Northeast India - Overview

Northeast (NE) India is the easternmost region of India comprising eight states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The region comprises an area measuring 262,230 square kilometres, ~9% of that of India, and houses a population of >46 million, which is 3.76% of India's population; and contributes 3% to the country’s gross domestic product (GDP).

Northeast India is the melting pot of various cultures and traditions and offers unique opportunities in terms of economic development. The region shares an international border of 5,182 kilometres (~99% of its total geographical boundary) with several neighbouring countries, including Tibet (1,395 kilometres), China (in the north), Myanmar (1,640 kilometres in the east), Bangladesh (1,596 kilometres in south-west), Nepal (97 kilometres in the west) and Bhutan (455 kilometres in north-west). Given its rich natural resources and strategic location, the region has the potential to become a powerhouse in terms of trade and investment.
THE DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHEASTERN REGION (DONER)

Established in 2001, the Department of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) coordinates the developmental efforts in the northeast region. The ministry coordinates with various departments allocated with development activities in the Northeast. It implements various schemes, including Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) and special packages through Northeast state governments and some central ministries.

ANNUAL EXPENDITURE OF NLCPR – BY NON-EXEMPTED MINISTRIES/DEPARTMENTS (RS. CRORE)

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![Image of a train in the countryside, possibly representing the development efforts in North Eastern Region.]

### Annual Expenditure of NLCPR – by Non-exempted Ministries/Departments (Rs. crore)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Budget Estimate</th>
<th>Revised Estimate</th>
<th>Actual Expenditure</th>
<th>Expenditure as % of RE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>36,107.56</td>
<td>27,359.17</td>
<td>24,819.18</td>
<td>90.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>29,087.93</td>
<td>29,669.22</td>
<td>28,673.73</td>
<td>96.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>29,124.79</td>
<td>32,180.08</td>
<td>29,367.9</td>
<td>91.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>43,244.64</td>
<td>40,971.69</td>
<td>39,753.44</td>
<td>97.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018-19</td>
<td>47,994.88</td>
<td>47,087.95</td>
<td>46,054.80</td>
<td>97.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>59,369.90</td>
<td>53,374.19</td>
<td>28,894.28</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-21</td>
<td>60,112.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following key institutions are covered under DoNER:

**North Eastern Council (NEC):** Established in 1971, the NEC is a statutory regional planning body, which provides financial assistance for various initiatives including infrastructure projects such as construction of roads, improving air connectivity and others through state governments.
Cane & Bamboo Technology Centre (CBTC): Formed in 2000, CBTC is an ISO 9001:2008 certified organisation that works as a part of part of Cane and Bamboo Technological Upgradation and Networking Programme of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It is aimed and committed to work for development of the cane and bamboo sector in the country, especially in the north eastern region (NER).

Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) under Administrative Control of the Ministry of DoNER

1) North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation (NEHHDC) Limited: It was established in 1977 in Shillong, Meghalaya, with the goal to promote and develop the handicrafts and handloom sector in the NER.

2) North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation (NERAMAC) Limited: Incorporated in 1982, the enterprise supports farmers/producers in NE to achieve remunerative prices for their produce and is aimed to enhance agricultural, procurement, processing and marketing infrastructure in the NER.

### NEC Sector-wise Expenditure During 2019 (Rs. crore)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture &amp; Allied</td>
<td>277.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power &amp; RRE</td>
<td>64.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation Flood Control &amp; Watershed Management</td>
<td>62.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industries</td>
<td>49.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>56.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport &amp; Communication</td>
<td>473.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical &amp; Health</td>
<td>14.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource Development &amp; Empowerment</td>
<td>138.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science &amp; Technology</td>
<td>16.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and Public Relation</td>
<td>15.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation &amp; Monitoring</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLCPR Central</td>
<td>141.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Plan (2070)</td>
<td>17.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,330.94</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3) North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi): It is a public limited company, comprising lending activities (fund based) and fee-based activities. The lending activities are undertaken through project finance schemes and microfinance schemes. It also provides fee-based advisory & consultancy services. NEDFi plays an important role in facilitating or setting up new industrial and service sector projects in north eastern states.

ADVENT OF START-UPS

In Northeast India, start-ups focussing on adventure tourism, agri-tech, media & entertainment and other sectors have emerged within a short period of time. Dr. Jitendra Singh, the Union Minister of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), highlighted that the Northeast is set to become one of the favourite business destinations of India post-COVID-19.

