Gorkhaland Issue

What is the issue?

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Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts, particularly the hill portions, have been in a politically driven near-total civic upsurge over language.

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What is the reason?

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- West Bengal government decided to institute a three-language formula in school education throughout the state.
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- Under this, Bengali will be compulsorily taught up to Class X, although students would not have to take an examination in the subject.
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- The agitation started as a protest against **imposition of Bengali** in the hills of West Bengal where Nepali is the official language.
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- The Bimal Gurung led Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM), , is on the frontline of the ongoing protests.
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- It considers the West Bengal government’s decision **a threat to the Gorkha** ethno-cultural identity and socio-economic interests.
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What is Gorkhaland?

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- Darjeeling is West Bengal`s northern-most district and is strategically located at a distance of 441 kms from the Sino-Indian border.
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- During **1986-88,** it had experienced a critical phase of public unrest on the Gorkha statehood issue.

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- Gorkhaland is a proposed state demanded by the people of the Darjeeling Hills and the people of Indian Gorkhas ethnic origin in the Northern part of West Bengal.
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- Proposed Gorkhaland State
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- It is based on the linguistic and cultural difference with regard to Bengali culture.
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- After a lot of internal violence and protracted negotiations among the Centre, state and the former Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), a Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was formed with autonomy over 19 functional areas devolved from the State List.
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- Subsequently, after the Trinamool government came to power, a revamped autonomous entity – the **Gorkhaland Territorial Administration** (GTA) with control over 59 departments including education and agriculture.
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What is the recent development?

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- Although the West Bengal government has withdrawn the controversial order, the GJM has now revived an earlier demand for statehood for the Gorkha people.
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- Further, GJM members have resigned from the **Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA).**
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- The party along with 12 other Gorkha outfits has also decided to render the institution of the GTA non-functional by preventing the holding any further elections to the body.
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- The **8th Schedule of the Constitution** lists Nepali as the official language of Darjeeling district as well as of Sikkim.
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- In other words, there has existed a decades-long constitutional provision for education and public transactions to be conducted in Nepali in Darjeeling, without the compulsion to study and be proficient in Bengali.
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- Also, the Gorkha inhabitants have been willingly acquiring Bengali to facilitate transactions both at the state level and with the plains people.
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- Nevertheless, the attempt to impose Bengali in Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts has angered their Gorkha inhabitants.
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What might be the implications for India?

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- Acceding to these demands is likely to have implications in other parts of the country.
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- Already, some outfits such as the **Bodoland Tribal Area Districts** of Assam and the **Indigenous Peoples' Front of Tripura,** which too demand statehood for the groups they represent in Assam and Tripura, respectively, have extended support to the GJM.
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- Other factors that are needed to be taken into account including the geographical contiguity of Darjeeling and Kalimpong to the border with China, the region's backwardness, and the base it provides for the recruitment of local Gorkhas in the Army.
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Why the present arragement is not working?

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- There have been **inadequacies in the functioning of the GTA** because

substantial administrative and fiscal authority has remained with the state government's district heads.
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- Moreover, the entire resource allocating authority and a broad spectrum of fiscal powers have continued to remain vested with the state government headquartered at Kolkata.
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- This **hiatus in authority** has been one among several factors affecting developmental activities in the area.
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- Thus, the arrangements for partial self-governance under gubernatorial (relating to Governor) aegis within the ambit of the 6th Schedule have not worked satisfactorily in serving the interests of the populace.
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What could be done?

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- Subject to a political consensus among Delhi, Kolkata and the local Gorkha leadership of Darjeeling-Kalimpong, there may still be some scope for a solution short of a full-fledged Gorkhaland state.
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- It must happed provided the governor's role is made more substantive and direct in respect of the devolved functional areas.
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- A **more effective autonomous institution** could also be considered, and assigned all the functional areas under the State List except law and order, infrastructure and disaster relief establishment.
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- Concomitant revenue raising powers may also be devolved to such an institution to avoid its financial dependence on the state government.
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- Another issue would be the provision of legislative authority to this entity vis-a-vis its functional and territorial jurisdiction.
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- If such a provision existed, the state govt would not have been able to implement its controversial Bengali language imposition decision.
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- Such a restructured autonomous entity may also be acceptable to the Gorkhas of Darjeeling-Kalimpong.
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Source: IDSA

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