**Original Research Article**

**THE NORTHEAST AND INDIA'S LOOK EAST POLICY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT MODEL AND CHALLENGES**

**Abstract**

India's Look East Policy (LEP) has garnered significant attention in recent years, particularly in the context of its engagement with the Northeast region. This paper critically analyzes the efficacy of the LEP in driving development in the Northeast, focusing on the challenges and opportunities associated with this approach. The paper begins by providing an overview of the historical background and evolution of India's Look East Policy, highlighting its objectives and key components. It then delves into a critical examination of the development model adopted under the LEP for the Northeast region, assessing its effectiveness in addressing the region's socio-economic disparities and infrastructure deficits. Furthermore, the paper explores the challenges hindering the successful implementation of the LEP-driven development model in the Northeast, including infrastructural bottlenecks, geopolitical complexities, environmental concerns, and socio-cultural factors. By analyzing existing literature, policy documents, and empirical data, the paper offers insights into the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the LEP as a tool for promoting regional development in the Northeast. The research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing content analysis of secondary data sources such as government reports, policy papers, scholarly articles, and development indicators, complemented by case study analysis of selected projects in the Northeast. Finally, the paper concludes by offering recommendations for policymakers to enhance the efficacy of the Look East Policy in driving sustainable development in the Northeast region, emphasizing the need for holistic and inclusive approaches that prioritize local participation, environmental sustainability, and infrastructural connectivity.

**Keywords:** Look East Policy, Northeast India, Development Model, Trade, Infrastructure, Geopolitics, Sustainability.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

South and South-East Asian nations. Historical accounts attest to the region's significant social and economic ties to various South and South East Asian areas. There were numerous more trade routes from Assam to China in addition to the Patkai route, via Burma, Bhutan, and Tibet. The northern highlands of Assam were well-connected to various regions including China, Afghanistan, and the Western regions through routes involving Bhutan and Tibet. Additionally, several other pathways facilitated these connections (Ray, 2005). In a 2005 study by Ray, the extent of openness of ancient Assam was succinctly described. It highlighted the significant advancement of local crafts, natural resources, silk, textiles, forest products, and more. Furthermore, the region's accessibility to diverse parts of India in the west, extending to Myanmar and southwestern China in the east, as well as connections to the north through tribal intermediaries and a direct sea route to the south, played a pivotal role in fostering prosperity for Assam and the broader northeastern India.

The resource-based businesses that grew in Assam during the colonial period, such as tea, oil, timber, etc., had limited connection to the regional commodity, factor, and financial markets. During the colonial period, the northeastern region of India had the opportunity for global maritime trade through the ports of East Bengal, which is now part of Bangladesh (Singh, 2020). This maritime access played a key role in the growth of the tea industry. The profits generated by this industry were either reinvested or diverted for investments in other areas. However, the local economy did not experience the positive effects of investment, consumption, production, and employment multipliers. This was primarily because the interaction between the modern economic sector and the traditional sector was limited. Additionally, the influx of low-cost industrial goods from Great Britain posed a threat to the domestic handloom and handicraft industries, which traditionally formed the backbone of Assam's economy (Sarma, 2006).

The conventional transportation and communication channels were severed by the partition of India (Bragta, 2021). According to the Shukla Commission, this division further isolated an already geopolitically marginalized region. Despite having over 4500 kilometers of external border shared with Bhutan, China, and Myanmar, the Northeast region of India was left with only a precarious 22-kilometer link to the Indian mainland through the vulnerable Siliguri corridor, known as the Gateway to the Northeast. This resulted in significant disruptions to the market, increased socioeconomic distance, and a notable slowdown in development, which were not adequately acknowledged or compensated. In contrast to the region's extensive international border spanning 5437.15 kilometers with Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, and Tibet, the Siliguri corridor represents a mere 27 kilometers of connectivity to the Indian heartland. This underscores the region's vulnerability and highlights the need for strategic attention and investment to address its unique challenges within the broader context of national development and security (High Level Commission, 1997). The main purpose of this study is to critically analyze the effectiveness of India's Look East Policy (LEP) as a strategy for promoting development in Northeast India. It seeks to assess the policy’s impact on the region’s socio-economic transformation, identify key challenges in its implementation, and recommend approaches for more inclusive, sustainable, and locally driven development.

