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BUILDING SYNERGIES THE NORTHEAST & INDIA'S NEW GOVERNMENT

WASBIR HUSSAIN, ARUNAV GOSWAMI & RANI PATHAK DAS

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ABOUT THE POLICY BRIEF

The Institute has undertaken an initiative to publish a series of informed policy recommendations in the form of briefs, as a part of its responsibilities to contribute to the potential new agenda for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

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B 7/3 Lower Ground Floor

Safdarjung Enclave

New Delhi 110029

Tel: 91-11-4100 1900, 4165 2556, 4165 2557, 4165
2558, 4165 2559

Fax: (91-11) 41652560

Building Synergies

The Northeast & India's New Government

Wasbir Hussain, Arunav Goswami & Rani Pathak Das

Resource-rich Northeast India has huge hydro-energy potential, oil and gas, coal, limestone, forest wealth, fruits and vegetables, flowers, herbs and aromatic plants, and rich flora and fauna, many of the extremely rare variety. However, even after 67 years of independence, this region is under developed, compared to other parts of the country. With 12 major insurgent groups active in the region, in addition to various other small insurgent groups and factions, the northeastern region is yet to be completely out of the grip of insurgency. Under-development in the region has been fuelling insurgency, with 7,704 insurgency-related incidents reported in the region between 2007 and 2014 (till March 2014), resulting in the death of 1,650 civilians during the same period.¹

Government of India has been providing special financial packages for development of the region, but the intended development is yet to be witnessed. The Union minister of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER), Gen (ret'd) V K Singh, had said in August 2014 that funds worth about Rs 13,000 crore meant for development of the region have remained unused over the years.

Since the security situation in the region has been volatile over the years, effective focus needs to be laid on this front. To tackle and perhaps end the local insurgencies, we suggest an immediate moratorium on peace talks by the government with insurgent groups, except continuing with the ongoing talks. A new security dimension has been created with the extension of the "red corridor" by the Maoists to Northeast India. Developmental and administrative measures need to be taken to tackle the Maoists without waiting for the rebellion to grow.

Another disturbing development is the coming of light of the fact that Islamist terror groups from across the border are making their presence felt in the region. While meting out adequate punishment to those found guilty, it must also be noted that the Muslim community in general in Assam has been practitioners of moderate Islam and have no history of engaging in any serious form of radical Islamist activity.

The North Eastern Region Vision 2020² states that:

- By 2020, per capita income in the Indian economy is expected to be about Rs. 87,459 at the 2006-07 prices.
- To reach this level of income, between 2006-07 and 2019-20, GSDP in the NE region will have to grow at 12.95 per cent per year on an average, or at 11.64 per cent in per capita terms. This is a mammoth task.

¹ Annual Report, 2013-14, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, http://mha.nic.in/sites/upload_files/mha/files/AR%28E%291314.pdf

² North Eastern Region Vision 2020, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government Of India, <http://www.mdoner.gov.in/content/vision-document>

- For this, the growth rate of per capita GSDP should accelerate to 12.35 per cent during the Twelfth Plan (2012-17) and 15.16 per cent during the Thirteenth Plan (2017-22). During the Eleventh Plan (2007-2012), the growth rate of GSDP of the northeastern states was 9.8 per cent.³

There are various development gaps in the Northeast as compared to rest of the country. Some of these are:

- The per capita income at current prices (during 2012-13) of the northeastern states like Assam (Rs. 42,036), Manipur (Rs. 36,290), Meghalaya (Rs. 60,156), Nagaland (Rs. 59,535), Tripura (Rs. 55,004) was less than per capita income of India at Rs. 68,747.⁴ The per capita income of Assam and Manipur was less than even the per capita income of states like Odisha (Rs. 49,489) and Jharkhand (Rs. 43,384).
- The road density of Arunachal Pradesh (178.88 km per 1000 sq. km), Manipur (862.27), Meghalaya (539.61), Mizoram (535.70) and Sikkim (791.43) is less than the national average of 1206.29 km per 1000 sq. km.⁵
- The region generates less than eight per cent of around 66,000 MW of hydroelectric power generation potential.⁶
- The region, according to the Ministry of the Development of the Northeast Region (DONER), has a net unemployment rate of 12 per cent.
- The incidence of poverty in the region is also high. Assam has 37.9 per cent of its population below the poverty line compared to the national rate of 29.8 per cent.⁷ Manipur has 47.1 per cent of its population below poverty line.⁸
- Industrial production is only 2.16 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Northeast, compared to the all-India figure of 27 per cent.⁹

Thus, in order to achieve a balanced and sustainable economic growth, India has to remove these regional imbalances and work towards a developed Northeast.

