



NER: BHARAT'S FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE, NOT A DISTANT FRONTIER

Why North-East India Is Central to National Security, Not Peripheral

By Sanjay Aditya Singh

For decades, the North-East Region (NER) of India has been described in the national imagination as a “frontier” — distant, remote, almost separate from the country’s mainstream narrative. It appears in postcards and tourism brochures as a land of misty hills, vibrant tribes, and untouched beauty. What rarely enters the conversation with equal force is a harder truth: the North-East is not a peripheral edge of Bharat but its first line of defence. It is where geography, history, culture, and geopolitics converge, making it central to India’s national security and strategic future.

Geography alone makes the case unmistakable. The North-East shares international borders with five countries — China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal — giving it one of the most complex border environments in the world. Connected to the rest of India by the narrow Siliguri Corridor, the region opens eastward into South-East Asia while simultaneously standing guard against pressures from the north and west. Arunachal Pradesh’s Himalayan ranges rise as natural sentinels along a contested boundary with China. Assam’s Brahmaputra valley forms the logistical heart of the region, sustaining transport, supply lines, and population centres. States like Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland lie at the crossroads between India and South-East Asia, making them vital not only for defence but also for diplomacy and trade. This geography does not place the North-East at the margins of India; it places it at the centre of India’s strategic map.

History reinforces what geography makes clear. Time and again, the North-East has been the arena where India’s sovereignty has been tested. The 1962 Sino-Indian War, fought across Arunachal Pradesh, exposed the cost of underestimating the region’s strategic importance. Less than a decade later, during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, the North-East became the staging ground for one of India’s most decisive military interventions, reshaping the political map of South Asia.

In the decades that followed, insurgencies in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, and other states revealed how neglect, underdevelopment, and alienation could be exploited to destabilise the nation. These were not isolated regional disturbances; they were national security challenges with nationwide consequences.

Today, the North-East remains a frontline zone, not only because of external threats but also because of its role in India’s broader strategic posture. The presence of the Indian Army, Assam Rifles, and other paramilitary forces across the region reflects this reality. Border management here is not routine administration; it is constant vigilance against infiltration, smuggling, trafficking, and hostile incursions. Roads, railways, and airfields in the region are not merely developmental projects but strategic assets designed for rapid mobilisation and response. Every bridge built across the Brahmaputra, every highway cutting through difficult terrain, strengthens India’s defensive depth.

Yet, security in the North-East cannot be understood only through the lens of military presence. Cultural resilience has long been one of the region’s strongest defences. Assam’s Ahom dynasty resisted Mughal invasions for centuries, shaping a legacy of resistance and statecraft. Tribal societies in Nagaland and Mizoram are rooted in strong community bonds and traditional governance systems that foster cohesion and collective responsibility. Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, with their blend of Buddhism and indigenous faiths, represent zones of spiritual continuity that cut across political borders. These cultural foundations create societies that are harder to fracture and manipulate, making them vital to internal stability.

In recent years, a significant shift has begun to reshape the region’s security landscape: development is increasingly being recognised as a form of defence. Infrastructure projects such as the Bogibeel Bridge in Assam or the Trans-Arunachal Highway are transforming mobility for civilians while simultaneously enhancing military readiness.



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Hydropower projects in Arunachal Pradesh and energy resources in Assam position the region as a strategic energy hub. Educational institutions in Shillong, Tezpur, Imphal, and other cities are nurturing a generation that sees itself as an integral part of India's future rather than a forgotten edge. Digital connectivity is shrinking distances, amplifying local voices, and reducing the sense of isolation that once fuelled unrest. Where opportunity expands, insurgency loses its ground. The global dimension of the North-East's importance is becoming increasingly evident. China's assertive posture along the Line of Actual Control places Arunachal Pradesh at the heart of Indo-China relations. Political instability in Myanmar spills across borders into Manipur and Mizoram, demanding constant coordination between security agencies and diplomatic channels. Bangladesh's proximity makes Assam and Tripura critical for managing migration, river-water diplomacy, and cross-border cooperation. Even friendly neighbours like Bhutan and Nepal are part of a delicate Himalayan balance in which the North-East plays a quiet but crucial role. This is the region where India's foreign policy intersects most directly with its domestic security concerns.

The continued use of the word "frontier" to describe the North-East reflects an outdated mindset. Frontiers are seen as distant edges; the North-East is anything but distant from India's core interests. It is the shield that absorbs strategic pressure, the bridge that connects India to the East, and the living embodiment of the country's civilisational diversity. To view it as peripheral is to misunderstand the map, ignore history, and underestimate the people who live and serve there.

As the Brahmaputra flows from the Himalayas through plains and borders, binding landscapes and lives, so too must Bharat's commitment to the North-East remain constant and unbroken. Strengthening the region is not an act of charity or regional appeasement; it is an investment in national survival and future prosperity. The North-East is not a distant frontier waiting for attention.

It is Bharat's first line of defence — vigilant, resilient, and indispensable



FEATURE STORY

UPSTREAM, DOWNSTREAM: GEOPOLITICS OF THE BRAHMAPUTRA BASIN

By Bhabna Kashyap

China's infrastructure race and psychological pressure campaign lurking along India's eastern frontier, turning rivers, roads, and silence into tools of influence.

In November 2025, an Indian traveller from Arunachal Pradesh was detained for 18 hours at Shanghai airport. Immigration officials declared her Indian passport "invalid," asserting that her birthplace was actually part of China. Though consular intervention ended the fantasy, it revealed how far our neighbours are willing to enforce it, both personally and bureaucratically. The way things stand, we are being conditioned to accept a reality where an Indian citizen is told her own birthplace is 'rented' property.

It is the geopolitical equivalent of a neighbour knocking on your door to inform you that your kitchen actually belongs to him. He points to an old, disputed map and claims your sink, your stove, and your cabinets. Even though you built the walls and hold the deed, every time you try to leave the house, he tells the neighbourhood you're a squatter.

But the real danger is this: if someone claims your kitchen, they eventually want control over the plumbing, too. This is exactly what is happening right now with the "Water Switch" on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra).

In his 2026 New Year address, Chinese President Xi Jinping confirmed a chilling reality: construction has officially begun on a massive mega-dam in Medog County, just miles from the "Great Bend" along our border. With a capacity nearly triple that of the Three Gorges Dam, this is no ordinary power plant, but a ticking time bomb in a geologically fragile zone prone to earthquakes and landslides. Reputable news outlets and regional analysts have flagged the project not just as an environmental and seismic risk but as a geopolitical gamble, part of China's broader infrastructure push that is already heightening strategic competition and water tensions along the Brahmaputra basin. By building a reservoir of this scale, our neighbour has moved from claiming our rooms to putting a valve on our main water pipe. When a mega-dam is built at a high altitude like the Great Bend, it changes two critical scientific variables:

1. FLOW REGULATION

In fluid dynamics, a reservoir acts as a giant capacitor. By holding back vast quantities of water, the upstream state can manipulate the Hydrograph (the graph showing the rate of flow over time.)

- The Drought Switch: During dry seasons, they can hold water back for their own provinces, leaving our fields parched and our cities thirsty.
- The Water Bomb: During monsoons, they can release massive volumes at once. In a region already vulnerable to disasters, this creates an artificial flash flood that could wipe out downstream cities in minutes.