1. **RESEARCH CONTEXT**

This paper employs a historical analysis to contextualize India's Look East Policy (LEP) within the broader historical, socio-economic, and geopolitical development of Northeast India. The study examines how historical factors — including colonial economic frameworks, post-independence developmental oversight, and geopolitical sidelining — have influenced the current conditions of the region. The LEP is rigorously assessed as a policy intervention aimed at rectifying past trends of isolation and underdevelopment. This perspective evaluates the Northeast's distinctive physical, demographic, and cultural characteristics within India's overarching strategic interactions with Southeast Asia. This context underpins the examination of LEP's efficacy in reshaping the region's infrastructure, economy, and society, while emphasising the historical continuities and disruptions that characterize present problems and possibilities.

1. **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses a historical-analytical framework to examine the development and implications of India’s Look East Policy (LEP) in Northeast India, focusing on its impact on regional development and the challenges associated with the driven development model. Primary materials, including government reports, policy documents, and official communications from both Indian and international sources, will undergo critical analysis to track policy evolution and its socio-economic effects. Secondary sources, such as academic publications and journal articles, will provide context and interpretation. A qualitative research approach will be used to evaluate the implementation of LEP, assess its challenges, and explore the underlying geopolitical and economic motivations behind the policy, particularly in relation to infrastructure, trade, and regional integration.

1. **OUTCOME OF THE STUDY**

The study reveals that while India's Look East and Act East Policies have enhanced trade connectivity and infrastructure development in Northeast India, their impact on local economic and social development remains limited. The policies have prioritized physical infrastructure and external investment over promoting indigenous entrepreneurship and addressing socio-economic disparities. Although there has been growth in regional trade and improved access to Southeast Asian markets, the benefits have not significantly translated into local employment generation or social inclusion. The findings highlight the need for a more balanced development strategy that integrates infrastructure growth with initiatives to empower local communities, promote sustainable livelihoods, and ensure inclusive regional development.

**4.1 India's Look East Policy and Northeast India**

India's inward-looking strategy of import substitution throughout the post-independence era never saw commerce as the main engine of the economy because its main objective was to create the essential heavy industries. Since the Northeast of the country is strategically located along international borders and has diverse physiographic and demographic features across its component states, trade opportunities with the neighboring Asian nations consequently have been largely underutilized. Over the past thirty years (1980–81 to 2013–14), the region's contribution to India's national GDP has decreased as its general economic development has slowed down.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Since the early 1990s, the Look East Policy (LEP) has offered a new perspective for the development of India's Northeast region. This policy positions the Northeast as a gateway to the dynamic economies of East and Southeast Asia (Bajpaee, 2023). Experts and development specialists focusing on this region have advocated for its resurgence by establishing economic ties with the rapidly growing Southeast Asian nations, as encouraged by the LEP. In 1996, India constructed the Friendship Road to Myanmar, recognizing its significance for continental access (Choudhury, 2023). This event was followed by the ASEAN Car rally, marking initial steps towards strengthening regional connectivity. However, apprehensions surfaced regarding the potential escalation of regional instability stemming from the Northeast Region's history of cross-border conflicts and insurgent activities. Despite the establishment of border trade points, progress remained sluggish. Approximately ten years after the inauguration of the Friendship Road, the North Eastern Council (NEC) developed a more holistic approach to implement the Look East Policy. This initiative was spearheaded by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) and was seamlessly integrated into the Vision NER: 2020 framework. The overarching objective was to alleviate the geographical isolation that the region had long endured. The notion of bridging Southeast Asia with South Asia has garnered significant attention within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). India has proactively embraced this concept through diverse channels and institutions, aligning it with its broader Act East strategy and its status as a full dialogue partner with ASEAN (Das & Guha, 2022). Vision NER: 2020 revolves around three primary thrust areas, aligning with the principles outlined in the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity. This master plan delineates a roadmap for regional cooperation within ASEAN, emphasizing the enhancement of physical, institutional, and people-to-people linkages. Collectively, these endeavors aim to foster economic integration and promote sustainable development across the region (Government of India, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, 2011).

