



BRIDGES, BORDERS & BROADBAND

The New Connectivity Story of NER India

By Sanjay Aditya Singh



For decades, the citizens of the North East have watched their region transform—sometimes slowly, sometimes dramatically, but always with quiet resilience. They have lived through floods along fragile embankments, landslides that cut off hill districts, and journeys that ended where railway lines abruptly stopped and highways narrowed into uncertainty. There was a time when the phrase “mainstream integration” felt like rhetoric. Today, it feels tangible.

Standing in Guwahati this February, watching yet another bridge stretch confidently across the Brahmaputra River, many residents felt something deeply emotional. On 14th February, a new bridge was inaugurated in the Guwahati City of NER, adding another vital artery to a region once defined by difficult crossings. For decades, the Brahmaputra has been both lifeline and barrier. To cross it was to measure time in patience. Each new bridge has rewritten that equation.

CONTENTS

TOPICS	PAGE NO.
Cover Story - Bridges, Borders & Broadband	1
Feature Story - Satellite Sovereignty	3
A New Narrative - Myth of Aspirational India	4
Frontier Heroes - Ladakh Scouts	5
Development at the Frontiers	6
Cultural Frontier - Border Communities	7
Frontier Spotlight - IPS, Bhaskarjyoti Mahanta	8
Frontline Valour - Galwan	9
Continental Axis - Island Outposts	10
Geopolitical Frontier	11
From The Editor's Desk - Editorial	12

Connectivity is also redefining borders. For years, the international boundaries surrounding the region were viewed predominantly through a security lens. Increasingly, they are being reimagined as economic corridors under India's Act East policy. Integrated check posts, better border roads, and trade facilitation mechanisms are slowly repositioning the North East as India's land bridge to Southeast Asia. Geography, once considered a constraint, is being reframed as strategic advantage.

Across different eras of governance, residents have noticed a shift not only in pace but in imagination. Earlier approaches often emphasized special packages and compensatory funding, acknowledging the region's challenges but sometimes reinforcing its sense of separateness. The current development narrative emphasizes integration, infrastructure, and long-term structural investment. It seeks to connect rather than compensate, to mainstream rather than marginalize. This shift matters because development is not only about allocation—it is about mindset. Of course, challenges remain. The terrain is unforgiving. Climate vulnerabilities are intensifying. Floods and landslides test infrastructure every year. Ecological sensitivity must guide future projects. Growth must be inclusive and culturally respectful. Connectivity must empower local communities, not overwhelm them.

But when citizens compare the North East of Fifteen years ago with the North East they see today, the difference is undeniable. Bridges span wider rivers. Airports welcome greater ambition. Highways cut through once-remote hills. Broadband connects villages to global conversations. The region's youth speak not of isolation but of opportunity. As India moves toward 2047—the centenary of independence—the vision of a Viksit Bharat will remain incomplete without a Viksit North East. That vision means seamless multimodal transport, thriving border trade, digital empowerment, resilient infrastructure, and sustainable growth that honours the region's extraordinary cultural and ecological richness.

Infrastructure in the North East is never just concrete and steel. It is psychology. It is dignity. It is integration. Over the past decade, the frequency with which Narendra Modi Ji Honorable Prime Minister of Bharat has visited the region has not gone unnoticed by its people. These were not symbolic fly-ins; they were marked by project reviews, foundation stones, inaugurations, and policy discussions. For a region that once felt distant from Delhi—geographically and politically—this sustained attention has carried significance. The message has been unmistakable: the North East is not peripheral; it is pivotal.

January 2026 brought another milestone—the unveiling of the new terminal at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati. Residents remember when air travel to and from the region was sparse and uncertain. Today, the airport reflects aspiration—modern design, expanded capacity, and the ambition to serve as a gateway not just to the seven sister states but to Southeast Asia. Airports change economies. They invite investors. They energize tourism. They connect entrepreneurs to national markets. Across Assam and neighbouring states, airstrips and regional airports are being upgraded, shrinking the psychological distance between the North East and the rest of the country.

But the transformation is not limited to air travel. Roads, once the region's most persistent vulnerability, are being re-engineered at scale. Citizens recall journeys that took ten hours to cover distances that should have required four. Today, national highways are being widened, hill roads are being stabilized with advanced engineering, and remote districts are being connected through all-weather corridors. Travel times are falling. Logistics costs are improving. Emergency response is faster. For farmers transporting perishable produce, these roads mean income security. For students, they mean access. For industry, they mean feasibility.

Railways, too, tell a powerful story. The expansion of broad-gauge lines and the push to connect more state capitals by rail represent not just transportation upgrades but statements of inclusion. When rail lines reach previously disconnected areas, they carry more than passengers—they carry opportunity. Yet perhaps the most transformative bridge of all is invisible: broadband.

Over the last decade, digital infrastructure has quietly expanded across rural and border districts. Optical fibre cables now reach blocks that once struggled for basic telecommunication. Governance services are moving online. Telemedicine platforms are reducing medical isolation. Young entrepreneurs are launching digital ventures from towns that once seemed far removed from economic centres. The North East's youth—creative, ambitious, digitally fluent—are leveraging this connectivity in ways that were unimaginable a generation ago.

The North East is no longer waiting for connection. It is building it—across rivers, across mountains, across borders, and across digital divides. For the people who have lived this journey for decades, this is not just development. It is a rewriting of destiny.



SATELLITE SOVEREIGNTY

Why India's New Space and Telecom Rules Matter for National Security in 2026

By Ankur Hatibaruah

The year 2026 signifies a crucial juncture in India's rise as a prominent global space power. The "Final Frontier" has evolved beyond a mere realm for scientific inquiry; it now serves as the foundation of contemporary telecommunications and a vital arena for national security. With Low Earth Orbit (LEO) becoming increasingly congested due to the presence of "mega-constellations" from international leaders such as Starlink and Amazon, the Indian government has implemented a series of transformative regulations, particularly under the Telecommunications Act of 2023 and the Telecom Cyber Security Amendment Rules of 2026. These regulations are not simply administrative modifications; they represent the foundational frameworks for "Satellite Sovereignty," a principle that guarantees India can connect its most remote areas without sacrificing its strategic independence.