In this brief, recommendations have been made covering certain sectors whose development in the key for a developed Northeast. Under each topic, a set of recommendations has been provided that can be implemented by the government so as to usher development in the northeastern region.

A. Insurgency & Peace Process

- Government has to declare a moratorium on peace talks and stop encouraging insurgency by talking to each and every insurgent group. The Ministry of Home Affairs has decided not to talk with any splinter factions of insurgent groups but the decision has remained confined to its annual report (2012-13).

³ Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17), Volume –I, <http://www.mdoner.gov.in/node/2226>

⁴ Press Information Bureau, Govt. of India, <http://pib.nic.in/archieve/others/2013/dec/d2013121703.pdf>

⁵ Infrastructure Statistics 2014, Central Statistics Office, Ministry Of Statistics And Programme Implementation, Govt. of India, http://mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/upload/infra_stat_2014/main_infra_stat_2014.htm

⁶ North Eastern Region Vision 2020, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government Of India, <http://www.mdoner.gov.in/content/vision-document>

⁷ Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government Of India, <http://mdoner.gov.in/content/poverty-estimates>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ www.planningcommission.nic.in

- Government needs to negotiate to achieve a solution in a shorter time frame and not stretch peace talks too long.
- Proper discussion and thinking over the provisions of the accord/agreement before signing needs to be undertaken, so that there is no discontent later on the issue. There have been numerous occasions of such discontent after signing of accords in Northeast.
- Government should avoid providing autonomy along ethnic lines and consider granting regional autonomy.
- Stress should be on sustaining peace through the peace processes and not just bringing groups on the negotiating table and sign an accord.
- Surrender of all the cadres of the outfits, not factions, and cessation of violence, should be used as a precondition for peace talks. Government needs to strictly enforce the ceasefire ground rules. The cadres of the outfits on ceasefire must not be allowed to carry arms and indulge in extortion and violence.
- A decision on the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act's repeal/amendment needs to be made quickly by the Government. Opposition to the AFSPA continues to remain the major rallying point in states like Manipur. Agitations demanding its repeal have broken out every now and then which have its repercussions on the law and order, economy as well as educational sectors. It has also been a source of alienation among the people. Amendments to the Act may be brought it, if not completely repealed.
- Government must ensure that the police stations constantly gather data and information on the type of actual Maoist activity and also the kind of local disenchantment that could be exploited by the Maoists. Maoist involvement in local issues needs to be constantly monitored. It is through these involvements that the Maoists seek to widen their support base in an area. Police personnel in local police stations need to be trained to monitor the possibility of such involvement. The activities of the known Maoist front organizations should also be strictly monitored
- Government need to strengthen intelligence regarding activities of Islamist terror groups in the region and stop them from extending their penetration among the vulnerable section of the Muslim community, especially those living in the under-developed and interior areas of the region. Government needs to ensure that innocent persons from the Muslim community are not harassed in the name of investigations as that could alienate sections within the community, making them vulnerable at the hands of anti-national elements trying to cash in on the situation.

B. Infrastructure & Connectivity

- Priority needs to be given to improve connectivity between the district headquarters and the remote areas in the northeastern states. In the year 2012-13, only 260 km of road network was constructed in the Northeast.¹⁰ The previous years were worse, with 150 km roads newly built in 2011-12 and only 146 km built in 2010-11.¹¹ However, the new BJP-led government at the Centre is giving thrust in improving infrastructure and connectivity.

¹⁰ "Govt fast-tracks work on N-E road network", The Pioneer, June 21, 2014, <http://www.dailypioneer.com/nation/govt-fast-tracks-work-on-n-e-road-network.html>

¹¹ Ibid.

