



Integration of North-Eastern States

This editorial is based on [“India at 75 / The fragility of the Northeast’s integration”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 16/08/2022. It traces the journey of integration of North East India since Independence.

For Prelims: North-East India, Sixth Schedule, Siliguri corridor, India's Act East Policy, , Bharatmala Pariyojana, Digital North East Vision 2022, National Bamboo Mission, Kaziranga National Park, ASEAN(Association of Southeast Asian Nations)

For Mains: Significance of North East for India, Challenges Related to North East India, Recent Government Initiatives for the Development of the North-East

North-East India, fondly called the **land of seven sisters**, represents both a geographic and political administrative division of the country. Northeastern Indian States are blessed with a wide range of **physiographic and ecoclimatic conditions** and the **geographical ‘gateway’** for much of India’s **endemic flora and fauna**.

Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution deals with the provisions for the administration of **tribal areas** in the states of **North-Eastern states: Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram**, in accordance with **Article 244** of the Indian Constitution.

North-East is home **to 3.8% of the national population** and occupies about 8% of India’s total geographical area. **Siliguri corridor**, a narrow strip of land in **West Bengal**, popularly known as **“chicken’s neck”** connects this region to the rest of mainland India.

The **integration of Northeast India** into mainstream Indian life has been on the national agenda from the very start of India’s journey as an independent nation. In these areas, **cultural and demographic integrity is a major concern** that does not receive enough attention in terms of **political, economic, social, and technological** advancements.

What is the 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**.
- **Ecological Significance:** North East is a part of **Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot**. It represents one of the highest avian and plant biodiversity of the Indian subcontinent.
 - This area has the prestige of **having all the bear species present in India**.

What are Current Challenges Pertaining to North-East India?

- **Isolation From the Rest of India:** The region's **accessibility has always remained weak due to geographical reasons** and underdeveloped transport links with the rest of India.
 - The physical location of northeastern states makes it imperative that they develop in consonance with their neighbours.
 - Also, as the region witnesses floods and landslides in the [Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys of Assam](#), considerable strain is exerted on the economy of not only Assam but other North-Eastern states too.
- **Lack of Efficient Infrastructure:** Infrastructure i.e. **physical (like roadways, waterways, energy and so on)** as well as **social infrastructure (for instance educational institutions, health facilities)** plays an important role in human development and economic growth of any region
 - One of the reasons for the economic backwardness of the North-Eastern states is the **poor state of basic infrastructural facilities**.
 - The prominent indicators of shortfalls in infrastructure in this region are: **increasingly congested roads, power failures, shortage of drinking water** etc.
- **Slow pace of industrial growth:** North-East India has remained historically underdeveloped in terms of [industrial growth](#).
 - **Post Independence**, due to the partition of India, the industrial sector in the Northeast received a serious setback as its **trade routes were cut-off with the rest of the country**.
 - This in turn hindered economic integration with other parts of India and also **reduced the attractiveness of the region as a destination of investment**.
- **Territorial Conflicts:** There are existing **inter-state and international territorial conflicts** within the Northeast that are often based on **historical border disputes** and differing ethnic, tribal or cultural affinities. Example: [Assam-Mizoram Border Dispute](#).
 - **With its proactive plans to increase its influence in the region, China remains a major source of concern**. The vulnerability of the **Siliguri Corridor** is a case in point.
- **Insurgency and Political Issues:** Insurgency or terrorism is a political weapon and is often the result of accumulated anger due to political, economic and social causes.
 - The **North-Eastern states have witnessed a rise of insurgent activities** and regional movements with a **feeling of exploitation and alienation from other Indian states**.
 - Some of the insurgent groups are [United Liberation Front of Assam \(ULFA\)](#), People's Liberation Army, National Socialist Council of Nagaland, **All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)**.

What are the Recent Government Initiatives for the Development of the North-East?

- **Infrastructure:**
 - [Bharatmala Pariyojana](#)
 - [Regional Connectivity Scheme \(RCS\)-UDAN](#)
- **Connectivity:**
 - [Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project](#)
 - India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway
- **Tourism:**
 - [Swadesh Darshan Scheme](#)
- **Other:**
 - [Digital North East Vision 2022](#)
 - [National Bamboo Mission](#)

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Act-East from Northeast:** Comprehensive implementation of **Act East policy** is relevant to the entire country but **particularly important for the long term growth of the North East**.
 - The agenda for its implementation must be prepared in **active association with the State Governments of North Eastern States**.
- **Potential Powerhouse of India:** Its **geo-strategic location** and natural resources also makes it a **potential powerhouse of India** for development and progress.
 - A comprehensive framework needs to be developed to make the region a **preferred investment location**.
 - To improve the limited entrepreneurial base, a **major capacity building exercise for local entrepreneurs should be taken up**.
- **Development of Tourism:** A key aspect of the development of the North East is tourism, which has the **potential to channel the region into mainstream development**.
 - Some of the famous tourism sites are: [Kaziranga National Park](#) famous for the **one horned rhinoceros**, **Dibru Saikhowa in Assam, Namdapha in Arunachal Pradesh**.
- **Enhancing Connectivity: Connectivity drives commerce**, air links to the Northeastern states should be a priority. The development of road and railway projects should be in accordance with **disaster-resilient measures**.
 - **Japan** has emerged as a major partner in our efforts for the development of the North-East and **connectivity to ASEAN(Association of Southeast Asian Nations)**.
- **Political and Social Awareness:** It is necessary to **foster inclusivity** and drive awareness campaigns to **change the perceptions from being a neglected, misgoverned, tribal region into a veritable soft power**.
- **Development of Physical and Social Infrastructure:** To **support road and bridge construction activities**, a separate unit should be established for **physical infrastructure viability research**.
 - Due to **lack of higher educational infrastructure in the North East**, a very large number of students **migrate** to other parts of the country for education leading to a drain of both manpower and financial resources
 - This re-emphasises the **need for setting up centres of excellence** for professional and higher education in the North East.
 - Furthermore, there is a need to **extend digital connectivity** and move towards **digital inclusion in the North East**.
- **Land Record Management:** The system of maintenance of formal land records in the North East is weak and **practically absent in tribal areas**.
 - This **prevents landholders from securing loans** and also leads to a number of **land-related disputes**.
 - It is **necessary to evolve a credible system of maintenance of land records**.
- **Northeast- Growing Sports Powerhouse:** North East is emerging as a **sports and sporting powerhouse of India** that drives some of the best sportspersons who go onto becoming icons.

- When **Mary Kom (Manipur)** won bronze medal at the **2012 Olympics** in London and **inspired countless girls to take to combat sports**, and this year it was **Mirabai Chanu (Manipur)** bagged silver **Tokyo Olympics 2020**.

Drishti Mains Question

“The simmering North East India has awaited a healing touch since Independence”. Explain.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Which Schedule of the Constitution of India contains special provisions for the administration and control of Scheduled Areas in several States? (2008)

- (a)** Third
- (b)** Fifth
- (c)** Seventh
- (d)** Ninth

Ans: (b)