2. SILT STARVATION AND EROSION

The Brahmaputra carries some of the highest silt levels in the world. A dam acts as a Silt Trap. When the water is held, the heavy sediment settles at the bottom of the reservoir.

The water released from the dam will be "hungry water." Because it is clear and lacks its natural silt load, it has higher kinetic energy and a greater capacity to erode the riverbanks in Assam and Arunachal. This may lead to massive land loss and the destruction of fertile floodplains.

From a physics perspective, the "Great Bend" is a massive drop in elevation (nearly 2,000 meters over a short distance). This will give the water immense potential energy. If a dam of that scale is to suffer a structural failure – whether due to the high seismic activity in the Himalayas (Zone V) or a "strategic release" – the resulting surge would be a wall of water moving with enough force to wipe out downstream cities in minutes.





THE UPPER SIANG MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT

: India's plan to build a massive reservoir in the Upper Siang is a direct application of Buffer Logic. Its goal is to create enough storage capacity on our side to "absorb" any sudden release of water from the Chinese side. By building our own massive reservoir, we create a "shock absorber" that can hold nearly 9 to 10 billion cubic meters of water.

1. If they release a sudden surge, our dam catches it.
2. If they cut the flow, our dam releases our stored water to keep the valley alive.

As we enter 2026, the frontier has shifted from Deed (maps) to Flow (water). China has already dammed the Mekong, causing devastating water shortages for countries like Cambodia and Laos. Rivers are being weaponized to reshape geography without a single troop crossing the border. Siang Multipurpose Project are essential buffers to ensure that our water security, energy needs, and territorial sovereignty remain protected, beyond the reach of external pressure or upstream control.

FRONTIER HIGHLIGHTS

BSF Enhances Strategic Fencing in the Chicken's Neck

By Biswarup Nath

STRENGTHENING BORDER INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY

BSF Enhances Strategic Fencing in the Chicken's Neck

In early January 2026, the Border Security Force (BSF) undertook significant infrastructure enhancements along the Chicken's Neck corridor — a crucial stretch linking mainland India to the Northeast. The BSF deployed 12-foot high concertina fencing, complemented by intensified patrolling, additional lighting, drone surveillance, and advanced monitoring systems, safeguarding this narrow yet vital lifeline of connectivity. This initiative builds resilience against potential spillover of unrest from neighboring regions and demonstrates a proactive approach toward securing frontiers while ensuring seamless movement for legitimate trade and travel.

Expansion of Check-Post Infrastructure

The Tripura Chief Minister announced plans to expand the Churaibari check post, a key junction between Tripura and Assam. The proposal aims to improve the flow of goods and vehicles, reduce congestion at the entry point, and foster enhanced economic activity and smoother inter-state border movement. Collaborative discussions with Assam authorities are underway to ensure efficient implementation.

GOVERNMENT RECORDS HIGHLIGHT EFFECTIVE BORDER ENFORCEMENT

Recent official data presented in Parliament underscored sustained enforcement along India's eastern frontiers during 2025. The Indo-Bangladesh border recorded a significant number of apprehensions and arrests — reflecting active patrols, robust fencing coverage, and collaborative intelligence-led operations. On the India-China border, no unauthorized entries were reported, underscoring effective security mechanisms and vigilance along this high-altitude frontier.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Across border districts, local youth organizations have been highly engaged in shaping community discussions around border identity, cultural preservation, and lawful economic opportunities. Peaceful rallies and youth-led forums during late December showcased civic enthusiasm and a shared desire for respectful coexistence and sustained development while reaffirming trust in formal institutional processes.

SECURITY FORCES BUILDING BONDS WITH BORDER COMMUNITIES

Peace Pilgrimage and Harmony Initiatives

On January 11, 2026, the Assam Rifles will flag off a peace-focused pilgrimage from Jiribam (Manipur) to promote unity in areas recently impacted by violence. The peace walk was aimed at strengthening community harmony, promoting reconciliation, and showcasing the security forces' commitment not just to safety but to social cohesion and healing in affected districts.

Christmas Celebrations with Civilians Across the Northeast

Across December, the Assam Rifles and Indian Army conducted Christmas celebrations in remote parts of the Northeast, including Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Assam. These festive events included cultural activities, gifts for children, and community engagement, demonstrating the armed forces' role in fostering solidarity and goodwill with local populations in border and interior regions alike.

PEOPLE OF THE BORDER: LIVES, ASPIRATIONS, AND DAILY REALITIES

Economic Connectivity and Local Trade

Border marketplaces in Manipur and Tripura experienced improved trade activity around the holiday season, supported by smoother movement protocols and cooperative enforcement that balances security requirements with community livelihoods.

Health & Well-Being Initiatives

Screening and health services near border towns, particularly those close to international check posts, were stepped up in coordination with state health departments to ensure public health safety alongside travel facilitation — reflecting the government's commitment to integrated border governance.

COMBATING ILLICIT CROSS-BORDER NETWORKS

Major Drug Seizure in Manipur

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) made a significant breakthrough in early January by seizing 7.3 kg of heroin linked to an international trafficking network operating along the India-Myanmar border. The arrest and seizure underscore ongoing efforts to curb cross-border smuggling and strengthen law enforcement coordination, reflecting continued vigilance at vulnerable transit points.

DIPLOMATIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE DEVELOPMENTS

Temporary Suspension of Bangladeshi Visa Services

In early January, Bangladesh temporarily suspended visa services at select missions in India, citing security considerations. While the move reflects evolving diplomatic dynamics, it has also prompted discussions on maintaining routine cross-border processes. Indian authorities are monitoring the situation and are committed to ensuring that necessary travel and trade facilitation continue in a structured manner.

A SECURE AND FLOURISHING FRONTIER

Between December 2025 and January 2026, the North Eastern Region has seen a multi-layered strengthening of border security fused with thoughtful, people-centric governance. Physical infrastructure improvements, law enforcement successes, developmental projects in remote border villages, and proactive civil-military engagements underscore a commitment to both national security and community well-being. The harmony initiatives, developmental services, and local youth engagement all reflect a vision of borders that are secure, connected, and lived in peace — where security forces and civilians work in partnership to safeguard territory while enabling vibrant socio-economic life.