- On June 24, 2014, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways approved Rs 15,000 crore road building projects in the northeastern region.¹² It has set a target of building 30 kms of road per day. The Indian government has also proposed building an 1800 km long Indo-China frontier highway in Arunachal Pradesh at a cost of Rs. 40,000 crore. The effective implementation of these projects should be the foremost priority of the government.
- Development of communication networks including broadband and wireless connectivity in Northeast India should be another priority for the government. In this regard, on September 10, 2014, the Central Government has approved an over Rs 5,300 crore project to boost telecom infrastructure and connectivity in Northeast India.
- The East-West highway connecting Silchar in Assam with Porbandar in Gujrat, which was scheduled to be completed in 2009, is still under construction. The government should see that the construction work is finished as soon as possible.
- The air connectivity between the capitals of northeastern states should be established. International flights between Guwahati and the capitals of the major South and Southeast Asian countries should also be started. Air cargo services should be provided with storage facilities at the Guwahati airport.
- Railway connectivity should be ensured between the state capitals. In this regard, Railways have undertaken an ambitious project to link all capital cities in the region at an estimated cost of Rs 17,000 crore by 2017.
- The Chittagong port in Bangladesh should be used more by India to ferry goods from the Northeast. This would save a lot of time and money and would also entail quick transport of materials to this land-locked region.
- Northeast India has a large perennial water system comprising the Barak and Brahmaputra rivers. Though declared National Waterway No. 2 way back in 1988, the Brahmaputra is yet to be fully utilized for navigation purposes. Government needs to invest in multimodal transport infrastructure in order to improve regional connectivity and also develop local-level infrastructure and build more ports and jetties.
- The water supply network in Northeast India needs to be developed. Investments may be invited from global financial bodies for this purpose. In five northeastern states of India, number of households having access to tap water facilities is less than the national average. These states are Assam (Urban – 366 per 1000 households; Rural – 63 per 1000 households), Manipur (Urban – 656, Rural – 247), Mizoram (Urban – 720, Rural – 146), NAGALAND (Urban – 257, Rural – 286) and Tripura (Urban- 606, Rural – 274). The national average is: Urban – 743 per 1000 households and Rural – 301 per 1000 households).

C. Agriculture & Agri-Allied

- Government can promote the Northeast as an 'organic farming zone' for its agro-climatic suitability for high-value agriculture and the minimal use of chemical fertilizers. The products of this region can then have a broader market reach.
- Efforts need to be made both by the government as well as the banking sector to overcome the constraints posed by non-existent/inadequate land records in the

¹² "Government to speed up road construction to 30 km a day: Nitin Gadkari", The Economic Times, June 24, 2014, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-06-24/news/50826070_1_road-projects-worth-road-ministry-stalled-projects

Northeast. This creates difficulties for lending to the farming community, especially long-term loans. In this regard, government may take steps to improve the maintenance of land records and bankers may evolve innovative lending methods like use of joint liability groups, involvement of NGOs and community-based organizations as banking correspondents and relaxation in the lending norms.

- Government may introduce programmes like Flood-prone Development Programme (FPDP) in the flood-prone areas of the Northeast, in the lines of already existing programmes like Drought-prone Area Programme (DPAP) in the dry regions and Desert Development Programme in the deserts. The programme can aim at minimizing the adverse effects of flood on production of crops and livestock.
- In order to prevent damage to agricultural yield due to floods, government may promote and encourage early sowing of short-duration paddy like Boro rice variety- *Jyomoti*, *Jyotiprasad* and *Kanaklata*, developed by Assam Agricultural University. These varieties mature 30-40 days before the traditional varieties of paddy and also gives a greater yield. Also, deep water crops like *Bao* paddy may be promoted in flood-prone and low-lying areas. These flood-resistant crops have naturally elongated stems to keep the foliage above water.
- Government may tie-up with agricultural research institutes to promote and encourage cultivation of high-yielding varieties of crops and also certain high yielding methods of cultivation like the SRI (System of Rice Intensification) method.
- Government may encourage research in areas such as evolving suitable agro-techniques for greater yield, developing an integrated pest and nutrient management system, developing appropriate soil and water management techniques, etc. There are a number of institutes in Northeast where these researches can be carried out like Assam Agricultural University, Central Rice Research Institute (CRRI), Assam, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Research Complex, Meghalaya, Central Agricultural University (CAU), Manipur, etc.
- Government may initiate programmes to promote the development of cash crops like jute, sugarcane, maize, horticultural crops. Government may also promote commercialization of processed maize product (Popcorn) and rice through post-harvest management/value-addition.
- Storage facilities may be constructed, particularly cold storage for perishable commodities. Chilling plant and other infrastructure facilities also needs to be developed to handle storage and marketing of milk and other livestock products. Other measures include establishing processing centers, applying quality control, using advanced packaging techniques and modern transportation methods.
- Government may initiate steps for developing the marketing infrastructure at the primary markets in rural areas and regulated markets in district level. This will reduce the dominance of traders and middlemen and help the farmers to earn better profits.
- Government should prepare and make available the flood map, irrigation map, rainfall map and prevailing cropping pattern map of the northeastern states for better agricultural planning by the respective agriculture department of the states.
- Government should focus research on developing appropriate crop sequence so as to escape or compensate for flood damages. In this regard, planting horticultural crops, fruits and grasses in the catchment areas of the river is useful as such crop coverage protects soil erosion and river inundation to a great extent.
- Government may develop a user-friendly information system through improved methods such as on-farm trials, demonstration, training, farmer-participatory

