Chapter VI

Different Phases of the Autonomy Movement of the Bodos

The movement, launched by the joint leadership of the ABSU-B PAC, had three distinct phases of its development. The first phase covered the period from 2 March 1987 to the 20th Annual session of the ABSU held at Bashbari (Dhubri district) in December 1988. The second phase lasted nearly for one year from the Bashbari session of the ABSU to the invitation of the ABSU-BPAC leaders to the tripartite talks in August 1989. The third phase started with the beginning of the tripartite talks on 28 August 1989 and continued to the signing of the Bodo Accord on 20 February 1993.

The first phase of the movement remained more or less peaceful and democratic. At the beginning the ABSU leaders showed a certain degree of tolerance and followed democratic principles while conducting the movement. The movement had its beginning with the holding mass rallies at the district headquarters on 2 March 1987. This was followed by mass demonstration staged in front of the D.C., S.D.O. and S.D.C. offices on 23 March. Next it organised mass rallies throughout Assam under the aegis of the Anchalik Committees which culminated in the central rally at Judge's Filed, Guwahati on 12 June 1987. The Bodo people from all walks of life and from all parts of Assam participated in the central rally and that was the largest rally ever held by the Bodos of Assam. The slogans like 'Divide Assam Fifty Fifty', 'No Separate
Homeland No Rest', 'Do Or Die', etc. were shouted by the participants while moving through the main thoroughfare in Guwahati.

A group of participants while returning from the rally was attacked by some miscreants at the Tihu chawk near Barama. One Sujit Narzary - a student of Class X of Kokrajhar Higher secondary School - got injured in the attack and later he succumbed to his injuries. He thus became the first martyr of the ABSU in the movement for a separate state. His killing was protested by boycotting the classes, holding rallies and wearing black badges on 16 June 1987.1

Within a couple of days another mass rally was held centrally in front of the Janata Bhawan, Dispur on 2 July 1987. Thousands of ABSU volunteers participated in the rally and shouted slogans demanding the separate homeland for the Bodos. They submitted a reminder to the Chief Minister of Assam demanding the fulfilment of their aspirations.2 Next the ABSU performed 'Mass Dharma Yajna' (religious prayer) and an oath taking ceremony for the success of their movement. The prayer meetings were held in the District Committee level on 21 July 1987 through their respective religious persuasion, Bathou, Brahma and Christianity. In the prayer meetings thus held the ABSU Volunteers and supporters prayed to the Almighty God and took the oath to 'Do or Die' for the cause of the separate state.3

On 10 August 1987 they resorted to mass hunger strike in front of the D.C., S.D.O and S.D.C. offices. The Government arrested hundreds of ABSU Volunteers mainly in the Dhubri district. The ABSU thereafter started 'bandh' programmes including rail and road blockade. This was resorted to towards the end of 1987. They called for a 12-hour Tribal area bandh on 27 August, a 24-hour bandh on 9 September and 36-hour bandh from 24 to 25 September 1987.
The Police resorted to firing on the ABSU Volunteers blockading the 52 National Highway at Lailangpara near Rowta in Darrang district killing Kabiram Basumatary (aged 28 years) and Alendra Basumatary (aged 18 years) and injuring Sabin Goyari seriously. The police also resorted to lathi charge in several places. On 15 September a 12-hour Darrang district bandh was observed in protest against the police firing at Lailangpara. During the 36-hour bandh on 24-25 September, the police opened fire on the ABSU Volunteers on 31 National Highway near Serfanguri in Kokrajhar district on 25 September killing one Obhiram Muchahary on the spot. The ABSU volunteers had to bear the brunt of merciless police lathi charge in several places and had to undergo incarceration and torture.

In turn the ABSU organised protest rallies and demonstrations in the Anchalik Committee level in front of the D.C., S.D.O. and S.D.C. offices. Despite the imposition of prohibitory order under section Cr. 144 there was no let up in the ABSU movement.

After the end of bandh programmes, the ABSU resorted to another series of programmes. The first was the 'mass crying' programme for a separate homeland on 12 October 1987 in the village level. The villagers participating in this programme raised slogans like 'No Homeland No Rest', 'Do For Homeland and Die for Homeland', 'Divide Assam Fifty Fifty', etc. The second was the cultural rallies conducted through processions held in important places throughout the province on 28 October 1987. The cultural rallies were preceded by the demonstration of items of Bodo culture accompanied by dances of Bodo dam sel and playing of tribal/traditional musical instrumnts. The third was the mass demonstration at the Boat-Club, New Delhi on 10 November.
Nearly 1500 ABSU volunteers, activists and supporters participated in this demonstration. A delegation of the ABSU met and submitted memoranda to Rajib Gandhi, Prime Minister of India and Balram Jakhar, Speaker of the Lok Sabha demanding a separate Union Territory for the Plains tribals of Assam on the same day.