The Ministry of DoNER launched NEVF to support new businesses and provide a fillip for skill development platforms in the region. The NEVF was set up with an initial funding of Rs. 100 crore (US$ 13.67 million).

In addition, Mr. HK Borah, the head of ecosystem development for IIM Calcutta Innovation Park (IIMCIP), which has been leading the mission to develop start-up ecosystem in the Northeast since 2016, in an interview said, “Until recently, we were majorly confined to a job-seeking mindset. But the good news is that the past two-three years have witnessed the onset of a paradigm shift in the mindset of the people in the region. More and more people, especially the youth, are realising the importance of innovation to tackle the myriad local challenges themselves rather than expecting someone else to resolve the problems. It has also been observed that India’s top VCs and angel networks have their eyes on the region. With the markets saturating elsewhere, Northeast India’s reasonably unexplored potential has investors warming up to the region.”

In 2021, various start-ups, from adventure tourism and agri-tech to media & entertainment, witnessed a rise in their businesses. Some ventures that made headlines are listed as follows:

My3DSelfie: Is a first-of-its-kind, Guwahati-based, 3D selfie store that creates 3D figurines from any type of photo. It operates in both B2B and B2C models. My3DSelfie serves in >39 countries and has delivered products to numerous customers, including Hollywood celebrities, sports personalities, high-profile government officials, Fortune 500 companies, universities such as Harvard, Stanford and Cardiff. Mr. Harsha Deka, CEO and Founder of My3DSelfie said, “We are seeing 2x growth in terms of revenue compared to last year and are growing 25-30% every month. Our Q3 2020 revenue was 3x times compared to Q2 2020 and Q4 is on track to be 2x more than Q3 2020. We have been doing record-breaking numbers every month since July 2020.” The start-up raised Rs. 50 lakh (US$ 68.34 thousand) from IIMCIP, Rs. 15 lakh (US$ 20.50 thousand) as a grant.
from the government of Assam, signed a term sheet—of Rs 1.5 crore (US$ 205.01 thousand)—with an investor at the first ‘North East India Fund Fest’ held in 2020 and currently is in talks with a few investors to raise a bigger round.

Zizira: Is a Shillong-based company, which deals in spices & herbs and supports local farmers by promoting their produce. Zizira works directly with local farmers to deliver herbs and spices to the Indian population living in metro cities, who have no access to these products. The start-up was founded by the 70-year-old Mr. Ralph Budelman in 2015, with an aim to build a larger farmer network and partner with more farmers who are not just from Meghalaya, but also from other north eastern states as well.

Voyage: Is a Gangtok-based start-up with a goal to preserve the environment by achieving ‘Zero Waste Himalaya’. Voyage was formed in 2018 by Mr. Pritam Pany who quit his corporate job to pursue solid waste management full-time, with the intention of working towards the betterment of his country. Voyage, as an impact enterprise, has a hybrid model with an NGO arm that works towards uplifting landfill ragpickers out of poverty. The NGO’s primary funding source has been online crowdfunding.

Voyage has undertaken many key projects such as making Gangtok Military Station zero waste by installing composting and waste management systems onsite, effectively stopping 90% of the generated waste from going to landfills daily. In October 2020, the firm established a one-tonne-per-day plastics processing unit that will stop ~300 tonnes of plastic per annum from getting burnt or going to the landfill.

Runway Nagaland: Is a platform for local artisans in Kohima who offer handmade products using indigenous techniques and designs. Runway Nagaland’s ‘Goulu’ tribal jewellery is a popular brand among consumers. In 2019-2020, the start-up posted a healthy growth, with a revenue of Rs. 40-67 lakh (US$ 54.67-91.57 thousand), and is planning to launch interesting offerings in banana fibre, which are likely to increase profitability by 35% within the first financial year.

Natventure: Is an adventure travel firm based in Guwahati and offers cycling and trekking tours. Mr. Jitu Pegu, along with Mr. Supuraj Gogoi (co-founder), started Natventure in 2016. Natventure specialises in cycling & trekking tours; undertakes outdoor educational tours for school children and arranges corporate outdoor training programmes. The company was awarded the ‘Best Adventure Tour Operator’ of Assam in 2018-19 by the state tourism department. Mr. Pegu stated that the company generates revenue mainly from cycling and outdoor educational trips and has plans to introduce water- and air-based activities in the next two years. So far, co-founders have invested ~Rs. 20 lakh (US$ 27.33 thousand), a majority of which was spent on equipment and product development.