interaction programme along with programmes for updating knowledge and skill of field level officers.

- Government may think of formulating a comprehensive livestock development policy in the northeastern states by involving the Agricultural department in the states, department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary as well as agricultural research institutes.
- Veterinary extension service needs to be strengthened in all the northeastern states. Many rural households yet do not receive the services of different field functionaries. Fishery extension service too should be revamped and strengthened so that technology available can be properly disseminated to farmers.

D. Flood & Erosion

- Floods in the northeastern Region affect an annual average of 1.25 million hectares of land.¹³ They inundate at least 2,000 villages in addition to destroying other infrastructure. Along with it, vast areas in the region have been affected by erosion, which include 1 million hectares in Assam; 815,000 hectares in Meghalaya, 508,000 hectares in Nagaland, 108,000 hectares in Tripura; and 14,000 hectares in Manipur.¹⁴ Every state in the Northeast suffers due to floods and many human lives are lost, while transport bottlenecks result in indirect economic losses.
- Government should facilitate rehabilitation of flood control embankments and the location and design of spurs and other erosion management structures with improved measurement of basic river processes, contributing to better analysis and a more complete understanding of river behaviour. The government here can play an important role by providing financing for procurement of equipments such as differential global positioning systems combined with echo sounders for improved bathymetric surveys, hand-held global positioning systems to undertake float tracking to document and map changes in current vectors, and an acoustic Doppler current profiler (ADCP) for discharge and flow measurements.
- The Brahmaputra Board needs to be replaced with a new agency. The Centre has already proposed the setting up of Brahmaputra River Valley Authority (BRVA) in place of the Brahmaputra Board. For effectively discharging its duties and responsibilities, this new authority should have the following: (a) an appropriate mandate, supported by legal provisions (b) support of local communities (c) transparency in the data it collects, in the way the data are analyzed and the results that are produced, so that it maintains a degree of credibility (d) needs to be largely staffed from officials from the northeastern region.
- The Central government needs to work with all the northeastern states to establish the new authority so that it becomes a cooperative management structure. All the state governments in the Northeast have to be brought on board, so that there is no dispute later on the mandate of the BRVA.
- Government may work towards the creation of a South Asia Shared Rivers Commission or Authority by bringing Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan and Nepal on board. The Commission can begin by formulating a framework agreement among the states that share rivers for their use, development, protection, conservation and

¹³ Development and Growth in Northeast India: The Natural Resources, Water, and Environment Nexus, World Bank, India Country Management Unit, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSAREGTOPWATRES/FeatureStories/21702969/NortheastStrategyReport_20-3-08.pdf

¹⁴ Ibid.

management of the water and related resources, and establish an institutional mechanism for cooperation among these states.

- The central government, through its water management authority, needs to make optimum use of the sequential satellite imagery to get an accurate perspective on changes to riverbank lines, both temporally and spatially. Systematic development of morphological prediction tools based on this satellite imagery would allow an assessment of erosion vulnerability. Based on this analysis, government may take measures for bank and embankment protection in a proactive manner.
- Government should involve the beneficiaries at the local level for effective flood and erosion control. Usually the state governments construct the schemes and remain responsible for their maintenance. The beneficiaries tend to remain uninvolved. This needs to be changed. The Brahmaputra master plan and sub basin plans may be made available in the public domain so that the common people have access to raw data and the planning documents, so that the beneficiaries themselves can give their own suggestions based on their own field-level experience.
- Improving the knowledge base for better water management is important for facilitating informed decisions. Certain devolution of decision-making powers to stakeholders at the basin level is important in order to improve outcomes and this has been proved from experience with water resource management worldwide.

