NDFB Movement: An Examination of Role of Civil and Political Organisations in Peace Process

Monjib Mochahari
PhD Scholar, Centre for Research and Development,
Tata Institute of Social Sciences, New Campus
Hostel VI, 203/C, Deonar, Mumbai- 400 088
Email: monjib2010@gmail.com
Mobile No: 09930190313

Purpose – Civil and political organizations play some crucial roles in conflict resolution. This study aims to critically analyse the various roles being played by two civil and political organizations in Assam, namely, the Bodo National Conference (BNC) and the People’s Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement (PJACBM) to bring the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) into peaceful negotiation with the Central government of India. The NDFB is one of the most powerful-armed groups fighting for establishing a separate homeland for the Bodos in Assam.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is based on focused group discussions and review of secondary literatures.

Findings – The BNC and the PJACBM have produced positive environments for peaceful solution of the demand of the two factions of the NDFB. But, they are far from producing any durable peace in the region due to internal differences among the Bodo leaders.

Research limitations/implications – The study is focussed on the role of two organisations only- BNC and PJACBM

Practical implications – This study will be useful for civil society organisations, which are working for peace and conflict resolution.

Originality/value – This is the first attempt to examine the role of Bodo National Convention (BNC) and People’s Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement (PJACBM) in conflict resolution.

Keywords – Bodoland, NDFB, BNC, PJACBM, Civil Society

Paper type: Research Paper
Introduction to Bodoland Movement

For more than 45 years, Assam’s Bodoland region has been on the scene of a host of Bodoland movement that have peaked and ebbed but never quite gone away. The Bodoland movement for a separate homeland by the indigenous Bodo tribe of Assam, which first began in the early 1960s, is today one of the oldest unresolved conflicts in Northeast India. The conflict has its roots in the post-colonial geo-political formation of states in Northeast India. According to Narzary (2010) Structural factors, including economic, social and political issues relating to land and resources, facilitating factors, including the degree of politicisation and ethnic consciousness, and triggering factors, such as discriminatory government policies and demographic aggression into tribal lands are considered to be root causes of the Bodo conflict in Assam. Moreover, when India attained her freedom from the British Rule in 1947, the Bodos, though they were the original inhabitants of the Northeast did not get due importance in the formation of the geo-political structure of the country (Hazarika, 2011). Instead, the Bodos witnessed alienation from the mainstream political set up, an aggression of tribal lands and resources by non-Bodos and discrimination as the successive State governments (Narzary, 2007 & Nath, 2008) enacted some policies favouring the ruling Assamese elites and depriving the ethnic minorities of the state. At this critical juncture, the Bodo leaders formed the Plain Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA) to fight for full autonomy in the predominantly plain tribal areas in Assam in 1967. With the formation of the PTCA, the Bodo leaders began to assert their socio-economic and political rights, which culminated into a chain of ethnic “identity” movement in the early 1960s, demanding for Union Territory called “Udayachal” (Banerjee & Roy 2010:14). However, this movement for a separate

---

1 Assam Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chalia enacted the Assam Official Language Act, 1960. Through this Act, Assamese language was made the official language of the State in 1960.
Union Territory exclusively for the plain tribal communities of Assam could not achieve anything despite several rounds of peace talks with the Central Government.

It was in the mid-1980s, the All Bodo Student’s Union (ABSU) under the leadership of Upendra Nath Braham, a vigorous agitation with a slogan “Divide Assam 50-50” for creation of a separate state called “Bodoland” on the north bank of the Brahmaputra was launched² (Nath, 2008). The ABSU took formally took up the homeland demand issue in 1987 justifying the issue of exploitation, unemployment, socio-economic and political injustice and preservation of ethnic cultural life (Battacharya & Deka 2010). Simultaneously, the movement had undergone a paradigm shift from a democratic and non-violent movement to armed struggle with the formation of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in 1986, which bowed to fight for sovereign Bodoland through armed revolution. With the formation of the NDFB, the entire Bodoland region in the lower Assam has remained on the theatre of frequent armed conflict. Due to inept handling and political expediency on the part of both successive State as well as Central Government, the Bodoland movement became more violent in the later part of the 1990s, resulting into loss of several hundred lives; ethnic conflagration, displacement of large number of people, disappearance of innocent youths and destruction of properties in Bodoland areas. Much year later, the agitating of ABSU-BPAC (Bodo People’s Action Committee) and the State Government signed a memorandum of understanding on 10 February 1933³. The Accord led to the formation of a territorially defined self-governing council called the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) to provide maximum autonomy to fulfil the economic, educational, and linguistic aspirations of the Bodos (Hazarika 2011). However, due to the non-fulfilment of the conditions of the Accord

