

2. Bodoland Territorial Region – Polity

The Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) is an autonomous area in Assam, administered under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution following a long statehood movement by the Bodo people. A 2020 Peace Accord significantly enhanced its autonomy with greater legislative powers, increased council membership, and official recognition for the Bodo language.

About Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR)

The BTR is an autonomous region located in the state of Assam, playing a significant role in the region's political and cultural landscape.

Geographical Location – It is situated on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River, nestled below the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh.

Administrative Composition – The region comprises four districts and is administered by the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

Demographics – The population is predominantly inhabited by the indigenous Bodo people, who are the primary ethnic group, along with other local communities.

Etymology – The name "Bodoland" is derived directly from the Bodo tribe, acknowledging their historical and cultural significance to the area.

Historical Background

The journey towards autonomy for Bodoland has been long and marked by significant movements and agreements.

Early Movements – The demand for autonomy began as early as 1967 with the formation of the Plains Tribes Council of Assam.

The Bodo Movement – In 1987, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) launched the Bodo Movement, escalating the demand for a separate state of Bodoland.

First Bodo Accord (1993) – This was the first major breakthrough, leading to the formation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) and granting a degree of self-governance.

Ancient & Medieval History – Before British control was established after the Duar War in 1865, the region was historically part of the ancient Kamarupa kingdom and was later ruled by the Koch-Mech dynasty, the Bhutan kingdom, and the Ahom kingdom.

Evolution of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)

The administrative structure of Bodoland has evolved significantly over the past few decades, culminating in the current BTR agreement.

1993 – Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) – Following the first Bodo Accord, Bodoland became an autonomous administrative unit under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, covering an area of 8,795 km².

2003 – Formation of the BTC – The BAC was upgraded and reconstituted as the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), with a broader mandate to promote –

1. Economic development
2. Education and language
3. Land rights and infrastructure
4. Preservation of cultural identity

2020 – The BTR Peace Agreement – A landmark tripartite agreement was signed on January 27, 2020, between the Government of India, the Government of Assam, and Bodo groups including the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), the All Bodo Students' Union, and the United Bodo People's Organisation. Key outcomes include –

1. **Establishment of BTR** – The region was formally named the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) with enhanced executive and legislative powers.
2. **Increased Representation** – The membership of the BTC was increased to 60 members.
3. **Boundary Readjustment** – The boundaries were altered to include contiguous Bodo-inhabited areas and exclude non-Bodo majority areas, aiming to create a Bodo-majority region.

4. **Cultural Recognition** – BTR was granted the right to have representation in national sports and cultural events like the National Games and Khelo India Youth Games.
5. **Official Language Status** – The Bodo language, written in the Devanagari script, was recognized as an associate official language of Assam.

Provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution

The Sixth Schedule provides a detailed framework for the administration of tribal areas in four specific northeastern states, granting them significant autonomy.

Constitutional Basis – Article 244(2) of the Constitution contains these provisions, which apply to tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.

Autonomous Districts and Regions – Tribal areas in these states are administered as Autonomous Districts. The Governor has the authority to create Autonomous Regions within a district if there are multiple distinct Scheduled Tribes residing there. The Governor also holds the power to organize, reorganize, alter the boundaries, or change the name of any autonomous district.

Constitution of Councils

District Council – Each autonomous district has a District Council with up to 30 members. A maximum of 4 members are nominated by the Governor, while the rest are elected through adult suffrage.

Regional Council – A separate Regional Council is constituted for each designated autonomous region.

Legislative Powers of Councils – Councils can legislate on matters like land use, forest management (excluding reserved forests), inheritance of property, marriage, divorce, and social customs. They can also make laws to regulate money-lending and trading by non-tribal individuals within their jurisdiction. Crucially, all laws passed by the councils require the assent of the Governor to come into effect.

Revenue and Taxation Powers – Councils are empowered to assess and collect land revenue. They can impose taxes on professions, trades, animals, vehicles, and entry of goods into the area. They also have the authority to grant licenses or leases for the extraction of minerals within their jurisdiction.

Administration of Justice – Councils can establish Village and District Council Courts to adjudicate disputes where all parties involved are members of Scheduled Tribes. The jurisdiction of the High Court over these cases is specified and can be limited by the Governor. These Council Courts cannot try criminal cases where the punishment is death or imprisonment for more than five years.

Developmental Powers – Councils are responsible for establishing or managing essential public services like primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle ponds, fisheries, roads, public transport, and waterways.

Applicability of Central and State Laws – Acts of the Parliament or the State Legislature do not automatically apply to these autonomous districts and regions. They can be applied with specific modifications and exceptions as deemed fit.

Governor's Oversight Powers – The Governor can appoint a commission to investigate and report on any matter related to the administration of the autonomous districts or regions.

Source – <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Sep/23/btc-elections-peaceful-with-72-turnout>