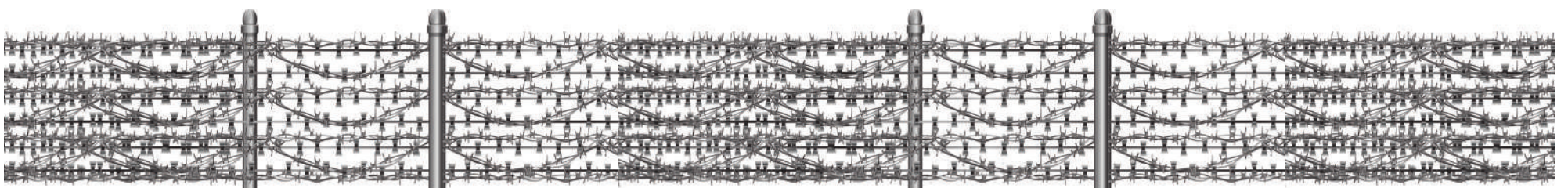
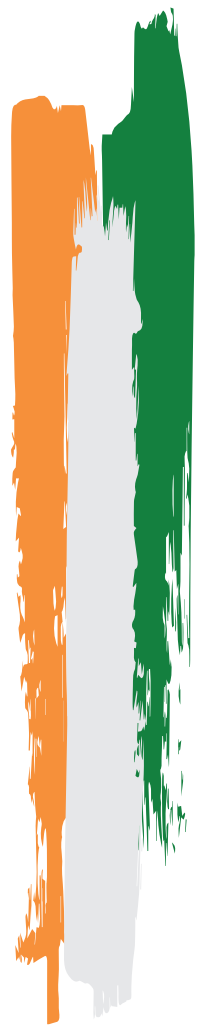
DEVELOPMENT & ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN BORDER DISTRICTS

Army Implements Civil Infrastructure Projects

To bolster civil-military cooperation and improve quality of life near border areas, the Indian Army set up solar power units in Sikkim and water storage facilities in Arunachal Pradesh in January 2026. These projects support basic energy and water needs in remote locations, reinforcing people's trust and enhancing living standards in regions that are also strategically important.

Mobile Medical Units for Arunachal Border Villages

The Government of Arunachal Pradesh sanctioned 40 mobile medical units as part of an effort to expand healthcare access in remote and border communities. Alongside the creation of additional posts for sub-jails and government colleges, this initiative reflects a holistic approach to strengthening public service delivery in frontier areas.



BANGLADESH'S LAW AND ORDER CRISIS

A Growing Security Concern for India and the North East

By Pradip Chandra Sarma

Bangladesh is currently facing a grave law and order crisis marked by deep political instability and the alarming rise of extremism. This situation has serious consequences not only for Bangladesh's own citizens but also for India, particularly the sensitive and strategically vital regions of North East India. A nation born out of a secular, linguistic, and democratic struggle in 1971 now appears to be drifting away from its founding ideals, gradually embracing a hard-line Islamist political narrative that is increasingly hostile towards India.

In recent years, anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh has grown steadily. Radical slogans, public calls to "Boycott India," and repeated attacks on Indian symbols reflect a disturbing shift in popular discourse. The growing influence of Jamaat-e-Islami and other Islamist forces within the political ecosystem has further worsened the situation. This ideological shift has weakened democratic institutions in Bangladesh and pushed the country closer to Pakistan and China—developments that raise legitimate strategic and security concerns for India. Ignoring these trends could prove costly in the long run.

Internally, Bangladesh's stability has been severely affected. Frequent reports of civil unrest, arson, looting, and attacks on media establishments point to a serious erosion of administrative control. Most concerning is the increasing targeting of minority communities, particularly Hindus. Incidents of mob violence, intimidation, and lynching have created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. The tragic killing of Dipu Chandra Das stands as a stark reminder of the vulnerability faced by minorities. Even Indian diplomatic missions and officials have encountered hostility, further straining bilateral relations.

Ironically, while minorities—especially Hindus—face growing insecurity in Bangladesh, India continues to shoulder the burden of hosting a very large number of illegal Bangladeshi migrants and Rohingyas. Over decades, weak enforcement and vote-bank politics allowed this problem to grow unchecked, leading to serious social, economic, and security challenges in border states such as Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, and West Bengal. The imbalance is striking: minorities fleeing persecution find little protection across the border, while India continues to absorb the consequences of Bangladesh's internal failures.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that in recent years the Government of India has initiated several corrective measures—ranging from improved border management to tighter identification mechanisms. The recent migration of illegal Bangladeshi nationals back from West Bengal following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise by the Election Commission of India is evidence that firm administrative action can yield results. However, given the rapidly deteriorating situation in Bangladesh, these efforts must be further strengthened and sustained with greater urgency.

India must now adopt a clear, firm, and realistic approach. This includes robust diplomatic engagement, enhanced border security, and lawful identification and deportation of illegal migrants. Equally important is raising the issue of minority rights in Bangladesh at appropriate international forums, ensuring that humanitarian concerns are addressed without compromising national security.

The unfolding crisis in Bangladesh is no longer merely an internal matter—it has direct and serious implications for India's national security, social harmony, and the fragile stability of the North East. A decisive and uncompromising approach, grounded in realism and national interest, is essential to safeguard India's sovereignty and long-term stability.



CHUMI GYATSE WATERFALL: A SACRED WATERFALL ON INDIA'S REMOTE FRONTIER

A travel and cultural look at the 108 sacred waterfalls near Tawang, shaped by nature, faith, and life along the India-China border.

By Dr. Mampi Bora



Hidden deep in the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh, near the quiet town of Tawang, lays a place that feels almost magical “Chumi Gyatse Waterfall”, also known as the Holy Waterfalls. This is not just one waterfall, but a rare and breathtaking sight of 108 waterfalls flowing together. Once you see it, you will understand why people say this place touches both the heart and the soul.

The journey to Chumi Gyatse itself is an adventure. From Tawang, the road takes you through pine forests, high-altitude grasslands, sharp mountain curves, and flowing streams. At one point, you travel close to 15,000 feet above sea level before going down into the peaceful Yangtse Valley. The road is rough in parts, but every turn gives you a view worth remembering.

After a short and easy 1.5 km walk, the waterfalls suddenly appear, and the sight is unbelievable. Clear, cold water pours down the rocky mountain wall in 108 separate streams, shining in the sunlight. The sound feels like nature’s own music. Many visitors say they forget everything else and just stand there in silence, watching.

What makes Chumi Gyatse truly special are the “stories and beliefs” connected to it. Local people believe that Guru Padmasambhava, also known as the ‘Second Buddha’, created these waterfalls. One popular story says he threw his rosary with 108 beads, and each bead turned into a stream of water. Another legend says the waterfalls were created to cure a deadly disease after prayers by villagers. A Tibetan book even mentions a powerful guru who brought water from 108 points in the rock to help people during hard times. Because of these beliefs, the water is considered holy and healing.

An interesting fact many don’t know is that Chumi Gyatse is located very close to the India-China (Tibet) border. Because of this, the area is sensitive, and visitors usually need special permission. The Indian Army closely protects the region, making travel safe but regulated. This border location also means fewer crowds, helping the place remain calm and unspoiled.

Chumi Gyatse has a deep impact on the people living in this sensitive border region. It gives them spiritual strength, a strong sense of cultural identity, and quiet pride. Living near such a sacred and internationally significant site, the people see themselves as protectors of both faith and land. Their beliefs naturally guide conservation. Polluting the water, cutting trees, or disturbing the peace is socially discouraged. Cleanliness is maintained not by strict laws, but through respect, tradition, and shared responsibility.

Villagers and monks gently guide visitors to behave respectfully, avoid plastic, and maintain silence. Their traditional knowledge helps protect the natural flow of water and the surrounding ecosystem. In addition, security forces posted in this border area support protection efforts, ensuring the site remains safe and undisturbed.

Chumi Gyatse shows us that some of the most meaningful places aren’t man-made. They are formed by nature over time and shaped by local beliefs and traditions. The sound of its flowing waters creates a calm atmosphere, reminding visitors that peace, faith, and respect for nature can exist even near international borders.

