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Gorkhaland Demand and the Constitutional Framework for Addressing Regional Aspirations in India

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Recent Developments:

- On **22 August 2026**, Union Home Minister **Amit Shah** chaired a meeting in Siliguri with representatives of the hill areas of West Bengal in the presence of West Bengal Chief Minister **Suvendu Adhikari**, where issues concerning the hill population, **identity, permanent political solution and constitutional recognition** were discussed.
- The Government decided to constitute a committee chaired by **Pankaj Kumar Singh**, former Deputy National Security Adviser and the current interlocutor, to finalise the modalities of a proposed **permanent political solution within the Constitution of India**.
- The development has renewed attention on the long-standing **Gorkhaland demand**, which seeks a separate administrative and political arrangement for the Gorkha-majority hill areas of northern West Bengal.
- The issue is also significant from a national-security perspective because the broader region lies close to the **Siliguri Corridor**, a strategically vital land link connecting mainland India with the northeastern States. The Union Home Minister separately reviewed the security of the corridor on 22 August 2026.

Roots of the Gorkhaland Demand:

Identity and Regional Aspirations:

- The demand for a distinct political identity among the Gorkhas has a long history and is rooted in concerns relating to **ethnic identity, language, culture, political representation and regional development**.
- The Darjeeling hills have a distinctive social and cultural composition, with **Gorkhas forming a major part of the population**, alongside communities such as Lepchas, Bhutias and others.
- The demand is therefore not based exclusively on language but reflects a combination of **identity, geography, governance and development-related aspirations**.
- Supporters of separate statehood argue that a geographically distinct hill region requires an administrative structure capable of responding more effectively to its **terrain, infrastructure requirements, economic conditions and cultural concerns**.

Historical Background:

- The roots of the demand for a separate administrative arrangement extend to the **early twentieth century**, when representatives of the Darjeeling hills began seeking separation from the administrative structure of Bengal.
- The political history of Darjeeling is also shaped by its earlier relationship with **Sikkim and Nepal**, followed by British control and subsequent integration into independent India. The official Darjeeling district history records the transfer of Darjeeling to the East India Company in 1835 and the subsequent expansion of British-controlled territory in the region.

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- The demand for a separate Gorkha political identity continued through the colonial period and acquired greater political intensity after Independence.
- The modern movement became particularly prominent during the **1980s**, culminating in a major agitation for a separate Gorkhaland state between 1986 and 1988.

Evolution of Institutional Arrangements:

Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council:

- The major agitation of **1982–1988** ended through an agreement that led to the establishment of the **Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council** as an autonomous body for the social, economic, educational and cultural advancement of the hill population.
- The West Bengal Legislature enacted the **Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Act, 1988**, providing an institutional mechanism for limited regional autonomy.
- The arrangement demonstrated that regional aspirations could be addressed through **autonomous institutions without immediately creating a separate State**.

Gorkhaland Territorial Administration:

- The next major institutional development was the **Gorkhaland Territorial Administration**, established under the **Gorkhaland Territorial Administration Act, 2011**, following a tripartite agreement involving the Government of India, Government of West Bengal and the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha.
- The statutory framework came into operation in **2012** and covers the hill areas comprising **Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and certain mouzas of the Siliguri subdivision**.
- The GTA was designed as an **autonomous self-governing body** intended to accelerate socio-economic, infrastructural, educational, cultural and linguistic development while recognising the ethnic identity of the Gorkhas.
- The persistence of the separate-state demand despite autonomous arrangements indicates that **administrative devolution and political statehood are not necessarily perceived as equivalent solutions**.

Constitutional Framework for Creation of New States:

Article 3 of the Constitution:

- **Article 3** empowers Parliament to create a new State by separating territory from an existing State, uniting two or more States or parts of States, or altering the area, boundaries or names of existing States.
- The power belongs to **Parliament**, which means that a region cannot unilaterally create a new State through a State legislature or local administrative decision.
- A Bill for this purpose can be introduced in either House of Parliament only on the **recommendation of the President**.
- If the proposed reorganisation affects the **area, boundaries or name of an existing State**, the President must refer the Bill to the concerned State Legislature for expressing its views.
- The views of the State Legislature are **not binding on Parliament**, meaning that Parliament can proceed even if the State Legislature opposes the proposal.
- A law made under Articles **2 and 3** can also contain provisions relating to the First and Fourth Schedules and other consequential matters, and such a law is not treated as a constitutional amendment under Article 368.

Evolution of State Reorganisation in India:

Dhar Commission, 1948:

- The **Dhar Commission** examined the question of reorganising provinces after Independence and gave greater weight to **administrative convenience and economic considerations** than to language as the sole

basis of reorganisation.

- Its approach reflected the concern that premature linguistic reorganisation could create administrative and political difficulties.

JVP Committee, 1948–49:

- The **JVP Committee**, comprising **Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya**, reconsidered the question of linguistic provinces.
- The Committee did not support the immediate creation of States solely on linguistic grounds and emphasised **national unity, security and administrative considerations**.
- The debate demonstrated that Indian federalism has historically attempted to balance **regional identity with national integration**.

