



India's Northeast Security transformation since 2014: A Geo-strategical Overview

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Abstract: After a long period of 200 years of colonialism, maintaining 'National security' has been a most vexing question for Third World countries. Economically, politically, and socially, these regions were quite backward, even the distance from outside countries was another factor in their development. One such third-world country is India which is landlocked to the north and surrounded by sea to the south. As a result, India is located in such a position that the easiest communication route of the countries of the Southwest with Southeast Asia is through India. We know that India is one of the most populous countries in the world which is the cause of its problem sometimes. The diversity among people and the position of different classes of people creates a kind of treasonous and anti-national possibility. And after World War II and the partition of 1971, India is very active and concerned about its 'National security'. Certain regions within India such as Jammu and Kashmir and Northeast India are associated with a lot of anti-national activities which have become a headache for the Indian government. Many steps have been taken for this, as maintaining National Security is one of its biggest goals of India, thus India has the world's third highest Military. Many governments such as P. V. Narasimha Rao Government (1991-1996), the Manmohan Singh government (2004-2014), Narendra Modi Government (2014-present), etc. have taken various actions and initiatives on 'National security'. Thus, I tried to highlight the problems that India is facing as a whole. The Northeast region is a region that has adversely affected India's internal security. I have tried to highlight some of the security issues of Northeast India in the following region and what changes have come since 2014. It is divided into five stages. In the first stage, some of the historical importance of Northeast India. In the second phase, the internal security issues that Northeast India faces or currently facing. In the third phase, the effect of the 'Look East Policy' and 'Act East Policy' in Northeast India. In the fourth stage, the impact of the Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent on the internal security of Northeast India, and in the last stage, I have tried to highlight the initiatives, and policies adopted by the Government of India as a result.

Keywords: Internal Security, Looks East Policy, Act East Policy, Insurgency, northeast India.

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the most populous countries in the world. Of which 15000 km is associated with border land area and 7000 km area is coastline area. The beautiful region of hills and nature were merged, known as Northeast India or Seven Sisters for their interdependence on each other. The Northeast region of India is located in a very important geopolitical area, which shares borders with the Southeast region (SER) of the world. Most of the Northeast shares a border with SAARC countries like China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Nepal. Among these, India shares hot and cold relations, though there is a cultural cross-border diversity between these countries. And the biggest problem that the demand for self-autonomy in these Northeast Indian states from mainland India, and their insurgency movement against various Indian laws and legal actions that have been going on for the last six decades. This northeastern region has a deep and interesting historical background by which the relationship of inter-states with India will be cleared in a way. The location of Northeast India and the location of India are in a place where regions like Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan are supplying opium to India, and on the other hand, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Laos, and Vietnam are smuggling arms, smuggling various narcotics, which are for India's internal security, not a good side. Not even Northeast India it is about states like Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir too. Also, the previous government followed many initiatives but the proper implementation was not there. In that respect, the Modi government does make New Delhi closer according to many current scholars throughout India and the world with various Policies and engagements.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Here, I mainly used secondary research to write the paper. After reading various books, articles, journals, news articles, etc. I have tried to give an overview.

NORTHEAST INDIA: A GEO-HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

A region as beautiful as the Northeast has a deep history. The Northeast is a region connected to India through a narrow corridor called the 'Chicken's Neck'. The northeastern region of India covers an area of about 2,62,379 km. Which is divided into two regions, one in the eastern Himalayas and the other in Northeast India (Shukla, 2012). The region lies between 22°N and 29°5'N latitude and 88°E and 97°30'E longitude. Which shares borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, and China.

Northeast India is very different in terms of culture, food, clothing, language, etc. But there are many reasons behind this variation. If you study the history of Northeast India, it can be seen that during the period of 500 BC, various Indo-Aryans came to live in this region. Also, before this and Tibet-Burmese came to live in this region. Needless to say, the Ahom and Manipuri Kingdoms ruled the region in the 19th century. The country division had a considerable influence on the region in the North East as well. Partition brought diversity to the geographical picture of India. Whereas Northeast India has become a region with which East and Southeast Asia share the Asian border and various bilateral relations have developed around that border. Be it border disputes or economic relations. Due to the impact of partition, it became difficult for India to maintain economic and friendly relations with East and Southeast Asian countries.