---

² The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) is a non-political student’s organization formed in March 1967.
³ Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC), now defunct was the political wing of the ABSU, which actively took part in the Bodoland Movement in the early 1990s. BPAC was a signatory of the first Bodo Accord of February 20, 1993. However, the “Bodoland Autonomous Council” (BAC) failed to non-implementation of the Accord by the State Government of Assam.
by the State government the BAC Accord failed (Battacharya & Deka 2010). Consequently, the Bodo leaders thus instigated another phase of agitation for a separate state (Hazarika 1994).

The revival of Bodoland movement by ABSU after the BAC fiasco coincided with the emergence of another militant group called the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) in 1996 who bowed to continue armed struggle until a separate state is carved out of Assam. Following a series of negotiations, the BLT leadership gave up the demand for a Bodoland state in 2001, and reconciled itself for an administrative arrangement under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, called “Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). Unlike other tribal councils, its territorial boundary comprises four new contiguous districts of Kokrajhar, Baska, Udalguri, and Chirang. However, the BTC Accord has again failed to meet the political aspirations of the movement leadership (The Hindu, 2012). Showering of economic largesse, by forming Autonomous Council has not really addressed the genuine problem, as Bodos are demanding for a separate homeland. The policy of satisfying the militant demands through the establishment of autonomous councils has failed to redress public grievances and fulfil popular aspirations of the Bodo people (Mukhim, 2009). ‘Inspite of the BTC being in existence for over 11 years, there has been little development in the area and the Bodos feel quite dejected. The BTC enjoys hardly any financial power and has to fully depend on the Central and State government funds. Besides, the loopholes in the legal provisions yet allow the non-tribal people to acquire land rights contrary to the existing laws of the country that promise to safeguard the tribal people’s land rights’ (Burman, 2010; 281, ICITP, 2007).

Obviously, the failure of the BTC accord to accommodate the growing socio-economic and political aspirations of the Bodos has re-ignited the inferno of Bodo struggle recently. The leaders of the ABSU once again spearheading the movement, calling the Central Government create a separate Bodo state under Article 2 and 3 of the Indian Constitution, which say that
the two third majority in the Parliament can form a new state. As the movement for a separate homeland completes 45 years, the Bodo debacle continues to remain as one of the most serious sources of violent political confrontation in Assam. What could one possibly assume is that the Bodoland demand is far from being resolved as the Bodo leaders have intensified the demand for a separate homeland. Moreover, the two factions of the National NDFB are yet to sign any peace accord with the Central government. One faction of the NDFB has been in ceasefire talks with the Central government since 2005, yet there despite lapsed of couple of years there has been no progress. Whereas, the other faction led by its founder President Ranjan Daimary is yet to enter into any formal ceasefire dialogue with the government. However, there have been unabated fratricidal killings between the two factions of the NDFB since its split in December 2008. The former surrendered cadres of the BLT, which converted into Bodoland Royal Tiger Force (BRTF) have also produced cycles of violence resulting into scores of death. Various civil and political organizations are led by a section of Bodo leaders, have been attempting to bring the two factions NDFB into negotiating table to end this long period of Bodo insurgency. The formation of the Bodo National Conference (BNC) in November 2010 and People’s Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement (PJACBM) in 31 March 2012 have ushered in a new peaceful environment for solution to the demands of the NDFB. Moreover, it has also created a mutual understanding among the Bodo leaders, Bodo political parties and civil society to jointly work for peaceful settlement of Bodo problem. It is worth noting, the PJACBM, though in limited way, could bridge the gap between the Bodos and other communities living Bodoland areas. It has created a deeper understanding among communities through dialogues to work collectively to address their grievances. This study examined the role played by the BNC and the PJACBM, which have significantly contributed to peace process of the two factions of the NDFB recently.
Who are the Bodos?