E. Unemployment & Livelihood Options

- The rising problem of unemployment needs to be addressed through a comprehensive action plan focusing on vocational education. The central government needs to work along with the state governments in the Northeast to set up more vocational training institutes and also arrange for soft loans for students passing out of these institutions. Vocational skills may be included in the school curricula on a compulsory basis so that the education system realistically prepares the students for their future life.
- The North East Rural Livelihood Project (NERLP), undertaken by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) with assistance from World Bank, has the capability of changing the rural unemployment scenario. Beginning in March 2012, the project has seen formation of over 4000 Self Help Groups (SHGs) and skill training to over 1500 youths.¹⁵ The government must ensure that more and more unemployed youths are brought under its ambit and open up scopes for employment for them.
- The government may introduce some new vocational training courses in the Industrial Training Institutes (ITI) in the northeastern states that can enhance the employability of the youths as well as encourage self-employment. Some courses that may be introduced include: drilling and maintenance, oil plant operation, plantation maintenance, upkeep, supervision and tea production. Training on spoken English language skills also can ensure employment in call centers. Prospects are also there in the vocational and technical training in the fields of sericulture, handloom and handicrafts.
- Government may establish a national level Board for vocational education as well as formulate a National Vocational Education Policy.

¹⁵ Implementation Status & Results, India, North East Rural Livelihoods Project (NERLP), http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/SAR/2014/07/06/090224b08255e57f/1_0/Rendred/PDF/India000North00Report000Sequence008.pdf

- Vocational Training Institutes may be opened in the state capitals of the Northeast on the lines of State Institute of Vocational Education in Andhra Pradesh.
- In order to encourage self-employment, liberal institutional finance should be made available in the region. Government may tie up with financial institutions to provide loans at subsidized interest rates to those wishing to start a venture on their own.
- Self Help Groups (SHG) plays an important role in the field of poverty and unemployment reduction. There are around 1,12,365 SHGs in Northeast India (as of March 2012).¹⁶ But the SHG movement is yet to take off in a major way in many of the northeastern states. Government may work towards bringing these SHGs under the organized sector, which will lead to increased penetration of the SHG movement in Northeast India.
- Government may make arrangements for training on entrepreneurship development and foreign trade for the traders. For this, the state governments may be encouraged to tie-up with institutions like Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) and arrange for courses on foreign trade to be provided in the northeastern states. Or, the government may also provide financial assistance for entrepreneurs willing to undertake courses related to foreign trade. This will increase participation in foreign trade amongst entrepreneurs in Northeast India.
- There are very few entrepreneurs taking up foreign trade in Northeast because of lack of awareness of rules and procedures involving such trade. Government as well as trade and industry bodies needs to regularly conduct awareness programmes to make traders aware of the nuance of foreign trade and encourage it.
- Specialized courses, with relevance to the Northeast, can be encouraged and introduced in the colleges and universities in the Northeast, which can develop technically qualified human resource in the region. Some such courses are: polymer sciences, environmental engineering and sciences, geology and petrology hydrology and physical sciences, bio technology, plantation regeneration / management, Tea Research, etc.
- Government also needs to promote modern methods of cultivation so as to increase the employment potential in the agriculture sector. Availability of new farm technology will attract greater number of persons to agriculture and also help in increase of agricultural productivity.
- Government may encourage private entrepreneurship in the Tourism sector in the Northeast. Tourism-related activities may be introduced in Public-Private Partnership mode.

F. Hydropower Development

- Hydropower potential of Northeast India is around 66,000 megawatts, which represents about 40 percent of the national potential. Within Northeast, Arunachal Pradesh has a share of about 81 per cent of the potential. Hydropower project revenues could potentially double the region's Net State Domestic Product (NSDP). At present, 12 per cent of the annual power generated from the projects is earmarked for the states as "free power", which is basically a royalty paid to the states for the use of their natural resources. Even at 12 percent, the income (from selling the free power) that would be accrued to the states if the best hydro sites were to be developed would significantly increase the state's revenues.

