

A Memorandum
on
the Question of Proposed Bodoland Territorial Council
submitted
to
His Excellency the President of India
(forwarded to the Hon'ble Prime Minister and the Hon'ble Home Minister)

by

Sanmilita Jana-Gosthiya Sangram Samity
Dated, 8 April, 2002

Your Excellency,

We have made the journey to Delhi to acquaint you with our grievances and with the real situation of terror that exists in the area proposed to be made Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) area under the provisions of the VIth Schedule of the constitution of India.

You will agree with us that the question of the BTC is not just a very sensitive one but also is a controversial one, in view of the experiences of the last decade and in view of the prevailing state of terror. And therefore we understand that to seek a lasting solution to the vexed question of Bodo autonomy, one will have to have a broad perspective in the mind and the principles of democracy and commitment to the constitution must not be forgotten in the name of exigencies.

But unfortunately, as we have seen some eight years ago, ignoring the recommendations of the three-member expert committee set-up by the then Central govt. in 1990 the then Cong(I) govt. in the state had struck a deal with the ABSU in 1993 created a Bodoland Autonomous Council, without having a word with the representative bodies of the other ethnicities (who together comprise a definite majority in the concerned area). This one-sided, undemocratic and deceitful solution, instead of establishing peace in the area and solving the Bodo problem, escalated Bodo terrorism and unfolded a sinister motive of 'ethnic cleansing' in the entire lower Assam area north of Brahmaputra.

Once again, we find that your government is negotiating a so-called peace proposal of upgrading the present BAC (created by the state) to a BTC (under the provisions of the VIth schedule of the constitution) one-sidedly with the erstwhile terrorist group Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT). Already, more than twelve round of talks with BLT has been concluded, while only deaf ears were turned to the cries and agonies of the non-Bodos living in the area. Their demand for a hearing and inclusion in the talks were met with an undemocratic spirit that the invitations were withdrawn, at the face of threat from the Bodo leadership, at the last moment and that was the only occasion when the govt. felt that they should not be ignored. It will not be out of context here that the Bodos too were ignored for more than two decades in a similar manner.

apprehend that such practices shall send wrong message to the people that unless one resorts to violence and tactics of terror, no talk can be held — is this the way of upholding democracy and the spirit of constitution ?

It has been claimed by the Bodo leadership that the non-Bodos living in the area are supporting the proposal to create the BTC - and they are presenting a set of leadership and people as evidence - but does democratic values not demand a probe by a competent rights body to ascertain whether such evidences are results of coercion and largescale intimidation. What the history of the decade tell? What happens to state govt.'s own admission of 'operation ethnic cleansing' submitted to the NHRC in 1998 ?? How do you explain the presence of 2.58 lakhs of refugees in relief camps of BAC since May, 1996 ??? When the Department of Home, Govt. of India bows down to the pressure of threat, how the non-Bodos living under constant threat to their life and property speak out their mind ? Yes, if we swear in the name of democracy and principles of fundamental rights, we shall have to answer. Without having an answer to these questions, search for peace will be illusory and fresh grounds of ethnic bitterness and antagonism will be created.

Bodo leadership claim that the Bodos constitute majority in whole of lower Assam that lies north of the river Brahmaputra. This is absolutely outrageous. There is not a single district in this area, comprising the seven districts : Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang and the northbank areas of Kamrup where the scheduled tribes, Bodos and others come anywhere near the majority status. Not only that, among the scores of the community development blocks in the concerned area, there are only three blocks in Kokrajhar district and one block in Bongaigaon district which have bare tribal majorities, ranging between 51.8% and 54%. Of these the Kokrajhar part of the bureaucratically bifurcated Sidli-Chirang block has a tribal population of 53.6%, while the other part, included in the lately created Bongaigaon district has only 25.9%. If the two blocks are combined, as they should be, the tribal percentage comes down to less than 40%. There are certain blocks viz. Jalah in Barpeta district, Baska in Nalbari district and Udalguri in Darrang district where the tribal population is between 42 and 46 per cent, but in all of these blocks Saranias and Rabhas, both classified as scheduled tribes, are there in substantial numbers, bringing down drastically the actual percentage of Bodos in those blocks. There is another block, Kachugaon in Kokrajhar district, which has a tribal population of nearly 45% and the enumerated tribals here are very largely Bodo. The percentage of Bodos in all other blocks is low or non-existent, with none reaching the forties and only five reaching the twenties. All our data is based on 1991 census and it is to be remembered that STs in this area include Rabhas, Saranias, Hajongs etc as well, apart from the Bodos. So where does that leave the Bodo protagonists ?

A very significant section of the people living in the area described above belong to the Koch-Rajbanshi ethnicity, who has been recommended by the parliamentary select committee constituted by the tenth Loka Sabha for inclusion in the list of scheduled tribes of India, and as many as four ordinances declared them as ST only to be reverted to their original status of BC, on expiry of the six months term of each of these ordinances. The Santhal, Munda etc living in the area in large numbers are also not regarded as scheduled tribes.