Historically, India's telecommunications sector functioned under a strict licensing system from the colonial era. By 2026, the complete enactment of the Telecommunications Act will have replaced this with a more efficient authorization framework. This transformation is particularly important for satellite broadband providers. It shifts away from the conventional auction-based spectrum allocation for satellite services, which has been a topic of considerable discussion, towards an administrative allocation process.

From a security perspective, this enables the government to select operators based on rigorous "trusted source" standards. By avoiding the auction's highest-bidder takes all principle, India can guarantee that its space-based internet infrastructure is not dominated by organizations with unclear ownership or connections to hostile nations. This "gatekeeper" strategy serves as the initial line of defence in preserving a secure digital environment.

In 2026, the most powerful asset in a nation's arsenal is its data. The newly established satcom guidelines impose stringent data localization requirements. Any satellite operator offering services in India must guarantee that user traffic is directed solely through domestic gateways.

The security ramifications are twofold: firstly, jurisdictional authority is secured by ensuring that data remains within Indian territory and does not traverse foreign "Points of Presence" (PoPs), thus enabling the government to maintain the legal authority to monitor and intercept traffic under emergency protocols; secondly, anti-mirroring measures are enforced through the 2026 regulations that explicitly forbid "data mirroring" overseas, which hinders foreign intelligence agencies from generating "digital twins" of Indian communication patterns, serving as a crucial defence against extensive espionage and pattern-of-life analysis that could reveal military movements or classified governmental information.

National security encompasses the principles of self-reliance in both positioning and timing. The regulations set for 2026 require the incorporation of NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation) into satellite user terminals. Although global systems such as GPS are widespread, they are still governed by foreign authorities who have the capability (and have previously done so) to disrupt signals during times of conflict.

By mandating that commercial satellite hardware be compatible with NavIC, India guarantees that its essential infrastructure, including power grids and financial systems, continues to function even if foreign navigation signals are disabled. This shift towards navigation sovereignty is a direct reaction to the vulnerabilities revealed in contemporary electronic warfare.

The Telecom Cyber Security Amendment Rules of 2026 have established a new category of regulated entities known as Telecom Identifier User Entities (TIUEs). This development broadens the scope of security standards to include non-telecom entities, such as major players in FinTech and e-commerce that utilize satellite links.

More importantly for satellite communication providers, the regulations require real-time tracking of user terminals. Operators are obligated to provide the precise latitude and longitude of any terminal upon request. Given the hybrid warfare threats anticipated in 2026, where non-state actors might exploit satellite internet to orchestrate attacks in areas that are difficult to monitor, such as the high Himalayas or remote maritime zones, this level of visibility is an essential security mandate. Additionally, the government is now empowered to temporarily suspend services or seize infrastructure during national emergencies without prior notification, thereby ensuring that the state retains ultimate control over its airwaves.

In 2026, national security extends beyond mere data and signals to include the physical protection of assets in space. The emergence of private launches from Indian startups such as Skyroot and Agnikul has significantly increased the risk of orbital collisions. The newly established regulations highlight the importance of Space Situational Awareness (SSA), mandating that operators share telemetry data to avert "Kessler Syndrome," a catastrophic chain reaction of satellite collisions that could render Low Earth Orbit (LEO) unusable for decades. Safeguarding the "territory" of space has become as crucial as protecting the Line of Control.

India's space and telecom regulations for 2026 reflect a refined equilibrium. By permitting 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and welcoming private entities, India is fostering the innovation necessary to close the digital divide. Nevertheless, by complementing this openness with stringent security requirements, data localization, NavIC integration, and protocols for "trusted sources," it is making it clear that its digital sky is not available for purchase.

Satellite Sovereignty signifies the understanding that in today's world, a nation's security is intrinsically linked to its networks. As India progresses towards its objective of establishing a \$44 billion space economy by 2033, the regulations set for 2026 act as a safeguard, shielding this expansion from unseen and subtle dangers.



THE MYTH OF ASPIRATIONAL INDIA: WHO GROWTH ACTUALLY LEAVES BEHIND

By Editorial Team

When the Economic Survey 2026 reported a 7.4% growth rate and 9.2 crore taxpayers, all of India nodded with pride. Office corridors, TV panels, in chai tapris in 2-tier cities and urban cafés alive resounded with the declaration – “India is growing.”

Once you step off the highway of the Golden Quadrilateral and move away from the tech parks of Hyderabad and Bengaluru and the glass towers of Gurgaon, the story changes. When expansion is driven mainly by service hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Gurgaon, it gives birth to two Indias. In one India, a smartphone is a tool for global work and upward mobility. In the other, it is a window into a lifestyle that feels permanently out of reach. India’s top 1% captures close to 23% of national income, while the middle remains thin and vulnerable. Growth has been strong, but it has been concentrated. For most citizens in rural and border districts, this out-of-reach view is not an aspiration but a constant source of frustration when good schools, health-care, and stable jobs remain tied to distant cities.

Our country shares a combined land boundary of about 15,000+ kilometers with Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. These are zones with tactical pressure, conflicting interests, and real risks for the country. Yet many of these areas have historically remained beneath the radar of both public awareness and national discourse.

Now consider the Northeast, which is a region with over 5,400 km of international border and only a narrow corridor connecting it to the rest of the country. Until recently, a very large percentage of villages didn’t even have mobile connectivity – a basic prerequisite for digital inclusion, economic opportunity, and national integration. Today that figure is improving, with over 90% of border habitations in the Northeast now covered by mobile networks, but still many gaps remain. What does that say? That the physical presence of roads and skeleton infrastructure doesn’t automatically translate into lived opportunity unless digital access, services, and local economic engines are also in place.

Our country shares a combined land boundary of about 15,000+ kilometers with Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. These are zones with tactical pressure, conflicting interests, and real risks for the country. Yet many of these areas have historically remained beneath the radar of both public awareness and national discourse.

