

For truce to hold

The Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) has done well to call off the agitation it spearheaded in the Darjeeling hills for over a hundred days. The Union home ministry will organise a meeting to discuss the issues raised by the protestors. The protest had begun to lose its sting as the extended bandh crippled normal life in the region. Tourism, the backbone of the local economy, suffered because of the extended shutdown and the violence and educational institutions and businesses were closed. The West Bengal government has described Singh's offer for talks as a face-saver for the GJM. Even if that is true, the state government must now reflect seriously on the reasons that had forced people in the hills to take to the streets again.

There is persuasive evidence to suggest that the Nepali-speaking majority of the Darjeeling hills continues to feel alienated from the state government, which is perceived to exclusively represent the Bengalis of the plains. Communities in the hills believe that Kolkata is unwilling to recognise their unique cultural character and that it wants to subsume their distinct linguistic and ethnic features in a Bengali identity. The idea of a separate Gorkhaland state is born out of a struggle in the hills to maintain a unique sub-regional identity. Of course, issues of governance have also been flagged. The West Bengal government, at various times, has sought to contain the statehood demand with the promise of administrative autonomy. The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council of the 1980s to the present Gorkhaland Territorial Administration were created in response to popular movements for a separate state. Though projected as autonomous entities, however, the state governments were reluctant to sufficiently empower them with funds or administrative powers. These bodies, predictably, failed to meet the expectations of the people. The state government has also invited accusations of insensitivity to the cultural claims and sentiments in the hills. The present phase of the protests, for instance, was provoked by an announcement by Chief Minister [Mamata Banerjee](#) that Bengali would be made compulsory in all schools.

Successive state governments have preferred to enforce peace in the hills by exploiting divisions within the Gorkhaland movement. This time, the state government weaned away a section of the GJM earlier this month. A week ago, the government constituted a nine-member board of administrators and bestowed on them the powers vested with GTA. It helped to end the bandh, but in the absence of institutional remedies to genuine concerns about the cultural identity of the hills and administrative autonomy, the protests could return.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com