The surge in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) originating from ASEAN countries and flowing into India represents a momentous advancement in the ASEAN-India relationship. During the period spanning from 2000 to 2011, trade activity between ASEAN and India experienced a remarkable annual growth rate of approximately 22%. By the fiscal year 2014-15, the trade volume had escalated to exceed US$ 76.53 billion. Significant investment flows have transpired in both directions, notably with ASEAN contributing more than 12.5% of the total investment influx into India since the year 2000. Statistics compiled by the Department of Economic Affairs indicate that Foreign Direct Investment inflows from ASEAN nations to India during the period from April 2007 to March 2015 approximated around US$ 32.44 billion. Concurrently, FDI outflows from India to ASEAN member countries during this same timeframe amounted to roughly US$ 38.672 billion according to data from the Department of Economic Affairs. Trade collaborations encompassing India and its proximate neighboring nations, including Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, recorded a notable 23% growth trajectory. Specifically, the trade value escalated from Rs. 81,385 crores in 2009-10 to Rs. 184,687 crores in 2013-14, as reported by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in 2014. However, it is essential to note that the Northeast Region's involvement in this progress has remained limited, contributing merely one to two percent of the overall trade activity. Most of this trade route traverses through major ports like Chennai, Vishakhapatnam, and Kolkata.

The region's deficient governance (A. Baruah: 2003; M. Hussain: 2003; R. Dev: 2004; S. Baruah: 2003) constitutes a contributing factor, yet alongside this, there exist significant issues concerning fundamental urban services (essential for attracting FDI) that notably fall short in this area (Baruah, 2003; Baruah, 2003; Dev, 2007; Hussain, 2006). While the country's average distance between towns stands at 33.51 km, the region encompassing 248 towns, spanning a little over a quarter of a million square kilometers, demonstrates a mean distance between towns of 49.23 km. Furthermore, in contrast to the national average of 1000 sq. km, a typical town in Northeast India often caters to a region spanning nearly 2000 sq. km. In this context, the provision of urban services in the region is considerably more distant. Allocations for urban development form a relatively minor fraction of any state's overall budget.[[2]](#footnote-2) The region's geographical isolation, lack of established urban infrastructure, and limited rural-urban connections within the unique spatial context hinder the penetration of FDI into the area. Consequently, it is not surprising that even after a decade of integrating Northeast India into the framework of the Look East Policy, the region remains isolated, confined, and landlocked. This status persists despite the vast unexplored dimensions encompassing the region's spatial, demographic, and economic facets.

The Government of India has recently displayed a notable inclination towards advancing the development of the Northeastern states. There is a growing impetus to accelerate the progress of the Northeast with the aim of establishing it as the hub for trade with South East Asian countries (Economic Times, 2016). Referred to as the "Economic Corridor of India," the Northeast region holds the potential to extend India's global market reach beyond its eastern borders. To effectively engage with nations along its far-eastern boundaries, India must first cultivate a robust "Act East" approach within the eight states of the Northeast. Beyond its economic significance, the region also holds strategic importance, warranting its alignment with other developed areas within the country. Recognizing the imperative to diminish the region's isolation, the government acknowledges the necessity of enhancing comprehensive connectivity across roadways, railways, telecommunications, power infrastructure, and waterways (Singh, 2015). This strategic effort seeks to curtail the region's isolation and propel it towards greater integration while simultaneously aligning with its larger vision to "Act East."

The North East region of India possesses a distinct advantage in fostering people-to-people interactions and cultivating stronger social bonds, thereby facilitating a form of diplomacy that resonates with the people. This is attributed to its shared cultural heritage with several ASEAN nations, such as Thailand, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Myanmar. The imperative to establish robust connections among South East Asian nations along an international route has led to initiatives like the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. This highway, along with its extension to include Lao PDR and Cambodia, forming the "Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC)," holds the potential to unlock the landlocked Northeast region by creating vital linkages. A more profound and comprehensive regional integration is essential to ensure secure and harmonious engagement with societies in the sub-region. This endeavor is spearheaded by individuals who acknowledge and value the distinctiveness and diversity of each constituent unit. From a geographical perspective, India's north-eastern expanse serves as a pivotal crossroads, acting as the principal convergence point between the Indian subcontinent and the South East Asian realm. In essence, the North East of India demarcates the conclusion of one territory and the commencement of another within the South East Asian context.