The Bodos are an ethnic community comprising a number of groups speaking a more or less common language and claiming a common ancestry. The 2001 Census report indicates that Bodos are the largest tribal groups in entire North East and eight largest tribes in India. Though there is some dispute as to how many sub-groups actually constitutes the large Bodo group, however, it is widely accepted that 18 different groups are part of the large Bodo family (Pulloppillil: 1997). Bodo-Kacharis is a branch of the Indo-Mongoloid Group falling within the Tibeto-Burmese linguistic section (George, 1994). The Bodos were referred as ‘Kacharis’ in the pre-colonial historiography of Assam (Barbora: 2005). There are 18 different sub-groups of the large Bodo family (Pulloppillil: 1997). The 2001 Government of India Census report states that the Bodo population constitute over 1.3 million, i.e., 40 per cent of the total tribal populations of Assam covering widest geographical area in Northeast India. Bodos are found in large numbers in the Lower and Middle parts of the Brahmaputra Valley, namely in the districts of Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup and Darrang. A sizeable numbers of Bodos have migrated to other states viz., Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh. They are also spread in different countries like Nepal and Bangladesh and Bhutan. In West Bengal and in the southern ranges of the Himalayas coming within the territory of Nepal, Bodos are known as ‘Meches.’ In parts of Upper Assam, Bodos are identified as ‘Sonowal-Kachari’ and ‘Thengal Kachari,’ while in the western and lower Assam they are popularly called ‘Bodo-Kachari.’ In the southern districts of North Cachar and Cachar, they are designated as ‘Dimasa’ and in Tripura, they are known as ‘Kok Borok’ and ‘Tepperah,’ (Bordoloi, et al. 1998). In Bangladesh they are known identified as Bodo (Mech) and Kok Borok, etc., who are

---

4 The term Bodo is used to denote a large number of tribes—the Garos of Meghalaya, Tippera of Tripura, and Boro-Kacharis, Koch, Rabha, Lalung, Dimasa, Hajong, Chutia, Deuri, and Moran of Assam and other parts of the Northeast. (M. N. Brahma, “The Bodo Kacharis of Assam-A Brief Introduction,” Bulletin of the Tribal Research Institute [Gauhati], 1:1 [1983], p. 52.)
predominantly found in the Sylhet province. The literacy rate is merely 61.3 per cent among
the Bodo population in Assam. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood of Bodo
community. About 90 per cent of the Bodos and other tribals depend upon agriculture for
livelihood; almost 70 per cent are landless and over 80 percent live in economic poverty.
Bodos of today speak a language of Tibeto-Burman origin; have an indigenous religion called
“Bathou” and sections of the Bodo people have adopted Christianity and Brahma religion.

In Assam, the majority of the Bodos inhabit in four districts of the Bodoland Territorial
Council\(^5\) (BTC). The Council, covering approximately 8795 Sq. Km was formed in February,
2003 by curving out some area of eight districts - Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Barpeta,
Nalbari, Kamrup, Darang and Sonitpur following the signing of Bodoland Territorial Council
(BTC) accord between the Government of India, Government of Assam and BLT leaders.
The administrative unit has been created with a mission to accomplish development in the
area of economic, education, preservation of land right, linguistic aspiration, socio-culture
and ethnic identity of Bodos. The BTC comprises of four districts- Udalguri, Bagsa, Chirang
and Kokrajhar. The population of BTC area as per 2001 Census report is 29.2 lakhs, out of
which the ST population is constitute 52 per cent and 3 per cent of the total Bodo population
of live in urban area. The average density of the population in BTC is 326 Sq.K.m. compared
to 340 per Sq.K.m. of Assam. The other indigenous communities like Rajbonshi, Sarania-
Kachari, Rabha and Garo that are also originated from great Bodo group now inhabit in large
part of BTC. Besides Tea and Other Ex-Tea tribes including Santhal, Orao, Bengali and
Assamese are also found.