The fact of the matter is that the Bodos constitute majorities only at the village and village cluster levels. This fact was well grasped by the central govt. committee headed by K S. Singh. What this three-member expert committee proposed had the same contours of the solution that most non-Bodo organisations had presented to the committee. This committee proposed basically several gram panchayat level and block level areas ranging over several districts which would be coordinated with an apex body. All three levels together would enjoy considerable autonomy visa-vis the state and union govts. through having a wide range of subjects to deal with.

Instead of sticking to such a noble yet practicable solution to the problem of selfdetermination for a cultural minority, the Bodo leadership kept themselves on the undemocratic course of getting a Bodo land in which they would be granted a majoritarian status in governance while the actual majority would be reduced to total powerlessness. And to realise this goal of theirs, the sectarian Bodo leadership not only silenced the dissident voices within their own community, adapted the policy of coercion — killing, intimidation, extortion - all being part of the grand ethnic cleansing operation.

And how the govts. at the centre and at the state are responding ? On the one hand unleashing a total military terror, and on the other hand appeasing the terrorists by offering BAG then, and BTC now.

Thus what we see is a concerted attempt to usurp the democratic rights of others by the Bodos and a continual governmental effort to appease them to desist from further terrorist outrages. The most glaring and latest of the example is the retreat of the Assam govt. from holding the Panchayat elections, that too after the election was statutorily notified, in the areas demarcated by the so-called Bodo leadership. And these are the manners in which the democratic values and the principles laid down in the constitution are being sacrificed, time and again, at the altar of expediency.

It appears that the union home ministry officials in the successive govts. are trying to solve the issue of the Bodo autonomy by the process of holding talks and negotiations, but why should they if they are really sincere, talk only with the Bodos ? Are the others, especially the victims of savagery, not to be consulted at all while the fate of their just and democratic aspirations is being decided by chauvinistic terrorists ?

Honest answers to these questions, Your Excellency, will surely force the Assam and Union government officials to change course, take stock, admit mistakes of the past and make fresh start on solving the Bodo problems.

We apprehend that if an autonomous council exclusively for the Bodos is created under the provisions of the sixth schedule, then by the codes of the schedule itself even the NonBodo scheduled tribes living in the proposed area shall loose the privileges and rights guaranteed by the constitution, not to speak of the other communities who deserve scheduling like Koch Rajbanshis & Adibasis. This is a total betrayal of the democratic principles.

Sir, it is our request to you to advice your government to implement the following :

- I) Conveno a Roundtable Conforence consisting of all political social and ethnic organisations to discuss the Bodo Issue;
- II) Issuance of white paper on the issue detailing the three-member expert committee recommendations, the reasons justifying the rejection of the recommendations and the true demographic data for the concerned territory;
- III) Stall the move for creating the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council, and publish in public Interest the minutes of the dialogues held between the Govt. and the BLT.

The situation in the concerned area brooks no delay and a disaster of Bosnian proportions will become inevitable if Governments continue to dither. We, therefore, beg you most humbly to listen to the voices from the region which are not terrorist voices and which have patiently borne much. But the seeds of retaliation are also brewing among those who still keep their sanity and stick to the democratic instincts and processes. Soon it may be too late. Then, if that sad day should come, the greatest victims will be precisely the minority i.e the Bodo masses.

- 1. All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Sammilani. 2. All Assam Adivasi Students Association. 3. ALI Assam Bengali Yuva-Chatra Federations. 4. United Minorities Front. 5. Jharkhandi Adivasi Sangram Parishad, Assam. 6. United Revolutionary Movement Council, Assam. 7. All Assam Jogi Samnilani. 8. Kochi Rajbanshi Sahitya Sabha. 9. All Assam Janagosthiya Kalita-Alpine Sammilan. 10. Lower Assam Minorities Council. 11. All Assam Minorities Students Union. 12. Janajah Suraksha Parishad. 13. All Assam Rabha Students Union. 14. Non-Bodo Citizens Suraksha Samiti. 15. All Koch-Rajbanshi Students Union. 16. United Minorities Yuva-Chatra Parishad. 17. Santras Birodhi Ganamancha. 18. Koch-Rajbanshi Sammihani (BAC). 19. Janajati Suraksha Parishad.

Annexure:

1. A memorandum on the same subject and Copy of Dr Bhupender Singh Committee recommendations submitted to C.M of Assam.

Your Sincerely
on behalf of SJSS.
Bakhta

Sd (Brojen Mahanta)
Deputy Chief convenor
SJSS

Justin lakra,
Convenor SJSS

Harender Mahanta
Central Ex Member

....., Koch Rajbanshis and other Assamese communities. All these people are now deprived of local self rule rights as Panchayats are not being formed in the BTAD area. Besides the right to be elected is