

India: 'Not a New Demand': Why Certain Groups Want Tura as Meghalaya's Winter Capital

Wednesday 26 July 2023, by [GOSWAMI Madhusree](#) (Date first published: 25 July 2023).

Five security personnel were injured in a mob attack at the office of [Meghalaya](#) Chief Minister [Conrad Sangma](#) in Tura on Monday, 24 July.

The chief minister, who was unharmed in the attack, was holding a meeting with representatives of the two protesting organisations – Achik Conscious Holistically Integrated Krima (ACHIK) and the Garo Hills State Movement Committee (GHSMC) – to discuss their demand to declare Tura as Meghalaya's winter capital.

"After the discussion was almost over, we heard sloganeering from outside," Sangma was quoted as saying by *NDTV*.

"I asked them not to create any scene out here. Their leaders [of the civil societies in talks] went outside to speak to the people. They came back and said they did not know who these people were, having never seen them before during the fasting protest," he added.

After the violence, the Meghalaya government imposed a restriction on large gatherings in Tura under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. At least 18 people, including two [Bharatiya Janata Party](#) (BJP) Mahila Morcha functionaries, were arrested for their alleged involvement in the attack – and a manhunt for two [Trinamool Congress](#) (TMC) leaders for allegedly instigating a mob to attack the building is on.

So, why is there a demand to declare Tura as Meghalaya's winter capital? Why has there been opposition to the demand? **The Quint** explains.

Why is There Demand for a Winter Capital?

Monday night's protest stems from the demand by ACHIK to establish Tura, the headquarters of the West Garo Hills region in Meghalaya, as the winter capital of the state. At present, the state's capital [Shillong](#) is located in the East Khasi Hills district.

Shillong is almost at the centre of the hills inhabited by the Khasis, one among the three matrilineal communities of Meghalaya. The other two are Garos concentrated in the Garo Hills, and the Jaintias dominating the Jaintia Hills.

Since 11 July, ACHIK leaders have been on an indefinite hunger strike over their demand to declare Tura as a winter capital – for a period of sixth months from October to March.

Last week, ACHIK, in a press release, said, "The significance of establishing a second or winter

capital cannot be overstated". Their reasons were:

- Such a move would "enable focused attention on specific regional challenges and foster overall prosperity"
- Tura's strategic location in the western part of Meghalaya which helps it serve as "a gateway to numerous remote areas, facilitating better connectivity and administration"
- Tura has the potential to stimulate socio-economic growth in the Garo Hills region.
- Tura will reduce the geo-physical barrier, adding that it will take more time to reach Shillong from Garo Hills
- Tura experiences relatively mild weather conditions during the winter months, which makes it an ideal location for the winter capital
- The relief it would bring to Shillong, especially during the winter season, when the tourism season is at its peak

"By shifting administrative functions to Tura during this period, the strain on resources and overcrowding in Shillong can be mitigated, ensuring sustainable resource management and preserving the natural beauty of both regions," the press release noted.

Moreover, they say the demand for a winter capital is not even a new one.

Thomas M Marak, president of ACHIK, was quoted by *The Meghalayan* as saying, "It is tragic to know that although the winter capital or second capital in Tura had been an agreed policy of the pioneers of the Meghalaya state, yet, it has just remained a distant dream with no actual policy for implementation even after 51 years of Meghalaya's statehood."

[Bernard N Marak](#), member of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, told *The Times of India* that the demand to declare Tura the winter capital was genuine, because "a winter capital was promised to the people of Garo Hills 50 years ago during the statehood movement but left halfway by the former leaders."

What's the Other Point of View?

Not everyone agrees with ACHIK's demand for a winter capital.

[Ampareen Lyngdoh](#), who serves as the state's health minister, has rejected the demand, saying it would not be correct to consider any kind of a capital anywhere else.

"We are in Shillong... it is the capital and we hope that these demands should not be entertained. That is my personal view because we will be in trouble if every district starts saying 'bring this to my district bring that to my district', it will be difficult for us to administrate."

— Ampareen Lyngdoh, Meghalaya's health minister, last week

Lyngdoh, however, alleged that some political leaders were behind the attack on Sangma on Monday.

"The attack on Monday was not by those who were demanding a winter capital for Tura. The miscreants who created a law and order situation were all political leaders of 2-3 parties who lost in the recent state elections, and this was indicated in the videos circulated on social media. We condemn this - and urge the administration and the police to arrest all concerned for the breach of security and direct threat to chief minister," Lyngdoh told **The Quint**.

Meanwhile, the demand to make Shillong the summer capital and Tura the winter capital has triggered a call in the Jaintia Hills for Jowai to be made the spring capital. Jowai is the nerve centre of the Jaintia Hills. This demand is being spearheaded by the Jaintia Students' Movement after the local unit of the Hynniewtrep Youth Council raised it a few days ago.

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