in the **five new districts of Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass**, beyond the existing councils in **Leh and Kargil**. Separately, the **Lieutenant Governor** approved **17 new tehsils**, raising Ladakh's total from **15 to 32**.

A UNION TERRITORY WITHOUT A LEGISLATURE

To understand why hill councils matter so much in Ladakh, one has to recall the region's constitutional status. When the **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019** came into force in **October 2019**, the former state was split into two Union Territories. **Jammu and Kashmir** became a UT **with a legislature**; **Ladakh** became a UT **without a legislature**.

That means Ladakh has **no elected legislative assembly** of its own. In the absence of a legislature, the **Autonomous Hill Development Councils** are the principal channel through which the people of Ladakh exercise elected, grassroots self-government. Expanding them is therefore not a routine administrative tweak; it is the main available route to deepen democratic representation in the region.

WHAT WAS ANNOUNCED

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Councils for Every District

The **LAHDC for Leh** was created in **1995** and the one for **Kargil** in **2003**. The 2026 announcement extends the model so that every district has its own council. The result is a council in each of the seven districts:

EXISTING COUNCILS	NEW COUNCILS (2026)
Leh (1995)	Sham
Kargil (2003)	Nubra
	Changthang
	Zaskar
	Drass

More Tehsils

Alongside the councils, the **Lieutenant Governor approved 17 new tehsils**, taking the total from **15 to 32**. Tehsils are the sub-district revenue and administrative units; more of them means administration reaches closer to remote and sparsely populated Himalayan communities.

THE LEGAL MACHINERY

The legal basis for a council in every district is **Section 3(1) of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Act**, which permits **one council per district**. However, the announcement is a statement of intent that still needs procedural steps to take effect. Giving it legal force requires:

- 1 An **amendment** to operationalise councils in the new districts, and
- 2 **Delimitation** (<https://ujjayi.com/vocab/delimitation/>) **of constituencies** so that each new council has defined electoral wards before elections can be held.

Until these steps are completed, the new councils exist in principle rather than in fully constituted, elected form.

THE WIDER LADAKH QUESTION

The council expansion should be read against Ladakh's broader, and still unmet, demands. Civil society and political groups in the region have pressed for:

- Inclusion of Ladakh under the **Sixth Schedule** (<https://ujiyari.com/terms/sixth-schedule/>) of the Constitution, which provides for autonomous district and regional councils with legislative, judicial and financial powers to protect tribal areas.
- Full **statehood** for Ladakh.

Seen this way, the seven-district council model is a **partial answer**. It strengthens decentralisation and local self-rule within the existing framework, but it does not by itself grant the constitutional protections of the Sixth Schedule or the political status of statehood. It is best understood as deepening grassroots democracy while the larger autonomy questions remain open.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Indian polity and governance, **devolution** (<https://ujiyari.com/terms/devolution/>) of powers and finances to local levels, functioning of local self-government, Union Territories, and the constitutional provisions relating to autonomous councils and tribal areas.

Prelims pointers:

- **Ladakh** became a **Union Territory without a legislature** under the **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019** (in force **October 2019**).
- The **LAHDC Leh** was created in **1995**; the **LAHDC Kargil** in **2003**.
- **Section 3(1)** of the **LAHDC Act** permits **one council per district**.
- The five new districts are **Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass**.
- The **LG approved 17 new tehsils**, raising the total from **15 to 32**.
- Ladakh's pending demands include inclusion under the **Sixth Schedule** and **statehood**.

Mains question: “In a Union Territory without a legislature, Autonomous Hill Development Councils become the primary vehicle of democratic self-government. Examine the significance of extending these councils across Ladakh and evaluate the demand for Sixth Schedule protection.” (15 marks, 250 words)

FACTS CORNER

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★ FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

Event (14 July 2026): Ladakh to constitute an AHDC in each of its seven districts; 17 new tehsils approved by the LG.

New councils: Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass, adding to Leh (1995) and Kargil (2003).

Tehsils: Total rises from 15 to 32.

Legal basis: Section 3(1) of the LAHDC Act (one council per district); needs amendment and delimitation.

Status: Ladakh is a UT without a legislature since the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 (October 2019).

Pending demands: Sixth Schedule inclusion and statehood.

Sources: *Ministry of Home Affairs* (<https://mha.gov.in/>), *Ladakh Administration*

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