



## Northeast India From Frontier to Frontrunner

**For Prelims:** [Northeast region](#), [Living root bridges](#), [Kaziranga National Park](#), [Inner Line Permit](#), [PM-DevINE](#), [Siliguri Corridor](#)

**For Mains:** Act East Policy and Role of Northeast India, Border Management and National Security in Northeast

[Source:TH](#)

### Why in News?

The Prime Minister at the “**Rising Northeast: The Investor Summit**” declared that the [Northeast Region \(NER\) of India](#) is no longer a “frontier” but a “frontrunner” in India’s growth journey. Highlighting its strategic importance and economic potential, he emphasized the region’s evolving role as a gateway for trade with [Southeast Asia](#).

**Note:** The **Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)** is organizing the **Rising Northeast Summit to unlock the investment and trade potential of the NER of India**.

- The initiative aims to project NER as a dynamic economic corridor with strategic connectivity to ASEAN and BBN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal) countries.
- Rising North East Investors Summit 2025 drew an **unprecedented Rs 4.3 lakh crore in investment interest**, setting the stage for the NER to become India’s next economic powerhouse.

### How is the Northeast Emerging as a ‘Frontrunner’ for India’s Growth?

- **Bio-economy and Natural Resources:** The NER, referred to as ‘**Ashta Lakshmis**’, highlights the region’s vast potential in renewable energy, agro-based industries, eco-tourism, and strategic manufacturing.
  - The region’s biodiversity is being leveraged for **green growth**. Assam is a major hub for [tea production](#), while Arunachal Pradesh leads in **bamboo-based industries**.
  - The region holds **40% of India’s hydropower potential (~62,000 MW)**, yet only 6.9% is harnessed. Solar potential is estimated at **57,360 MW with only 17% installed capacity**.
- **Tourism and Human Capital Strengths:** The Northeast’s natural beauty and vibrant culture make it a perfect destination for eco-friendly and sustainable tourism.
  - Key attractions include [Meghalaya’s living root bridges](#), [Sikkim’s eco-tourism](#), [Kaziranga National Park](#), and [Kamakhya Temple](#) in Assam, and [Manipur’s Loktak](#)

**Lake.** These sites boost local livelihoods and promote eco-friendly travel.

- Additionally, high literacy rates among NER (~80%) and a high proportion of English-speaking populations contribute to the region's workforce readiness.
- States like Manipur and Mizoram are national leaders in sports like football, boxing, and weightlifting.

- **Gateway to Southeast Asia:** The Northeast is central to [India's Act East Policy](#), serving as a bridge to ASEAN and Indo-Pacific markets.
  - Projects like the [India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway](#) and the **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project** are enhancing regional connectivity.
  - Development of ports like **Sittwe in Myanmar** and **Chittagong in Bangladesh** will connect Northeast India to key Indian Ocean shipping routes, boosting India-ASEAN trade from **USD 125 billion to USD 200 billion over the next decade**.
- **Critical to National Security:** NER shares 5,484 km of borders with five countries (**Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet/China**) plays a frontline role in national security.
  - The [Siliguri Corridor \(Chicken's Neck\)](#) is a vital **strategic and economic lifeline**, connecting Northeast India to the rest of the country and serving as a key transit hub for trade with Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Nepal.
- **Infrastructure Push:** The central government has significantly increased funding with 10% of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways' budget allocated to the Northeast.
  - The [North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme \(NESIDS\)](#), launched in 2018, has a USD 1 billion allocation for roads, water, and power.
  - Projects like the [Sela Tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh](#) are improving all-weather connectivity to remote areas. New initiatives like the upcoming [Semiconductor Plant in Assam](#) mark a shift toward high-tech industrial investment.



