

GORKHALAND ISSUE

WHY IN NEWS?

There has been total shutdown in Darjeeling and instances of violence over demand for creation of Gorkhaland.



GORKHALAND



WHY THE AGITATION?

Long-term cause problems in functioning of GTA (Gorkhaland Territorial Administration). The leaders have accused state govt. of interference and not devolving enough financial resources to GTA.



Immediate cause Bengali language being made mandatory upto class 9th by the state government. The Gorkhas, whose native language is Nepali, has taken it as a threat to their identity.



WHO ARE GORKHA?

Indian Gorkhas are indigenous people living all along the Himalayan belt and the North-East states of India. The Gorkhas inhabit areas in J&K, Himachal, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Darjeeling, Assam, and other states in the North-East.



GORKHALAND

Gorkhaland consists of Nepali-speaking people of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and other hilly districts. The people belonging to these areas hardly have any connection with the Bengali community and are different in ethnicity, culture and language.



HISTORY OF DEMAND FOR GORKHALAND



In 1780, the Gorkhas captured Sikkim and other areas includes Darjeeling, Siliguri, Simla, Nainital, Garhwal hills, and Kumaon, that is, the entire region from Teesta to Sutlej. After 35 years of rule, The Gorkhas surrendered the territory to British in the Treaty of Segoulee in 1816, after they lost the Anglo-Nepal war.



In 1907, the first demand for Gorkhaland was submitted to Morley-Minto Reforms panel. Later, on several occasions demands were made to the British government and then government of Independent India.

There have been two mass-movements- first in the 1980s and then in 2007.

WHY DEMAND FOR GORKHALAND?



Differences in language and culture.



Aspiration of Indian Gorkha identity: Since creation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in 1988 and GTA in 2012 did not fulfill this aspiration, they failed.



Relative Economic deprivation



Alleged maltreatment by Bengalis and lack of voice in Kolkata.

RESPONSES TO GORKHALAND



DARJEELING GORKHA HILL COUNCIL (DGHC):

Following the agitation that began in 1986, a tripartite agreement was reached between Government of India, Government of West Bengal, and Gorkha National Liberation Front in July 1988. Under this, an autonomous Hill Council (DGHC) under a State Act was set up for the social, economic, educational, and cultural advancement of the people residing in the Hill areas of Darjeeling District. The Council covered the three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling district and a few Mouzas within the Siliguri sub-division.

The Council was given limited executive powers but in the absence of legislative powers the aspirations of the people of the region could not be addressed.

PROBLEMS

The non-inclusion of the Dooars region in the Council became a major reason of discontent.

Lack of legislative powers means that the people of the region have no control over laws to govern themselves by

PROBLEMS

Dooars has been left out and instead a verification team has been set to identify Gorkha majority areas in the Dooars.



GORKHALAND TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATION (GTA)

GTA created in 2012 through a tripartite agreement signed by Govt. of West Bengal and Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), replaced the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. It is a semi-autonomous administrative body. It has administrative, executive and financial powers but no legislative powers. GTA presently has three hill subdivisions Darjeeling Kurseong and Mirik and some areas of Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district and the whole of Kalimpong district under its authority.

WAY FORWARD



The agitation for a separate Gorkhaland state must be brought to a swift end through a solution which meets the aspirations of the Nepali-speaking people without hurting the sentiments of the Bengali-speaking majority, which is largely against the division of the state. The possible steps include:

Good power sharing agreement Gorkhaland on its own is not financially viable. Except tourism it doesn't have much of its own resources. Tea industry is also facing crisis. The functioning of GTA also to be improved and made accountable.

Government of centre as well as state needs to be more sensitive towards needs and aspirations of Gorkhas.

Eg instead of being made optional, it could have been made optional.

Economic development of the region. Hospitals, schools, public services must be set up and existing ones need to be improved.

Creation of an Autonomous State of Gorkhaland within an undivided West Bengal can be considered. Article 244A provides for an autonomous state for certain tribal areas in Assam with its own legislature and council of ministers. By a constitutional amendment, the applicability of this article can be extended to West Bengal. Alternatively, through a constitutional amendment, an Article similar to Article 244 A, can be inserted as a new chapter in Part VI of the Constitution. This will enable the establishment of an Autonomous State of Gorkhaland, with a Legislature and council of ministers within the existing state of West Bengal without bifurcating it.