Just 20 minutes away, visitors can also enjoy the Damting Village Hot Spring, a hidden gem with warm, sulphur-rich water believed to be good for health. It’s the perfect way to relax after the mountain journey.

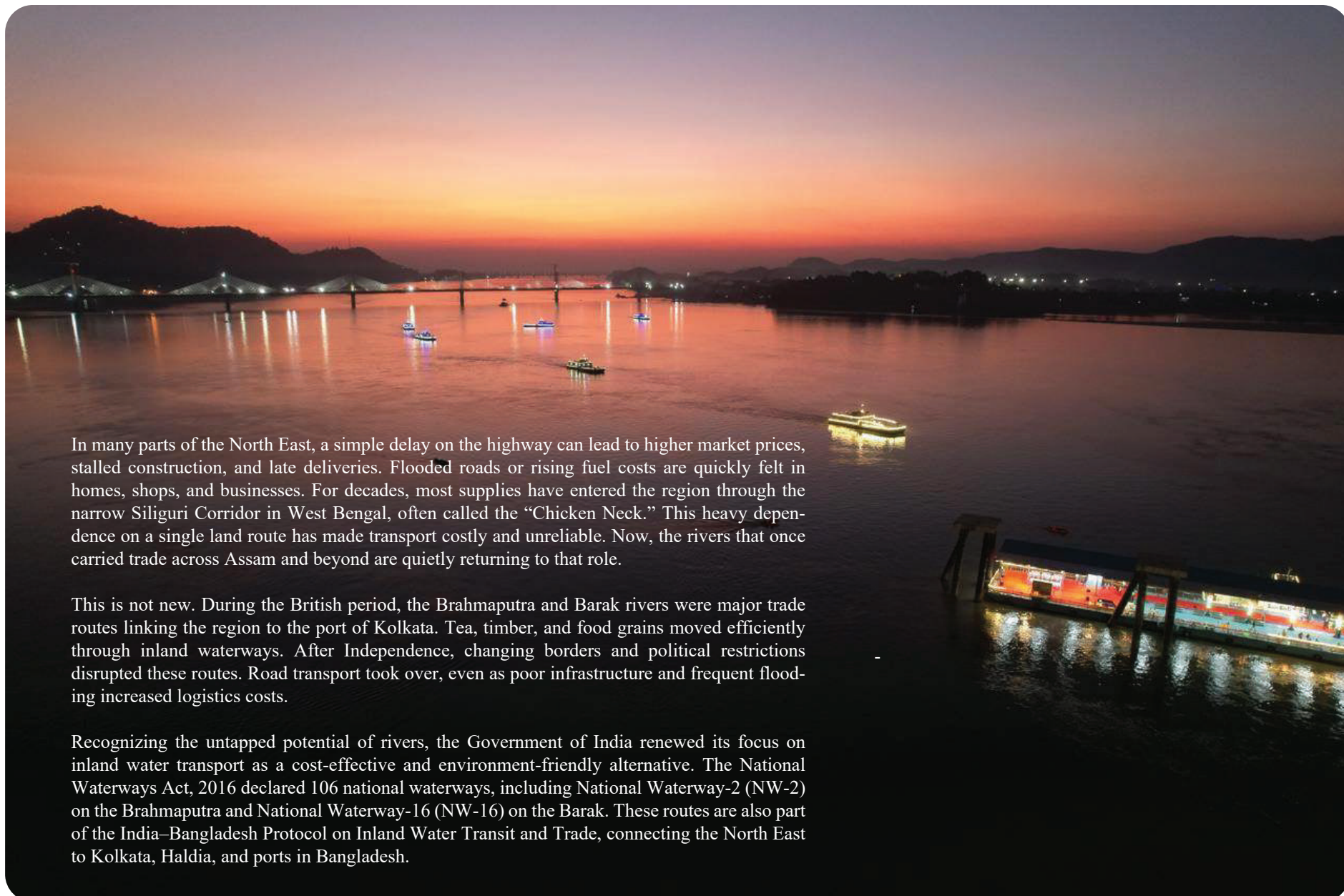
Chumi Gyatse offers adventure, spirituality, peace, and natural beauty all in one place. If you are looking for something rare, meaningful, and unforgettable, this holy waterfall is waiting for you.



HOW WATERWAYS ARE POWERING TRADE AND TOURISM IN THE NORTH EAST

For years, the North East depended on narrow road links. Now, its rivers are opening new paths for trade, travel, and tourism.

By Dr. Mrinaljyoti Deka



In many parts of the North East, a simple delay on the highway can lead to higher market prices, stalled construction, and late deliveries. Flooded roads or rising fuel costs are quickly felt in homes, shops, and businesses. For decades, most supplies have entered the region through the narrow Siliguri Corridor in West Bengal, often called the “Chicken Neck.” This heavy dependence on a single land route has made transport costly and unreliable. Now, the rivers that once carried trade across Assam and beyond are quietly returning to that role.

This is not new. During the British period, the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers were major trade routes linking the region to the port of Kolkata. Tea, timber, and food grains moved efficiently through inland waterways. After Independence, changing borders and political restrictions disrupted these routes. Road transport took over, even as poor infrastructure and frequent flooding increased logistics costs.

Recognizing the untapped potential of rivers, the Government of India renewed its focus on inland water transport as a cost-effective and environment-friendly alternative. The National Waterways Act, 2016 declared 106 national waterways, including National Waterway-2 (NW-2) on the Brahmaputra and National Waterway-16 (NW-16) on the Barak. These routes are also part of the India–Bangladesh Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade, connecting the North East to Kolkata, Haldia, and ports in Bangladesh.

Today, inland water transport is becoming central to economic activity. Cargo now moves through Indian and Bangladeshi river routes under the Protocol agreement. At Pandu Port in Guwahati, barges carry coal, cement, and food grains instead of relying only on trucks. In Silchar and Karimganj, river-linked cargo terminals handle bulk goods more efficiently through Bangladesh’s waterways.

The cost advantage is significant. According to the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, transporting bulk cargo by river can be up to 60 percent cheaper than by road. When cement, fertilizers, and fuel move at lower costs, construction becomes more affordable and market prices remain more stable.

Local industries benefit as well. Assam’s tea exporters, bamboo producers, fruit growers, and handicraft sellers can reach ports through river-based logistics hubs. Lower transport expenses improve profit margins and make it easier to access national and international buyers.

Jobs are growing along these routes. Port operations in Pandu, Dhubri, Silchar, and Karimganj support boat crews, warehouse staff, drivers, and maintenance workers. The World Bank-supported Assam Inland Water Transport Project has upgraded terminals, safety systems, and passenger facilities, improving both cargo movement and daily river travel.

Tourism follows the water.

Brahmaputra cruises, wildlife visits near Kaziranga, and cultural routes through river towns bring visitors to smaller communities. Hotels, guides, boat operators, and local vendors benefit directly from this activity.

For many island and riverine areas, ferries remain the fastest way to reach schools, markets, and hospitals. Safer vessels and improved terminals reduce travel time and strengthen access for rural populations.