# What are the Challenges in Making Northeast India a Frontrunner?

- **Historical Insurgency and Security Issues:** Decades of insurgent movements (Naga, Mizo, ULFA, NDFB) created instability, affecting investment and development.
  - **Cross-border infiltration from Bangladesh and Myanmar** has posed persistent security challenges.
  - The [2023 ethnic violence in Manipur](#) between Meiteis and Kukis highlights deep-rooted tensions and fragile inter-community relations and **identity politics prevent** a unified development approach.
  - Fear of “outsiders” and demands for perpetuation of [Inner Line Permits \(ILP\)](#) create resistance to migration, investment, and entrepreneurship.
- **Agricultural Distress and Employment Gaps:** Although agriculture is the mainstay, the region faces serious issues like low productivity and lack of modern techniques.
  - **Middlemen dominance is prevalent in NER**, which traps farmers in debt and low income. Even cooperatives struggle to compete against these intermediaries.
  - Despite high literacy and English proficiency, a lack of industry-ready skills affects employability.
- **Low Tourist Footfall:** The region’s huge tourism potential is underutilized due to limited connectivity, safety concerns, and weak marketing.
- **Dependency on Central Funds:** Many NER states heavily rely on Union government support, indicating low fiscal self-reliance.
- **Limited Industrial Base:** Industrial development is uneven, and **high logistics costs discourage** large-scale investments.
- **Geographical Constraints and Environmental Vulnerability:** Difficult terrain, frequent floods, and landslides hamper infrastructure development and connectivity.
  - The Northeast faces **frequent floods, landslides, and erratic rainfall** that harm infrastructure and livelihoods.
  - The **2022 Assam floods**, which displaced millions, highlight the region’s ecological vulnerability, while climate change threatens agriculture and water security.
- **Drug Trafficking:** Proximity to the **Golden Triangle** makes the NER vulnerable to narcotics trafficking, especially in Manipur and Mizoram.
  - Rise in drug addiction among youth, overburdening healthcare systems and worsening the social fabric.

## What are Initiatives Related to Development of the Northeast Region?

- [PM’s Development Initiative for North East Region \(PM-DevINE\)](#)
- [North East Industrial Development Scheme \(NEIDS\)](#)
- [Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region \(MOVCDNER\)](#)
- [Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialization Scheme \(UNNATI\)](#)
- [National Bamboo Mission](#)
- [Bharatmala Pariyojana](#)

## How can the NER be made the Frontrunner for India’s Growth??

- **Promoting Tourism and Cultural Economy:** Develop eco-tourism, spiritual tourism, and ethnic village circuits under [Swadesh Darshan 2.0](#) and [Dekho Apna Desh initiatives](#).
  - Encourage homestay models and cultural entrepreneurship through training and **micro-credit via Startup India and MUDRA loans**.
  - Organize more international cultural festivals (like **Hornbill and Pang Lhabsol**) to position the region as a soft power hub.
- **Human Capital Development:** Set up multidisciplinary universities and skill centers in partnership with institutions like IIT-Guwahati. Tailor skilling to regional strengths (e.g., handicrafts, agri-tech, hospitality, disaster response).
- **Promoting Organic Agriculture:** Provide better market access via **NE-RACE**, reducing the

### **middleman burden**

- Provide price incentives for organic produce, along with branding and marketing support under the **MOVCDNER**.

- **Deepening Industrialization:** Revamp NEIDS with real-time monitoring, faster approvals, and targeted sectoral clusters (e.g., organic food, handicrafts, pharma, and agro-processing).
  - Establish **Border Economic Zones (BEZs)** in Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram similar to **Special Economic Zones (SEZs)** with plug-and-play infrastructure to boost industrial growth and cross-border trade.
- **Strengthening Infrastructure:** Expedite the rollout of **BharatNet through 5G corridors**, digital literacy programs, and tech hubs in every state capital.
  - Expand the **UDAN Scheme** with better last-mile air links, especially for tourist circuits and border trade zones.
- **Addressing Insurgency and Ethnic Conflicts:** Promote ethnic reconciliation via inclusive local governance, youth inter-community programs, job creation and ensuring political representation.
  - The **Lokur Committee (1965)** recommended **safeguarding tribal land rights, improving education**, healthcare, employment for ST communities, and enhancing welfare schemes to tackle socio-economic challenges.

### **Drishti Mains Question:**

Discuss the strategic significance of Northeast India in the context of India's Act East Policy and evolving geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific.

## **UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)**

**Q.** Cross-border movement of insurgents is only one of the several security challenges facing the policing of the border in North-East India. Examine the various challenges currently emanating across the India-Myanmar border. Also, discuss the steps to counter the challenges. **(2019)**

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