Assam was a part of Bengal province before 1874 during British rule (Figure:1). However, in 1921, Assam was separated from Bengal (Pawar, 2016). In the post-colonial period, after 1947, the state of Assam, part of Northeast India, became a constitutional state (Figure:2). In the 19th century, Northeast India became a region of Bengal province. After a long period of British rule, Assam statehood was established in 1947. From which the remaining six states were not separate, it was included. later Nagaland in 1963, Tripura and Manipur in 1972, Arunachal Pradesh in 1973, Mizoram in 1987, and Sikkim in 2002 were integrated with Northeast India. Thus 8 states were formed by establishing their own different culture, tribes, languages, etc. As a frontier region, Northeast India geo-strategically occupies a position that shares a vibrant economic zone with South and South-East Asia.

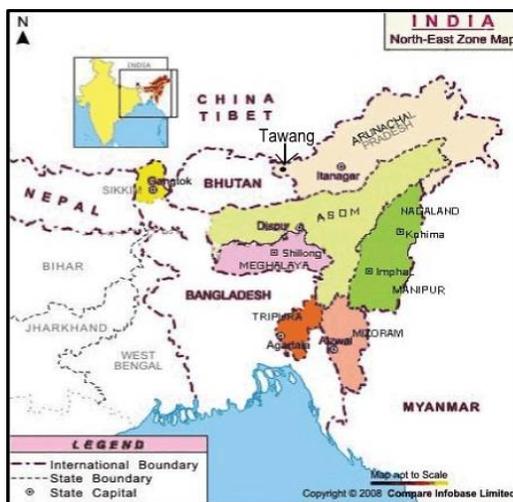
In 1971 Northeast became known as a region. However, since independence, the relationship of Northeast India with mainland India was not very good due to various reasons, for which Nagaland celebrated its independence on 16th August instead of 15th August 1947. Also coming to the post-colonial society, AFSPA was issued in the Northeast region because they fight for their autonomous statehood for which various insurgency movements were also done which was not very favorable for India and for maintaining India's relations with the Northeast and East Asian regions. Even today AFSPA has been issued for security in various parts of North East India, the negative role of which is always on the people of this region, which we can see through various news channels, news reports, etc. However, efforts are being made to establish peace, but the communication gap remains today among the people of mainland India, for which many people of the Northeast do not consider themselves Indians. If the present-day picture is seen, it is observed that no matter what relations Northeast India shares with mainland India, economically, politically, and sociologically Northeast India has developed a lot.

F:1: Northeastern India Before Independence



Source: <https://conceptresearchfoundation.com/2017/04/21/lack-of-development-in-the-north-eastern-part-of-india-%E2%80%95-a-historical-legacy/>

F:2: Northeast India Since Independence

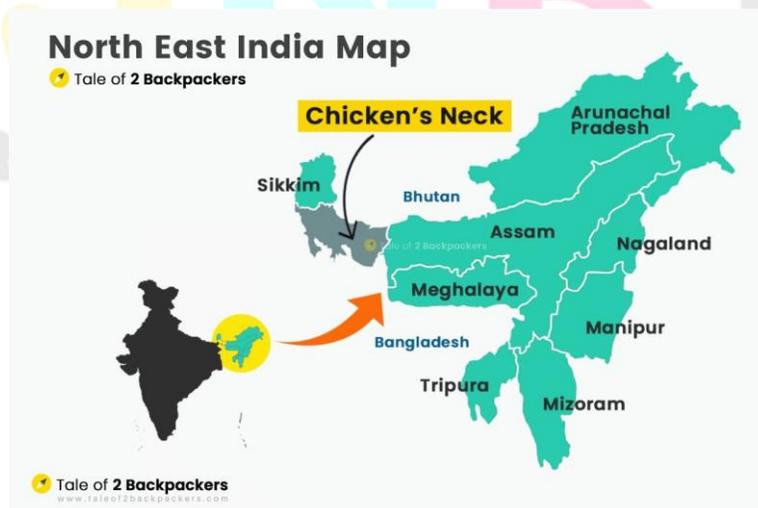


Source: <https://bhavanajagat.com/2016/02/03/tibets-independence-is-indias-security/north-east-india/>