As cargo and passenger movement increase, monitoring becomes more important. River routes pass through sensitive border areas where smuggling and illegal trade have been reported. Stronger customs checks, patrol boats, and surveillance systems help keep commercial routes secure. Environmental care also matters. The Brahmaputra and Barak face erosion, flooding, and heavy siltation, and dredging is carried out under guidelines to protect wetlands and riverbank communities.

Inland waterways, previously underutilised, are now playing a visible role in the North East’s economy. They influence what people pay for building materials, how farm produce moves to market, and how river tourism is growing, reconnecting the region with the rest of the country.

Quietly but steadily, the rivers are back in business.

MYANMAR CRISIS AND ITS RIPPLE EFFECTS ON INDIA'S EASTERN BORDERS

How the ongoing crisis in Myanmar is affecting refugees, border security, and communities in India's northeast.

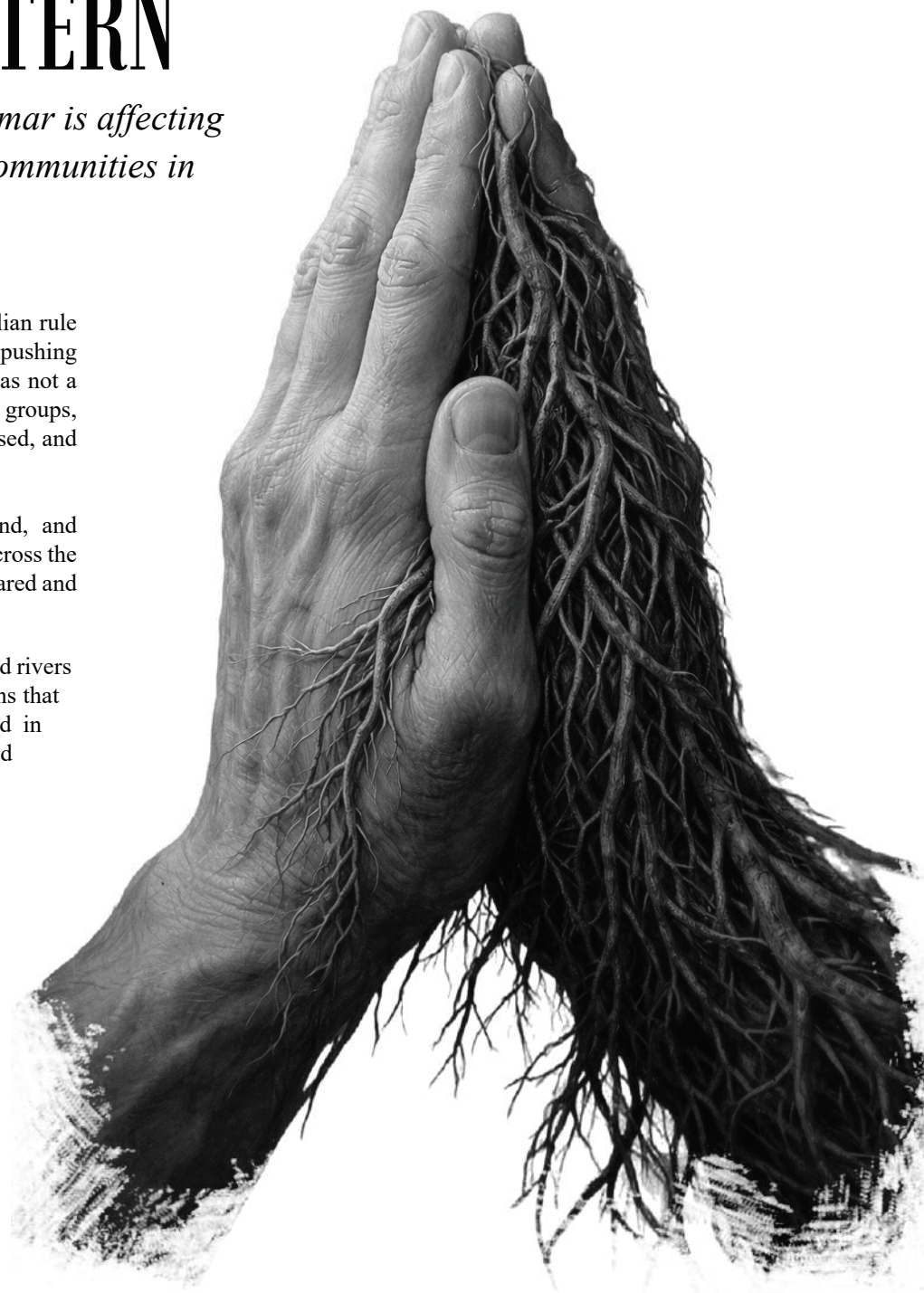
By Ankur Hatibaruah

Myanmar's military seized power in February 2021, ending a decade of fragile civilian rule and triggering unrest across the country. Peaceful protests were met with brutal force, pushing ordinary citizens, students, and ethnic minorities to take up arms. What followed was not a conventional civil war but a fractured conflict involving the military, ethnic armed groups, and newly formed resistance forces. Entire villages were bombed, economies collapsed, and basic services broke down.

For people living along India's eastern borders in Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh, the impact was felt almost immediately. Gunfire could be heard across the border. Families crossed into India to escape the violence. Trade slowed, jobs disappeared and daily life became uncertain.

India shares a long and porous border with Myanmar, shaped more by hills, forests, and rivers than by fences. Communities on both sides share ethnic ties, languages, and traditions that predate modern boundaries. According to the UNHCR, since violence intensified in Myanmar's Chin and Sagaing regions, nearly 64,300 Myanmar nationals have crossed into India since the 2021 coup, with many sheltering in Mizoram and Manipur. These refugees were not strange aliens. They were relatives, neighbours, people with shared histories. Local communities opened their homes, churches, and halls, offering food and shelter despite limited resources. Mizoram alone is hosting over 41,000 refugees, primarily from Myanmar's Chin State, with local churches and civil society providing critical support. But here's the catch: India does not have a formal refugee law. India is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and has no dedicated refugee law, leaving many refugees in a legal grey zone. Refugees exist in a legal grey zone, with little clarity on healthcare, education, or long-term settlement. For border states already facing development challenges, this sudden burden stretched administrative capacity.

Security concerns have also grown alongside the humanitarian crisis. With Myanmar's state authority weakened, armed groups and illicit networks found more room to operate. Weapons, drugs, and militants moved across the border more easily. Insurgent groups that had once been pushed back now see opportunities in the chaos.



Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project



India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway

On one hand, India has avoided openly condemning the junta, keeping channels open to safeguard security and ongoing projects. On the other, it has advocated dialogue, democracy, and an end to violence, while extending humanitarian aid. This balancing act shows just how hard it is to reconcile idealism with national interest and human suffering.

The Myanmar crisis makes one thing clear: when conflict erupts in one country, it rarely stays within its borders, especially when neighbours share a border. In India, the conflict shows up in crowded relief camps, busy checkpoints, disrupted trade, and delayed development projects.

The conflict shows no signs of ending soon. India faces a tough balance. Borders need to be secure, but refugees cannot be ignored. They need shelter, food, and basic services. Security and compassion must go hand in hand. We can sit here pretending that what is happening in Myanmar is simply politics in another country, but India cannot look away.

How can India maintain peace when instability is so close?

