



The Big Picture - Infrastructure and North-East

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The central Government has given a big push to a diverse range of infrastructure projects in the North Eastern Region. The emphasis has been on improving rail, road, air and inland waterways connectivity in the region. In addition to this, schemes such as the National Bamboo mission, Digital North East Vision 2022 and North East Industrial Development Scheme have also been launched for the overall development of the North Eastern states.

Infrastructural Development in North East

- **The North-Eastern Council (NEC) is a nodal agency for economic and social development of the north-east.** Its key members include governors and chief ministers of these eight states.

- **Enhanced connectivity in the Northeast will lead to two benefits.**
 - Along with connectivity, the level of economic activity is bound to increase. Previously, even fiscal concession given to the states failed to attract significant industrial investments. The reason was high logistical costs of moving merchandise to high consumption regions. In this context, better connectivity provides a booster shot to economic activity, including tourism.
 - The other important benefit is from a strategic standpoint. The region borders China and considering the history of confrontations with China, it is essential that military personnel can be moved swiftly in the region.
 - For Example, Bogibeel Bridge will vastly improve access to Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Air Connectivity**
 - The NEC is funding upgradation of infrastructure in 12 operational airports.
 - The Pakyong Airport in Sikkim is the first greenfield airport in Northeast India. It is situated around 30 kilometers from Gangtok.
- **Road Connectivity**
 - The NEC is focusing on building roads spanning 10,500 kilometers, which will include inter-state and roads of economic importance.
 - Despite being the largest state in the country, Arunachal Pradesh has the least road density. The Union Ministry of Road and Transport is planning to expedite the Trans-Arunachal Highway project.
 - An express highway project along the Brahmaputra River, spanning 1,300 km, will come up and that is expected to resolve connectivity issues in Assam.
- **Railway Connectivity**
 - There are plans to provide a railway link for the NE states through 20 major railway projects, encompassing 13 new lines, two gauge conversions and five doublings with a length of nearly 2,624 kilometers.
 - Construction of a broad gauge railway line connecting Bairabi and Sairang is in progress that will connect capital cities of the north-eastern states by 2020.
- **Digital connectivity**
 - Telecom Commission has approved a comprehensive strategy to implement BharatNet in North East Region (NER).
 - Under this strategy, 4240 Gram Panchayats (GPs) in the North-East are to be connected by broadband and by satellite connectivity.
 - The telecom ministry has announced a multitude of goals with respect to North East—
 - The plan for 100 percent teledensity by 2020.
 - Expansion of mobile connectivity by 2019.
 - Last mile connectivity through BharatNet in all the Gram Panchayats including Satellite Connectivity in the difficult and inaccessible GPs.

- Network for Spectrum (NFS) project for providing Optical fiber connectivity for the defense forces in the border areas and Wi-Fi project to provide internet connectivity to the general rural public.

Bogibeel Bridge

- The combined road and rail bridge, which spans the River Brahmaputra between Dibrugarh and Dhemaji districts of Assam, is of immense economic and strategic significance for the nation.
- **This is also Asia's 2nd longest railroad bridge that has a serviceable period of around 120 years.**
- This is the 4th longest bridge in India after Bhupen Hazarika Setu (Assam), Mahatma Gandhi Setu (Bihar) and Bandra-Worli Sea Link (Mumbai, Maharashtra).
- It took 16 years to complete the project as heavy rainfall in the region became the main cause for the slow progress.
- **As the Bogibeel bridge being situated in an earthquake-prone area, it is built to withstand earthquakes of magnitudes up to 7 in Richter Scale.**

Significance

- **The bridge will reduce the distance** from Dibrugarh to Rangiya and a train journey from Itanagar, capital of Arunachal Pradesh, to Dibrugarh (Assam) will be 180km.
- People from Dhemaji, Jonai and North Lakhimpur who had to travel the whole day to cross the Brahmaputra to reach Dibrugarh, will now cross the river within hours.
- **The Bogibeel Bridge is the insignia of the governments Act East Policy.** The 3Cs of the Act East Policy, that is Commerce, Connect and Communicate are catered to by such infrastructure.
- Investing in infrastructure would also generate employment and would play a major role in thwarting secessionist movements in the North East region.

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National Bamboo Mission

- The Mission envisages promoting holistic growth of the bamboo sector by adopting the area-based, regionally differentiated strategy. It aims to increase the area under bamboo cultivation and marketing.
- Under the Mission, steps have been taken to increase the availability of quality planting material by supporting the setting up of new nurseries and strengthening of existing ones.
- To address forward integration, the Mission has taken steps to strengthen the marketing of bamboo products, especially those of handicraft items.

North-East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS)

In order to promote employment in the North East States, Government is incentivizing primarily the MSME Sector through this scheme.

Tourism

- International Tourism Mart (ITM) is organized annually with the objective of showcasing the largely untapped tourism potential of the North East region in the domestic and international markets.
- 10% of the plan allocation of the Ministry of Tourism is marked for the North East region.
- There are plans to hold an NER Tourism Mart where tour operators from all over the country can meet and the regional tourism can be showcased.