The year 1987 ended with two other important programmes. The first was the 48-hour rail roko (from 5 A.M. of 26 November to 5 A.M. of 28 November) and the second was the 48-hour National Highway Blockade from 5 A.M of 9 December to 5 A.M. of 11 December).

Though this phase of the movement did not result in any way materialising their demands, the movement gained strength and momentum because of mass participation in all of its programmes.

The year 1988 began with a programme called the 'Great Mass Rallies' organised in the district headquarters by the respective District Committees of the ABSU on 4 January. This was followed by a 12-hour Kokrajhar district bandh programme demanding the transfer of anti-tribal L.N. Tamuli, the Additional Deputy Commissioner of the district. During the bandh period police opened fire at Kashikotra (Sidli) killing on Swarka Narzary on the spot.

Upendra Nath Brahma, the ABSU President met R.Venkataraman, the President of India, at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi on 18 January. He also submitted a memorandum to the President. Later, a 5-member delegation of ABSU met Chintamoni Panigrahi, the Union Minister of State for Home, and submitted a memorandum on 22 January.

While the movement was thus proceeding on two fronts, bandh culture and submission of memoranda, the police let loose a reign of terror among the
people belonging to the Bodo tribe. The police gang-rapped 8 Bodo damsels and an old woman at Bhumka village on the night of 25/26 January in Kokrajhar district that invited the condemnation of all sections of people throughout the state. There was no end to the police atrocities. The incident at Bhumka was followed by repeated raids in the Bodo villages and the arrests and torture on ABSU volunteers and supporters.

In the face of increasing torture and repression the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) raised their voice against police atrocities and submitted memorandum to the Union Home Minister on 3 February demanding protection from the wrath of the State police. The ABSU, however, continued their agitational programmes with renewed vigour and strength. They staged a 2-day relay-hunger strike in front of the D.C., S.D.O. and S.I.O offices on 10 and 11 February with the participation of large number of ABSU Volunteers and supporters. A 100-hour National Highway blockade was resorted to from 1 to 5 March 1988. This was followed a peaceful 'Padayatra' through the National Highway on 18 April. The Kokrajhar district administration imposed prohibitory order under section 144 Cr.P.C., and resorted to lathi charge on the 'padayatris' injuring hundreds including women.

The ABSU observed a 72-hour Assam Bandh from 5 A.M of 27 April to 5 A.M of 30 April 1988. The police and the official circle claimed, through the media, the ABSU volunteers resorted to large-scale violence during the bandh period. The Director-General of Police, Assam, reported that there were 28 bomb blasts in Kokrajhar and Udalguri sub-division during 72-hour Assam Bandh. The Police recovered and defused 23 live bombs. Two loaded trucks were set ablaze, while several houses belonging to non-tribals were burnt down.
At least two wooden bridges were set afire. Improvised bazooka type devices were also used by the ABSU. Nearly 300 people have been arrested. The ABSU called it an attempt at anti-propaganda against the movement.

The Government took strong measures to suppress the movement. The police atrocities continued. They opened fire on the volunteers at Rangapara near Gossaigaon in Kokrajhar district killing one Ganjer Basumatary (aged 28 years). They raided the village Sonai Serfung near Udalguri in Darrang district and opened fire killing the innocent villager Purna Kanta Daimary (aged 16 years) and injuring several others including girls and women. While raiding the villages of Charaibil area under Gossaigaon Police Station in Kokrajhar district the police opened fire killing Gaide Basumatary (aged 32 years) on the spot and injuring one Helena Basumatary (aged 15 years). The latter succumbed to her injuries later in hospital.

The UTNLF expressed grave concern over the growing incidents of atrocities perpetrated by the police for the suppression of the movement. The ABSU, while refuting all charges of violence made against them by the Government said, "... these police firings, atrocities on innocent women are unprecedented in the political history of Assam which show the violation of human rights of civilian Bodo men and women. This is, of course, nothing but only a suppressive policy to genocide the Bodos." The ABSU strongly condemned the indiscriminate police firing at Charaibil and demanded judicial inquiries into the incidents and unconditional release of the arrested persons. They also urged upon the Government to stop police atrocities, raiding of villages and killing of Bodos.
Apart from this the ABSU held mass protest rallies against police atrocities and killings in the Anchalik level on 16 May 1988 followed by a 12-hour Tribal Area bandh on 17 May. Thereafter the ABSU launched a 100-hour rail roko programme from 5 A.M. of 22 May to 9 A.M. of 26 May. This was followed by another 100-hour rail-cum-rasta roko programme from 14 June to 18 June 1988.