NORTHEAST INDIA: INTERNAL SECURITY CHALLENGES

The aspects that are needed for the development of a country are its geography, population, economy, resources, military, diplomacy, and national identity, to establish itself as a global influence. But it was not very easy for India to establish itself as an emerging power outside of the long 200-year colonial period. Among them, India's lack of infrastructure development and economy were some of the main problems. Also, after independence, the problem that India had to face the most was the border dispute problem of India. One of the most important regions was Northeast India. There were also border disputes between India in Western and Northern areas. Senior Lecturer at the Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya, Malaysia, Dr. Rahul Mishra wrote in a recent article, 'During the Cold War, especially in 1962, the main reason for the India-China War was around these borders. As a result, China tried in various ways to separate this northeastern area from India in particular, and for that, they supported separatism or separatist situation in various ways. Also, we read the Geo-Historical Overview of Northeast India and saw the geographical position of Northeast India where it has only 1% connection with the mainland which is severed during monsoons through the Chicken's Neck (Figure:3), and that connection is severed from the mainland India. As a result of which there is some pressure on the center to maintain communication and administrative development, also we cannot hide the various lapses on the part of the government, and the remaining 99% border Northeast India shares with countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and China. Many times different insurgency movements from Myanmar have been carried out in this region. As a result, from border issues to development, the establishment of political relations becomes very complicated. Although Japan has come to Northeast India at present, the India-Japan relationship has caused the infrastructural development of Northeast India in many ways.

F:3: Northeast India's Chicken's Neck



Source: <https://www.taleof2backpackers.com/northeast-india-travel-guide/northeast-india-travel-map/>

Now I will highlight India's internal security issues starting from these border issues by explaining the following sections.

i. **Border Dispute:**

Northeast India shares most of its borders with countries like Myanmar, China, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan, so they have to go through many border problems. India-Myanmar border relations are most dangerous and harmful to India's internal security. India shares a 1,624-kilometer border with Myanmar. According to world organizations like United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP), and International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), Northeast India and Myanmar sharing borders could become harmful to mainland India. As we know how many types of insurgency problems have arisen in Northeast India for the last six decades. Which has become an advantage for countries like Myanmar, China, and Bangladesh to oppose India. It is said that to support these insurgencies in the Northeastern region of Myanmar, small guns, sophisticated small arms, and explosives are smuggled through Bangladesh through the Garo Hills of Meghalaya or the Moreh border of India-Myanmar (Figure:4). Also, drugs and various narcotics such as opium are heavily trafficked from the Southeastern region even to mainland India by this border. Which is also known as Indo Myanmar Friendship Gate. Also, Indian intelligence agencies have confirmed that Bangladesh Intelligence and ISL are still making indiscriminate efforts to arm insurgent groups in the North-East region, and for that, they are maintaining their adopted policies (Pawar 2016).

F:4: India- Myanmar Moreh (India) - Tamu (Myanmar) Border

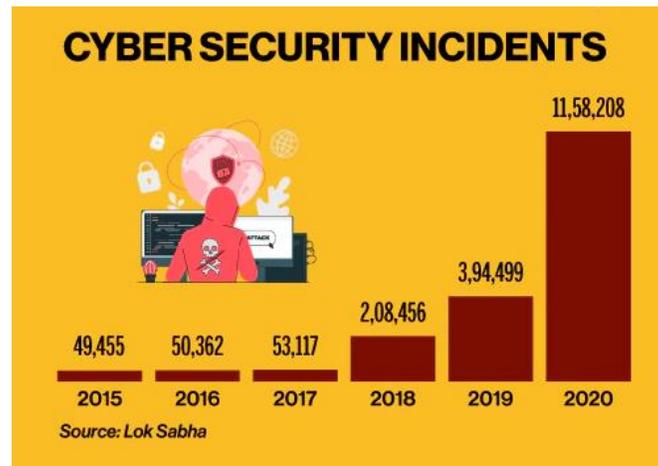


Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India%E2%80%93Myanmar%E2%80%93Thailand_Trilateral_Highway

i. **Cyber Security:**

Between 2012 and 2017, India ranked third in the world among internet users, with the USA being the first and China the second. India is one of the largest and fastest-growing markets in terms of internet usage, with 560 million internet subscribers in 2018, second only to China. Based on current trends, it is estimated that the number of internet users in India will grow from around 750 million to 800 million, and the number of smartphone users will reach between 650 million and 700 million by 2023. Given such rapid developments, adopting “robust cybersecurity policies are crucial to secure India's future progress and growth” (Samuel and Sharma 2016). All this is said only because India is an emerging economy and there is nothing wrong with this emerging attitude of India and moving with the times. However, India's emerging use of the Internet has led to problems for India's internal security. What we call cyber security problems and Cyber-attacks.