\(^5\) The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) is a territorial privilege established according to the Memorandum of
Settlement of February 10, 2003. BTC came into existence immediately after surrender of Bodo Liberation
Tigers (BLT). The BLT laid down their weapons on December 6, 2003 under the leadership of Hagrama
Mohilary. He was sworn in as the Chief Executive Member (CEM) on December 7, 2003. The Council is
created under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India has been opposed by some organizations.
Historically, the Bodos rulers once controlled much of the present day Assam state until the 12th century. It was after the arrival of the Ahoms in 1228 AD in Assam, conflict between the Bodo-Kacharis and the Ahoms started. Banerjee and Roy (2010: 11-12) argued that with the passage of time they migrated to the Brahmaputra Valley and lived there until the 3rd century. During the time, they came to be known as ‘Dimasas’ meaning children of the Great River ‘Bullungbuthur’ (now Brahmaputra). Later in the 14th Century, the Pushyavarman of Varman Dynasty drove Bodos out of the Brahmaputra plains. Then they moved towards eastern Assam and established a kingdom in the plains of the river Dhansiri. The Dimasa, by that time came to be known as Kacharis, established their full-fledged capital at Dimapur and ruled over there for more than four hundred years. In the subsequent period, the Ahom Kings overpowered the Kachari Kingdom and driven them out from Dimapur to the North Cachar Hills. Soon the Kachari kings shifted their capital at Maibong (now in North Kachar Hills District of Assam) and ruled over there for 200 years. The remnants of the Kachari Kingdom still exist in Dimapur in Nagaland and Maibong area of Assam. Gradually, being attacked by the neighbouring Kingdom, Kacharis expanded towards the plains of Cachar (now one of the districts of Assam) and shifted their capital from Maibong to Khaspur. They ruled for 80 years there. In 1830 A.D., the Kachari Kingdom finally came to the end with the assassination of Raja Govindo Chandra. After his death, the British annexed the Kachari Kingdom under the Doctrine of Laps.

---

6 The Ahom Kingdom (1228–1826, called Kingdom of Assam in medieval times) was a medieval kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam that maintained its sovereignty for nearly 600 years and successfully resisted Mughal expansion in Northeast India. It was able to establish its suzerainty over the Brahmaputra valley and had a profound effect on the political and social life in the region. The kingdom was established by Sukaphaa, a Tai prince from Mong Mao in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra between the extant Sutiya Kingdom in the north and the Kachari Kingdom in the south.

7 The Kachari Kingdom (called Dimasa Kingdom in medieval times) was a powerful kingdom in medieval Assam. The rulers belonged to the Bodo-Kachari people, part of the greater Bodo ethnic group.
The Bodo Problem: The Antecedents

Most outside observers perceived ‘Bodo unrest’ as a fight against the modernizing and unifying state. Scholars, academicians and political thinkers agreed that numerous factors have contributed to Bodoland movement in the post independence period. According to George (1994), the movement for a separate Bodo state had its origins in the economic and socio-cultural aspirations of the Bodo people, who first raised the demand for a separate homeland while still under British rule. It was in the 1930s and 1940s the Bodo delegations when they met the Simon Commission and other British Parliamentary and Constitutional Group to press for recognition as a separate entity, different from the Assamese mainstream (Hazarika 1994). The then Bodo Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma viewed that the Bodos could overcome the deprivation they had been facing in the socio-economic field through direct participation in politics and hence made a demand for a reserved seat in the legislature during the British Rule (Roy 1995).

