

New Bodo Accord

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Source: *The Hindu*

Manifest pedagogy: Bodo accord is a step in furthering the peace process in the north east. Combined with infrastructural development and holistic Act east policy, it helps in ushering a new era of a new India.

In news: The Centre has signed the Bodo Peace Accord to bring peace to Assam.

Placing it in syllabus: Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)

Static dimensions:

- History of all Bodo accords and their outcomes
- Autonomous district councils

Current dimensions:

- New accord and proposed changes
- Its importance and criticisms

Content:

The agreement was signed between the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the Assam government and the Bodo groups.

History of Bodos and Bodo accords and their outcomes:

- The Bodos are an **ethnolinguistic group** who were the earliest inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley and present-day Assam.
- They are one of the **Indo-Mongoloid tribal communities** belonging to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family.
- They predominantly inhabit the **northwestern part of Assam** along the foothills of the Himalayas.

With the passage of time, the Bodos started feeling threatened in their own homeland as they fell behind the dominant Assamese population in terms of socio-economic and cultural identity which resulted in **Bodo movement**.

The leaders of the movement emphasised that the Bodo people are ethnically different from the rest of the people of present-day Assam and hence entitled to a **separate state-Bodoland**.

- The **Bodos first mobilised their numbers in 1923** when the community **approached the Indian Statutory Commission** demanding political power.
- Subsequently, the **All Assam Plains Tribal League (AAPT)** **was formed in 1933** with the objective to protect Bodo identity and demand for separate electorate system, and reservation of five seats for greater electoral participation.
- **Other factors** that heightened the feeling of resentment and isolation in the Bodos were:
 - **Introduction of the Official language bill on 10 October, 1960** which tried to enforce the use of Assamese as the official language by the state government.
 - The **decision to impose Assamese language** as the sole medium of instruction in university and secondary levels of education in 1972.
 - The movement by All Assam Students' Union to **persuade the government to scrap the reservation enjoyed by the tribal students**.

Bodo accords:

The government tried to sign pacts to end the insurgency.

1. The **first accord was signed with the All Bodo Students' Union in 1993**, leading to the creation of a **Bodoland Autonomous Council** with limited political powers.

But the accord failed as it failed to consider minorities other than Bodos who were also the residents of those areas.

2. In **2003**, the **second accord was signed with the militant group Bodo Liberation Tigers**, leading to formation of **Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)** with four districts of Assam – Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baska and Udalguri – called Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD).

However, this too failed due to rising discontent from non-Bodo residents of the BTAD areas, who accounted for nearly two-thirds of its population. The differences between extremist and militant wings of Bodo groups also got added.

3. The freshly signed Bodo accord in January, 2020 is the third such accord which promises political empowerment of Bodo people.

Autonomous District Councils (ADCs):

- The **Sixth Schedule** consists of provisions for the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, according to **Article 244** of the Indian Constitution.
- It seeks to **safeguard the rights of tribal population** through the formation of Autonomous District Councils (ADC).
- ADCs are **bodies representing a district to which the Constitution has given varying degrees of autonomy** within the state legislature.
- The **governors** of these states are empowered to reorganise boundaries of the tribal areas.
- They can also **alter or change the names of autonomous regions** without a separate legislation.
- Along with ADCs, the Sixth Schedule also provides for **separate Regional Councils** for each area constituted as

an autonomous region.

- As of now, there are **10 areas in the Northeast that are registered as autonomous districts** – *three in Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram and one in Tripura.*
- Each autonomous district and regional council **consists of not more than 30 members, with a term of five years.**
- Out of 30, four are nominated by the governor and the rest via elections.
- The **BTC is an exception as it can constitute up to 46 members out of which 40 are elected.**
- Of these 40 seats, 35 are reserved for the STs and non-tribal communities, five are unreserved and the rest six are nominated by the governor from underrepresented communities of the BTAD.

Powers of ADCs:

- They are **empowered with civil and judicial powers**, can constitute village courts within their jurisdiction to hear trial of cases involving the tribes.
- They are also **empowered to make legislative laws** on matters like land, forests, fisheries, social security, entertainment, public health, etc. with due approval from the governor.
- The roles of the central and state governments are restricted from the territorial jurisdiction of these autonomous regions.
- **Acts passed by Parliament and state legislatures may or may not be levied in these regions** unless the President and the governor gives her or his approval, with or without modifications in the laws for the autonomous regions.
- The **BTAD and other areas mentioned under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution have been exempted from the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.**

New accord and proposed changes:

- The key provisions of the accord cover **three main aspects** of the Bodo people's demand:
 - Clemency and mainstreaming of people who were involved in violent agitation
 - greater autonomy and economic development of Bodo people
 - preservation of Bodo language and culture
- The accord states that **1,550 militants** belonging to deemed terrorist organisations like **National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) (P)**, **NDFB(RD)** and **NDFB(S)** **will lay down their arms on 30 January, 2020.**
- They will be **rehabilitated by the Central and state governments.**
- The state government will give **Rs 5 lakh** each to the next of kin of those who lost their lives during the agitation for a separate state.
- **Criminal cases with non-heinous charges** against NDFB members will be **withdrawn.**
- Those **cases which are heinous** will be **reviewed on a case-to-case basis** as per the existing rules.
- Bodos living in the hills would be conferred a **Scheduled Hill Tribe status.**
- An **economic programme of Rs 1,500 crore** will be implemented for the development of Bodo areas in the next three years with **equal contribution of Rs 750 crore each from the Central and state governments.**
- The funds would be used to set up industry and employment package and promote eco-tourism.
- The government will set up a **Central University** in the name of Upendranath Brahma and a **National Sports University** will be set up.
- A regional medical institute, hotel management campus, a Mother Dairy plant, a **National Institute of Technology** and more Navodaya Vidyalayas will be set up.
- The existing structure of **Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)** **will be strengthened with more powers and its seats will be expanded from 40 to 60.** ((The BTC

currently has control over 30 subjects such as education, forests, horticulture but no jurisdiction over the police, revenue and general administration departments, which are controlled by the Assam government)).

- A **commission will be set up for inclusion of Bodo-dominated villages in the BTC and exclusion of those where Bodos are not in majority.**
- With more administrative powers the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (**BTAD**) spread over four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri **will be renamed as Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).**



- **Bodo language** as in Devanagari script will be **notified** by the state government **as an associate official language of Assam.**

Its importance and criticisms:

- The accord is a significant step in **bringing to end the 27 years unrest** which took around 4000 lives.
- People previously associated with armed resistance groups will enter the mainstream and contribute to the nation's progress.
- It helps in **better shaping of ADCs** by giving them more powers which in turn results in Bodo people's development.
- It will **fulfill their political and economic demands** besides safeguarding the Bodo language and culture.

Criticisms:

The latest accord like previous two agreements, **does not include the sizeable non-Bodo population of the area** (Primarily Bengali Muslims, whose roots can be traced to Bangladesh and tribal communities like Santhals and Koch-Rajbongshi), who, in fact, together form a majority in the BRC

and have suffered tremendously in the years of violence unleashed by Bodo militants.

The non-Bodo organisations are protesting as **non-Bodo stakeholders residing in the BTAD and the banned Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) were not included in the peace talks** and made signatories to the accord.

The accord has been blamed as being **biased towards Bodo population** which forms **25%** in BTAD at the cost of remaining 75% non-Bodo population.

The agreement has **not addressed the issue of "citizenship or work permit" for non-domiciles** in the BTAD.