

Gist of RSTV Big Picture: Northeast's Growth Potential

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Guests:

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What's in the news-?

- The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone for the Manipur Water Supply Project.
- The PM highlighted that the Northeastern region of India has the potential to become India's growth engine, and asserted that peace has now been established in the region.
- Modern infrastructure is being built to improve connectivity because India's Northeast, is the gateway to ancient cultural relationships with East Asia.
- The region holds immense prospects for future trade, travel and tourism for the country.

North east India comprises of eight states – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

The importance of the northeast region-

- The north eastern states are sandwiched between neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Bhutan, and Nepal. Hence India's Northeast holds strategic and political importance.
- It ensures India's connectivity with the rest of East Asian countries.
- The northeastern region of India is one of the 17 biodiversity hotspots in the world.
- With just 7.98% of the geographical area of the country, north east (NE) has nearly 25% of India's forest cover.
- Social and educational attainment levels of people in this region are very high. NE states have one of the highest literacy rates in India. As per the census 2011, literacy rates are-
 - Tripura- 87.75%
 - Mizoram- 91.58%
 - Meghalaya- 75.5%
 - Manipur - 79.85%
 - Nagaland- 79.6 %
- The region is home to a large number of ethnic communities and diverse tribal groups having unique dialects and traditions.

Challenges in the region:

- Despite covering 8% of the total geographical area of the country, the northeast has been facing political isolation due to geographical separation from the mainland, post-independence.
 - Many ethnic differences were perpetuated by the British which created multiple identities in the region with conflicting interests.
- Despite the northeast vision 2020 which aims at bringing the region at par with other states in terms of economic development, the lacunae in economic growth persists.

- Employment opportunities for the educated youth, in the IT and services sector are low.
- Private companies do not have a substantial investment in the region as the transaction cost for the investors here is much higher as compared to the other regions in the country.
 - The higher transaction cost is due to security issues in the region.
- As per the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2019 there is a sharp decline in the forest cover in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Sikkim.

Is the sense of isolation in the Northeast being addressed ?

In the last few years, efforts are being directed toward restoring peace and normalcy in the region:

- Security intervention is provided by the Government.
- The youth in the region are much more integrated with the mainstream because of higher educational attainment and interaction with outside communities.

Agitations against developmental projects posing threat to the environment:

People oriented, grass root level agitations have taken place whenever development projects have threatened the environment in the region:

- Dehing Patkai- National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) approved a coal-mining project in the Saleki reserve forest which is a part of the Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve. This move sparked protests by environmentalists, students and NGOs demanding protection for Dehing Patkai which is known as the 'Amazon of the East'.
- Baghjan Oil explosion- Oil India Limited (OIL) plant had a fire explosion leading to agitation due to the loss of lives and against ecological pollution, by the local villagers.

Balancing ecological development and employment generation:

- Focus must be laid on creating enough employment opportunities for the local youth as they are the best bet in bringing normalcy to the region and getting the entire region integrated with the rest of the country.
- Instead of following the traditional industrial model of development like in the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, natural resources abundant in this region such as bamboo and rubber must be harnessed.
 - Bamboo can be used not only for making furniture but also for making biofuels, which is a sustainable energy source.
- Flood management and water management projects in this region can help meet its water as well as developmental needs along with stabilizing the ecosystem of the rest of the country.
- People in the northeast region can speak comparatively better English than in many other parts of the country.
 - This English speaking skill can be channelised for service based activities which includes Business process outsourcing (BPOs) and Knowledge process outsourcing (KPOs).

Government initiatives for development of the Northeast -

- **India's Act East Policy unveiled in 2014:** envisages the economic development and better connectivity for the north eastern states. The larger aim is boosting trade and security ties between India and the Southeast Asian and East Asian countries.
- **National Bamboo Mission:** was launched for promoting holistic growth of bamboo sector for social, commercial and economical advantage of the local communities in the northeastern region .
- **Arunachal Pradesh Land Settlement and Records Amendment Act 2018:**
 - Confers ownership rights to indigenous tribal people including communities and clans who

own land possession certificates.

- This will enable people to mortgage land for obtaining loans from banks or lease out the land.
- **Bru or Reang resettlement:** agreement was signed between Centre, Mizoram, Tripura and Bru Displaced People's Forum for resolving the resettlement issue of the Bru tribal group.

The best way forward:

- Integrative and balanced approach must be followed for the development of the Northeastern region, through emphasis on industrial development, ecological preservation and ethnic aspirations of the local community.
- Northeast region must be integrated with mainland India by tackling the security concerns in the north eastern states and promoting more private entrepreneurs to invest in the region.
- The mainland Indian geographical connectivity with the northeast is routed through Bangladesh. Maintaining a stable political relationship with Bangladesh is critical along with addressing security concerns along the border of the two countries.