**4.2 How Effective are the Regional Cooperation and Development Corridors**

The astute utilization of economic and regional geography to chart the intricate network of economic participants engaged in employment and production, intertwined with pivotal social and environmental attributes, has emerged as a cornerstone strategy for contemporary development practitioners (Fau, 2016). This approach, anchored in regional geography, assimilates the concept of an economic corridor. However, it is imperative to grasp that an economic corridor transcends its surface role as a mere conduit for the movement of people and commodities. In essence, these corridors function as integral components within intricate socio-economic networks. These encompass not only global and regional production and value chains but also extend to encompass social and institutional networks. As such, economic corridors emerge as indispensable elements interwoven into the very socioeconomic tapestry of a region or territory. The synthesis between local and global elements profoundly influences corridor development, especially within landlocked domains. This synergy inherently fortifies trade interconnections among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) along value chains. This, in turn, serves to elevate productivity levels while also introducing diversification to export portfolios. Moreover, the establishment of comprehensive transit agreements within these corridors expedites access to untapped markets. This interplay initiates a constructive feedback loop, propelling the trajectory of growth forward (Soproni, 2015; Hope & Cox, 2015).

Diverse global regions have witnessed the unfolding of corridor development, each revealing a spectrum of distinct experiences. As illuminated by the Baltic nations' case study, the creation of an internal market framework within the European Union (EU) underscores how the regional amalgamation of previously marginalized economic spheres yields substantial favorable repercussions. An illustrative instance emerges from the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), where the establishment of commercial corridors has markedly improved transport linkages to far-flung and landlocked domains. This evolution has seamlessly integrated the GMS into the intricate web of Asian value chain networks. The strategic ports within the GMS have seamlessly facilitated connections to East Asian manufacturing networks via international shipping, while the overland routes act as feeder conduits, channeling production from inland centers to these maritime hubs. Paralleling this, akin to the remarkable Karakoram Highway—a feat of Chinese engineering cutting through the formidable Karakoram-Himalayan (K-H) mountain range—the 1,300-kilometer Karakoram Highway has been meticulously crafted to facilitate streamlined access from China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), specifically Kashgar, to Pakistan's capital, Islamabad. Furthermore, a profound linkage between Kolkata and Kunming spanning 2,800 kilometers is poised to materialize. This visionary endeavor, a facet of the Bangladesh China India Myanmar (BCIM) conference, known as the Kunming Initiative, unveils an economic corridor of immense significance.[[3]](#footnote-3) Although sections of the road, save for a 255-kilometer stretch from Silchar to Imphal in India and a 200-kilometer segment from Kalewa to Monywa in Myanmar, are currently navigable, their condition remains arduous, particularly during the monsoon season. Significantly, this expansive region is intricately interwoven with the One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative, encapsulating an expansive territory spanning 165,000 square kilometers and housing a population of 440 million individuals.[[4]](#footnote-4)

It is imperative to grasp that the ramifications of corridor development extend beyond the confines of individual countries or the specific areas where they are fostered. While such connectivity often kindles optimism and aspiration for the holistic advancement of the involved regions, it is crucial to acknowledge that the effects of corridor progress can transcend the realm of economic benefits and potentially exert adverse pressures on natural ecosystems. This intricate interplay within corridors might not invariably contribute positively to a region's economic trajectory and can, in fact, bear detrimental consequences. Even among the six Mekong nations—Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, and China—where substantial economic growth has been observed, it is notable that not all road and highway developments have yielded the conventional benefits typically attributed to economic corridors. The assumption that additional broadband infrastructure will uniformly enhance the quality of life for the most marginalized and vulnerable populations is subject to debate (Oxfam Australia, 2008). The vantage point of social implications also warrants consideration, particularly in regions with nuanced circumstances like Northeast India. Furthermore, key economic indicators such as alterations in exports, imports, pricing dynamics, production patterns, and consumption trends are pivotal metrics for comprehending the economic consequences of corridor advancement. Such variables offer insights into the intricate economic implications underlying corridor development. Arunachal Pradesh's unresolved border dispute with China, bilateral security concerns about the cross-border insurgency, and migration worries with Bangladesh are just a few of the issues that continue to pose significant sociopolitical obstacles to the process.

It is commonly recognized that the Northeast has a high level of endemism, major populations of wildlife species, and a rich biodiversity (plant and animal species found nowhere else). It is also home to several indigenous tribes, many of which rely heavily on natural resources for their subsistence. These communities also have distinctive sociocultural, agroecological, and land-holding systems. Therefore, while dealing with the economic effectiveness of an environmentally sensitive region, maintaining the ecosystem takes center stage. There are justifications for rewarding these areas for preserving their ecosystems at the sacrifice of economic efficiency and so reducing harmful externalities (Koch-Weser & Kahlenborn, 2004). Considering the region's fragile environment, it is crucial to address the effects of these activities on shared resources that are essential to local populations' lives as well as maintaining biological balances and economic gains.

