

CSB IAS ACADEMY

TOPIC OF THE DAY (DATE:04.01.2023)

ULFA PEACE DEAL

WHY IN NEWS?

Recently, The pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) signed a peace accord with the Central government and the Assam government.

Background:

- Historical Context: Assam witnessed an influx of migrants since the 19th century, aggravated by the Partition in 1947 and the subsequent refugee crisis. The competition for resources led to a mass movement in 1979.
- Assam Accord (1985): The Assam Accord aimed to address the issue of foreigners in Assam but did not prevent the emergence of radical groups like ULFA, Mizo National Front, and National Liberation Front of Tripura.

ULFA:

- Formation: The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) originated during the anti-foreigners movement of 1979.
- Aim: ULFA sought to establish a sovereign Assamese nation through armed struggle against the Indian state.
- Leadership: Current leaders include Arabinda Rajkhowa and Paresh Baruah.
- Geographical Presence: ULFA maintained camps in Myanmar and had historical connections with Bangladesh and Bhutan.
- Links: ULFA has been linked to other insurgent groups in the Northeast, Myanmar, and international terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda. There are reported links with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).
- Impact: Over 44 years, the struggle involved kidnappings, extortion, executions, bomb blasts, and loss of life in Assam and beyond.

Indian Government's Response:

- Military Measures: Operations like Bajrang (1990) were launched, Assam was declared a 'disturbed area,' President's rule was imposed, and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) was invoked.
- Strategic Measures: Support was allegedly provided to certain factions like Surrendered ULFA (SULFA) in 1992.

ULFA Peace Accord:

- People's Consultative Group (PCG): Formed by ULFA in 2005, it mediated talks, but ULFA later walked out.
- Pro-Talk Factions: Some ULFA commanders, like Arabinda Rajkhowa, proposed peace talks, leading to the signing of the Suspension of Operation (SoO) in 2011.
- 12-Point Charter (2012): The pro-talk faction submitted demands to the central government, which responded in 2023.

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- Tripartite Peace Agreement (2023): Discussions between Rajkhowa's faction and the Centre resulted in the recent peace accord.

Key Points of ULFA Peace Accord:

- Surrender of Arms: ULFA cadres agreed to surrender arms, vacate camps, and join the peaceful democratic process.
- Committee Formation: A committee would monitor the program implementation.
- Reservation: 97 out of 126 Assembly seats in Assam would be reserved for indigenous people.
- Financial Support: Rs. 1.5 lakh crore investment pledged in the peace accord.
- Constitutional Safeguards: Land rights protection and restrictions on migration.

ULFA-I and Paresh Baruah:

- Non-participation: The faction led by Paresh Baruah (ULFA-I) has not joined the peace process.
- Location: Baruah is reportedly in China, and the ULFA-I operates from the Myanmar border with the support of around 100 cadres.
- The peace accord represents a significant step toward resolving the long-standing insurgency in Assam, although challenges remain with the non-participation of ULFA-I. The tripartite agreement outlines a roadmap for disarmament, socio-political integration, and economic development in the region.

Significance of North East for India

- **Strategic Significance:** North-East India is the gateway to South-East Asia and beyond. It is India's land-bridge to Myanmar. India's Act East Policy places the northeastern states on the territorial frontier of India's eastward engagement.
- **Cultural Significance:** North East India is one of the most culturally diverse areas of the world. It is home to over 200 tribes. Popular festivals include the Hornbill Festival of Nagaland, Pang Lhabsol of Sikkim, etc. North-east India is a Dowry-Free Zone. The rich tapestry of cultures of Northeast is reflected in its highly developed Folk dance forms like Bihu (Assam). Manipur has a tradition of worshipping nature in sacred groves, called UmangLai.
- **Economic Significance:** Economically, the Region is rich in natural resources of "TOT" (Tea, Oil, and Timber). It is a veritable powerhouse with a potential of 50000 MW of hydroelectric power and an abundant reserve of fossil fuels.
- **Energy Resources:** Due to the presence of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, the North-Eastern region has immense potential as far as hydroelectric energy is concerned. Similarly, it has been a source of crude oil and natural gas in the form of Digboi oil fields. Potential oil and natural gas reserves have been found at the Arakan Basin.
- **Carbon Sink:** India has vowed to create an additional 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon sink per year under its Nationally Determined Contributions as a part of the Paris Summit. North-Eastern India with its dense forest cover can play a huge role in such endeavour. Mizoram is the best state in India in terms of forest cover.