

# 1. Uranium Mining – Environment

The Centre's push for uranium mining in Meghalaya is met with strong resistance from local Khasi communities citing environmental concerns and their autonomous rights. This has created a conflict between national resource requirements and the constitutional safeguards for tribal areas under the Sixth Schedule.

## Uranium Mining in Meghalaya – Tensions and Governance

The central government's decision to pursue uranium mining in the Domiasiat and Wahkaji areas of Meghalaya has ignited significant concerns regarding the infringement of tribal rights, potential environmental degradation, and the bypassing of established procedural safeguards.

### Opposition and Concerns of Local Communities

The push for mining has been met with strong and long-standing resistance from the local inhabitants, primarily the Khasi community.

**Historical Opposition** – For decades, since the 1980s, Khasi community groups have consistently and actively opposed any attempts at uranium exploration and extraction in their ancestral lands.

**Invoking Constitutional Protections** – Local organizations are urging the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council to exercise its constitutional powers under the Sixth Schedule to safeguard tribal land, resources, and rights from external exploitation.

**Environmental Impact** – A primary concern is the severe environmental damage associated with uranium mining. It is known to be a highly polluting activity that can cause irreversible changes to the landscape, contaminate water sources, and pose long-term health risks.

**Perception of Injustice** – The government's top-down approach reinforces a deep-seated feeling among tribal communities that their lands are viewed merely as a 'resource frontier' to be exploited for the benefit of the 'Rest of India', with little to no regard for their consent or well-being.

### Provisions of the Sixth Schedule

The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution provides special administrative provisions for tribal areas in four north-eastern states to protect their unique culture and autonomy.

**Constitutional Basis** – It is governed by Article 244(2) and applies specifically to the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.

### Administrative Structure

**Autonomous Districts & Regions** – Tribal areas are administered as Autonomous Districts. The Governor has the authority to create Autonomous Regions within a district if multiple Scheduled Tribes reside there.

**Governor's Power of Reorganization** – The Governor can organize, reorganize, alter the boundaries, or change the name of these autonomous districts.

### Constitution of Councils

**District Council** – Each autonomous district has a District Council with up to 30 members. A maximum of 4 members are nominated by the Governor, while the rest are elected through adult suffrage.

**Regional Council** – A separate Regional Council is established for each designated autonomous region.

**Legislative Powers of Councils** – These councils can legislate on crucial local matters such as land use, forest management (excluding reserved forests), inheritance customs, and local trading regulations. They can enact laws to regulate money-lending and trade conducted by non-tribals within their jurisdiction. Crucially, all laws passed by the councils require the Governor's assent to become effective.

**Revenue and Taxation Powers** – Councils are empowered to assess and collect land revenue. They can impose taxes on professions, trades, animals, vehicles, and other local items. They hold the authority to grant licenses or leases for the extraction of minerals within their jurisdictional areas.

**Administration of Justice** – Councils can establish Village and District Council Courts to adjudicate disputes where all parties are members of Scheduled Tribes. These courts, however, cannot try cases that involve punishments of death or imprisonment for a term exceeding five years. The High Courts retain jurisdiction over specific cases as determined by the Governor.

**Applicability of Laws** – Acts of Parliament or State Legislatures do not automatically apply to these autonomous regions. They can be applied with specific modifications or exceptions as deemed appropriate.

**Governor's Oversight** – The Governor can appoint commissions to investigate and report on any matter related to the administration of these autonomous districts or regions.

### About Uranium

**Nature** – Uranium is a dense, heavy, and radioactive metal naturally found in the Earth's crust.

**Sources** – It is primarily extracted from uranium-bearing minerals like uraninite (also known as pitchblende), brannerite, and carnotite. It is also found in smaller quantities in phosphate rocks and monazite sands.

### Civilian Uses

1. **Nuclear Fuel** – Its isotope, Uranium-235, is the principal fuel used in nuclear power reactors to generate electricity.
2. **Medical Field** – It is used in radiation therapy for cancer treatment, in radiography, and for the production of medical isotopes.

**Military Uses** – Uranium is used to power nuclear submarines and serves as a key component in the production of nuclear weapons.

### Uranium Deposits in India

**First Discovery** – India's first uranium deposit was identified in 1951 at Jaduguda, located in the Singhbhum Thrust Belt of Jharkhand. The mining and processing operations at Jaduguda commenced in 1968.

### Other Significant Deposits

**Andhra Pradesh** – The Cuddapah Basin holds significant reserves.

**Meghalaya** – Sandstone-type deposits are found in the Mahadek Basin, specifically at Domiasiat, Wakhyn, and Mawsynram.

**Potential Areas** – Promising sites for future uranium exploration and mining have been identified in Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Chhattisgarh.

### Major Global Uranium Producers

According to 2022 data, the global production of uranium is dominated by a few key countries –

**Kazakhstan** – The world's largest producer, accounting for 43% of the global supply.

**Canada** – The second-largest producer, contributing 15%.

**Namibia** – The third-largest, with an 11% share of the world supply.

Source – [https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/uranium-unrest-on-uranium-mining-in-meghalaya/article70077165.ece#google\\_vignette](https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/uranium-unrest-on-uranium-mining-in-meghalaya/article70077165.ece#google_vignette)