Spokehub Cycling: Is a Guwahati-based premium bike service outlet and retail point that provides sales and services of high-end bikes, along with spares and accessories. Mrs. Ajanta Boro and Mr. Bikash Doley quit their jobs in 2016 to set up Spokehub Cycling. The idea for this start-up emerged
when they realised there was a lack of service for premium bicycles in the city and traditional bike shops were not equipped to handle those bikes. In early 2020, Spokehub Cycling received a funding of Rs. 15 lakh (US$ 20.50 thousand) through 'Start-up Assam', an initiative by the Assam government to create a start-up ecosystem in the state.

DEVELOPING INDUSTRIES THROUGH GOVERNMENT-LED SCHEMES

The Indian government is working towards boosting various sectors such as railway, airports and roads & highways by introducing numerous projects and improving the connectivity of north eastern states. Since 2014, the government has been launching a gush of projects to improve infrastructure in the region.

Rubber Plantation

After Kerala, Tripura is the second-largest natural rubber producing state in the country, with >85,038 hectares of land under plantation, producing 74,139 tonnes of rubber annually. >1.50 lakh families are associated with natural rubber cultivation in the state.

Tripura Industries and Commerce Department revealed that 90% of the rubber produced is sold outside the state, earning ~Rs. 600 crore (US$ 81.98 million) annually.

In January 2021, Industry body Automatic Tyre Manufactures Association (ATMA) announced to invest Rs. 1,100 crore (US$ 150.29 million) to expand rubber plantation across 2,00,000 hectares of land in Northeast India in the next five years. Mr. Piyush Goyal, the Minister of Railways and Minister of Commerce & Industry, applauded this move and acknowledged the high-quality natural rubber produced in the Northeast. Mr. Goyal urged the eight north eastern states to reach out to the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) for loan assistance to farmers.

Similarly, Government of Assam Industries & Commerce Industries and Commerce Minister, Mr. Chandra Mohan Patowary announced that Assam’s rubber sector provides employment to two lakh people and the government plans to increase rubber plantation from 1.3 lakh hectares to 5 lakh hectares. He has also added that 'Advantage Assam' has attracted investments worth Rs. 65,000 crore (US$ 8.88 billion) and the MSME Act, 2020 will significantly boost the state’s rubber industries. In addition, he also called for investments from key tyre manufacturers such as JK Tyre, Apollo Tyre, CEAT and MRF.

Tourism

Northeast India is a favourable tourist destination because of its ease in allowing visitors to travel between various states. Endowed with stunning landscape and a rich cultural heritage, the north eastern states are now hoping that the tourism sector, which suffered a crisis during the pandemic, will switch gears in 2021.

North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council, also known as the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council of Assam, is preparing to welcome tourists to the district. Haflong, Dima Hasao district’s headquarters, is Assam’s only hill station that is ideal for trekking, rafting, zip lining and rock climbing.

Also, Assam has added innovative attractions to tourist places such as seaplanes and cycle tracks in Majuli Island to enhance tourist footfall and their experience. Mr. Shantanu Kalita, who heads Spicejet’s seaplane department, stated that seaplanes will revolutionise tourism in Northeast. “After
Ahmedabad, which received the country's first seaplane service between the Sabarmati riverfront and Statue of Unity in Kevadia, Gujarat, in October 2020, Assam will see seaplanes ferrying tourists between Guwahati and Umrangso, which hosts the Falcon Festival in Dima Hasao. He also added that the next seaplane service will be started in Arunachal Pradesh.

Seaplanes are also expected to carry cargo between states and border countries. This is on the back of a series of recent trade agreements between India and Bangladesh, enabling the use of Chittagong and Mongla ports in Bangladesh for speedy movement of goods between the north eastern states.

Sports

Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to Boost Cricket
On January 8, 2020, Mr. Jay Shah, Secretary of Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced plans to expand cricket in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim. Mr. Shah met with Chief Ministers of the two states to discuss prospects to enhance capacity, cricketing infrastructure, NCA coaches and technical staff, training methodologies and medical facilities. The initiative will help build base and tap the potential of upcoming players in the northeast. The BCCI has also planned to introduce more sports programmes across the region.

Launch of Assam Rifles Public School (ARPS)
On January 4, 2020, Mr. Kiren Rijiju, Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, launched the Assam Rifles Public School (ARPS) as a Khelo India Sports School in Shillong. ARPS will help in promoting sports talent from rural areas of the northeast. The Khelo India Sports School aims to integrate sports with education, thus developing sports in the country. At present, nine sports schools have been approved across the country. ARPS is the first Northeast sports school announced under the ‘Khelo India’ scheme. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, in an official release, said that the government will bear all expenses for qualified sports students in terms of lodging, education, competition exposure, insurance, medical, training, salary of coaches and support staff and sports equipment.

