

Article 244 (A) of Indian Constitution

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Context

In the Diphu Lok Sabha constituency in Assam, candidates from all political parties have pledged to put into action **Article 244(A) of the Constitution**, which aims to establish an autonomous region, almost like a separate government within the state.

Key Highlights

- Diphu is the most sparsely populated of Assam's 14 Lok Sabha constituencies, with only 8.9 lakh voters.
- It is reserved for Scheduled Tribes (STs), and covers six legislative Assembly segments in 3 tribal-majority hill districts of Assam: **Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and Dima Hasao**.
 - These three districts are administered under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
- These areas come under two independent councils: **the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council**.
- Voters on the seat belong to diverse communities: **Karbi (the third largest tribe in the country), Dimasas, Hmar, Kuki, Rengma Naga, Zeme Naga, Bodo, Garo, Assamese, Gorkha, etc.**

Article 244(A) of the Constitution

- **22nd amendment act of 1969**

- The Constitution (22nd Amendment) Act of 1969 introduced Article 244(A), permitting Parliament to create an autonomous region in Assam.
- This area needs to consist of positive tribal areas like Karbi Anglong.

- **Key highlights**

- In this autonomous area, there may be a separate governing frame, like a Legislature or Council of Ministers, or both.
- This provision is more superior than what is currently in place under the Sixth Schedule for those regions.

Difference from the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution

- Under the Sixth Schedule, there are already councils with elected representatives for decentralized governance in tribal areas.
- However, those councils have restricted powers. They can't control regulation enforcement, and their economic authority is also restrained.
- On the other hand, Article 244(A) demands for more autonomous powers to tribal regions. Among those the most critical power is the control over law and order.

Demand for autonomy

- **History of Autonomy Demand**

- The demand for autonomy in the hill areas of undivided Assam dates back to the 1950s, with a movement seeking a separate hill state.
- This movement in the end caused the formation of Meghalaya as a full-fledged state in 1972.
- Despite this, leaders in the Karbi Anglong region chose to remain with Assam, motivated through the promise of autonomy under Article 244(A).

- **Role of Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC)**

- ASDC, set up as a mass organization advocating for regional autonomy, played a pivotal function.
- In 1995, the ASDC, alongside local student bodies, reached a Memorandum of Settlement with state and central governments.
- This agreement aimed to reinforce the powers of the 2 autonomous councils in the area by increasing the variety of departments under their charge from 10 to 30.

- **Political Representation and Insurgency**

- Frustrated by the elusive nature of autonomy, the decision for implementing Article 244(A) escalated into armed insurgency through the years.
- Both the Delhi and Guwahati governments have engaged in peace negotiations with militant companies, such as the Karbi and Dimas

factions, signing several peace accords within the system.

- **Peace agreement**

- In 2021, a peace agreement was signed with 5 militant organizations in Karbi Anglong.
- These organizations covered Karbi People's Liberation Tigers, People's Democratic Council of Karbi Longri, Karbi Longri NC Hills Liberation Front, Kuki Liberation Front, and United People's Liberation Army.
- Under this agreement, more autonomy and a special development package deal of Rs 1,000 crore over 5 years have been promised.
- In 2023, an agreement was signed with the Dimasas National Liberation Army alongside the same tracks.

Source:*The Indian Express*

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Article 244 of the Indian Constitution relates to the administration of scheduled areas and tribal areas. Analyse the impact of non-implementation of the provisions of the Fifth schedule on the growth of Left wing extremism. (2013)