Now consider the Northeast, which is a region with over 5,400 km of international border and only a narrow corridor connecting it to the rest of the country. Until recently, a very large percentage of villages didn’t even have mobile connectivity – a basic prerequisite for digital inclusion, economic opportunity, and national integration. Today that figure is improving, with over 90% of border habitations in the Northeast now covered by mobile networks, but still many gaps remain. What does that say? That the physical presence of roads and skeleton infrastructure doesn’t automatically translate into lived opportunity unless digital access, services, and local economic engines are also in place.

These patterns have played out historically. Where connectivity was poor and economic opportunity are weak, local grievances allowed insurgent ideologies and external attention to grow. We need to upgrade our viewpoint on borders as not only lines surrounded with an alien, “other” lifestyle where forces patrol but as communities where people live, work, and decide whether India is home in every sense. When people from the mainland travel to border regions, they often arrive with preconceived ideas – seeing border communities as “other,” and therefore potentially hostile. These assumptions are quickly sensed by local communities, who respond with defensiveness, resentment, or hostility of their own. In turn, visitors interpret this reaction as confirmation of their original bias, while border communities find sympathy elsewhere, outside the national imagination that already excludes them. Thus, a self-reinforcing cycle of mistrust, alienation, and perceived betrayal continues.

Borders are not secured only by fences and forces. They are secured by communities that stay. A thriving local population becomes the state’s first line of awareness – its eyes, ears, and early warning system.

The government actually recognises this, and has been acting on it. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has announced major new connectivity projects, including an ambitious rail link from Chalsa towards Doklam, enhancing access to the Indo China frontier. The Vibrant Village Programme and Border Area Development

Programme are designed specifically to bring infrastructure, services, and economic opportunity to the frontlines.

In 2023, India and Bangladesh agreed to launch five joint development projects along their shared frontier, an unprecedented step towards shared economic activities for border populations.

In Uttarakhand, a Border Area Development Council has been formed to establish innovation and training centres in frontier districts. In the Northeast, specialized projects to use local resources like bamboo in industry are underway, with Rs. 82.5 crore invested to create value chains and jobs.

In many border areas of India, development has happened without making local people feel included. This has led to anger, unrest, and movements like the Maoist insurgency instead of real progress. When jobs and opportunities are missing, people migrate away, leaving villages empty, weakening both the community and the country’s security.

This reality is not ignored by the state. Programmes like the Border Area Development Programme, Vibrant Villages, and expanded Border Roads Organisation projects reflect a clear understanding: borders are safest when people living there can imagine a future where they are. Roads, bridges, connectivity, and welfare delivery are necessary foundations.

True development allows young people to grow where they are born. This happens when education is useful, local jobs exist, and dignity of work does not depend on migrating elsewhere. Aspiration is built when growth feels near, not televised.

This is where responsibility extends beyond policy. As citizens, we must stop treating uneven development as an unfortunate side-effect of success. When we celebrate growth without asking where it lives and who it excludes, we quietly accept the hollowing out of the nation’s edges.

Borders are not held by fences alone. They are held by people who stay, invest, and believe.

And belief, in the end, is the strongest defence a nation can have.



LADAKH SCOUTS

The Snow Warriors of India's High Frontiers

By Jyotirmoy Kalita

The Ladakh Scouts are a mountain infantry regiment of the Indian Army, specifically raised and trained for high-altitude and cold-weather warfare in some of the planet's most inhospitable regions. The Ladakh Scouts' principal role is to guard India's high-altitude borders, particularly in Ladakh and adjacent mountain regions. Nicknamed the "Snow Warriors" or "Snow Leopards," this regiment has been continuously involved in virtually every major Indian Army operation since their formation.

ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION

The roots of the Ladakh Scouts trace back to the immediate post-independence period when "Nubra Guards" raised from local Ladakhi warriors to help defend the frontier during the late 1940s. In 1952, the Nubra Guards were merged as the 7th Battalion, Jammu & Kashmir Militia. The 14th Battalion of the militia was also raised from Ladakh in 1959.

On 1 June 1963, in the aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian War, Col. S.P Salunke, recognising the need for troops accustomed to high altitude, formally raised the Ladakh Scouts from the 7th and 14th Battalions of the Jammu & Kashmir Militia.

Following outstanding performance in the Kargil War of 1999, the Ladakh Scouts were formally redesignated as a full-fledged infantry regiment on 1 June 2000.

The Ladakh Scouts recruits mainly from India's Ladakhi and Tibetan ethnic communities. Today, the regiment consists of five battalions.



MAJOR ENGAGEMENTS AND OPERATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Indo-Pakistani Wars of 1965 and 1971

The Snow Leopards were deployed in both the 1965 and 1971 wars against Pakistan, earning battle honours and demonstrating their ability to operate on rugged frontiers. It was also in the 1947-48 war with Pakistan that 17-year-old **Chewang Rinchen** led his Ladakhi volunteers against Pakistanis in the Nubra Valley and routed them. He was awarded a well-deserved **Maha Vir Chakra**, a feat he repeated in the 1971 war, capturing vital territory in Baltistan in the Turtuk sector and earning the medal a second time, becoming a Ladakhi and Indian Army war hero.

Operation Meghdoot (1984)

In April 1984, units of the Ladakh Scouts played a key role in Indian Army's deployment and occupation of the Siachen Glacier.

Kargil War (1999 – Operation Vijay)

The regiment's most celebrated engagement came during the 1999 Kargil War against Pakistani infiltrators. Ladakh Scouts battalions were among the first to be deployed for combat operations, often at elevations exceeding 15,000 feet. Their troops seized strategic positions in the Batalik, Yaldor, and Chorbatla sectors, often in close combat under intense enemy fire and severe climatic conditions.

For their actions, the Scouts earned a **Unit Citation**, one of the rarest collective honours, and numerous individual gallantry awards. One notable example was **Major Sonam Wangchuk**, who received the **Maha Vir Chakra** for exceptional bravery in the Batalik Sector, leading a flank attack under fire to secure crucial ground.

DECORATIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

The Ladakh Scouts rank among the most decorated units in the Indian Army. As of recent official tallies, the regiment's personnel have received hundreds of gallantry and service awards across conflicts and peace duties, including:

- 1 Ashoka Chakra (India's highest peacetime military decoration)
- 10 Maha Vir Chakras
- 26 Vir Chakras
- 2 Kirti Chakras
- 6 Shaurya Chakras
- Numerous medals for distinguished service and battlefield conduct

In recognition of their exceptional service, the regiment and its battalions were presented with the President's Colours in August 2017, a ceremonial honour reserved for units with distinguished records.

While presenting the Colours, President Ram Nath Kovind said, "Your courage and steadfastness have won you the Battle Honour 'Turtuk' for liberating approximately 804 square km of Indian territory in 1971, and Battle Honour 'Batalik' and Theatre Honour 'Kargil' in Operation Vijay in 1999. The regiment was a pioneer on the Siachen Glacier, as part of Operation Meghdoot, and Eastern Ladakh, which in a true sense is your home.

Your invaluable contribution during Operation Vijay in 1999 earned you the award of the Chief of Army Staff Banner and Unit Citation. I am also pleased to note that one of your battalions participated with great distinction in the United Nations Peace-keeping Mission in Lebanon."



BORDER BOOM

By Editorial Team

The frontier areas of India were largely perceived as isolated and secure for many years. A more subtle but no less significant change is taking place now: tourism is becoming a potent instrument for border region economic revitalization. The increase in tourists is no longer coincidental in locations like Tawang, Ziro, and Majuli; rather, it is transforming local economies, enhancing cultural identity, and bringing communities closer to their land.

For example, the 17th-century Tawang Monastery is located in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, just 20 kilometers from the Line of Actual Control with China. Access has changed as a result of increased connectivity after being cut off for months throughout the winter. More than 1,200 kilometers of critical roads in the western Arunachal sector have been improved and expanded over the last ten years by the Border Roads Organization (BRO), greatly enhancing year-round mobility. Travel restrictions have also been lowered via civil airline connections via Tezpur and helicopter services during busy times.

The outcomes have been recorded. State tourism statistics show that Tawang had over a ninefold rise in yearly visitor visits from 2015 to 2023, from about 15,000 to over 135,000. Employment accompanied the expansion. State tourism statistics show that Tawang had over a ninefold rise in yearly visitor visits from 2015 to 2023, from about 15,000 to over 135,000.

Ziro Valley tells a similar story, though driven by culture and ecology rather than monasteries and mountain passes. Home to the Apatani tribe, Ziro has built its tourism profile around sustainable agriculture, tribal heritage, and the now internationally recognised Ziro Music Festival. Since its launch in 2012, the festival has grown to attract tens of thousands of visitors annually, including international travellers. Broader tourist footfall in the valley increased from approximately 10,000 in the mid-2010s to over 60,000 annually by the early 2020s.

Government policy has reinforced this growth. Under the Ministry of Tourism's Homestay Scheme and the Swadesh Darshan programme, infrastructure upgrades – from rural roads to visitor facilities – have received central support. Certified homestays ensure safety standards while empowering families to participate directly in the tourism economy. A 2023 assessment by local academic institutions estimated that tourism-linked revenues in Ziro have more than doubled within five years, creating steady employment for youth who might otherwise migrate to cities.

Majuli, the world's largest inhabited river island in Assam, presents perhaps the most striking example of tourism as revival strategy. Long threatened by erosion and out-migration, Majuli has repositioned itself through cultural and eco-tourism. Its Vaishnavite monasteries (sattras), unique river ecology, and inclusion on UNESCO's tentative World Heritage list have raised global visibility. Tourist arrivals, which were below 10,000 annually a decade ago, have climbed to roughly 80,000–85,000 in recent years.

Public investment has followed recognition. The Assam Tourism Development Corporation allocated substantial funding between 2022 and 2024 for riverfront development, interpretation centres, and improved ferry services. Under the central government's Swadesh Darshan scheme, eco-friendly infrastructure such as walkways and bird-watching platforms was introduced to balance conservation with access. Today, more than 200 registered homestays and small hospitality enterprises operate on the island, generating local employment and reducing outward migration.

What makes frontier tourism distinct is its multiplier effect. It diversifies income beyond agriculture and government employment. It creates service-sector jobs for youth and women. It incentivises the preservation of crafts, music, ritual traditions, and indigenous knowledge. Crucially, it strengthens demographic stability in strategically sensitive areas by making economic survival viable at home.

Tourism in these regions is not ornamental development; it is structural. Roads built for strategic mobility now carry visitors. Festivals designed to celebrate identity now sustain livelihoods. Islands once defined by erosion now attract global curiosity. We are seeing that today at the frontier, development no longer arrives only in uniform or concrete – it arrives with backpacks, cameras, and return tickets.

about 15,000 to over 135,000.



THE STORY OF RIWAI

*Border Communities as Guardians
of Living Architecture*

By Dr. Mampi Bora Das



In the green hills of Meghalaya, close to the India–Bangladesh international border lays a small Khasi village called Riwai. Though modest in size, Riwai is home to one of nature’s most wonderful creations: a living root bridge. This bridge is not made of stone, cement, or iron. Instead, it is grown slowly by the local community using the living roots of trees. It is a beautiful example of how border communities protect heritage through patience, care, and deep respect for nature.

The living root bridge of Riwai is locally known as “Jingkieng Jri.” For the people of this village, the bridge is part of everyday life. Long before tourists arrived, it helped villagers cross streams during heavy rains, especially in a region known for some of the highest rainfall in the world. In border areas like Riwai, where natural conditions can be harsh and resources limited, such living structures were essential for survival and connection.