According to the NCRB report, in 2006 the number of cyber-related crimes was 142, in 2014 it increased to 9622. Which indicates India's internal security problem. Data theft has created many problems in India's internal security, such as the recent 2018 attack on Cosmos Pvt ltd bank in Pune, which shook the entire Indian banking sector when hackers stole Rs 94.24 crore from Cosmos Cooperative Bank. 2018 also began with a data breach of the personal records of 1.1 billion Indian Aadhaar cardholders. UIDAI revealed that around 210 Indian government websites leaked people's Aadhaar details online and the leaked data included Aadhaar, PAN and mobile number, bank account number, IFSC code, and every personal information of most individual card holders. WhatsApp is currently a medium where there is no government interference. Used for various anti-nationalist purposes, Pakistan interacts with countries such as Myanmar for activities ranging from military operations to terrorism over northern India and Northeast India mainly. The Digital India Book 2025 scheme adopted by the government for which the establishment of a 5G mobile network is facilitating the development of the country on the one hand and also increasing cybercrime in the country on the other hand (Figure:5).



Source: <https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/economy-politics/story/beware-cyber-security-attacks-in-india-grew-194-in-2020-291535-2021-03-23>

ii. Human Security in Northeast India:

According to the report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), human security refers to protection from hunger, disease, suppression, and chronic threats (UNDP, 1994). Just as national security aims to protect the country from external problems, human security aims to protect human life from external problems. That is, national security and human security are interrelated. According to the National Bomb Data Center (NBDC) report, India is the third most dangerous country in the world in terms of bomb blasts. India's north-eastern region, particularly Manipur and Assam, and Maoist-dominated areas were the worst affected by the blasts. According to the 2013 National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report, Assam reported the highest crime rate (54.2 percent), followed by Manipur (44.6 percent), and Delhi (34.7 percent). An IED blast in Assam's Cachar district severely damaged a large portion of the Chirpur Bridge on National Highway 37 in 2013. Needless to say, after Iraq and Pakistan, India ranks third in terms of bomb blasts, which has created a barrier to the Human security of Indians.

THE IMPACT OF LOOK EAST AND ACT EAST POLICY IN INDIA

Post-Cold War foreign policy and Look East Policy 1991 was adopted by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to promote good relations and relations with Eastern and South Eastern countries. As a result, the development of India's Northeast India was one of the reasons. The Look East policy was adopted at a time when the entire world was experiencing great turmoil due to the end of the Cold War. With the collapse of the USSR, the United States became the sole superpower, creating a unipolar system. So, India needed to establish good relations with other countries. In that case, the Look East policy played an important role in establishing India's relations with other South East and East countries.

Globalization in the 1990s also helped the economic development of the world (Pattnaik 2013). India wanted to fulfill its national interests by developing relations with its neighboring countries, especially those in the South East (Sikri 2009: 114). In the second phase (Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government in the 2000s), some changes were made to the LEP for the development of the North East region of India as well. The region is highly developed in terms of limestone, oil, and various mineral resources which can be of great help in the economic development of the country. Despite the potential, the region lags behind other regions of India. Being a landlocked region, it is difficult to develop proper relations with mainland India. Also lack of proper infrastructural development. Lack of proper warehousing and transportation etc. (NSDC n.d.). India's NE shares a 1434-km land border with Bangladesh (Dey and Mazumdar 2014). NE mainly exports coal, limestone, ginger, dried fish, rawhide, and synthetic filaments to Bangladesh; and food products, plastic goods, woven and crocheted synthetic fabrics, vests, cloaks, fireclay, bricks, cotton waste, PVC pipes, furniture from Bangladesh, and imports rice, etc. (MDONER 2010-11). Myanmar-Northeast India border trade started roughly in 1995. India exports various products like cotton, cumin, medicines, beans, auto-machines, etc. to Myanmar. So, this is how Southeast Asian countries trade with the Northeast region. Although the Look East policy has achieved many successes over the past few decades. However, various bilateral border issues with China and Myanmar and proper connectivity with the mainland, and lack of governance work have led to the failure of the LEP (Das, Paul, and Mathur 2016).

Finally, came the act east policy adopted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. The North East region acts as a gateway to South East Asia, which is one of the important sectors for New Delhi to grow its relations with the countries of the region. The region is rich

in energy reserves, natural gas, coal, oil, limestone, and other mineral resources, which have the potential to develop into India's powerhouse (Ahmed 2019). The major benefits of the Act East Policy to the region are:

1. Makes the commercial sector much easier.
2. Being rich in natural resources helps in trade with Southeast Asian countries.
3. Promotion of tourism and appropriate government measures for it.
4. It tries to attract investors to invest in the Northeast region. For example, we see the image of Japan-India bilateral relations, etc.

