

Bodo Accord

August 16, 2020

Why is it in the news?

The Ministry of Home Affairs, Assam government and Bodo groups including the All Bodo Students' Union and militant outfits signed an agreement on January 27. It was New Delhi's third attempt at conflict resolution after the 1993 and 2003 accords.

Context of the issue

- In order to meet the aspirations of the Bodos in Assam and in pursuance of the Memorandum of Settlement signed between the Central Government, the Government of Assam and Bodo Liberation Tigers, the 6th schedule was amended in 2003.
- The amendment provided for the following
 - It specified the Bodoland Territorial Areas District (BTAD) in the list of the tribal areas of the State of Assam
 - It created an autonomous self-governing body known as the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) within the state of Assam
 - It vested the council with legislative, administrative and financial powers in respect of specified subjects
 - It provided adequate safeguards for the non-tribal in the BTC area.

Changes due to New Accord

- BTAD is renamed as Bodoland Territorial Region.
- A commission appointed by the state government will examine and recommend if villages contiguous to BTAD and with a majority tribal population can be included into the BTR while those now in BTAD and with a majority non-

tribal population can opt out of the BTR.

- This will lead to an increase in the Bodo population in BTR and decrease in non-tribal population, leading to mitigation of inter-community clashes wherever it is happening.
- The government will set up a Bodo-Kachari Welfare Council for focused development of Bodo villages outside BTAD (to address the needs of Bodos outside BTAD).
- It provides for more legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers to BTC.
- The Government of Assam will notify Bodo language in Devanagari script as the associate official language in the state.
- In regards to cases filed during the armed movement, criminal cases for non-heinous crimes shall be withdrawn and those in connection with heinous crimes shall be reviewed case by case according to the existing policy on the subject.

Objections to changes

- No other council under the 6th schedule in the Northeast has been conferred such wide-ranging powers as the BTC. The agreement lists another 8 subjects to be transferred from the state government which will take the total to 48 to be administered by the council. But this could also trigger demands from the other councils in the region for similar packages and transfer of subjects.
- Non-Bodo communities that constitute an overwhelming majority in the 4 districts of the BTAD have alleged discrimination by the Bodo leadership since the council was formed in 2003. Only 10 are reserved for them out of a total 40 elected seats in the council which will now be increased to 60.
- The ST (Hills) status is primarily reserved for tribes residing in the 2 autonomous hill districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao, where the Karbis and Dimasas are

the most dominant in their respective areas. At present, while 16 seats are reserved for STs in the 126-member Assam Assembly, 2 are reserved for existing tribes in the 14 Lok Sabha seats of the State. The agreement stipulates that Bodos living in the hill areas outside the BTAD will be conferred Scheduled Tribe (Hills) status. It has not gone down well with tribes such as the Karbis.