The bridge is created from the aerial roots of the rubber fig tree (*Ficus elastica*). The villagers carefully guide these roots across a stream using bamboo and betel nut trunks. Over many years, the roots grow thicker, stronger, and slowly join together. As time passes, the bridge becomes strong enough to carry people safely. This process takes decades and is continued by different generations of villagers, making the bridge a symbol of intergenerational learning.

What makes Riwai special is not just the bridge, but the values behind it. The Khasi community believes that nature is sacred and should be protected. Forests, rivers, and trees are respected, not exploited. This belief has helped the community preserve their environment even while living close to an international border, where development pressures and changes are common.

Riwai’s location near the India-Bangladesh border gives the village added importance. Border villages are often seen only from a security or political point of view. However, Riwai shows another side of border life, one in which culture, tradition, and harmony with nature are carefully maintained. The living root bridge is a reminder of two hidden functions that border communities fulfil: guardians of heritage and protectors of the landscape.

Today, Riwai welcomes visitors from India and abroad. Tourists come to see the living bridge, walk through the village, and learn about Khasi culture. The community manages tourism responsibly, ensuring that visitors respect local customs and do not damage the bridge. This has created new livelihood opportunities while keeping traditions alive.

The story of Riwai teaches us an important lesson. True development does not always mean building more concrete structures. Sometimes, it means learning from nature and respecting the wisdom of communities who have lived in balance with their environment for generations. In Riwai, the roots do more than just form a bridge – they connect people, culture, and nature across time.



SECURING A POROUS FRONTIER

An Interview with IPS Officer

Shri Bhaskarjyoti Mahanta,

Former Director General of Police, Assam

Shri Bhaskarjyoti Mahanta, IPS, former Director General of Police (DGP), Assam, and senior Indian Police Service officer of the Assam cadre, has overseen some of India's most complex border policing environments. With decades of operational experience in counter-insurgency, intelligence coordination, and border management, he offers a rare ground-level view of the challenges along the India–Bangladesh frontier.

Q: The India–Bangladesh border is long, porous, and densely populated. What makes it uniquely difficult to police?

Shri Bhaskarjyoti Mahanta:

This border is not merely a line; it is a constantly shifting operational challenge. Geography itself resists control. In the Dhubri sector alone, we secured 48.11 km of riverine stretch using integrated surveillance and patrol systems, but a 4.35 km gap in Karimganj still requires continuous 24/7 boat patrols because river channels shift and create vulnerabilities. We also identified 60 micro-porous gaps under bridges and culverts. While 25 have been sealed, 35 still require construction and physical deployment. Monsoons regularly damage fencing—recent collapses of 60- and 70-metre sections illustrate how nature itself undermines infrastructure. The political environment matters too. Following the August 2024 regime change in Bangladesh, cooperation reduced and anti-India sentiment increased. This has transformed border policing from routine law enforcement into a frontline national security responsibility.

Q: Illegal migration, smuggling, and trafficking are often discussed together. How do they intersect?

Mahanta:

On the ground, these are not separate crimes but one integrated illicit economy. The same routes, networks, and logistics move cattle, narcotics, and people. Since enforcement of the Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 2021, authorities have seized over 16,000 cattle and arrested more than 4,800 smugglers.

Between January 2024 and January 2025, 2,601 Bangladeshi nationals were apprehended. In the current fiscal year, Assam has deported 255 illegal entrants, including Rohingyas.

The long-term risk is not just physical infiltration but institutional influence. Radical groups seek to exploit demographic vulnerabilities, enter social institutions, and eventually influence political and ideological structures.

Q: Has border fencing and technological surveillance worked?

Mahanta:

Where fencing and technology are complete, the results are clear. In Dhubri, integrated fencing and surveillance transformed a vulnerable zone into a controlled sector, leading to seizure of over 21,000 cattle and arrest of 1,653 offenders.

But fencing is only effective when continuous. The unfenced 4.35 km stretch in Karimganj remains vulnerable. Similarly, incomplete construction under bridges creates operational gaps.

The future lies in smart fencing. The Smart Fence pilot at BOP Lathitilla is nearly complete, with 100% electrical and 98% civil work done. Once fully operational, such systems will allow real-time monitoring rather than relying solely on manpower.

Q: How effective is coordination between police, BSF, and intelligence agencies?

Mahanta:

Coordination today is far stronger than before. Intelligence sharing across Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, and central agencies allows us to track networks like AQIS, JMB, and PFI across state boundaries.

However, structural constraints remain. By law, BSF must hand over suspects within 24 hours, but evidence continuity often suffers, contributing to conviction rates below 5% in historical cattle smuggling cases.

Modern criminal networks use encrypted communication, hawala channels, and digital financial tools. Our legal and administrative systems must evolve accordingly.



Q: How deeply entrenched are smuggling networks?

Mahanta:

These networks are deeply embedded in local economies. In border districts with limited formal employment, smuggling becomes an economic alternative.

We have arrested 38 Indian facilitators in Karimganj alone. But dismantling networks requires targeting financial coordinators, not just couriers. As long as profits outweigh risks, these networks adapt and survive.

A comprehensive policy reform involving policing, customs, and financial enforcement is urgently needed.

Q: How real is the threat of extremist infiltration?

Mahanta:

It is very real and evolving. Operation Praghat in December 2025 dismantled an AQIS-linked module with arrests across multiple states. Earlier operations resulted in capture of over 60 operatives linked to extremist networks.

The threat has shifted from physical infiltration to institutional and ideological penetration. We have used provisions under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) to criminalize possession and circulation of extremist propaganda.

The key is surgical policing—targeting ideology and networks, not communities.

Q: What is the biggest future threat along the Bangladesh border?

Mahanta:

The future threat is digital and ideological infiltration combined with physical vulnerabilities. Radicalization through online platforms, financial mule networks, and institutional influence will define the next phase.

Police must evolve from traditional border guards into intelligence-driven, technologically enabled security forces capable of monitoring digital, financial, and ideological threats.

Completing infrastructure gaps, deploying smart fencing, and strengthening intelligence integration will determine our success.