Meanwhile the Chief Minister of Assam invited the ABSU leaders to a talk at Dispur. The ABSU submitted a set of ten demands to the Chief Minister as agenda for discussion and following this the first bipartite talks between the ABSU leaders and the State Government took place on 27 June 1988 at Dispur. But no decision was arrived at as the government refused to accept the demands of the ABSU.14

After the failure of the bipartite talks, the ABSU leaders and supporters resorted to a mass prayer, called 'Dharma Jyojna' in Anchalik level on 29 June 1988. A few days later they called for 100-hour Assam Bandh from 5 A.M. of 11 July to 5 A.M. of 15 July. The series of violent incidents including bomb blasts marked the bandh in several places of the state.15

The ABSU observed the 42nd Independence Day (15 August 1988) as a 'Black Day' protesting against the police atrocities, imposition of TADA Act, 1987, violation of human rights of the Bodos and continued raids on the villages.

This was followed by a 5-day 'office band' in the tribal areas of Assam from 16 to 20 August 1988 again followed by alternate 4-day Assam Bandh from 6 August to 12 September 1988. A 'Peace Padayatra' on 4 October and mass rallies in the district headquarters on 13 October 1988 followed these...
programmes. In the districts of Kokrajhar and Darrang, the ABSU called for a 5
day office bandh as the administration did not give permission to hold the mass
rallies in these two districts.

On being invited to talks again by the State Government, the ABSU
leaders put their movement temporarily under suspension from 30 October 1988.
This period of suspension was utilised by the ABSU leaders in organisational
activities too. Hitherto the ABSU alone had led the movement of the Bodos for
the creation of separate state. The success they had already made in terms of
organising and mobilising the Bodo people made them aware about the
necessity of another broadbased mass organisation to achieve their objectives.
This awareness resulted, as has been referred to above, in the formation of the
Bodo Peoples' Action Committee on 18 November 1988. Thus the Bodos
became united under the umbrella of the ABSU- BPAC and the movement
began to take a violent turn since then.

The Second Phase of the Movement

The 20th Annual session of the ABSU held at Bashbari, 19-22 December 1988
was a turning point in the history of the Bodo Autonomy Movement. The Bodo
people numbering several lacs including 35 thousand ABSU- BPAC
representatives hailing from different parts of the country including the
neighbouring countries of Nepal and Bhutan attended the session.

The session re-elected Upendra Nath Brahma to the office of the
President of the ABSU for the second term and it took a strong decision to
secure a homeland for the Bodos. The session, while discarding 89 demands,
retained only three main political demands, as submitted to the Government
earlier by the ABSU. The session also demanded a full- fledged state called
'Bodoland' instead of a 'Union Territory' as demanded earlier. All the tribal organisations—political and non-political—extended their full support to this demand.

The second bipartite talk held on 11 January 1989 at Dispur between the Assam Government and the ABSU leaders failed due to the lack of sincerity on the part of the former. In the talk Durgadas Boro, Minister of Sports, represented the Assam Government. No serious discussion was held on the Bodo issue and it just turned out to be a tea party. Thus the AGP Government missed the opportunity to solve the Bodo issue amicably through mutual discussion. The lukewarm attitude of the AGP Government made the ABSU/Bodo leaders dissatisfied and arrogant. After the failure of the second round of bipartite talk the ABSU leaders took a tough line declaring to participate in such talk in future only in the presence of a Union Minister as observer.

The ABSU-BPAC, thereafter, decided to launch a vigorous mass movement in support of their demands. The second phase of their movement began from February 1989 after a lapse of 4 months. The renewal of the movement by the ABSU-BPAC helped in the creation of an atmosphere of violence indulged in both by the movement leaders and the Government.

Meanwhile, an underground militant organisation called the Bodo Security Force (Br.S.F.) had emerged to sustain the movement through violent and clandestine sabotage activities. According to Police sources, the Br.S.F. originated in a village in the district of Darrang in October 1986. One Ranjan Daimari alias Ransaigra Daimari alias Nabla of village Odlakahibari under Paneri Police Station in Darrang district was its Chairman while Dhiren Boro alias Chunthangra (Commander-in-Chief), Hectorson Musahari alias Hengthasu
(Home Secretary), Gobinda Basumatary alias Swukwai (Foreign Secretary) were other office bearers. Ranjan Daimari was a highly educated person having a Master degree in Political Science, and he drafted the Constitution of the Br.S.F. The Constitution declares.

"We, the Revolutionary Boro do hereby solmenly resolve to constitute a Revolutionary organisation for an armed struggle to liberate the Bodoland for distinct identity and civilisation of the Boros and therein to transfer a democratic socialist society to promote liberty, equality and fraternity."

