

# ENDGAME: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE TRIPARTITE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE PRO-TALKS FACTION OF THE UNITED LIBERATION FRONT OF ASOM, UNION GOVERNMENT AND THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT

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The signing of a [tripartite agreement, in New Delhi, between the pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom, the Union government and the Assam State government](#) marks the end of a process that began in 2009. Nearly 15 years ago, the “chairman” of ULFA, Arabinda Rajkhowa, who went on to become the face of the pro-talks faction, was “arrested”, even as other key leaders of the insurgent outfit surrendered. By 2011, following a unilateral ceasefire by the group, the ULFA’s pro-talks faction had already signed a “suspension of operations” agreement, with several cadres staying put at special camps called “Nabanirman Kendras”, putting an end to the then 32-year-old insurgency. A much-delayed talks process finally concluded last week, resulting in the [current tripartite memorandum of settlement](#), enabling the faction’s cadres to agree to surrender arms and vacate their camps. The “commander-in-chief” of the outfit, Paresh Baruah, had opposed the dialogue process in 2009, insisting that the “sovereignty issue” be a part of it, and since then his faction, the ULFA (Independent) has remained hostile to the peace process. The ULFA(I) is now a much weakened outfit, with Baruah believed to be in north-east Myanmar. The ULFA has long lost its potency as an insurgent force from its heydays in the 1990s, when it managed to farm the discontent that persisted in rural Assam even after the Assam Accord of 1985. Since then, the organisation has lost popular support, especially among sections of Assam’s peasantry, due to its violent tactics targeting civilians such as migrant workers and the poor, relying on extortion, besides espousing a flawed chauvinist ideology that misconstrued the nature of the Indian state, which yielded diminishing returns.

Military operations by Bhutan in the early 2000s broke its insurgent might and, later, the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government in Bangladesh handed over most of the outfit’s leaders. Since then, the pro-talks faction gave up the demand for sovereignty and revised its charter of demands to accommodate the interests of the “indigenous people” of Assam, while seeking an honourable exit. The delay in the conclusion of talks meant that some cadres had left the camps over the years, with a few joining the ULFA(I), but reports indicate that recruits to the Baruah-led organisation have fallen drastically in recent years. The threat of militancy from the remnants of

the ULFA might have subsided dramatically over the years in Assam, but much needs to be done to raise the livelihood standards of the peasantry in the north-eastern State. Persistent poverty has been a key reason for mobilisation on a narrow ethnic basis, a radical version of which has been espoused by organisations such as ULFA.

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