Whereas, Narzary (2007) expressed that feeling of nationalistic attitude among the educated Bodos grew with the formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) in 1952, which submitted a memorandum to the then Assam Chief Minister Bishnuram Medhi for the introduction of Bodo Medium schools in 1953. However, the state govt did not take any action for the introduction of Bodo medium in the Primary Schools. Protesting against state’s apathy, the BSS took out a mass rally in Kokrajhar district in 1962 to fulfil their genuine demands. On the other hand, scholar and writer Hazarika (1994) notes that the desire for socio-political rights of the Bodos took shape with the formation of the PTCA on 25 February 1967 at Kokrajhar. The PTCA finally became the mouthpiece of the Bodos (Hazarika, 2011). However, following factors have significantly contributed to Bodo unrest in Assam:
i) Land and demographic aggression: According to George (1994), the Bodos constituted 49 per cent of Assam's population in 1947, but decline to 29% due to quick demographic change in the postcolonial Assam. The base of the Bodo economy is land, and while 90% of the Bodos and almost 70% of them are landless today due to indebtedness, poverty, and above all the entry of outsiders into essentially tribal areas. The arrival of refugees from Bangladesh in Northeast India following the participation not only reduced the local population into minorities but also created problems of shelter and settlement in large tribal areas of Assam (Singh, 2008). The aboriginal Bodo people were squeezed rapidly towards the north bank of the River Brahmaputra over the past years. Narzary (2010) argued the forceful acquisition of tribal lands by the Assam government was another factor that Bodos to resist the state policies. Burman (2010) argued that almost 40% of forests in Bodoland areas are already encroached by migrant populations. In addition, as George (1994) argued that as early as in 1950, the Congress government in Assam introduced several tribal blocks and belts exclusively for Schedule Tribes and Schedule Castes, but despite this initiative, the various settlement policy implementations by the successive Assam governments increased the number of non-tribals in the tribal areas in the name of development. Again, when ASSU leader Prafulla Mahanta became Chief Minister in 1985, the government promulgated a new law to evict all unauthorised occupants of forest lands, the poor-poverty ridden Bodo people were adversely affected by government’s policy (ibid).

ii) Language and Identity: The issue of language was the central to the formation and struggle of the Bodo community. Karlsson (2001) justifies that ‘the issue of language was the central to the formation and struggle of the Bodo community.’ It struck the tribal intellectuals as a move to establish a permanent monopoly of power in the state for the Assamese, reducing the tribals for good to poor relations in the state. Likewise, Saikia (2011) argued that despite vociferous opposition from the non-Assamese speaking population of the State, the
Congress Government led by the then Chief Minister B. P. Chaliha yielded to the demands of the Assamese speaking majority and enacted the Assam Official Language Act in 1960. Saikia argued that the discriminatory legislation was predominantly associated with affirming the rights of the urban, educated Assamese-speaking majority.’ As a direct response to state’s discriminatory policy, for the first time the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) began its language movement in 1963 (Hazarika, 1994). In 1969, the BSS demanded the abolition of the Assamese script and its replacement with the Roman script for the Bodo people. However, the Prafulla Mahanta led AGP government issued a circular in 1985 of Secondary Education Board of Assam, according to which Assamese subject was made compulsory even to non-Assamese speaking students in schools across the state further angered the already agitated Bodo leaders. (Narzary, 2007)

iii) Politics and Identity Assertion: According to Amrapali (nd) argued that the Bodoland movement in the postcolonial Assam has been associated with ideas of autonomy, liberation and revolution, the Bodos sought to reconstruct their history and took recourse to an organised armed assertion for a separate nation. It is also argued that the ‘Bodo Nationalism’ in Assam emerges through a multi-faceted contestation against the dominance of the Brahmin Assamese ruling class. Cultivated politics of difference, on the hegemonic state, which aims at suppressing this contestation from below in the postcolonial period contributed to Bodo political movement (Roy, 2007). Similarly, Barman (2010) expressed that the Bodo community in the wake of experiencing the prolonged and historical domination in the hands of the caste Hindu, Assamese people raised the question of ‘Bodos are not Assamese’. However, the policies pursued by the Indian government during the 1960s and 1970s leading to the creation of separate tribal states for populations smaller than the Bodos made the demand of the plains tribals seem legitimate (George, 1994).
The Formation of the NDFB

In is in the backdrop of these above-mentioned reasons that a section of Bodo youths resorted to arms revolution. Obviously, it began with the formation of Bodo Volunteer Force (BVF), a resistance force formed by ABSU. It was followed by the formation of a powerful militant group called the Bodo Security Force (BdSF) on 3 October 1986 by educated Bodo youths at Udalguri district who bowed to fight for sovereign Bodoland through arms revolution and stared operating since the 1990s. The main objective of the outfit was to: a) liberate Bodoland from the Indian expansionism and occupation, b) free the Bodo nation from the colonist exploitation, oppression and domination, c) establish a Democratic Socialists Society to promote liberty, equality and fraternity, and, d) uphold the integrity and sovereignty of Bodoland.

