



## 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

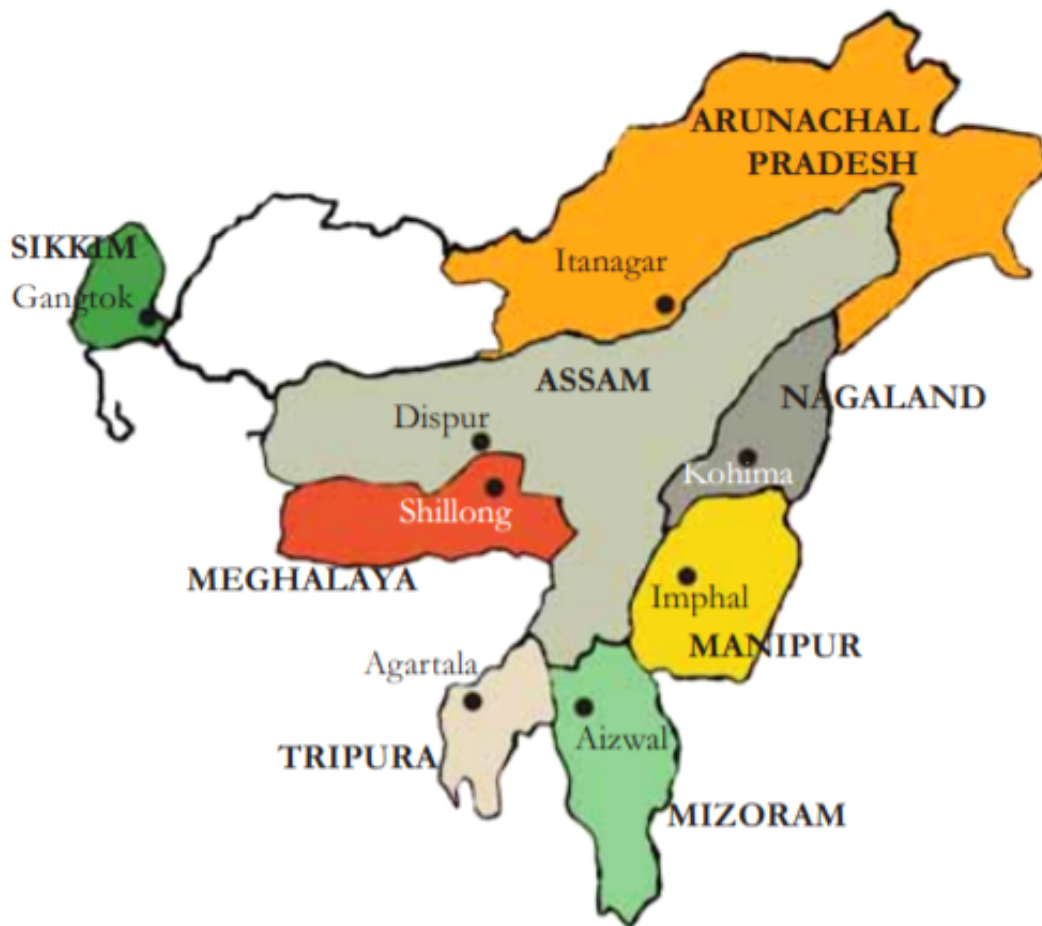
**North-East India**, fondly called the **land of seven sisters**, represents both a geographic and political administrative division of the country. Northeastern Indian States are blessed with a wide range of **physiographic and ecoclimatic conditions** and the **geographical ‘gateway’** for much of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

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## 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)**

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