Introducing Sports Medicine Degree
In January 2020, Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), a premier medical institute in Imphal, announced plans to introduce sports medicine postgraduate (PG) programme. Mr. Santa Singh, RIMS Director, revealed that the institute has received the necessary permissions from the Medical Council of India (MCI) to start MD in sports medicine. He also added that this programme will benefit sportsmen in the state. RIMS has become one of the few medical institutes to provide a PG degree in sports medicine.

Railways

Northeast India–Bangladesh Railway Line
In February 2020, Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh announced a key railway project, connecting Northeast India with its neighbouring country Bangladesh. The project is aimed to commence train connectivity between the Akhaura Junction in Bangladesh with Agartala Railway Station in Tripura. It is expected to be completed by March 2021. This will be first rail route to aid passenger and goods transport from Northeast India to Bangladesh.

Jiribam–Imphal Railway Line
This project is expected to connect Manipur to the rest of the country via a railway network. It will have India’s tallest girder rail bridge. The bridge will have a pier height of 141 metres, which is twice the height of Delhi’s Qutub Minar. The project began in
Bhairabi–Sairang Railway Line
This new rail line project will connect Mizoram to Indian Railways network up to Bairabi railway station in Mizoram. The project includes as many as 32 underground tunnels, 55 key bridges, 87 minor bridges, 16 cut and cover tunnels, 5 road under bridges (RUB) and 5 road over bridges (ROB). This project is worth Rs. 5,021.45 crore (US$ 686.29 million) and expected to be completed by March 2023. Once completed, it will provide rail connectivity and boost the economy of the state.

Dimapur–Kohima Railway Project
Nagaland’s capital, Kohima will get the railway line through 82 km long Dimapur–Kohima project. This rail project is expected to be completed by March 2023.

Teteliya–Byrnihat Railway Project
Meghalaya’s capital, Shillong will be connected to the Indian Railways network through the 22 km long Teteliya–Byrnihat project. This railway project is likely to be completed by March 2022. In February 2020, Rs. 100 crore (US$ 13.67 million) budget was allocated for the construction of this rail line. Earlier, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) halted the construction due to opposition from the pressure groups as they wanted an effective mechanism to check influx before executing the project.

Sivok–Rangpo Railway Project
Sikkim’s capital, Gangtok will get Indian Railways connectivity through the 44 km long Sivok–Rangpo railway project. The project will cost ~Rs. 8,900 crore (US$ 1.22 billion) and budget allotment for 2020-21 was Rs. 60

Power

North Eastern Region Power System Improvement Project (NERPSIP)
In December 2020, the cabinet committee on economic affairs approved the revised cost estimate (RCE) for the NERPSIP at ~Rs. 67 billion (~US$ 910 million). The RCE approval is a milestone that will create a reliable power grid and improve the states’ connectivity to the upcoming load centres, extending grid-connected power to all consumers in the region. The project, due to be commissioned by December 2021, will be implemented through Power Grid Corporation (PGCIL), a public sector under the Ministry of Power (MoP) in association with six North Eastern states—Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.

Solar Power Projects under Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission (JNNSM)
The Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission (JNNSM) aims to achieve 20 GW solar capacity by 2022. The North Eastern states will witness an outpouring of solar power installations as the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) plans to develop 1,000 MW of solar projects under the JNNSM.

In addition, Sterlite Power is also ramping up the transmission infrastructure in Northeast India with an interstate transmission system project connecting the region to the western India. Power Finance Corporation Limited invested Rs. 20.7 billion (~US$ 281 million) in this project, which is expected to supply power from solar, nuclear and hydropower projects to western and north eastern regions.

Hydropower
The 600 MW Kameng hydropower plant commissioned in the Northeast has progressed by synchronising its fourth generating unit of 150 MW with the grid on January 19, 2021. This plant will change the face of hydropower in the region and supply uninterrupted hydropower for crucial balancing of solar and wind power in the grid. Besides the north eastern states, Haryana, UP and Nepal will also benefit from the plant, which is designed to generate 3,353 million units of clean electrical energy annually.
**Airport**

**Third International Airport**
Northeast India will have its third international airport—Agartala’s Maharaja Bir Bikram (MBB) Airport by March 2021. Airport Authority of India (AAI) officials stated that the project—costing Rs. 438 crore (US$ 59.84 million)—is on its way to completion and the Tripura government is keen to start air connectivity with Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries.