On November 25, 1994, the BdSF rechristened itself as the NDFB. The areas in the north and north-west of the river Brahmaputra in Assam formed the main expanse of operation of the outfit. The NDFB is seen to be active in the Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar, Darrang, Barpeta, Dhubri, Nalbari, Sonitpur and Demaji districts of Assam. Base camps were set up in the jungles of Bhutan, Bangladesh and later in Myanmar. NDFB was also known to be active in the Garo hills region of Meghalaya, close to the Assam-Meghalaya border. The outfit act in collaboration with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN –K), Kamatapur Liberation Army (KLO), Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC), etc. The outfit is also alleged to have network with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), a militant outfit of Myanmar for procurement of arms and ammunitions. ‘The BdSF on numerous occasions blew up the railway tracks, railway coaches, bridges and roadways to cripple the daily life in the region. They also valiantly

Ranjan Daimary was the Commander-in-Chief of the NDFB who is now in lodged in jail following his arrest in Bangladesh in May 2010.
fought the security forces, which unleashed inhuman brutalities on the militants as well as the innocent Bodos’ (Burman, 2010: 276). It is also argued that the ethnic riots in 1993, 1994, 1996, and 1998 in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon and the handy work of the NDFB. Even today, the outfit has remained one of the potential sources of Bodo armed struggle.

Negotiating Peace

In the long struggle for a homeland, the peace process with the NDFB was never an easy task. The outfit was never ready to compromise on the question of sovereignty since its very inception. Moreover, the years of counter insurgency operations by the security and paramilitary forces on NDFB proved futile and failed to end armed violence in Assam, particularly in the Bodoland region. Even, the “Operation All Clear” which was jointly launched by the Royal Bhutan Army and Indian Security forces on 15 December 2003 against the three militant groups - ULFA, NDFB and Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) was could not weakened the militant groups\(^9\). The NDFB along with other outfit groups shifted its base camps to Bangladesh and Myanmar after the army operation in Bhutan and continued to make random attacks on security establishments.

It was much years later, some genuine efforts were initiated by the Bodo Women Justice Forum (BWJF) and Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples to bring the NDFB into negotiating table for a peaceful solution of the Bodo problem. However, could not yield any positive outcome. It was, with the formation of a civil society organisation by Bodo intellectuals called, the Bodo People’s Forum for Peace and Rights (BPFPR) in April 2004, the NDFB showed its eagerness to seat for formal peace talks with the central government for

\(^9\) The Indian Army claimed that about 650 militant were either killed or apprehended or made to surrender during the ‘Operation All Clear’ which continued for three weeks. Among the person arrested were the ULFA ideologue and political advisor, Bhimkanta Buragohain and the publicity secretary Mithinga Daimari.
amicable solution of the long-standing demands of the Bodos\textsuperscript{10}. It was at the behest of the BPRPR, for the first time the NDFB announced a six-month long unilateral ceasefire on October 8, 2004. However, what disappointed the outfit was that both at the Centre and the State did not reciprocate to their move for peace dialogue, but security forces continued operations against the outfit. At the end of the ceasefire period, the outfit further extended the truce on April 15. Meanwhile, the Assam Government released Govinda Basumatary, the arrested general secretary of the NDFB to open a channel of communication with the outfits’ top leadership based in Bangladesh. Several parleys between the outfits leadership and representatives of the Union Government and Government of Assam were held in different parts of the state and New Delhi. It resulted in the signing of a tripartite ceasefire agreement on May 25, 2005 at New Delhi. Since then ceasefire has been periodically extended but with little progress in peace talks.

Nonetheless, the peace efforts of the BPFPR received a death burial with the sudden split of the NDFB on 15 December 2008. The outfit split into two factions: its founder president Rajan Daimary, alias D. R Nabla now leads one group and the other faction is under the leadership of its General Secretary Govinda Basumatary. Following his expulsion from the group, Daimary faction moved away from the ceasefire talks with the Central government, whereas the group led by Govinda Basumatary, now known as the NDFB-P (Progressive) continued to remain in designated ceasefire camps. Currently, the NDFB-P cadres are located within the three designated camps set up in Udalguri, Baksa and Kokrajhar following signing of ceasefire agreement with the Central government in May 2005. The sudden split in the outfit resulted into violent confrontations between the two factions. Simultaneously, the government continued to launch operations against the anti-talk faction. The intense internal

