Darjeeling Unrest

What is the issue?

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Separate statehood movement of get renewed and intensified in Darjeeling district of West Bengal.

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What sparked the renewed protest?

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- Gorkha agitation stir renewed after West Bengal government makes Bengali mandatory in all schools in the region.
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- Gorkha Janmukti Morcha-led by Bimal Gurung intensifies its demands for a separate state of Gorkhaland calling an indefinite bandh in the region.
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Nepali population:

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- Census figures over the years show that the state with the largest Nepali-speaking population is West Bengal — 10.23 lakh in 2001, which is almost twice as many as in Assam, the next highest state with 5.65 lakh.
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- Sikkim has the highest concentration of Nepali-speaking people, at 62.6 per cent.
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- Although the Nepali-speaking segment makes up just 1.2 per cent of Bengal’s population.
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- Darjeeling evokes more interest in Nepal than any other Indian region where Nepali-speaking persons are settled.
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- The idea of a “Greater Nepal” still motivates a section of Nepal activists who want Darjeeling restored.
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How strong is the cultural bridge?

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- In the late 1970s, Nepali scholars from Darjeeling as well as Assam led a movement for recognition of the language under the Eighth Schedule.
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- The Morarji Desai-led government, however, turned it down. Sikkim, which became part of India in 1975, joined the movement and the language was eventually given that status in 1992.
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- Darjeeling’s Nepali-speaking population also contributed to the growth of trade union politics, their affiliations mostly to the CPI in the initial stages.
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- Darjeeling, along with Sikkim, has also been where promotion of the Nepali language and literature has been largely concentrated.
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- Sikkim and a couple of the other Northeastern states, on account of their high concentration of Nepali-speaking people, too have made efforts to promote Nepali culture and language.
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- Each year, Sikkim celebrates the poet’s birthday on July 13 as Bhanu Jayanti, with literary figures from both countries invited.
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Why the Nepali people agitate?

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- The tactful and rigid segregation of workers from the British era to the line of ethnicity in the hills, where the Nepalese were brought in and the plains, where the Chottanagpur migrants worked, rendered one community hostile against the other.
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- The few Bengalis present in the hills were and have always been the babus, working for the British and then the State. The marwaris have

controlled most of the wealth, further isolating the Nepali population.
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- The Nepalese find themselves reduced to second class citizens, at the hands of these otherwise miniscule inhabitants.
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- The movement led by the Gorkha National Liberation Front, projected the CPM-led government in Bengal as anti-Nepali.
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- The demand for Gorkhaland has always found its support among the tea plantation workers. Kipat (ownership of land by a community) and Maato (mud) remain central to the movement.
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Is there any peace process took place before?

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- Long back, the Gorkhaland movement was called off following a tripartite agreement that led to creation of an autonomous hill council.
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Source: Indian Express

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