The crisis has also slowed India's hopes for development and connectivity in the region. Projects like the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway were meant to bring economic opportunities to the Northeast, linking it to Southeast Asia and global markets. For many, these projects symbolized inclusion and growth. Yet ongoing fighting in Myanmar has delayed construction and made travel unsafe.

Moreover, the crisis has reshaped regional geopolitics. Isolated internationally, Myanmar's military has leaned more heavily on China and Russia. That matters to India. Myanmar is not merely a neighbouring country; it serves as a vital link between South and Southeast Asia and is an essential component of the Bay of Bengal region. A Myanmar leaning closer to China constricts India's strategic options and complicates its Act East Policy.



INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE

Tryst with India's Coldest Frontiers

By Jyotirmoy Kalita



Operating in some of the world's most inhospitable terrain, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police has evolved beyond a conventional border-guarding force into a multidimensional security institution.

The ITBP is a Central Armed Police Force and one of India's designated Border Guarding Forces under the Ministry of Home Affairs. It is responsible for guarding India's border with Tibet. The force was raised on 24 October 1962 under the CRPF Act with an initial strength of four battalions, in the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The conflict underscored the need for a dedicated, professionally trained force capable of permanently manning the high-altitude Himalayan frontier. The force is widely regarded as one of India's most technically specialised and terrain-adapted security forces.

At the apex of the force is the Director General (DG), an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, who exercises overall command and administrative control. The DG is supported by Additional Directors General (ADGs), Inspectors General (IGs), and Deputy Inspectors General (DIGs). The force has approximately 60 service battalions and 4 specialist battalions, supported by 17 training centres and 7 logistics establishments, with a total strength of around 88,432 personnel.

It currently patrols the 3,488-km India-China border from the Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Diphu La in Arunachal Pradesh. The border posts patrolled by ITBP are as high as 18,900 ft and vulnerable to high velocity storms, snow blizzards, avalanches, and landslides, where the temperature dips to -40°C.

BEYOND ACTIVE SECURITY - CIVIC WELFARE

Through its Civic Action Programmes (CAPs), the ITBP complements border security with community engagement and welfare delivery in remote Himalayan regions. These initiatives are critical for building trust in areas where civilian cooperation and local knowledge directly strengthen security outcomes. Under CAPs, the force conducts medical and veterinary camps, distributes educational materials to children, and provides essential household supplies to border communities.

ITBP has been involved in greening the Himalayan regions especially in Inner Himalayas. Being the only human presence in some areas close to China border, it has taken on itself the task of maintaining the delicate balance of flora and fauna.

ITBP is also the first responder for natural disasters in the Himalayas and has 8 Regional Response Centres in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Northeast India. Its specialised Water Wing, deployed in rivers, lakes, reservoirs, and dam sites, is frequently engaged in rescue operations and civilian assistance during emergencies.

Himveer Wives' Welfare Association, a welfare wing of the ITBP is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the welfare of spouses, children, and dependents of ITBP personnel. The association focuses on rehabilitating battle casualties and widows of personnel killed in action, while also providing vocational training and empowerment programmes. There are more than 88,000 members in the association.

BEYOND THE FRONTIER

Beyond the border regions, the ITBP has played an important national role during times of crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it established a quarantine facility in New Delhi for Indian nationals evacuated from Wuhan. The force was also credited with operating the Sardar Patel COVID Care Centre at Chhatrapur, New Delhi—then the world's largest COVID care facility—during the first, second, and third waves of the pandemic.

The ITBP has also achieved notable success in mountaineering and high-altitude expeditions, reflecting the depth of its specialised training and endurance. Over the decades, its personnel have received numerous gallantry awards, service medals, and commendations for acts of bravery and humanitarian service under extreme conditions. The force has excelled nationally in adventure and sporting disciplines such as ice hockey, equestrian sports, wushu, archery, kayaking, skiing, and mountaineering. Its ice hockey team is regarded as one of the strongest in the country, with several players representing India at the national level.



BORDER LINES, DIGITAL TIMES

By Bhabna Kashyap

Imagine standing in a remote border village in India's Northeast or along the Himalayan frontier. You pull out your phone to make a call, but the network is weak. Connectivity is patchy. Your device struggles to stay online. In the old days, borders were tangible – barbed wire, checkpoints, a clear line on a map.

Today, the real frontier is digital.

For decades, Indian telecom policy deliberately weakened mobile signals near international borders in order to prevent foreign networks from spilling into Indian territory. Over time, some of these restrictions were eased to improve coverage. But the result is uneven. Even today, large stretches of the Northeast remain underserved, with incomplete 4G and 5G rollout. Official data shows that while over 90 percent of villages in the Northeast technically have mobile coverage, difficult terrain, especially in Arunachal Pradesh and other frontier districts, continues to leave serious gaps. In practical terms, “coverage” often means unreliable or unusable service.

In 2025, the Department of Telecommunications moved decisively, issuing some of the toughest satellite communication security rules India has ever seen. These rules mandate lawful interception, domestic routing of traffic, and the creation of special monitoring zones near borders. Critically, they established enhanced monitoring requirements within 50 kilometres of international borders and explicitly require that user data must not be visible or accessible outside India. Digital traffic near the frontier must remain under Indian jurisdiction, no exceptions.

In many border areas, residents use foreign SIM cards or latch onto neighbouring country networks just to make calls or use the internet. It's not political. It's convenient. You use whatever works, and life on the borders goes on, but a crack has now opened up.

When your phone connects to a foreign network, even basic data like call timing, location signals, connection records, may fall under another country's legal system. Not messages. Not content. Metadata. And metadata is powerful. At scale, it reveals movement, density, habits, rhythms. Who lives where. When areas are active. When they go quiet. This is where weak infrastructure becomes more than a development problem. In many frontier regions, mobile signals behave like bad weather: unpredictable and impossible to plan around. When networks fail, communication thins. Emergency response slows. Blind spots emerge, causing reduced real-time visibility for regulators. Lawful interception becomes harder. Economic and digital governance loses precision.

This is not theoretical. A separate report confirms that 504 villages in border areas of the Northeast still lack mobile network connectivity, forcing residents to rely on workarounds. Even where signals exist, coverage is often weak or inconsistent, a reality repeatedly highlighted in border connectivity reporting.

There are no verified reports of foreign networks actively exploiting these gaps. But border history teaches one lesson clearly: risk rarely announces itself. It accumulates silently, in spaces where oversight is weakest. These are precisely the spaces India's new telecom and satellite policies are designed to close.