An idea of the conceptual identity of the Br.S.F. can be gleaned from the Leaflet "The Voice of the Boro Security Force" dtd. 19 April 1987. It highlighted the history of the Bodos who had been ruling most parts of North Eastern India and has been still maintaining their own language, culture, tradition and heritage, etc. It says despite their efforts to "establish their distinct civilisation and a place in the history of modern India as well as of the world, the Boros are still socially, economically and politically most backward ethnic group as they are exploited, suppressed and oppressed." So they are determined to liberate Bodoland to maintain the distinct identity and civilisation of the Bodos through armed struggle. Originally the militants were two hundred in numbers and the number subsequently increased. They received training in extremist and sabotage activities under the guidance of experts belonging to other insurgent groups working in the region. The militants belonging to the Br.S.F. were well-equipped with sophisticated arms and weapons. The topography of the North Eastern region of India and the borders provided them with safety hideouts.
They resorted to kidnapping a number of wealthy contractors, businessmen and top officials of the Tea gardens for raising fund for their organisation. They kidnapped the manager of the Nanaipara T.E. of the Godrej Group (October 1991), of Dimakuchi T.E. of the Williamson Magor Group (March 19992) and Bolin Bardaloi of the Tata Tea Ltd. All of them were released after being forced to pay heavy ransom.25

The Br.S.F. created a fear psychosis among the people. "In 1990 alone they killed over fifty and wounded not less than a hundred."26 They stepped up their violent activities culminating in the three bomb blasts within 24 hours on 22 and 23 November 1992 killing nearly 42 people in the state. One bomb was blasted in Guwahati and the other on the bridge of the Gaurang near Dhubri.27 In the wake of these violent incidents the Union Government issued a declaration instantly banning the Br.S.F with effect from 23 November 1992.28

The ABSU- BPAC, on the other hand, very often continue to condemn these violent and extremist activities resorted to by the Br.S.F. The ABSU- BPAC leaders continue to deny their having any links or relations either with the violent or extremist activities or with the Br.S.F. from time to time.29

Despite this denial it becomes clear that the Br.S.F. became more active during the currency of the bandh programme called by the ABSU- BPAC and their activities became a part of the movement.

In the wake of the Bashbari session of the ABSU the ABSU- BPAC announced their first programme of 120-hour Assam Bandh beginning from 16 February 1989. The tension mounted to such an extent in the Bodo dominated areas that the Assam Government issued strict instructions to maintain law and order to keep the situation under control.30
The Government tightened the security measures and the Army staged flag march in the kokrajhar district, but still then the violent activities were rampant during the bandh hours in the Udalguri Sub-division and in the Kokrajhar district. As reported by the print media, 7 persons, 8 terrorists were killed and 35 Bodo militants including a Havildar giving training to the Bodo militants during bandh hour were arrested. Wanton killings and attacks on PTCA and AGP leaders and supporters became the order of the day. Attacks on police stations and police patrolling parties by the Bodo militants also increased even after the end of the bandh period. Describing the situation prevailing in the state, the Assam Home Minister wrote to the Union Home Minister thus,

"The movement has proved to be neither mass based nor democratic. The movement has become an excuse to murder innocent persons, including political workers, to loot highway drivers and select businessmen and to destroy public property. It certainly cannot be the objective of any democratic and peaceful movement to shoot dead an Assistant Headmaster who went to hoist the national flag on 26 January 1989."

After reviewing the situation, the Union Home Minister gave a suggestion to the Assam Home Minister to initiate a dialogue with the ABSU. Thus being advised by the Union Home Minister, the Assam Home Minister invited the ABSU leaders to a talk on 28 February 1989 and appealed them to call off the agitational programme to create a congenial atmosphere.

The ABSU made it a condition that they would participate in the talk only in case a representative of the union Government was present as observer.
on one hand and the Government of Assam on the other, the former called for a 175-hour Assam Bandh from 5 A.M. of 2 March 1989.

The maintenance of law and order became very difficult during the bandh period. 16 persons including 8 militants and 1 Homeguard died during the bandh period while 63 burning cases were recorded. bomb blasts occurred for 29 times at different places and police and security forces were attacked for 41 times. Apart from this the police arrested 16 Bodo militants. But the situation did not show any improvement even after the bandh period was over.34

The ABSU-BPAC started another spate of agitation from 10 March 1989. This time they called for 10-day Total Assam Bandh demanding the intervention of the Union Government in the Bodo issue. They turned down an invitation of the Assam Home Minister for talks on 17 April 1989 remaining adamant to their earlier stance.35

After the failure of the two rounds of discussion with the Assam Government, the ABSU being invited to talks without precondition by the Assam Home Minister36 declared,

"Now, all these stages including the demands for central representative in the talks between the ABSU and the Assam Government is over."37