\footnote{BPFPR was an initiative by a group of peace loving Bodo intellectuals to give a platform to NDFB for initiating political dialogue with the Central government.}
rivalry among the insurgent Bodo leaders has proved to be biggest hurdle to peace process, which side by side put an end to peace initiatives of the BPRPR. In addition, some of the erstwhile members of the BLT, who now claimed themselves as the Bodoland Royal Tigers Force (BRTF), unleashed series of attacks on both the factions of the NDFB. Over, 300 Bodo youths were killed between 2007 and 2011 due to fratricides and counter-insurgency operations by security and paramilitary forces. The NDFB has been a major challenge to the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) - the political arrangement arrived at with the now disbanded BLT in February 2003. The NDFB termed the formation of the BTC as an “exercise in futility” and a move against the interests of the Bodo community. Thus, prospects frequent counter insurgency operations and fratricides posed a serious threat to peace process and efforts made by civil society particularly that of the BPFPR proved futile.

**BNC: Initiating Peace Dialogue**

The formation of BNC added a new chapter in peace-making process in strife-torn Bodoland area. It is an umbrella organisation consisting of 23 Bodo organisations. It was formed 19 November 2010 with the objective of providing a common platform for all Bodo organisations — civil, political and non-political organisations— to fight for their common causes, including the demand for a separate State of Bodoland (Talukdar, 2011). Some of the member organisations of the BNC include – Bodoland People’s Front (BPF), All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF), BWJF, Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), Dularai Boro Harimu Afad (DuBHA), etc. The primary objective of the BNC is to work for greater unity and reconciliation among the civil society, Bodo leaders and organisations, which are engaged in fratricidal killings. The peace efforts of the BNC have showed the seeds of unity among the warring Bodo groups. Moreover, to work for peace and expedite the peace talks

---

11 The Bodoland People’s Front (BPF) is a state political party in Assam state. The BPF has been in ruling the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) since its formation in February 2003.
with the anti-talk faction of the NDFB is one of the major priorities of the BNC. It is obvious that the BNC has been attempting to bring the anti-talk faction of the NDFB to negotiating table since its very inception. Though in limited ways, the BNC has been seeking to prevent, reduce, transform and helping people recover from armed violence. Genuine efforts have been initiated to herald a permanent peace and unity among the various Bodo organizations. There are five categories of peace building, including – i) peace advocacy and promotion, ii) Dialogue with the government agencies, iii) Building consensus among the people and organisations, iv) providing rich a platform for reconciliation process, and vi) mobilising the civil society.

In addition, the BNC has been providing a much-needed political platform to start a peace dialogue with the anti-talk faction of the NDFB to end the Bodo imbroglio. This effort has already given some positive result. The outfit under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary, for a second time declared unilateral ceasefire on 8 July 2011. The general meeting of the NDFB unanimously decided to cease all hostile activities indefinite to find a durable political solution to the conflict through political dialogue with effect from August 1 2011 (INAS, 2011). Although there is no much headway in the peace talks, however, what is visible at the movement is that the NDFB-anti talk faction has responded to their appeals for ceasing of anti social activities. On 18 June 2012, the members of the BNC, led by BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary officially met the representatives of the Government of India to urge them to hasten the peace process with the anti-talk NDFB. Leaders of the BNC met the Joint Secretary (North East), Ministry of Home Affairs, Shambhu Singh, and interlocutor P.C Halder. The Central government has already conducted series of information discussion with Ranjan Daimary. However, the formal ceasefire talk is yet to begin.
PJACBM: Building Consensus among communities

What could be turned as a landmark achievement in the role of both political and civil society organisations in peace process is the formation of the PJACBM on 31 March 2012. The 45 tribal and non-tribal organizations, including those representing Adivasis, Gorkhas and Bengali, Rabha, Lalung, Miri, Karbi communities have come under the banner of PJACBM to bring a long-term solution to Bodo conflict. Jebra Ram Muchahary, who is the president of Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal People, Northeast Zone, leads the PJACBM.