Therefore, we can say 'Act East Policy', the extended form of 'Look East Policy'. And as all these opportunities increase, more of these Northeast regions will be developed and as a result of development, people will get jobs, for which there so many insurgency movements in the Northeast will continue to decrease.

THE IMPACT OF GOLDEN CRESCENT AND GOLDEN TRIANGLE

Drug abuse is a social problem in contemporary times. Like other countries of the world, the amount of drug consumption in India has increased exponentially in the last three decades. And partly responsible for this is India's geography, especially the North-East region of India. It is said that large quantities of opium are smuggled from India's neighboring countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Laos, and Vietnam to the northeastern region of India, especially to Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, etc., and also to Punjab, Jammu, and Kashmir, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, etc. A lot of drugs are trafficked. And the North East also has a large number of tribal people in the region as a result of which they consume raw opium, narcotics, ganja, etc.

The United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP) feels that drug use and consumption of various drugs in India's North East region are slowly increasing and getting out of hand. India is a Golden Crescent located between two of Asia's largest opium-producing and exporting regions, followed by countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The other is the Golden Triangle, which includes countries like Myanmar, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Vietnam, Thailand, from where large quantities of narcotics are exported to India's north and north-west regions and on the other hand to the north-east region, which is a particular problem for India's national security. I have tried to Highlight India's position through a diagram below (Arya and Kumar 2018) (Figure:7).

F:7: India's Position in between Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle



Source: <https://www.jatinverma.org/home/search/%20Golden%20Crescent>

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO REDUCE THE PROBLEMS

The North East Division deals with internal security and maintenance of law and order in the North Eastern states. The Ministry of Home Affairs is taking various steps for the development of various ethnic groups. Infrastructural developments like roads, rail links, power supply, water supply, etc. are being worked on by the Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region in this region. It is also trying to stop various illegal activities in the Northeast region by increasing diplomatic relations with countries like Myanmar and Bangladesh. The following Northeast Division tries to work on these problems.

1. Different groups signed agreements with NER.
2. Regarding problems between Assam and neighboring states.
3. To maintain the security of North-East Regions.
4. Maintaining security with Bangladesh and Myanmar.
5. Peacemaking with various insurgent groups in North East as well etc. (mha.gov.in)

During the tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, North East India has seen various internal security developments in many areas. For example, the governments of Assam and Meghalaya have joined hands with the national government in New Delhi to resolve their 50-year-old border issues this year. In March, the central government withdrew AFSP from around 15 Nagaland districts and set up 15 police stations in Manipur and 23 police stations in Assam. Detailing how the BJP plans to solve the problems of the Northeast region, one of the BJP Leaders said in a conference which is quoted by Times of India, "Amit Shah spoke about how the journey of the BJP has been in the north-east and development post-arrival of the Modi government in 2014...We also discussed how the AFSPA has been removed from the northeast region in about 60 percent of the areas... He also said that by 2024, there will be no more fault lines in the northeast and all the issues will be resolved." Since 2014, Delhi has moved closer to Northeast India by changing the 'Look East Policy to the 'Act East Policy.

Since 2014, Delhi has moved closer to Northeast India by changing the Look East Policy to the Act East Policy. In 2015, the government signed a peace accord with the Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) after 80-point talks. The recent "Karbi-Anglong Peace Accord" has ended the three-decade-old political crisis in Assam's Karbi-Anglong district. Recently, Raju Bista the Member of Parliament from Darjeeling wrote in one of his articles, "The Government of India, under the visionary leadership of PM Modi, continues to work towards ensuring a peaceful North East, where all people, of all ethnicity, language, and culture can live together in peace and harmony, and thrive'.

CONCLUSION

Finally, it can be said that Northeast India is a region with which Mainland India's connectivity through the Chicken's Neck or Siliguri Corridor is very limited and narrow, but India should resolve the ongoing issues with Northeast India and develop a kind of good relationship. A good relationship with mainland India will be good for both Northeast India and mainland India, with the result that the incidence and reduction of such acts of malfeasance through the Northeast border will be reduced. One of the reasons is that Northeast India is rich in natural features apart from minerals. Also, 8% of the people in the country live there. As a result, the business trade in Northeast India can be a lever factor for both Mainland India. Also, China's 3rd Congress vote won by Xi Jinping may cause fear for India's Northeast region especially the Tibet area and Northeast India. Also, China's good relations with Myanmar can only cause fear for India to seize India. Hence from a future perspective, good relations between the two can be good for both and help to maintain India's 'Unity in Diversity.

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