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Challenges to Infrastructure Development in North East Region

1. Roads are the underlying foundations for the entire economic development of the North East. The region, for geographic and sometimes strategic reasons has very thin railway network and air service cannot be the means to take care of the humungous transport needs of even one state, forget eight states. Thus how the road network shapes up is more than an integral part of the story of the development of the region, it is also a very key index.
2. The North East states conceal some interesting paradoxes. Some of them have excellent demographic characteristics like a high literacy rate and consequent access to education. Yet at the same time they all suffer from high infant mortality as hospital care for the mother and child are few and far between. The region has splendid swathes of forests harbouring massive varieties of fauna and flora. Yet development of the states could mean cutting into those regions, as there are few alternatives to not do so.
3. The other issues are of course maintaining of the tribal way of life, key to understanding the diversity of the region. The development imperatives often bring up challenges of how to protect the tribal culture, while at the same time help use modern science and education for the benefit of the region.
4. A very important step to instill an integrated understanding of these imperatives that are common for the region has been the government of India's establishing of a ministry for the development of the north east region. The ministry's mandate is unique in that it does not focus on a state or a scheme but addresses the full gamut of the needs of the region.
5. As India moves on to a high growth trajectory, the way the north east region shapes up will impact a large percentage of that growth rate.
6. The process of development had been rather slow in the North Eastern region for many reasons. The traditional system of self-governance and social customs of livelihood in the NER had remained virtually untouched during the British rule.

Creation of rail network for tea growing areas for commercial interests was, perhaps, the only major economic activity in the region. This was coupled with extraction of Petroleum and some Coal Mining in the Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland belt.

7. Partition of the country in 1947 which carved out Bangladesh, hitherto East Bengal, completely isolated the North Eastern region save a slender chicken's neck leading to severe distortion in the socio-economic situation. In effect, the market and the centers of production got separated by a political dividing line which had severe economic repercussion on the livelihood of people along the entire Bangladesh border. All the produce from Agriculture, Horticulture and Mines had, hitherto ready-made markets in Bangladesh, which got cut-off:
8. The physical infrastructure includes roads, air-ports, highways, power projects, water supply, urban infrastructure, all of which together hold the key for the growth of this region.
9. In the vision NER 2020 Document of the North East Council five basic deficits were identified. These are
 - a. Basic needs deficit
 - b. Infrastructure deficit
 - c. Resource Deficit
 - d. Deficit of understanding with the rest of the country and
 - e. Governance deficit
10. There is a basic governance issue which is plagued by sixth schedule institutions super-imposed on a democratic Government, the illegal migrants problem and egalitarian set up which abhors any authority.
11. What are the major challenges to the growth in the North East Regions? Certainly the poor connectivity with the rest of the country is a challenge. The cost of delivery of services is high due to difficult terrain, dispersed and small habitations; Low financial viability of the projects and inadequate project implementation capability. Bilateral arrangements are not in place for optimum rail and road connectivity via Bangladesh. Above all, there are security concerns with our international neighbors because of which telecom and other infrastructure is not extending fully up to the International border.
12. There is scope for critical intervention with accelerated development of connectivity in the Road, Rail, Air and Inland Water Transport sectors. Connectivity via Bangladesh, if agreed to, would be a great leap forward provided investment would also come from the private sector into infrastructure development.
13. There is tremendous opportunity of more than 60,000 MW Hydro potential which remains largely untapped. However, the environmental problems will have to be addressed. Potential of mineral wealth, especially coal, lime stone and uranium reserves in Meghalaya is yet to be scientifically exploited. Floriculture, horticulture, organic crops

with certification and improvement in paddy productivity are areas which have a multiplier effect. However, the supporting infrastructure is required.

