

# HISTORY HEADLINE: BODO ACCORD FOLLOWS A SERIES OF BETRAYALS

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Dispute Redressal Mechanisms, and the Centre-State Relations

*(Written by Raju Kumar Narzary)*

On January 27, the 3rd Bodo Peace Accord in the form of Bodoland Territorial Region was signed, effectively ending insurgency that has lasted years.

In the late 19th and early 20th Century, Bodos and other native communities in Brahmaputra Valley witnessed large-scale in-migration from the then East Bengal and the Central Indian Chota Nagpur region. A British administrator, Sir Edward Gait, predicted in his book *A History of Assam* that the extinction of the Bodo community was just a matter of time.

It is around this time that a socio-political-religious leader, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, started mobilising Bodos and other plains tribes to reclaim their ethnic and linguistic identity. In 1928-29, a Bodo delegation led by Brahma submitted a memorandum to the visiting Simon Commission, demanding a Bodo Regiment in the British (Indian) Army; reservation of seats in Assam's Provincial Council and local bodies; and the right of Bodos to enlist separately as Bodo in the electoral roll and Census. Many of demands were later conceded through the Government of India Act 1935.

In 1935, the Assam Tribal League won many seats and supported the Gopinath Bordoloi-led [Indian National Congress](#) government in Assam. In 1948, through the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, tribal land was sought to be protected by creating a separate Tribal Belt and Block, a move that led to the merger of the Assam Tribal League with the Congress.

In 1952, two powerful socio-cultural-literary bodies, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) and All Assam Tribal Sangha, moved in to fill the political vacuum amongst the Bodos. While in 1963 the BSS managed to get Bodo language introduced as a medium of instruction in schools, the Tribal Sangha stuck to political demands. In the 1960s, with India witnessing the creation of separate states on linguistic and ethnic lines, the Bodos remained hopeful of a state. But while most of the hill districts of Assam were created to safeguard hill tribes, the Bodos, one of the largest tribal groups of India numbering more than four million, were once again forced to take up political demands.

In 1967, the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) were formed, seeking a separate state by the name of 'Udayachal' for the plains tribes.

Around the same time, the BSS launched a mass movement seeking that the Assamese script be replaced with the Roman script. The Assam government tried to crush this movement, imprisoning thousands. In 1973, 17 people were killed when police fired on protesters.

This planted the seeds of Bodo militancy. In 1986, with Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma as president, the ABSU decided to take over the movement for a separate state and called it Bodoland. A mass moment was started on March 2, 1987, which was countered by the Assam Gana Parishad government, then flush with the success of the Assam Accord of 1985.

In 1986, the first Bodo militant outfit, the Bodo Security Force (BSF), was born, followed by the

Bodo Volunteer Force two years later. In 1989, a riot in Gohpur area between the Assamese and Bodos led to killing of 550 Bodos while over 75,000 fled to Arunachal Pradesh. This fuelled the divide between the Assamese and Bodos. With law and order collapsing, the Centre deployed the Army across Assam.

On May 1, 1990, ABSU president Brahma died and it started talks with the Government, leading to the first peace accord on February 20, 1993, and a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC). However, when not even one of its clauses was implemented by Assam, a section of the ABSU leaders went underground to form the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), one of the most ferocious militant groups of our time. In the meantime, the BSF, with camps in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar, renamed itself the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB).

What followed were gun battles, killings, kidnappings, extortion. All the Bodo areas were brought under AFSPA.

At the time of the 1999 [Kargil War](#), responding to a plea by then home minister L K Advani, the BLT declared a ceasefire, facilitating safe passage for the Army through the Siliguri Corridor that connects Northeast to mainland India. Finally, on February 10, 2003, the Bodoland Territorial Council Accord was signed, facilitating Bodoland Territorial Area Districts. It covered Baksa, Chirang, [Kokrajhar](#) and Udalguri districts of Assam.

In 2004, a Suspension of Operation Agreement was signed between the NDFB and the government.

With little emerging out of the negotiations, a section of the NDFB broke the Agreement, and carried out attacks across Assam. Gobinda Basumatary went on to form the NDFB(P), even as a large number of cadres remained with the parent organisation led by Ranjan Daimary.

Daimary led from his hideouts in Bangladesh until he was arrested in 2010, after which NDFB too declared a ceasefire. But again nothing emerged from the peace negotiations. Finally, thanks to protests by the ABSU, the Central and state governments started negotiating with all factions. It was this that eventually led to the signing of the 3rd Bodo Peace Accord, with all four factions of the NDFB surrendering on January 30 in Guwahati.

***The writer works with the North East Research & Social Work Networking, a voluntary organisation based in Assam***

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