The airport is designed with fascinating interiors on a 30,000 sqm. area and has a capacity to park six aircrafts at a time. It will also have 20 check-in counters, four passenger boarding bridges, conveyor belts and passenger-friendly modern facilities & amenities. The MBB Airport is expected to handle 1,000 domestic and 200 international passengers during peak hours. The airport is established 20 km north of Agartala and sits just along the India–Bangladesh border.

**Rupsi Airport Ready to Take Off**
In November 2020, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) announced that Assam’s Rupsi Airport will soon commence operations under the regional connectivity scheme (RCS). The airport is located in Kokrajhar district of Assam. It is one of India’s newest project in the RCS route and will provide direct connectivity to cities such as Guwahati in Assam and Kolkata in West Bengal. The airport was redeveloped at an estimated cost of Rs. 69 crore (US$ 9.43 million) and is spread across 337 acres of land; and has a terminal building with an area of 3,500 sqm. The airport is built with sustainable features including rainwater harvesting systems, solid waste management systems and horticulture systems.

**Roadways**

**13 Highway Projects**
And a road safety project were inaugurated in Manipur in August 2020, 13 highway projects and a road safety project were inaugurated in Manipur. The road projects, which cover 316 kms will be completed at an estimated cost of Rs 3,000 crore (US$ 410.01 million). These projects will boost connectivity and development in Manipur. While speaking at the inaugural function, Union Minister for Road Transport, Highways and MSMEs, Mr. Nitin Gadkari said, "Keeping with the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi’s desire to develop infrastructure in the Northeast, we have undertaken several projects in the region". He assured to release additional funds worth Rs. 250 crore from the Central Road Fund (CRF) as soon as the utilisation certificate is received from the state. He also announced that the elevated road project in Imphal will resume in a couple of months. He further requested Manipur’s Chief Minister, Mr. N Biren Singh, to expedite land acquisition and utility shifting projects in the state, so that road projects could be speeded.

Minister of State RTH (Road Transport & Highways) General (Retd), Mr. V. K. Singh said that under the Act East Policy*, the government has provided special impetus to North Eastern states.

Mr. V. K. Singh continued by saying that Manipur plays a strategic role as it shares border with Myanmar. The trilateral highway connecting India, Myanmar and Thailand starts from Manipur and projects are undertaken to ensure smooth traffic between the three countries. He also added that the two bridges over the rivers Barak and Maku on NH37 will be completed by March 2021.
In addition to this, Dr. Jitendra Singh said, “the North East continues to be the priority of the government, infrastructure works have continued in this region despite all odds, and that it is in keeping with the PMs call for development of Rs 100 lakh crore (US$ 1.37 trillion) infrastructure in the country.”

*(The Look East Policy was launched by former Prime Minister Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao in 1991 whose main focus was to shift the country’s trading from the west of India to the east of India, i.e., towards the booming South East Asian countries. The new NDA government in the Centre upgraded this policy as the “Act East Policy” at the East Asia Summit held in Myanmar in November 2014.)*

27th National Highways Projects in Assam

In December 2020, Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Mr. Nitin Gadkari, along with Assam Chief Minister Mr. Sarbananda Sonowal, laid the foundation stone for the 27th Rashtriya Rajmarg Pariyojana (National Highways Projects) in Silchar, Assam. The project, with a total length of 439 kilometres, will include building bridges over Krishnai river to connect Meghalaya to the rest of India. The project with an estimated cost of Rs. 2,366 crore (US$ 323.36 million) is expected to boost tourism, improve socioeconomic conditions and enhance commercial activities of the region. It will also benefit availing health services, which includes transporting patients and in generating employment in the north eastern region.

WAY FORWARD

In September 2020, the Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Amit Shah, while inaugurating ‘Destination North East – 2020’ stated that Northeast India, which was once known for terrorism, blockade and violence, is now known for tourism, organic farming and start-ups. He added that the Northeast region will emerge as one of the favourite tourism and business destinations of India. He called for making the Northeast a tourism industry and an IT and organic farming hub to increase the Northeast’s contribution in the country’s GDP by 2024.

Mr. Shah also applauded the government for taking initiatives such as the Land Border Agreement with Bangladesh, Manipur Blockade, Bodo Agreement and the surrender by 641 cadres of 8 militant groups to establish peace in the Northeast.

Given the notable support from the government, entrepreneurial enthusiasm from the Northeast millennials and the recognition received from the country and beyond, Northeast India is on its way to rise with shining colours in years to come.