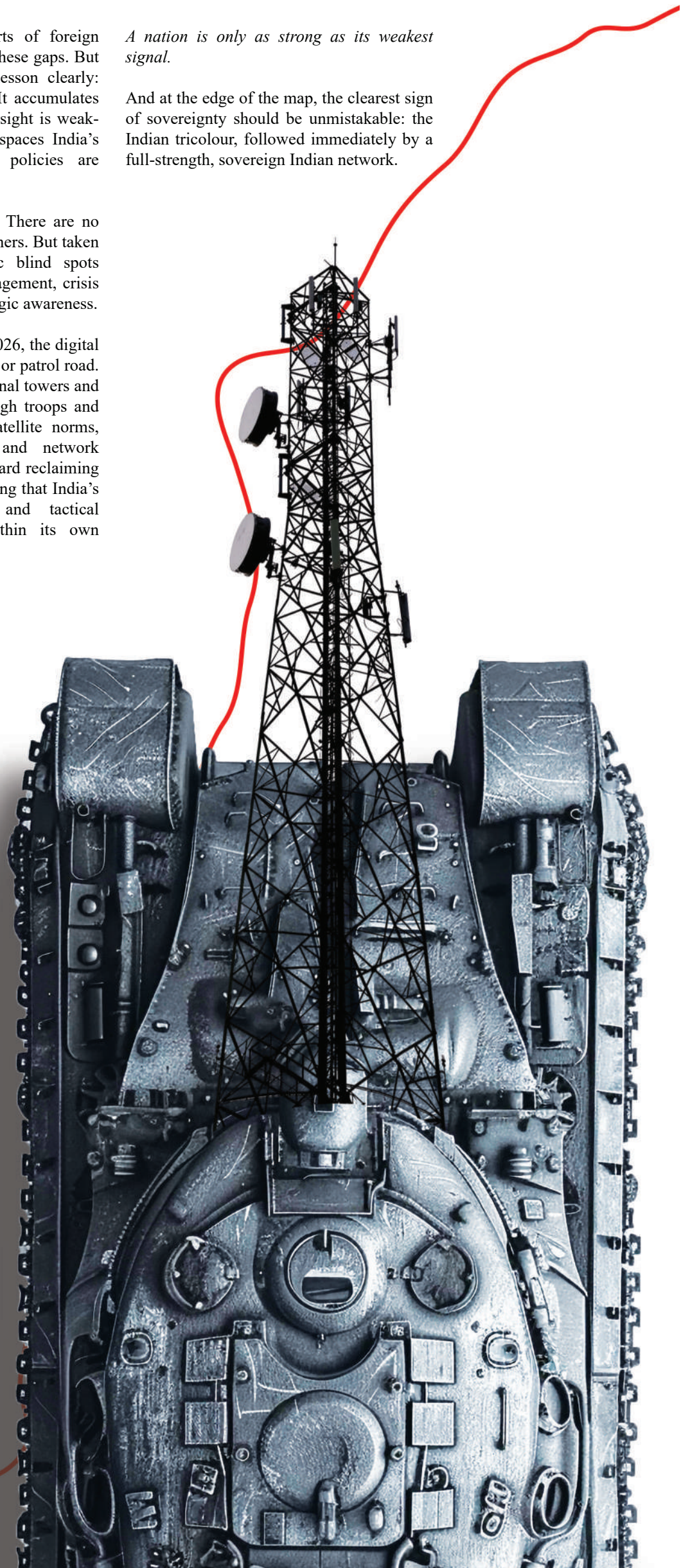
None of this looks dramatic. There are no alarms, no breaking news banners. But taken together, these are systemic blind spots which can shape border management, crisis response, and long-term strategic awareness.

As India moves deeper into 2026, the digital frontier is as real as any fence or patrol road. Defence now runs through signal towers and data routes as much as through troops and terrain. The government's satellite norms, border monitoring zones, and network expansion plans are steps toward reclaiming the blind spots towards ensuring that India's communications, markets, and tactical visibility remain firmly within its own borders.

When network gaps hit the borders, phones and data can cross outside India's control, raising security concerns.

A nation is only as strong as its weakest signal.

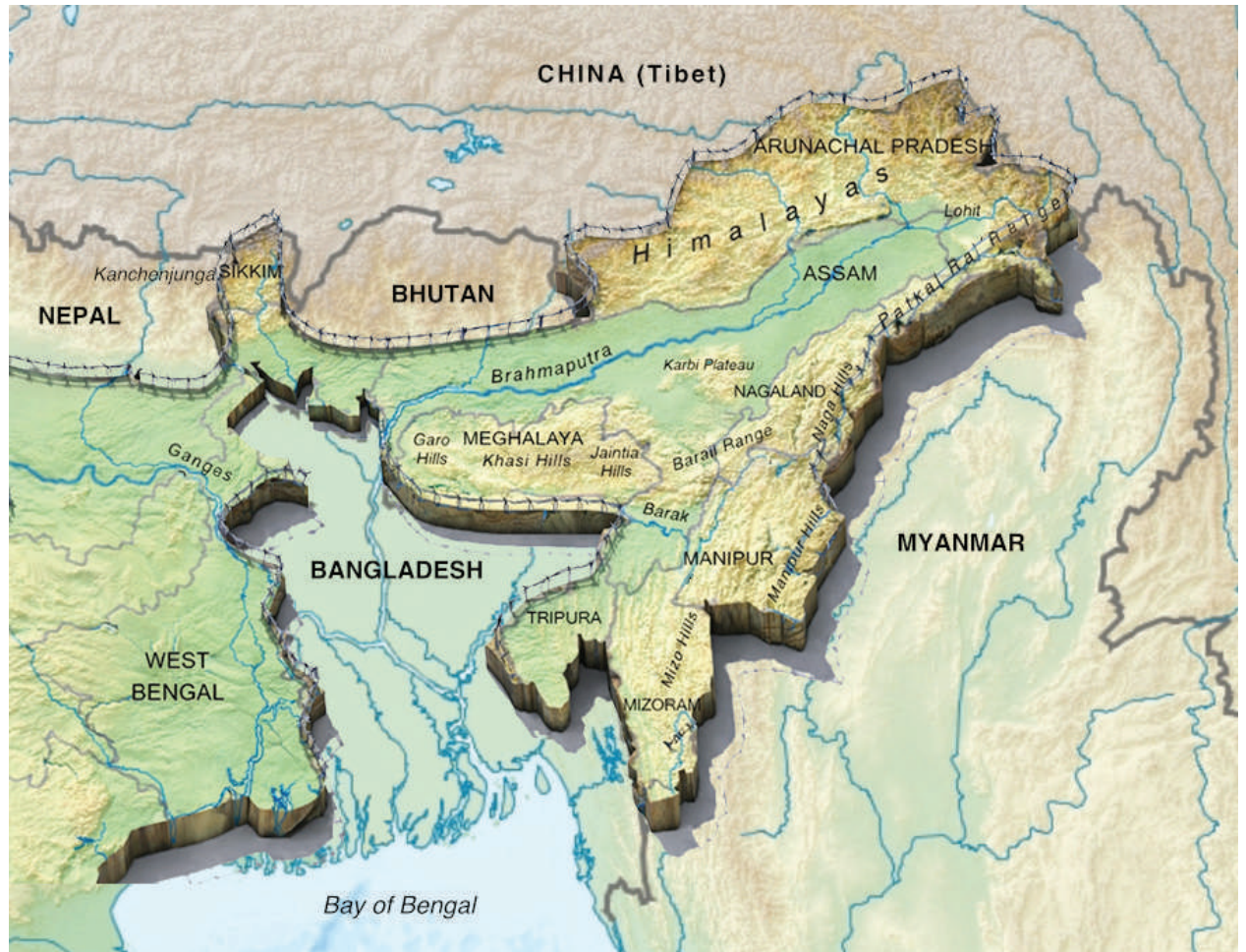
And at the edge of the map, the clearest sign of sovereignty should be unmistakable: the Indian tricolour, followed immediately by a full-strength, sovereign Indian network.