In the meantime, the ABSU-BPAC declared a 300-hour total Assam Bandh from 6 May 1989 with an intimidation that they would call for a 1001-hour bandh in case of a negative response from the Centre. They also threatened to boycott the next parliamentary election if the centre failed to bring an immediate and amicable solution to the Bodoland problem.38
In the face of continuous agitational programmes undertaken by the ABSU- BPAC, the Assam Government brought Kokrajhar district under the Assam Disturbed Areas Act, 1955, on 6 July 1989. This resulted in the increase of police atrocities on the innocent Bodo people. "In Kokrajhar and Udalguri subdivision of the Darrang district majority of the houses remained vacant at night. Not only the young, but women and children had to take shelter in nearby jungles for fear of raiding police parties. Boros were suspected as terrorists and in the name of encounters not even old and invalids were spared."  

As there was no respite to incidence of violence, the Chief Minister of Assam decided to hold talks with the presence of a Central observer. Accordingly the Chief Minister requested the Union Government to send one Central observer to attend the talks between the ABSU- BPAC leaders and the Assam Government. But the ABSU- BPAC expressed their unwillingness claiming that the stage had already been over for Central observer. Apart from this the ABSU leaders demanded the Government of Assam to hold talks outside the state on security grounds.  

The negotiation for holding the talks did not yield results. Because the Government of Assam was neither in favour of the talk being held outside the state nor prepared to have 'Bodoland' in the agenda for discussion. In the meantime, a fresh spate of violence and group clashes between the Bodos and non-Bodos took place in several places of the state.  

Thus being pressurised, the Government of Assam decided to hold talks in New Delhi and issued invitation to the ABSU- BPAC leaders for the same. It was the outcome of the talks held between the Union Home Minister and the Chief
Minister of Assam in August 1989 in New Delhi. The ABSU accepted the offer of talks proposed to be held on 28 August 1989 and suspended the ongoing 1001-hour Assam Bandh bringing a sense of relief to the people of the affected areas.

Immediately after the announcement of the talks, some other organisations like the PTCA and the AASU demanded their inclusion as parties in the process of negotiation. But the Union and the State Governments did not give any importance to the demand of either party. With this came an end the second phase of the ABSU-BPAC movement for autonomous state for the Bodos.

Third Phase

The third phase of the movement led by the ABSU-BPAC leadership lasted for nearly three and half years from the Tripartite Delhi Talks on 28 August 1989 to 20 February 1993. During this period as many as nine rounds of official talks and several informal talks between the ABSU-BPAC leaders, the Union Government and the Assam Government took place. While continuing the talks the ABSU-BPAC leaders held out the threat to renew the agitational programmes in case of the failure of the talks on the expected lines. The ABSU-BPAC leaders suspended all their agitational programmes during the talks but their underground outfit, the Br.S.F., continued their sabotage activities without let or hindrance.

However, attempts were made by the Government of Assam and the ABSU-BPAC leadership to create an atmosphere congenial for talks. The Government of Assam withdrew the Assam Disturbed Areas Act, 1955, from the district of Kokrajhar. It also decided to withdraw gradually the Terrorist and
Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) and Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, 1958.\textsuperscript{47}

In the Tripartite Talks thus held in New Delhi, Upendra Nath Brahma, President of the ABSU, led the ABSU- BPAC team, while the Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta led the Assam Government and Dr (Mrs.) Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, Union Minister of State for Welfare, led the Union Government. But the initial Talks that began with a bang ended in a whimper. Veteran Journalist Satis Chandra Kakati writes,

"The talk began with a bang but ended in a whimper as is evident from the refusal of the ABSU representatives to touch with a bargepole even a cup of tea offered by the Government of Assam, let alone the lunch the State Government arranged in all sincerity that the ABSU would bury the hatched and accept the reception. It appears that the Mahanta- Brahma handshake with the proceedings of the long awaited talk began was a deception.\textsuperscript{48}

The proceedings of the talks reveal that it was exploratory in nature. Despite this fact it roused great expectation for the solution of the Bodo problem once and for all. But immediately after the end of the first round of talks the political situation in Assam was marked by violence resorted by the extremist elements having allegiance to the ABSU. The mass killings at Borkajuli in Nalbari district on 8 September 1989\textsuperscript{49} again revealed that the extremist elements had already went out of the control of the ABSU- BPAC leadership. Thereafter efforts were made by the Assam Government and the ABSU- BPAC leadership to create a congenial atmosphere for talks.

The second round of tripartite talks was held on 5 October 1989. The ABSU- BPAC team reiterated their demand for the creation a separate state of
'Bodoland' on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Dr (Mrs.) Rajendra Kumari Bajpai stated that "the policy of the Government of India was against any further division of the State." The Chief Minister of Assam, P.K. Mahanta, told that "the Government of Assam would examine an appropriate legal, political and administrative arrangement acceptable to all sections of people in the State." The demand for Bodoland was thus discarded by the Union and the Assam Governments.

