

SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON BODO ACCORD

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

New Delhi's third attempt at conflict resolution with Assam's Bodos came out of the blue. The State had been more in the news for the sustained protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, one that pre-dates the pan-India ferment after the Bill's passage in Parliament. The [signing of the peace accord](#) on January 27 shifted attention after the Prime Minister had to abort two planned trips to Guwahati for a summit with Japanese Prime Minister Shinz Abe on December 15 and the inauguration of the Khelo India Games on January 10. The new deal offers more hope than the 1993 and 2003 accords; some of the most potent factions of the National Democratic Front of Boroland that had stayed away from earlier agreements are now on board. More significantly, the stakeholders have agreed that the updated political arrangements would remain confined to the realm of wider autonomy within the State of Assam, giving statehood and Union Territory demands a final burial. The generous terms promise an expanded area to be renamed as Bodoland Territorial Region, a 1,500-crore development package, and greater contiguity of Bodo-populated areas. There is also an offer of general amnesty for militants, with heinous crimes likely to be benignly reviewed, and 5 lakh each to the families of those killed during the Bodo movement — it claimed nearly 4,000 lives. On a success scale, the agreement falls somewhere between the Naga framework agreement of August 2015, shrouded in secrecy, and the January 16 Bru settlement to permanently settle around 34,000 people displaced from Mizoram in 1997 in Tripura. While it empowers Bodos, the question of an enduring peace remains moot.

With newer claimants to a share of spoils, the current bonhomie could be severely tested when the expanded Bodoland Territorial Council goes to the polls soon. It has been dominated since inception in 2003 by the Bodoland Peoples Front, comprising former Bodo Liberation Tigers cadre, but the new batches of surrendered militants as well as the All Bodo Students' Union intend to enter the fray. Of greater concern are inter-tribal and community ties. The Bodos comprise not more than 30% of the population in the BTR region, and the central munificence has deepened the insecurity among Koch Rajbongshis, Adivasis and Muslims. The politics of deferring to such identity-based movements is part of an old playbook of internal security in the Northeast — the Bru solution betrays shades of it, and one can trace it back to the Mizo insurgency and Laldenga becoming the Chief Minister of Mizoram. The Kokrajhar MP, a non-Bodo, has appealed to the government to ensure that a Bodo solution does not engender a non-Bodo problem. The accord's success will lie in the stakeholders working out a power-sharing arrangement in the proposed BTR that privileges equity over hegemony.

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