For officers like Shri Bhaskarjyoti Mahanta, border policing is no longer confined to geography. It now extends into data networks, financial flows, and institutional resilience—making the frontier not just a line to defend, but a system to secure.



GALWAN: THE NIGHT OF STEEL AND SILENCE

By Editorial Team

On the night of 15 June 2020, in the stark and unforgiving heights of Eastern Ladakh, history was written not with gunfire, but with grit. At over 14,000 feet above sea level, where oxygen is thin and silence is vast, Colonel B. Santosh Babu, Commanding Officer of 16 Bihar Regiment, led his men into one of the most intense and brutal confrontations in recent military memory. **The Galwan Valley—cold, wind-carved, and strategically vital—became the stage for extraordinary courage.**

Born in Telangana and commissioned into the Indian Army in 2004, Colonel Santosh Babu was known among his peers as composed, thoughtful, and fiercely protective of his soldiers. terrain itself became an adversary—narrow ledges, sharp drops, and freezing waters turned every movement into peril.

Amid the chaos, Colonel Santosh Babu stood at the forefront. When tempers flared and physical clashes erupted, he did not retreat to safety. He engaged directly, coordinating his troops and urging restraint where possible, firmness where necessary. Despite sustaining severe injuries during the confrontation, he continued to lead, refusing evacuation and focusing instead on stabilizing the situation and reinforcing his men's resolve. Inspired by their commanding officer's courage, the soldiers of 16 Bihar Regiment fought with extraordinary tenacity. In sub-zero temperatures and near-darkness, they held their ground. The confrontation lasted hours, echoing across the valley in shouts, struggle, and the relentless rush of the river below. By dawn, twenty Indian soldiers, including Colonel Santosh Babu, had made the supreme sacrifice. Their stand ensured that positions were defended and that the message of resolve was unmistakable. The events of that night marked a turning point in **India's approach to border vigilance—operational preparedness was strengthened, infrastructure accelerated, and a new clarity emerged in strategic posture.**

For his conspicuous bravery, indomitable spirit, and leadership under extreme adversity, Colonel B. Santosh Babu was posthumously awarded the **Maha Vir Chakra**, India's second-highest wartime gallantry award. But beyond medals and citations, his legacy rests in something deeper: the example of leading from the front when it matters most. Galwan was not a conventional battle. There were no artillery barrages or aerial strikes—only human endurance tested against terrain and tension. Yet it revealed something profound about modern soldiering: that courage remains timeless, even as geopolitics evolves.

Today, Colonel Santosh Babu's name is spoken with quiet reverence in military circles. His story is studied not merely as an episode of conflict, but as a lesson in leadership—calm in crisis, strength in adversity, and duty above self. In the thin air of Galwan, where the mountains keep their own counsel, the memory of that night endures. It reminds us that frontiers are not only lines on a map—they are guarded by men and women whose resolve defines a nation's sovereignty.

And among them, Colonel Santosh Babu stands tall—etched forever into the granite of India's military history.



ISLAND OUTPOSTS

Strategic watchers of India's Eastern Seas Andaman & Nicobar, Lakshadweep and similar islands as defence and monitoring hubs.

By Dr. Mrinal Jyoti Deka

The Andaman and Nicobar Archipelago (a group of islands with similar origins) in the Bay of Bengal and the Lakshadweep islands in the Arabian Sea are the two main island groupings in India. The Indian Plate and Burma Minor Plate collided to form the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Coral islands make up the Lakshadweep Islands. These islands are a part of the volcanic Reunion Hotspot.

There are islands in the Indo-Gangetic Delta (which are more parts of the delta than islands) and between India and Sri Lanka (which are remnants of Adams Bridge, Rama's Bridge, or Rama Setu; developed owing to submergence) in addition to these two groupings. The North, Middle, and South are the three main Andaman islands. Little Andaman and South Andaman are divided by the Duncan Passage. The Ten Degree Channel divides the Nicobar group of islands in the south from the Great Andaman group in the north.

The Andaman Nicobar Islands' capital, Port Blair, is located in the South Andaman. The Great Nicobar is the biggest of the Nicobar islands. It is located near the Indonesian island of Sumatra and is the southernmost island. The northernmost is the Car Nicobar. There are three different kinds of islands in the Arabian Sea. Minicoy Island, Amindivi Islands, and Laccadive Islands. These islands are currently referred to as Lakshadweep. There are twenty-five small islands that make up the Lakshadweep Islands. They are widely dispersed between 200 and 500 kilometers southwest of the coast of Kerala. The Minicoy Island lies in the south, and the Amindivi Islands are in the north. At 4.53 square kilometers, Minicoy Island is the biggest and most developed.

The Andaman Nicobar Islands has got historical significance in case of the Kalapani to Cellular Jail. During World War II, it was occupied by Japan. A few Indian navy personnel were stationed on the A&N islands in 1962 following a claimed sighting of a Chinese submarine. It is worth mentioning that Post-Kargil War, Following the Kargil security assessment report, India's first unified theater operational command, the Andaman Nicobar Command (ANC) in Port Blair, was created in 2001.