The third round of talks tentatively scheduled for November 1989 was postponed due to a change of Government at the Centre. The Congress (I) Government was replaced by the National Front Government with AGP participating in it. The ABSU- BPAC leadership did not tolerate the delay and they threatened to restart the agitational programmes from January 1990 in the event of the failure of the resumption of talks by 31 December 1989. The pressure ultimately yielded results and the third round of tripartite talks were held at New Delhi on 11 January 1990. Upendra Nath Brahma led a 20-member team in the talks while Ram Vilash Paswan- Union Labour and Welfare Minister- and P.K. Mahanta- Chief Minister of Assam represented the Central and Assam Government respectively.

With the entry of the National Front Government in the process of dialogue, the third round of talks became more or less an exercise of preliminary nature. This time again the demand for a separate state for the Bodos was discarded. Ram Vilash Paswan- Union Minister- however, suggested the Assam Government "to consider the grievances put forward by ABSU- BPAC in a practical manner so that solution can be found early and without further delay to the Bodo issue."
At the same time Paswan also suggested for the formation of a small tripartite committee.\(^{55}\) His pragmatic approach to the Bodo problem revealed the genuine interests shown by the National Front Government for the solution of the Bodo issue. Under this perception the ABSU-BPAC suspended all of their agitational programmes.\(^{56}\)

The Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Round of Tripartite Talks did not proceed on expected lines as desired by the ABSU-BPAC leadership. Neither the State nor the Central Government did intend to yield to the demand of the Bodos with a separate state. Each time the discussion was held on that demand and each time the talk was adjourned on that demand. However, the Fifth Round of Talks resulted in the formation of the 8-member committee comprising the representatives of the Centre, State and the ABSU-BPAC to go into the various aspects of the Bodo issue and submit its report in the next meeting.\(^{57}\)

At this critical juncture, Upendra Nath Brahma died of cancer on 30 April 1990 leaving the reins of the Bodo movement in the hands of his successor Sansuma Khungur Biswmuityary.

The 8-member committee submitted its report in the Sixth Round of Tripartite Talks on 3 July 1990. The report contains a number of issues pertaining to land, employment, language and other issues concerning the Bodos and other plains tribals of Assam. The report was discussed in the meeting and decided to adopt a resolution for the all round development of the tribal areas of Assam in the ensuing Seventh Round of Talks proposed to be held on 3 August 1990.\(^{58}\)
At this stage the new ABSU President, S K Bwiswmutiary held out a fresh threat to withdraw from the negotiation if no concrete proposal were tabled for the solution of the Bodo problem in the ensuing talk.

The Seventh Round of Tripartite Talks began on 8 August 1990 with note of great hope and expectation. A concrete proposal relating to the political aspect of the Bodo issue was tabled for discussion. It was prepared on the basis of the issues raised by the Bodo leadership from time to time and on the basis of the report submitted by the 8-member committee earlier. P.K.Mahanta- Chief Minister of Assam, on the other hand, submitted a plan for a new Panchayati Raj System for the tribal areas.

P.K.Mahanta- Chief Minister, had suggested for a complete devolution and decentralisation of administrative and financial powers with special provision for the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes to pursue their own welfare and developmental schemes. He suggested also a package of measures for the socio-economic development of the plains tribes of Assam. But the Bodo delegates expressed dissatisfaction and disappointment on the proposal of the State Government and they outright rejected it. They called the proposal "provocative and humiliating".

Ram Vilash Paswan, on the other hand, while rejecting the demand for 'Bodoland' called the proposal of the State Government as 'inadequate' and made suggestion "for granting greater autonomy". He also made it clear that since the proposal of the State Government was not in the form of a decision the matter could be discussed further regarding granting of more autonomy to the Bodos and other plains tribes of Assam in the next round of talks. P.K.Mahanta expressed his displeasure at the suggestion of Ram Vilash Paswan. He termed it
as "instigation to the Bodo leaders for further demands". The Bodo leaders, on the other hand, welcomed it.

In the Eighth Round of Tripartite Talks held on 13 September 1990, Ram Vilash Paswan, the representative of the Union Government, submitted a proposal in the form of a resolution that runs as follows,

"The Government of India is deeply concerned about the problems of Bodos and other Plains tribals of Assam and is committed to their economic development and other rights. On serious consideration of the Bodo problem, the Government of India proposes that a three member committee of Experts may be set up to determine the area of Bodos and other Plains tribes to the north of river Brahmaputra and make recommendations as to the autonomy, legislative, administrative and financial power that may be given to them. This committee will consult all the groups concerned and submit its report within a period of forty five days to the Government of India."  