**4.3 Nurturing Geopolitical and Economic Relevance through Enhanced Connectivity: Northeast India's Development under LEP/AEP**

To propel the Indian North Eastern Region into global prominence, the Look East Policy (LEP) or Act East Policy (AEP) underscores the criticality of erecting robust infrastructure networks, interlinking roads, and connectivity routes with South Asia and Southeast Asia. The overarching objective of this expanded connectivity initiative is to dismantle the historical geographic isolation of Northeast India, thereby orchestrating its evolution into a pivotal commercial hub within the region. Intrinsically tied to this endeavor is the aspiration to bolster India's influence in the geopolitical dynamics of South Asia and Southeast Asia, whereby the LEP/AEP interweaves foreign policy pursuits with the imperative of regional economic prosperity. Historically, Northeast India has languished behind other regions in terms of industrial and economic advancement. This disparity was often attributed to what was perceived as a neglectful treatment of the region by the central administration, fostering discontent and political unrest. Such sentiment was driven by the perception that the region's valuable natural resources were exploited without commensurate investments in its industrial growth. Protests, notably the Assam Movement of 1979–1985, sought not only economic prospects but also preservation of indigenous identity and cultural capital. Beyond Assam, the states of Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland manifested agitation politics, centering on the recognition and safeguarding of their distinctive societies, rather than solely freeing their economies from state control. Northeast India serves as a symbolic overland conduit, bridging the economic promise of India and Southeast Asia. The efficacy of this bridging role hinges on the development of transportation, communication, and trade-related infrastructure, or the absence thereof. Aligned with neoliberal principles, the LEP/AEP has harnessed market-oriented strategies to kindle development, necessitating states to ease economic constraints and establish a conducive environment for trade and industry expansion. This entails furnishing the region with trade-promoting infrastructure and fostering industrial growth through enhanced connectivity. At its core, the Northeast region's strategy hinges on infrastructure-centered development, envisaging that the market economy will propel regional economic augmentation once the bedrock of physical connectivity is established.

Nonetheless, the trajectory of growth carved by the neoliberal doctrine has proven to be averse to fostering a more equitably distributed landscape of economic prospects. The repercussions of the economy's vulnerability to the fluctuations of the capital market have amplified the vulnerability of the impoverished strata. This economic framework has notably omitted the social imperative of shaping growth to be "pro-poor," conspicuously absent from its developmental framework (Williamson, 2003). While the absence of governmental intervention amplifies the avenues for the privileged to amplify their earnings, the neoliberal paradigm does yield incremental income increments for the less affluent. However, the proportional advancement for those with meager initial resources remains marginal. This holds particularly true in regions like Northeast India, historically characterized by modest income levels. The capacity of the region's underprivileged to harness these emerging prospects remains largely not swayed by the strategies conceived within connection development plans. Intriguingly, it remains an ongoing pursuit to ascertain the precise impacts of burgeoning commerce and trade brought forth by growth, particularly in a neoliberal economic model, and how these dynamics resonate within the fabric of Northeast Indian society. This unfolds against the backdrop of a contracting state role in resource allocation within the market sphere. Notwithstanding theoretical paradigms associating infrastructural advancement with development, empirical research has disclosed that the benefits of road construction are unevenly distributed across diverse populations (Jonathan, 2002). The perceptible undercurrent of unease and resistance discernible in social demonstrations against the notion of enhanced connectivity can be attributed to the persistently evolving political economy. For the average inhabitant of the region, especially among its tribal communities, the immediate dividends of novel economic opportunities remain elusive. Instead, there is a looming risk of relinquishing long-held rights to specific lands and resources, as these assets are transmuted to align with private ownership paradigms, consequently repurposed or requisitioned for the construction of public infrastructure (Karlsson, 2011).