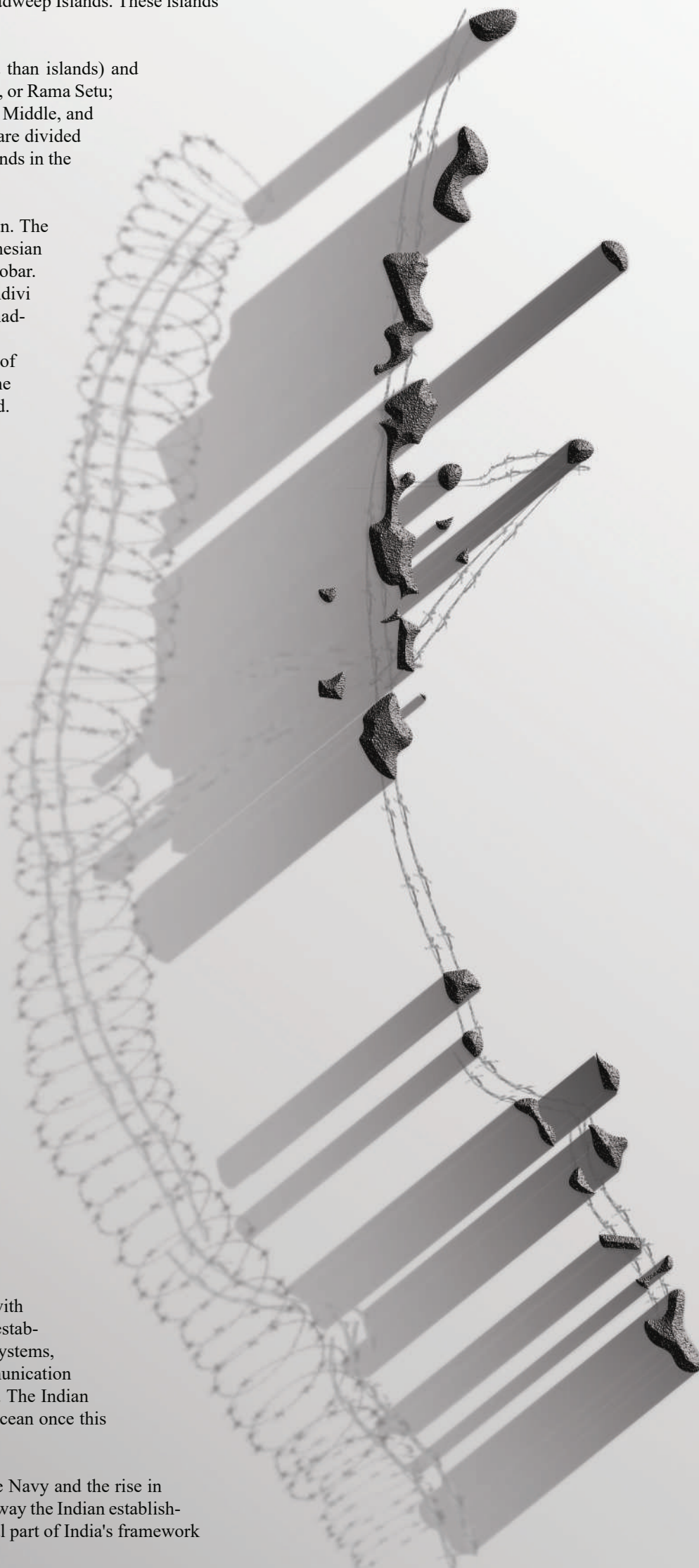
It is crucial in the event of a "Malacca Dilemma" because of placement of the Andaman Nicobar Islands at the western entrance/exit of the Strait of Malacca. It enables India to keep an eye on the traffic movement between the Andaman Sea (Indian Ocean) and the South China Sea (Pacific Ocean). The Indian cities of Chennai and Kolkata are farther away from the A&N islands than Myanmar, Indonesia, and Thailand. It promises underwater mineral and hydrocarbon riches and expands India's EEZ by 300,000 sq km. Since less than 40 of the 836 islands and islets in the archipelago are inhabited, there is a chance that a covetous neighbor could secretly occupy them, a la "Kargil heights." Concerns are raised by China's construction of a military installation on Myanmar's Coco Islands, which are located north of the A&N Islands.

Due to its close vicinity to the coastal republics of Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, Lakshadweep is also crucial. Plans to improve the standing of naval operations out of Lakshadweep have long existed; during the Cold War, India also intended to base its navy there. But until 2014, when it was announced that the islands will be developed as a strategic outpost for the Indian Navy, this never really added together.

The operationalization of the naval facility INS Dweepprakshak in 2012 was the first specific plan for Lakshadweep. On the islands of Minicoy, Kavaratti, and Androth, three naval detachments have also been active. The Union Government has also approved Bitra Island's development as the fourth Naval detachment, according to the most recent plans being laid out for the islands. Additionally, the Indian Coast Guard has its own District Headquarters in Lakshadweep's city, Kavaratti. Every year, the Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard, Coastal Police, and other coastal security agencies take part in SAGAR KAVACH, an exercise designed to evaluate each agency's operationality and readiness to handle maritime threats.

Additionally, India has set up a network of coastal radars that link mainland India with Lakshadweep, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mauritius, and the Seychelles. This was established in the wake of the Mumbai terror attacks. Radars, automatic identification systems, long-range tracking and identification systems, day and night cameras, and communication systems are just a few of the static sensors that make up the surveillance network. The Indian Navy will be able to keep an eye on practically all naval activities in the Indian Ocean once this network is fully operational.

The announcement that the islands will be developed as a strategic outpost for the Navy and the rise in activities in Lakshadweep and its environs have marked a significant change in the way the Indian establishment now perceives the islands of Lakshadweep. It is regarded not only as a crucial part of India's framework for coastal security but also as a tool for force projection.



RARELY ARE NARRATIVES ALLOWED TO BLOOM ACCIDENTALLY

Why Indian Audiences Must Stop Outsourcing Their Reality to Western Narratives

By Bhabna Kashyap

Western media doesn't misread conflicts involving India because it lacks information.

It misreads them because it applies a liberal moral framework to problems that are civilisational, geographic, and security-driven.

That, by itself, is not the real danger.

The real danger is that Indian audiences are beginning to internalise these narratives — and treat them as authoritative interpretations of their own region.

Western newsrooms are built for distance. Their stories must move fast, assign moral clarity, and resolve into recognisable roles: aggressor and victim, protester and state, escalation and restraint. **Here's what Western media actually says:**

Take the long-running situation on the India–China border. Outlets like **The Washington Post** wrote that clashes are a product of “aggressive nationalist movements” on both sides and that they pose a risk of a broader conflict. **Bloomberg** described China's presence on the frontier as “border invasion” that will push India toward the US.

Notice the words: *invasion, aggression, nationalist*. They imposed definitive moral labels on us to support their narrative, not explanations grounded in facts on the ground.