After a little bit of amendments being admitted, the ABSU-BPAC accepted the proposal. The State Government reserved its right of comment and stated that it would give its opinion on the proposal within a month after having a discussion in the cabinet.

Formation of the 3-Member Expert Committee

The formation of the 3-member expert committee was delayed because of the political instability leading to the fall of V.P. Singh Ministry (7 November) and the formation of the Chandra Sekhar Ministry (10 November) at the centre. It was followed by the imposition of Presidents' Rule in Assam to curb the secessionist activities resorted to by the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) in the midnight of 27 November 1990.
The ABSU- BPAC leadership took the matter seriously and demanded the Union Government to form the 3- Member Expert Committee as proposed earlier otherwise they would resume their agitational activities.\textsuperscript{66} Thus being pressurised the Union Government formed the 3- Member Expert Committee on 25 February 1991 with Dr. Bhupinder Singh, IAS (Retd.) as Chairman. Two other members of the Committee were Dr. K.S. Singh IAS, Director General, Anthropological Survey of India, and A.M. Gokhale, IAS, Joint Secretary, Department of Rural Development, Government of India. The Committee was to submit its report within three months to the Government of India.\textsuperscript{67}

The function of the Expert Committee was delayed because of a writ petition filed in the Hon'ble Gauhati High Court. Bhagagiri Roychaudhury filed the writ petition challenging the legality of the formation of the Expert Committee and praying for a stay on its functioning.\textsuperscript{68}

The Hon'ble High Court granted an interim stay and vacated the same on 7 August 1991.\textsuperscript{69} Thus the legal compulsion being removed, the Expert Committee started functioning by the end of the year 1991.

The Expert Committee visited different parts of the State meeting peoples and public leaders and receiving memoranda. The Committee could not submit its report within the stipulated period and it ultimately submitted the report to the Union Government on 30 March 1992. In the meantime a change of Government had taken place both at the Centre and in Assam. Congress (I) captured power both at the Centre and in the State in 1991. P.V. Narasingha Rao became the Prime Minister, while Hiteswar Saikia the Chief Minister of Assam.

In its Report, the Committee recommended for the formation of two Apex Councils- one for the Bodos in the Western- Central sector and the other for the
Mishings in the Eastern sector with three-tier politico-administrative structures.70

The Committee envisaged the creation of the village council known as the "Gami Jothum" for the Bodos in Western-Central zone and the "Dolung Kebang" for the Mishings in the Eastern zone. Provisions were made for the creation of a regional council known as "Bodo Gudi Jothum" for the Bodos and "Mishing Banke Kebang" for the Mishings. The Committee also specified the number of members of each local body and appended an illustrative list of subjects and powers that could be considered for assignment to the Apex Council.71

However, the ABSU-BPAC leadership did not accept the recommendations of the Three Member Expert Committee headed by Dr. Bhupinder Singh. The ABSU-BPAC, in their memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister P.V. Narasingha Rao and the Home Minister S.B. Chavan, said that the Report "can never meet the hopes and aspirations of the Bodos."72 The leadership, therefore, urged upon the Prime Minister to intervene and resolve the issue without further delay. Neither the Central Government nor the State Government said anything on the Report. The Report as such was an exercise in utter futility and it received a silent burial.

Signing of the Bodo Accord

Thereafter the Centre asked the State Government to suggest an alternative solution to the Bodo problem.73 Hiteswar Saikia, Chief Minister of Assam, with a view to finding out a solution to the Bodo problem held a series of meetings of all political parties in May, June and August 1992.

These meetings arrived at a consensus for the maintenance of the territorial unity of Assam and the urgent need for a solution to the Bodo problem.
within united Assam. The political parties agreed that political, legislative, administrative and financial powers be given to the Bodos within the geographical and political boundaries of Assam. The State Government thereafter prepared a draft proposal for giving "maximum autonomy" to the Bodos. It envisaged the creation of a 30-Member Bodoland Autonomous Council with the jurisdiction of having power over the villages with 50% Bodo people. The proposal also made provision for Bodo Regional Council and Panchayat forming the middle and bottom level units.

But the ABSU-BPAC leadership rejected the recommendations of the all Party meetings. They reiterated their demand for a separate state saying that nothing short of a separate state would satisfy and fulfil the aspirations of the Bodos. The ABSU-BPAC leadership also demanded the demarcation of the "Bodoland territory" taking the Assembly constituency as the unit starting from the Gossaigaon in the west to the Bihpuria Assembly constituencies in the east. The Bodo leadership also submitted one after another two lists of villages for inclusion in the Bodoland territory. The number of the villages was 4653. They also demanded the inclusion of 109 tea gardens within the said territory. The State Government did not agree to this.