Despite proactive governmental efforts to stimulate investments in the local industry through initiatives like investor summits and business conclaves, local businesses in the region have not exhibited substantial progress. This trend has persisted even more notably since the transformation of the Look East Policy (LEP) into the Act East Policy (AEP). The underlying rationale behind this phenomenon possibly lies in the distinctive orientation of the LEP/AEP, which places greater emphasis on forging an infrastructure conducive to streamlined commercial transit, rather than a focal point on nurturing the growth of indigenous enterprises and local capital within the region. Since the inception of the LEP/AEP, a striking illustration of this orientation can be observed in the solitary Inland Container Depot (ICD) located in the Northeast vicinity, precisely at Amingaon across the Brahmaputra River from Guwahati City. Intriguingly, the operational dynamics of this ICD have showcased a discernible unidirectional trend in cargo flow, predominantly involving cargoes outward-bound, notably towards Kolkata Port. This conspicuous operational pattern at the ICD, largely centered on the transportation of Assamese tea, stands as a tangible indicator that the region's export-driven trade landscape has not exhibited notable growth under the LEP/AEP framework (Santanu, 2011).

1. **CONCLUSION**

The Look East Policy (LEP) and its more ambitious iteration, the Act East Policy (AEP), have set forth a comprehensive vision for the Northeast region, encompassing the establishment of trade-related infrastructure and seamless connectivity to facilitate the unimpeded flow of trade between South Asia and South East Asian realms. In sharp contrast to prior Indian foreign policy approaches that adopted a security-centric lens towards the Indian Northeastern Region, the LEP/AEP strategically positions this area as an open arena for commerce, investments, and regional cooperation. This confluence of geopolitical aspirations with the impetus for economic advancement underscores the transformative shift introduced by the LEP/AEP. However, the push to enhance trade activity and foster economic growth across South Asia and Southeast Asia, reliant on substantial infrastructure development, has fostered a paradigm primarily focused on strengthening physical infrastructure. As highlighted by South Asian scholar Faizal Yahya, India's interaction with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the 1990s shifted towards accelerating the modernization and establishment of vital Indian infrastructure, including communication networks, highways, ports, and power facilities (Faizal, 2003).

The development approach has encountered criticism within the region for its inability to cultivate the growth of indigenous businesses and local capital, and for its apparent oversight of addressing developmental concerns in Northeast India through a social lens. The policy's foundations rooted in neoliberal principles advocate for minimizing government involvement in market dynamics. However, this approach falls insufficient in terms of equipping the local populace to effectively capitalize on the economic prospects facilitated by the burgeoning interconnectedness.

While the enhancement of infrastructure has spurred industrial investments in the area, critics have pointed out a perceived stagnation in the advancement of the manufacturing sector. These dissenting voices have criticized both the Look East Policy (LEP) and the Act East Policy (AEP), alleging that they serve as tools to facilitate the extraction of resources by capitalist interests in the region. Anthropologist Dolly Kikon offers a unique perspective, portraying the infrastructural development in the northeast as a manifestation of the innate human inclination towards monumental and substantial constructions. In this interpretation, Kikon draws upon the insights derived from Walther Benjamin's explorations into material cultures. However, there is a background for such a reductionist perspective of infrastructure building. It has highlighted the worries expressed by social groups in the area who fear that it might just remain a temporary hub for trade and transportation if the drive to build infrastructure does not coincide with plans for social development (Dolly, 2018).

**Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)**

I, hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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1. The contribution of the Northeast Economy to the national income has come down from 4.2 percent in 1980-81 to 2.8 percent in 2013-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Statistical data indicate that the ULB, Municipal Boards of this region can spend very little on basic core services e.g., the per capita expenditure of the municipalities and ULBs on core services is Rs.11 in Manipur, Rs.28 in Meghalaya, Rs.34 in Tripura and Rs.119 in case of Assam. The Municipality Corporation of Guwahati (largest city of this region) spends just 27 percent of its total expenditure on the core services. A comparative picture reveals that the state of Maharashtra spends about 95 percent of its expenditure on core services while the national average for India is about 74 percent. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Would connect Benapole/Petrapole on the India-Bangladesh border to Dhaka and Sylhet and then re-enter India near Silchar in Assam and traverse through Imphal to Tamu-Kalewa Road in Myanmar and then connect through Mandalay and Lashio and reach Kunming via Ruili, Longling and Dali. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This route requires a total investment of $1.4 trillion and is one of the prime focuses of the Chinese foreign policy and China has established a Silk Road Fund (SRF) of $40 billion for building the required infrastructure to promote connectivity in the region. The Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), with a capital of $100 billion and the New Development Bank (NDB), with a capital of $50 billion (slated to increase to USD $100 billion)—are poised to contribute significantly to the development of the proposed infrastructure. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)