States Reorganisation Commission, 1953–55:

- The **States Reorganisation Commission** was chaired by **Justice Fazal Ali**, with **H. N. Kunzrand K. M. Panikkar** as members.
- The Commission examined the reorganisation of States comprehensively and recognised **language and culture** as important factors while rejecting the idea that a single criterion should determine all State boundaries.
- Its recommendations contributed to the **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**, which substantially reorganised India's internal administrative boundaries.
- The subsequent evolution of Indian federalism demonstrates that State boundaries are not permanently fixed and can be modified when **political, administrative, cultural and developmental circumstances** require it.

Why Do Demands for New States Arise?

Linguistic and Cultural Identity:

- Communities may seek separate Statehood to protect their **language, culture, traditions and distinctive historical identity**, particularly when they perceive themselves as politically or culturally marginalised within a larger State.

Administrative Efficiency:

- Large States and geographically isolated regions can face difficulties in delivering **public services, infrastructure and governance** effectively.
- Separate Statehood may therefore be demanded to bring the **government closer to citizens** and improve administrative responsiveness.

Political Representation:

- Statehood provides a region with its own **legislature, executive, budgetary priorities and political institutions**, potentially increasing regional representation in decision-making.
- Smaller States can sometimes provide greater political visibility to previously peripheral regions, although Statehood alone does not automatically guarantee better governance.

Economic and Developmental Aspirations:

- Regional movements frequently argue that local resources and revenues are not adequately reflected in **regional infrastructure, employment, education and public investment**.
- Such perceptions can transform economic grievances into broader demands for political autonomy.

Major Issues Associated with New State Demands:

Proliferation of Regional Demands:

- Granting Statehood to one region can encourage similar demands elsewhere, including demands associated with **Vidarbha, Bundelkhand, Bodoland and Harit Pradesh**.
- However, the existence of multiple demands does not by itself invalidate them because each proposal must be assessed according to its **constitutional, administrative, economic, social and security implications**.

Economic Viability:

- A new State requires substantial expenditure on **administrative infrastructure, legislature, secretariat, High Court arrangements, public institutions and government machinery**.
- The proposed State must therefore possess adequate revenue-generating capacity and institutional capability to provide essential public services.

Inter-State Disputes:

- Reorganisation can generate disputes relating to **boundaries, water resources, forests, government employees, public assets, liabilities and institutional jurisdiction**.
- Such disputes can continue long after the formal creation of a new State.

Identity-Based Politics:

- Statehood movements centred excessively on ethnicity or language can create **majoritarian and exclusionary tendencies**.
- Any new political arrangement must therefore protect the rights and interests of **minority communities within the proposed territorial unit**.

Gorkhaland and National Security:

Strategic Importance of the Siliguri Corridor:

- The Gorkhaland question has a special strategic dimension because the Darjeeling–Siliguri region is associated with the **Siliguri Corridor**, which connects mainland India with the northeastern States.
- The Union Government reviewed the security of the corridor on **22 August 2026**, involving the Ministry of Home Affairs, armed forces, border-guarding organisations and other agencies.
- The strategic environment includes concerns relating to **border management, demographic changes, illegal immigration and connectivity**, making stability in the region important for national security.
- Therefore, any political settlement in the Darjeeling hills must simultaneously address **regional aspirations, constitutional governance and strategic stability**.

Way Forward:

Balancing Identity and Constitutional Governance:

- The preferred approach should focus on a **constitutional, negotiated and inclusive political settlement** rather than prolonged confrontation.
- The current committee process can examine the concerns of different stakeholders and identify an arrangement that combines **political representation, administrative autonomy, economic development and cultural recognition**.
- Any settlement should ensure that the interests of **Gorkhas, Lepchas, Bhutias and other communities** are protected and that no group faces political exclusion.

- Greater fiscal and administrative devolution can be considered where constitutionally and institutionally appropriate, particularly for **local infrastructure, education, tourism, livelihoods and cultural development**.
- Development policies should focus on the region's comparative advantages, including **tourism, tea, horticulture, education, logistics and border-area infrastructure**.
- A durable solution should also integrate **national-security considerations**, particularly the protection of the Siliguri Corridor and effective border management.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Key Constitutional and Analytical Points:

- **Article 3:** Parliament possesses the power to create new States and alter the area, boundaries or names of existing States.
- **State Legislature's Role:** Its views are sought when the proposal affects the State's area, boundaries or name, but those views are **not binding on Parliament**.
- **Gorkhaland Territorial Administration:** The autonomous arrangement was established through the **2011 statutory framework** and became operational in **2012**.
- **Current Development:** The Government has initiated a committee process under **Pankaj Kumar Singh** to finalise modalities for a permanent political solution within the constitutional framework.
- **Strategic Link:** The Gorkhaland question intersects with the security of the **Siliguri Corridor**, making it simultaneously a question of **federal accommodation and national security**.
- **Useful UPSC phrase:** *“Indian federalism is not merely a division of powers but a continuous process of accommodating regional aspirations within the constitutional framework.”*
- **Core conclusion:** A durable settlement should balance **identity, development and political representation** with **administrative viability, constitutionalism, social inclusion, national security and territorial integrity**, thereby converting regional aspirations into an instrument of **responsive and cooperative governance**.