¹⁶ NABARD, http://theglobaljournals.com/ijsr/file.php?val=December_2013_1386064789_998b8_22.pdf

- Government needs to make all the stakeholders informed about the benefits of hydropower development in the Northeast. Agreement and consent of the states and the communities needs to be taken. And for this talks at all levels needs to be arranged by the central government, state government and the power corporations.
- In order that the people relocated due to constriction of dams are benefited, government should devise a policy that is geared towards enhancing productivity and earning potential of the displaced people, rather than simply compensating them in cash for losses. A credible mechanisms needs to be developed to share some of the development benefits with affected people. Some benefits may include electrification of relocated villages and creation of jobs for the displaced.
- Government can study examples from other countries where such situations have been faced. An example that can be cited is about the development forums of Papua New Guinea. The forums are legally binding agreements between developers, the local government and affected parties. They stipulate the rights and obligations of each party and the kinds of benefits (public goods and compensation), the responsibility for providing benefits, and the ways in which environmental impacts will be addressed. This model has worked due to its following features: (a) highly inclusive (b) flexible, allowing stakeholders to choose the types of benefits that will be delivered (c) incorporates credible oversight mechanisms with legal underpinnings and (d) is based on voluntarism and negotiation rather than administrative decree.
- The authorities need to devise proper Catchment Area Treatment (CAT) plan around dams to control deforestation and erosion. The plan should also focus on the problem of silt and debris load to river from the susceptible areas of the catchment and checking the sediment load from the tributaries directly discharging into the reservoir.
- Instead of going for building large dams, the government should instead focus on building small run-of-the-river projects for hydro power development in Northeast India. Such projects would also be safe from seismic activities and will have less impact on the biodiversity of the region.

G. Illegal Migration

- Detection and expulsion of illegal immigrants have not been easy in Northeast India. The problem is further aggravated by the lack of a treaty between India and Bangladesh on deportation issue. Bangladesh has refused to take back over 29,000 persons declared as illegal migrants by Foreigners Tribunals since 1985 because it does not recognize the verdicts given by India's Foreigners Tribunals.¹⁷ Between 2010 and 2012, only 134 illegal immigrants were deported from Assam to Bangladesh, even though the Foreigners Tribunals had found 5,652 such people during that period¹⁸. Also, during 2009-2011, 58,932 Bangladeshi nationals, who had entered India legally, did not return¹⁹.
- Fencing along the porous Indo-Bangladesh border needs to be completed on an urgent basis. In order to control the influx of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, the

¹⁷ 'UN report boosts Assam's fight against Bangla influx', The Times of India, September 14, 2013, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/UN-report-boosts-Assams-fight-against-Bangla-influx/articleshow/22566597.cms>

¹⁸ 'Assam deported only 134 Bangladeshi illegal immigrants in past 2 yrs', The Times of India, September 18, 2012, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Assam-deported-only-134-Bangladeshi-illegal-immigrants-in-past-2-yrs/articleshow/16441711.cms>

¹⁹ Ibid.

Indian government had sanctioned the Indo-Bangladesh Border Roads & Fence project in 1986²⁰. Under the project, the entire stretch of Indo-Bangladesh border was to be fenced. However, along the Northeast India-Bangladesh border, 1,567 km of fencing have only been completed against the sanctioned fencing length of 1,888 km (till March 31, 2014).²¹ The remaining length of 321 km needs to be fenced soon.

- Fast-tracking of pending cases at the Foreigners Tribunals is also a necessity and for this appointment of suitable persons on the Tribunals and improvement of infrastructure needs to be given first priority.
- The government needs to use all diplomatic channels to ensure that a bilateral agreement is signed between India and Bangladesh to deport the illegal migrants. Unless such an agreement is signed the problem of illegal migration cannot be solved.