In the meanwhile, violent activities had increased throughout the state. In the wake of the death of Upendra Nath Brahma the Br.S.F., the Bodo militant group had captured the leadership of the Bodo movement. Seeing the ill portents ahead, the Central Government by a Notification dt.d. 22 November 1992 banned the Br.S.F. This was followed by a 1001-hour Assam Bandh declared by the ABSU-BPAC leadership from 5 A.M. of 24 November 1992 demanding the creation of "Bodoland" along with two autonomous districts councils- the Lalung
District Council and the Nilachal District Council. But due to the intervention of
the Union Home Minister the Bodo leadership deferred the bandh call and
agreed to solve the problem through dialogue.80

Rajesh Pilot, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, took the
initiative for arriving at an amicable settlement of the Bodo problem. Pilot was
successful in reducing the differences between the State Government and the
ABSU-BPAC leadership and finally he made an amicable and mutually
acceptable solution to the Bodo problem. The Memorandum of Settlement
(MOS), popularly known as the Bodo Accord, was signed on 20 February 1993
between the State Government of Assam and the ABSU-BPAC leadership.81 In
this way was brought to an end the six year long Bodo Autonomy Movement.

Notes and References

1 ABSU Souvenir, 1988, p.111; Pathak, S., 1995, pp.18-19
2 ABSU Souvenir, 1988, p.112
3 Ibid.; ABSU Handout, Kokrajhar 7th July 1987
5 Souvenir, 1988, p.114
6 Ibid., p.116; Pathak, S., 1995, p.21; ABSU Handout, Kokrajhar, 11 January 1988
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10 Souvenir, 1988, pp 118-19
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13 ABSU Press Release, 20 May 1988
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15 Pathak, S., 1995, p. 23
16 Souvenir, 1988, pp. 120-21
17 ABSU- BPAC Memorandum to the Three Member Expert Committee on Bodo Issues, dtd. Kokrajhar the 18 April 1991, p. 77
18 ABSU Press Release, Guwahati, 27 December 1988
20 Ibid.
22 News-item, *The Sentinel*, July 6, 1992
26 Ibid., p. 96
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Government Press Release, 8 and 9 February 1989
31 Pathak, S., 1995, p. 27

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Ibid.


55 Ibid.


57 Proceedings of the Fifth Round of Tripartite Talks dtd. 18 April 1990 signed by Ram Vilash Paswan, P.K.Mahanta and Upendra Nath Brahma


60 Minutes of the meeting dtd. 8 August 1990 signed by Ram Vilash Paswan, P.K.Mahanta and S.K. Bwiswmutiary.

61 The package included: continuation of the three language formula in the secondary stage of education and English as the medium of instruction in the Higher Secondary, College and University in addition to Assamese, teaching of Bodo as MIL, starting of Bodo in M.A. degree level in Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities, provincialisation of Bodo medium schools, creation of a separate
Directorate for Tribal education and recognition of Bodo as associate official language, etc.

62 Minutes of the meeting dtd. 8 August 1990 signed by Ram Vilash Paswan, P.K. Mahanta and S.K. Bwiswmutiary

63 Ibid.

64 Resolution of the Tripartite Talks dtd. 13 September 1990

65 Minutes of the Tripartite Talks dtd. 13 September 1990 signed by Ram Vilash Paswan, P.K. Mahanta and S.K. Bwiswmutiary

66 Memorandum to the 3-Member Expert Committee on the Bodo issue submitted by the ABSU-BPAC, dtd. Kokrajhar 8 April 1991, p.5

67 Ibid.

68 Roy, A, 1995, pp.70-71

69 News-item, The Sentinel, 10 August 1991

70 The Bodos with a population of about 11.07 lacs and the Mishings with a population of about 3.15 lacs are the two major tribes in the northern plains of the Brahmaputra, though there are other tribes with a very small groups such as the Sonowals (1.02 lacs), the Rabhas (.08 lacs), the Deuri (0.2 lacs), the Lalung (0.05 lacs), and Mech (0.14 lacs). The Report of the Expert Committee on the Plains Tribes of Assam, New Delhi, March 1992, pp.3-6

71 Ibid., pp.8-10

72 News-item, The Assam Tribune, 14 April 1992

73 News-item, The Sentinel, 2 May 1992

74 News-item, The Assam Tribune, 9 May 1992
75 News-item, *The Sentinel*, 30 June 1992

76 Ibid.

77 News-item, *The North-East Times*, 2 July 1992


80 News-item, ibid.

81 Sansuma Khungur Bwismutiary, Rabiram Brahma and Subhas Basumatary on behalf of ABSU-BPAC, K.S. Rao, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Assam signed the Accord in presence of the Assam Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Rajesh Pilot.