



## New Bodo Accord

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Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the Assam government and the Bodo groups signed a tripartite agreement to redraw, rename and changing power-sharing agreement in the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) in Assam.

This agreement has been termed as **Third Bodo Accord**. According to the Union government, the signing of the agreement will end the **50-year-old Bodo crisis**. This agreement is a series of concerted efforts to fulfil the aspirations of the Bodo people relating to their cultural identity, language, education and economic development and political aspiration.

### What is the Bodoland Dispute?

- **Bodos are the single largest community among the notified Scheduled Tribes** in Assam. They constitute about 5-6% of Assam's population.
- The first organised demand for a **Bodo state came in 1967-68** under the banner of the political party called Plains Tribals Council of Assam.
- In 1985, when the **Assam Movement culminated in the Assam Accord**, many Bodos saw it as essentially focusing on the interests of the Assamese-speaking community.
- As a result of this, several Bodo groups led by the **All Bodo Students Union (ABSU)** and **National Democratic Front of Bodoland** have been demanding separate land for the ethnic community, a movement that has claimed nearly 4,000 lives.
- After the years of violent clashes, the **first Bodo Accord was signed with the ABSU in 1993**, leading to the creation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council with limited political powers.

- Under the **second Bodo Accord**, it is agreed to create a self-governing body for the Bodo Areas in the State of Assam. In pursuance of this, the **Bodoland Territorial Council** (BTC) was created in 2003 with some more financial and other powers.
  - Bodoland Territorial Council is an **autonomous region in the state of Assam** in India.
  - It is made up of four districts (Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri) on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river, by the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh.
  - The area under the jurisdiction of BTC, formed under the 2003 Accord, was called the **Bodo Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD)**.
- BTC is an area governed under the 6th schedule. However, BTC is an exception to the constitutional provision under the 6th schedule.
  - As it can constitute up to 46 members out of which 40 are elected.
  - Of these 40 seats, 35 are reserved for the Scheduled Tribes and non-tribal communities, five are unreserved and the rest six are nominated by the governor from underrepresented communities of the Bodoland Territorial Areas District (BTAD).
- Thus, the creation of the BTC can be seen as a new experiment of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule.

### **Autonomous districts and regional councils**

- Along with ADCs, the Sixth Schedule also provides for separate Regional Councils for each area constituted as an autonomous region.
  - In all, there are 10 areas in the Northeast that are registered as autonomous districts – three in Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram and one in Tripura.
  - These regions are named as district council of (name of district) and regional council of (name of region).
- Each autonomous district and regional council consists of not more than 30 members, of which four are nominated by the governor and the rest via elections. All of them remain in power for a term of five years.

### **Sixth Schedule**

- 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.
- Passed by the Constituent Assembly in 1949, it seeks to safeguard the rights of the 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.
  - In simpler terms, she or he can choose to include or exclude any area, increase or decrease the boundaries and unite two or more autonomous districts into one.
  - They can also alter or change the names of autonomous regions without separate legislation.

## Need For New Accord

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- The **Bodo Accord signed in 2003**, constitutionally mandated legislative power to the BTC. However, denial of assent by the Governor to laws passed by the BTC was one of the key reasons for the ABSU rejecting the 2003 accord and reviving the statehood demand.
- Also, there is a demand for inclusion of villages with ST majority and contiguous to the BTAD, and exclusion of villages which are contiguous to non-Sixth Schedule areas and have majority non-ST population.

## New Accord

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- According to the new accord, BTAD will be renamed as **Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR)**.
- The agreement promises more legislative, executive and administrative autonomy under the **Sixth Schedule to Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) and expansion of the BTC territory in lieu of statehood**.
- It provides for **alteration of the area of BTAD** and provisions for Bodos outside BTAD.
  - For this, 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.
  - Subsequent to this alteration, the total number of Assembly seats will go up to 60, from the existing 40.
- The Government of Assam will notify **Bodo language in Devanagari script as the associate official language in the state**.
- The memorandum of the settlement says that the criminal cases registered against members of the NDFB factions for “non-heinous” crimes shall be withdrawn by the Assam government and in cases of heinous crimes it will be reviewed.
- A **Special Development Package of Rs. 1500 Crore** would be given by the Centre to undertake specific projects for the development of Bodo areas.

- The Assam government will set up a **Bodo-Kachari Autonomous Council**, which will be a satellite council for the focussed development of Bodo villages outside the BTR on the lines of the existing six councils for plains tribes.

## Associated Issues

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- The new Bodo Accord has led to the **intensification of the movement for Kamatapur State** by organisations of the Koch-Rajbongshi community.  
The territory of the demanded Kamatapur State overlaps with the present BTAD.
- **Ripple Effect:** The augmented area and powers of the BTC, under the new accord, may trigger fresh aspirations in the nine autonomous councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram to graduate to the new model.
- **Ethnic Fault-line:** Clamour for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status by the Koch-Rajbongshi, Adivasis and several other non-ST communities has also grown.  
Likely expansion of the ST list in Assam has the potential to keep the Bodos out of power in the BTC and may push Bodo organisations to revive their homeland demand. As the reservation of seats of BTC is for the STs and not exclusively for the Bodos.

## Conclusion

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- The New Bodo Accord may have maintained the territorial integrity of Assam. However, the demand for **separate statehood** may emerge in other parts of the northeast as the region is endowed with ethno-cultural diversity.
- In order to deal with such complexities, the provision of setting up regional autonomous councils under the Sixth Schedule can be explored to create the space for communities which sought to preserve their cultural identity, language, education and economic development.

### ***Drishti Mains Question***

Peace will continue to be fragile in Assam's Bodo heartland until an all-inclusive power-sharing and governance model is evolved under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. Discuss.