Thousands of kilometres away from newsroom desks, the reality is this: **India has over 15,000 kilometres of land borders**, much of it inherited, disconnected, and hard to patrol. The 3,400-kilometre Line of Actual Control with China has never been formally demarcated, and military patrols have bumped into each other since the 1950s—not because of a sudden “escalation,” but because that frontier was never peacefully settled.

Western coverage often presents India's increased patrols and border activity as something sudden or aggressive. In reality, India is only catching up. For years, China built roads and permanent facilities near the border while India lagged behind. When India finally expanded road construction through the Border Roads Organisation, eased clearances, and increased funding, mobility improved in areas where winter once cut off even foot movement. With better roads, patrols naturally began to meet more often. When distance shrinks, contact increases. Tension rises not because of ideology, but because geography no longer keeps the two sides apart.

Now consider another area where Western coverage often misleads: terrorism and internal security in India.

After violent incidents like the Dantewada blast in Chhattisgarh in 2023, where 10 policemen and a driver were killed by a Maoist blast, many Western outlets prefer neutral terms such as “militants” or “gunmen,” even when local officials use the word terrorist.

India's mainstream media and officials have noted this pattern repeatedly, arguing that euphemisms soften the reality of ideologically motivated violence.

Let's put real numbers on the table:

- Terror-related fatalities in India peaked around 2009–10 and have since fallen by over 70% according to official data.
- Areas affected by Maoist violence once spanned over 180 districts; today that footprint is below 40.
- Major counter-insurgency operations such as Operation Black Forest (2025) saw security forces disrupt Maoist formations, recover thousands of rounds of ammunition and IEDs, and neutralise key commanders.

That brings us to the real consequence of these Western narratives:

- Western framing turns tactical responses into moral problems, rather than explaining them as tools of state survival.
- Coverage that uses euphemisms like “gunmen” or “tensions” normalises violence, hiding causes like cross-border support for terror groups or decades-long insurgencies.
- Western headlines shape global opinion but rarely reflect local reality, causing Indians and others to misread their own security environment if they treat international reporting as definitive truth.

Yet these outcomes are rarely linked to policy. Instead, coverage isolates arrests, protests, or allegations, reframing a security problem as primarily a civil-liberties debate. Violence becomes abstract. State response becomes suspect. Context disappears.

But this external misreading would matter far less if it stayed external.

It doesn't.

Today, many young Indians are more emotionally invested in the Israel–Palestine conflict than in developments unfolding in Bangladesh, Myanmar, or India's own border regions. They can recite slogans about Gaza while knowing little about instability next door — instability that directly affects India through migration pressure, border security radicalisation,

Western media prioritises conflicts that fit its moral grammar and travel well on social platforms. South Asian security realities do not. They are slow, unglamorous, historically tangled, and resistant to clean villains. So they are ignored, and Indian audiences absorb the same hierarchy of attention.

The consequence is serious.

When citizens misunderstand their own security environment, public discourse becomes emotionally intense but strategically hollow. Tactical responses are moralised. Structural threats are minimised. Democratic pressure shifts away from outcomes and toward optics. Caring about Palestine is not the problem. Caring more about distant moral theatre than nearby material risk is. So read Western coverage, by all means — but sceptically. Not as instruction. Not as moral authority. And certainly not as a substitute for understanding your own neighbourhood.

For the west, India may be an opinion page.

But when people live in it, it is geography.



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

When we released the first issue of The Frontier Insights in December 2025, it was an idea born out of conviction — that the voice of the frontier must be heard, documented, and understood. Today, as I write the editorial for our third issue of this fourth nightly magazine published by Seemanta Chetna Mancha Purvotar, I do so with immense pride and gratitude.

What began as a Humble National initiative has steadily grown into a global conversation. From Vancouver Island in Canada to Georgia in the United States, from the Gold Coast in Australia to readers across Bharat, The Frontier Insights is being read, discussed, and shared. This journey in such a short span reflects not merely our effort, but your trust. For that, we are deeply thankful.

Our editorial philosophy remains simple: if it concerns the nation, especially its frontiers, we put it on paper. We do not embellish unnecessarily, nor do we dilute facts. The frontier deserves clarity. It deserves seriousness. It deserves commitment.

Bharat today is not the Bharat of 1947. In seventy-five years of independence, our nation has travelled a remarkable path — politically, economically, strategically, and technologically. From a newly independent state finding its footing, India has emerged as a confident global voice. Infrastructure is expanding, digital networks are redefining governance, and aspirations of citizens have grown beyond survival toward excellence.

Now, the national vision stands firmly on the horizon: Viksit Bharat 2047. As we approach the centenary of independence, the aspiration is clear — a developed, secure, prosperous, and globally respected India. Strong initiatives are being taken to strengthen infrastructure, modernize institutions, secure our economy, and empower our youth. Yet, as we move toward development, one truth remains constant: border protection will always be central to our national journey.

A nation as vast and diverse as Bharat cannot ignore its frontiers. Borders are not merely lines on a map; they are living realities — of security, culture, trade, and resilience. Challenges along our borders may evolve, but they will never disappear. Vigilance, awareness, and informed public discourse will always be necessary.

That is where The Frontier Insights defines its role. We are committed to being Bharat's border conscience — documenting developments, analyzing security perspectives, highlighting infrastructure growth, and bringing frontier affairs into mainstream understanding. We aim to inform responsibly and consistently.

As you turn the pages of this third edition, I hope you will find it thoughtful, relevant, and worthy of your time. Your readership strengthens our resolve. The frontier speaks — and together, we will ensure it is heard.



SANJAY ADITYA SINGH
Chairman - Editorial Board



FRONTIER INSIGHTS

Published by Seemanta Chetana Mancha Purvottar



Chairman of the Editorial Board: Sri Sanjay Aditya Singh | Art Direction & Design: Sri A. R. Chetiya

Address: Kesab Dham, Paltan Bazar | Guwahati-08 | Phone: +91 94011 07844

E-mail: info@frontierinsights.in | www.frontierinsights.in