H. Autonomy & Ethnic Aspirations

- The government may think of setting up a Tribal Advisory Council in the northeastern states. It may be a body of not more than 20 members with the Chief Minister as its Chairperson. The council may have as its members, community leaders from the autonomous council areas, economists, social activists, representatives of reputed think tanks of the region as well as officials from Hill Area Development and Tribal Welfare department of the government. This council would assist and advice the Governor on issues of governance and development in the tribal areas.
- The government may consider creation of regional councils and stop creating tribe-specific councils. These regional councils would cover a particular region and would have jurisdiction over all the ethnic group and communities living in the area. Village councils could be formed under these regional councils and these councils would work along with the regional councils for implementing various development projects. In this way, the sense of discrimination would also not prevail among the various ethnic groups and development would also reach the grassroots.
- Considering that development is the need of the hour, village councils under the Autonomous District Councils may be activated to further decentralize power in the area. The Panchayati Raj model could be used as a framework for setting up such village councils.
- The government may consider formulating Community-based Development Programmes, which will involve participation and ownership of community members in programme implementation and ensure that benefits reach the community. It will allow local communities to prioritize developmental investments through inter-community dialogues, thus leading to increased community-level dialogues and inputs in project planning and implementation. Earlier experiences of such programmes in Asian countries like Philippines have shown that community-based development programmes can address a lot of issues like economic deprivation, ethnic conflicts and weak local institutions.
- In order to keep track of allocation and utilization of development funds in the districts, a liaison body of autonomous council members and civil society leaders can be set up. This can be a non-political monitoring and liaison mechanism between the councils and the people.

²⁰ Goswami, Arunav, 'Prime Minister's visit to Bangladesh: Will the illegal migration issue be resolved?', Point of View, Centre for Development and Peace Studies, August 26, 2011, <http://cdpsindia.org/point-of-view65.asp>

²¹ Annual Report, 2013-14, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, http://mha.nic.in/sites/upload_files/mha/files/AR%28E%291314.pdf

- A Special Secretary Tribal Affairs may be appointed in Raj Bhavan. The person needs to possess knowledge of the tribal areas and the local culture and have to undertake field visits to such areas and report to the Governor on the ground situation, location-specific needs of the communities and all related issues. The Special Secretary can be a link between the Governor, the Councils and the State Government.

I. Foreign Trade and Look East Policy

- Security needs to be made a comprehensive part of Look East Policy. At present, various insurgent groups are active along the roads connecting Northeast India to Southeast Asia. Unless security network is not good along these routes, the future of connectivity through these routes will face a question mark.
- A Seamless Travel Framework needs to be developed so that once the highway connecting South and Southeast Asia is completed, the transport network does not face hurdles due to excessive documentation needs.
- Government needs to upgrade the infrastructure at the existing Land Custom Stations (LCS) in the Northeast. Warehouses with enough space for storage of different varieties of products needs to be built. Cold storages need to be built at the LCSs for storage of perishable items. Facilities like round-the-clock power back-up, banks providing Letter of Credit facility, weighbridges, proper office building, conference rooms, etc. needs to come up at the LCSs.
- The development of roads is a must for improving trade through the borders. Unless the roads are improved, there will be less movement of traded goods through the LCSs. The government needs to undertake a survey of the connecting roads to the LCSs and on a priority-basis start developing the road network.
- Both the central and state governments needs to take proper steps for development of local industries like agro-processing, horticulture, textiles, handlooms, edible oils, petroleum products, cement, cotton yarns etc. The people must be encouraged to take up trade activities and for this attractive schemes needs to be devised by the government. In this way, local products can compete with other imported products and also create demand in the market of other countries including Bangladesh.
- The central government needs to establish an office of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) in Northeast India. The ministry working for development of the region needs to have a presence here. The office needs to be manned by high-level officials of the ministry.
- The central government needs to consider the view of the state government in both economic and foreign policy issues, especially on issues relating to border trade and infrastructure development.
- Some infrastructure projects like the India-Myanmar Railway link project, though ready on paper, have not yet started. Immediate steps must be taken to make such projects operational on field.
- Some of the projects like the Stilwell Road project are not moving fast because of diplomatic red tapes. The Indian government must take up these issues with the respective governments to fast track the proceedings.
- In order to strengthen the linkages between the Northeast and Southeast Asia, the various government ministries and departments have to work in sync. It has to be a coordinated effort from the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, so as to carry forward the Look East policy or efforts to connect the country's far-eastern region with Southeast Asia,



besides completing the various ongoing or planned projects in the stipulated time frame.

- Government may regularly conduct awareness programmes to make traders aware of the nuance of foreign trade and encourage it.