BORDER INFRASTRUCTURE IN NORTHEAST INDIA

By Jyotirmoy Kalita

Over the last decade, India's Northeast Region (NER) has witnessed a sustained push to transform its border areas through a dual approach: village-level development under the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) and large, strategic investments in highways, bridges, tunnels, and railways. BADP, a centrally sponsored scheme implemented in border blocks within a 0–10 km radius of international boundaries, focuses on addressing infrastructure deficits and improving the quality of life in frontier villages. Complementing this, major connectivity projects executed by central agencies have enhanced strategic mobility, economic integration, and administrative reach.



Category	Typical Projects	Strategic Role
BADP	Village roads, water supply, electrification, schools, PHCs, community halls	Local development and state presence
Highways	National highways, border corridors	Inter-district/state connectivity
Bridges	Major river crossings	All-weather regional linkage
Tunnels	Mountain and high-altitude tunnels	Year-round strategic access
Railways	New lines, capital connectivity	Economic & strategic integration
Airports	Regional and international linkages	National and international connectivity

ROAD CONNECTIVITY: STRATEGIC PROJECTS

Shangshak–Tengnoupal Road (Manipur)

- Length: 48 km | Cost: ₹777.61 crore | Status: Under implementation (late 2025)
- Strengthens eastern Manipur access near the Indo-Myanmar border for civilians and defence.

Imphal–Moirang Corridor (Manipur)

- Length: 36.78 km | Cost: ₹2,169 crore | Status: Completed (early 2020s)
- Enhances intra-state connectivity for trade and defence logistics.

Zorinpui–Longmasu Road (Mizoram)

- Length: 28 km | Cost: ₹764 crore | Status: Completed (~2021)
- Last-mile access near Indo-Myanmar border; complements BADP feeder roads and Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project.

Trans-Arunachal Highway (NH-13)

- Length: 1,559 km | Cost: Part of broader SARDP-NE investment (~₹63,542 crore) | Status: Largely operational
- Backbone road linking easternmost borders to interior markets.

BRIDGES: ALL-WEATHER CONNECTIVITY

Diffo Bridge (Arunachal Pradesh)

- Length: 426 m | Inaugurated: 2019
- Year-round connectivity across Dibang Valley; supports civilian and military movement.

Atal Setu / Rangpo Bridge (Sikkim)

- Length: 1.12 km | Opened: 2022
- Connects Sikkim to West Bengal; facilitates freight and defence logistics.

Dhubri–Phulbari Bridge (Assam–Meghalaya)

- Length: 19.3 km | Cost: ₹4,997 crore | Status: Under construction; expected completion 2028
- Will be one of India's longest river bridges, improving western Assam–Meghalaya connectivity.

TUNNELS AND HIGH-ALTITUDE ROUTES

Sela Tunnel (Arunachal Pradesh)

- Length: 12.04 km | Cost: ₹825 crore | Opened: 9 March 2024
- Provides all-weather link between Assam and Tawang; bypasses winter blockages near the LAC.

RAIL CONNECTIVITY

Bairabi–Sairang Rail Line (Mizoram)

- Length: 51.38 km | Cost: ₹8,070–8,215 crore | Status: Commissioned 2025
- First rail link connecting Aizawl to India's national network; reduces dependence on road travel, enhances trade and tourism.

Jiribam–Imphal Rail Project (Manipur)

- Length: 111 km | Status: Advanced stages (as of 2025); phased commissioning mid-2020s
- Links Imphal with national rail grid, improving goods and passenger movement.

Rail Push Across NER

- Total sanctioned: 777 km (~₹69,342 crore) | Commissioned: 278 km by March 2025

AIR CONNECTIVITY: GUWAHATI AS THE NORTHEAST'S STRATEGIC GATEWAY

Over the past decade, LGBI Airport in Guwahati has strengthened the Northeast's integration by linking border states to national and international networks, complementing surface connectivity projects. The airport underwent major expansion, with the new integrated terminal (Terminal 2) inaugurated in December 2025 at a cost of ~₹2,000 crore. The upgrade increased passenger handling capacity from ~3.4 million to over 13 million annually and introduced modern facilities, including DigiYatra-enabled e-gates, enhanced cargo and security infrastructure, and expanded aprons and taxiways, supporting both economic growth and strategic mobility across NER border regions.

Over the last decade, the Northeast's border regions have undergone a multi-layered transformation: BADP initiatives have addressed local infrastructure deficits, while major highways, bridges, tunnels, railways, and the upgraded Guwahati airport have integrated remote areas with the national economy and strengthened strategic access. Together, these projects have not only improved civilian life and trade but also enhanced India's operational depth along international borders, positioning NER as a more connected, resilient, and secure frontier.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

India's North-East stands firm not only because of its geography or institutions, but because of its people. From riverine villages to high mountain settlements, civilians across the region play a quiet yet decisive role in safeguarding the nation's borders. This edition of Frontier Insights recognises that border security in the North-East is not the responsibility of uniformed forces alone—it is a shared national duty, lived daily by ordinary citizens.

In border areas, civilians are the first observers of change. Farmers notice unfamiliar movements, traders sense shifts in informal routes, fishermen read the rivers better than any map. Their local knowledge, community networks, and instinctive awareness act as Bharat's earliest warning system. This cooperation between civilians and security forces has strengthened trust, improved intelligence flow, and created a model of people-centric border management rooted in mutual respect.

Such participation is not born out of fear, but of belonging. The people of the North-East understand that protecting the border also protects livelihoods, culture, and future generations. Their role reflects maturity and ownership—an understanding that national security begins at home.

Equally vital is the role of civil society organisations in shaping awareness and dialogue around border realities. Seemanta Chetna Mancha Purvottar has emerged as a bridge between border communities, policymakers, and the national conscience. Through consistent engagement, research, and outreach, the organisation has worked to highlight ground realities, encourage civic responsibility, and promote informed discussions on border security, development, and cultural integrity.

Seemanta Chetna Mancha Purvottar's efforts underscore an important truth: strong borders are built not only with infrastructure and deployment, but with awareness and participation. By amplifying local voices and fostering dialogue, it has helped integrate border perspectives into the broader national narrative—ensuring that policy reflects lived experience.

This edition of Frontier Insights also acknowledges the seamless coordination between civilians, local administrations, and forces such as the Assam Rifles and state police. Their combined efforts demonstrate that security and development are not opposing goals, but complementary ones. Roads, schools, markets, and digital connectivity enhance not just opportunity, but vigilance and resilience.

At its core, this issue celebrates partnership. Partnership between the citizen and the state, between tradition and progress, between local identity and national purpose. The North-East exemplifies how border regions can be strong, confident, and deeply connected to the nation's heart.

Frontier Insights believes that when civilians are respected as stakeholders, when organisations like Seemanta Chetna Mancha Purvottar act as facilitators of understanding, and when security is rooted in trust, borders become zones of strength rather than lines of separation.

The North-East stands today as a living example of this shared responsibility—watchful, connected, and committed to Bharat's future

Sanjay Aditya

SANJAY ADITYA SINGH
Chairman - Editorial Board

FRONTIER



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