The objectives of the PJACBM are: a) to unite Bodo indigenous people and all other ethnic communities living in Bodoland area to jointly work for a peaceful solution of the Bodo problem, b) to interlink and coordinate with democratic organisations and institutions to facilitate peaceful solution of Bodo conflict, c) to undertake peaceful and democratic activities for the protection and promotion of culture, language, education and human rights, and, d) to work for promotion of self-governance, and, e) to work for peaceful co-existence of all sections of people living in Bodoland region. It could be argued that the, PJACBM has been able to build a bridge between the insurgent leaders and the government and among the different communities living in Bodoland areas.

The PJACBM, backed by the NDFB-P, for the first time visualised that the proposed separate Bodoland state is not only for the Bodos but also for all non-Bodo communities living in the region. What has been visible is that, the PJACBM has been urging the Central government to expedite the peace talks with the NDFB-P for early solution of the Bodo imbroglio. However, due to lack of realistic and pragmatic policies not much progress in NDFB-P peace process though the NDFB-P has been in ceasefire talks since 2005. The sincerity and eagerness on peace dialogue particularly the State government is quite to be lethargic. The peace efforts of the PJACBM are not producing any decisive result at the level political
levels. Of course, it is quite successful in bringing about a consensus, mutual understanding and co-operation among the members of the different communities in Bodoland region.

However, even though the PJACBM wanted to make the proposed Bodoland state movement a broad-based one, political observers argue that the newly formed Ana-Bodo Surakhya Samity (ABSS), which is oppose to the creation of a new state has become an obstacle to peaceful solution of the Bodo debacle (N.A. 2012). The recent violence which took place between July 19 to 20, 2012 in four districts of lower Assam between the indigenous tribes and illegal migrants settled in Bodoland areas have come a shock to the peace efforts of the PJACBM. The existence of ABSS, a non-Bodo forum that compromises of 27 organisations in Lower Assam has become counter-productive to peace-making efforts made by the PJACBM and the BNC. In addition, the emergence of the All Bodoland Minority Students Unit (ABMSU), which is also opposed to the creation of Bodoland state, is not only becoming a threat to peace and harmony in the region, but a counter-productive mechanism to derail the peace talks with the Bodo militant outfits\textsuperscript{12}.

**Conclusion**

The involvement of BNC and PJACBM in peace process has produced some positive environments for peaceful solution of the demand of the two factions of the NDFB. Though the BNC and the PJACBM have managed to bridge the gap between the two factions as well as creating some space for harmony and reconciliation among the Bodo leaders and different communities; it is far from producing any durable peace in the region due to internal differences among the Bodo leaders. The fight for political supremacy and search for peoples’ party loyalty continue to exist which itself is creating trust deficit among the Bodo

\textsuperscript{12} ABMSU is a student union body in Bodoland area. They are particularly active in four districts of Bodoland Territorial Council.
leaders. The conflicting parties are yet to reach the middle ground for making joint efforts to bring about peaceful solution to Bodo problem in Assam. As of now, there is no sign that both the faction will unite, through attacks and counter attacks have been declining. In order to reach the middle ground, both the BNC and the PJACBM and their initiatives must establish themselves as a socially powerful force. Unfortunately, this is yet to happen. This can happen only when the ABSU leaders join their efforts. Until date, the ABSU has ignored to be part of any of the peace group due to existence of internal differences among the leaders of the outfit and the member organisations of the BNC and PJACBM. Moreover, though the BNC and PJACBM have been urging the state and the Central government to expedite the peace talks with the outfit groups, yet no progress has been made till date. The NDFB-P has been in ceasefire talks since 2005, but not progress is seen as of now. In addition, the peace talk with anti-talk faction is yet to start. The unnecessary delay in the negotiation with the NDFB-R is likely to have a serious fallout due lack of willingness on the part of the Central government to start the formal peace dialogue with the outfit. The state and civil society need to mount herculean effort to make the peace dialogue meaningful.

References:


IANS. (2012). NDFB offers indefinite ceasefire,


http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gide20, 28 August 2012


Mukhim, Patricia. (2009), “When Dreams turn sour. *Assam Tribune*, November 12,


n.a. (2012), *Non-Bodos oppose bifurcation of Assam*, Times of India,


Nath, Monoj Kumar. (2003), “*Bodo insurgency in Assam: New accord and new Problems*”.