14. There is a plan to provide railway connectivity to all the State capitals.
15. As regards air connectivity, a few new Greenfield airports have been proposed.
16. It must be understood that the working season in the North East is only about 5 months and the heavy monsoon and inclement weather leave a toll on the condition of roads. Unfortunately, the maintenance of roads is a matter which requires far greater attention. It is felt that setting up of a Maintenance Fund for the roads is required.
17. Inland Water between Dhubri and Pandu-Dibrugarh can provide cargo movement of coal gypsum, tea etc. At a reduced cost. Other routes including development of the Barak River Transport System needs to be further developed.
18. The Kaladan River Project envisages a sea route from Kolkata to Sittwe (Myanmar) through Bay of Bengal and traversing 255 Kms upstream on river Kaladan in Myanmar connecting Mizoram. 62 Kms of highway road is to be built in Myanmar connecting the India border at Mizoram and finally merging with the National Highway-54. If this route is to be built, it will cut the cost of infrastructure tremendously in the North East.
19. To conclude, with the help of technology the perceived remoteness of North East States needs to be overcome. Further greater efforts at trade and communication through Bangladesh and Myanmar will help restore the economic prosperity of the North East region. Given the geographical parameters of the North East, a logical direction for economic growth must come from the Look East Policy of the Government of India. It is ultimately the people of the North East who hold the key to progress and development of the region. Tourism in North Eastern Region

Cultural Diplomacy to Boost Tourism

1. Tourism is a sector that has potential for fast growth. It pushes growth of infrastructure, stimulates cultural activity and leads to improved understanding and better relations between the tourists and the hosts. If managed properly, domestic and international tourism can be among the foremost vehicles for growth and development. Tourism has also become an instrument for sustainable human development. Tourism in India:
2. There has been remarkable growth in the recent years in foreign/domestic tourist arrivals to India due to the various efforts made, including promoting India through the Incredible India campaign in overseas markets. It is ranked the 14th best tourist destination for its natural resources and 24th for its cultural resources.

Scale of Tourism in North Eastern Region

1. The Ministry of Tourism calls the North Eastern Region a 'paradise unexplored' The north-eastern region has incredible tourism potential. The rich natural beauty, exotic flora and fauna, diversity in ethnicity, culture, language, food habits, dresses etc. serve as invaluable assets for the development of tourism in the region.

2. Despite of the current hype about India's Look East Policy and current high growth trajectory and also despite of the Incredible India campaign there has not been remarkable growth in foreign/domestic tourist arrivals to the NER.
3. The main reason why tourists, both domestic and foreign, are not attracted to the North-East is that the region is particularly backward in physical, social and cultural infrastructure. The budget provision for tourism is also quite inadequate considering the present low level of development.
4. Moreover, although it is high time for us to prepare ourselves to derive the benefits that are likely to emerge from India's Look East Policy which is an important strategic shift in India's vision of the world and its engagement with Southeast Asian neighbours, not much has been done to employ cultural diplomacy as a tool for engagement. Northeast India holds an advantageous position in India's Look East Policy (LEP) since the region provides a key historical and cultural relation with Southeast Asia. The case of the Tai ethnic groups of the region brings to light a historically shared but currently disjointed cultural identity, which link India's Northeast with Southeast Asia. The Tai ethnic groups live in a vast area extending from the south of China, and north of Vietnam to Laos, Thailand, Myanmar and India's Northeast states of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. This is absolutely indicative of the potential for boosting economic ties and cultural tourism with Southeast Asia.
5. We may therefore conclude that the main problem facing the tourism industry in the North East is the lack of adequate and reliable tourism infrastructure. Infrastructure development is a fundamental prerequisite for the meaningful involvement of the North Eastern Region in India's Look East Policy and globalisation process. All these will require huge investment; and, therefore it is imperative that adequate fund flow for public investment is assured. We need to formulate a comprehensive strategy for the speedy development of the region and deepen the engagement with the ASEAN countries through cultural diplomacy. Tourism development and infrastructure projects should be taken up on war footing without disturbing the social and cultural identities to the various ethnic groups of the region and also taking into account the natural and cultural landscapes, bio-diversity characteristics and the broader visual context of custom and heritage.

Focus should be given to using local resources and architectural styles and traditions.

Courtesy: Yojana