

## NITI Aayog's Vision for North-East



(Source - <http://sevendairy.com/top-10-visited-northeast-india-websites-2012/>)

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## Lead Essay

### NITI Aayog's Vision for North-East

NITI Aayog is to be commended that its strategy paper titled “Three Years Action Agenda 2017-18 to 2019-20”, which was released on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017, has a separate section on Regional Strategies that focuses at length on the North Eastern Region too. As expected the elimination of poverty, increased prosperity and improved education and health indicators form a key part of the chapter on Regional Strategies of the paper. Although, the strategy paper has rightly mentioned the objective of regional strategies to target the less prosperous regions to ensure Balanced Regional Development, the priorities and agendas proposed, particularly for North East Region lacks clarity and details on the measures by which the Government is expecting to achieve its objective of balanced regional development.

#### North-East as a specially targeted region

NITI Aayog has identified four region of India to focus on targeted action for Balanced Regional Development. North East Region consisting eight states, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland and Sikkim is one of the four regions. To set the context for categorizing North-East Region for targeted action, it is essential to highlight the situation and the circumstances under which the people of North-East are living.

#### International Borders

Northeast shares only 2 percent of its border with the central part of the country and the other 98 percent with the international border of Bangladesh, China, Myanmar and Bhutan<sup>1</sup>. This characteristic of the region has made the area more vulnerable to illegal infiltration of population, which not only adds pressure on their economic and environmental resources, but also disturbs the internal peace process. The historical Assam Movement of the 1980s, which was the fallout of Indo-Bangladesh border conflict, is one of the apt examples in this regard. Thus, the Northeastern states with international border have been bearing a heavier burden for not only providing basic facilities to the people living in these areas but also for the broader national goal of securing the border.

#### Internal Peace and Harmony

Apart from the international border disputes with neighbouring countries, the Northeast region has also been unable to resolve the decades-old border disputes among Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram. As for example the dispute between Assam and Nagaland is the most prominent with a history of violent clashes between border communities, which has led to both states accusing each other of illegally occupying each other's territories<sup>2</sup>. This entire disharmony in the region has made the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, a menacing and long presence, which has added to problems in the region. In a gazette notification, the Home Ministry declared the entire Assam as a “disturbed” area under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) for three more months from 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2017, citing various violent activities by insurgent groups ULFA, NDFB and others. The same gazette notification also includes bordering areas of Meghalaya and in another gazette notification the ministry declared three districts and areas bordering Assam in Arunachal Pradesh as “disturbed” areas.

#### Physical Isolation

The Brahmaputra and Barak valley, as two major rivers, the mountains and hills, including the international borders have made the region an unusual geographical terrain. The constant flooding and erosion along the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries due to monsoon rains makes life uncertain and precarious every year. The fact that the flood prone area of the

<sup>1</sup> See, Barua (2005) , India's North-East Development Issues in a Historical Perspective

<sup>2</sup> Bidhan S Laishram, (2005) *Border Disputes in Northeast India: Failures of Imaginary* , available at: <http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/border-disputes-in-northeast-india-failures-of-imaginary-1727.html>

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country as a whole stands at about 10.2 percent of the total area of the country, but flood prone area of Assam is 39.58 percent of the area of the state<sup>3</sup>, should give an idea of the scale of problem and its impact on the people of Assam.

### Psychological Isolation

The draft mentions that “the physical isolation of the region post-1947 and a pause in infrastructure development after the India-Pakistan war of 1965 has hampered the region’s economic growth”. But it does not mention about the psychological isolation of the region from rest of the part of the nation, which has been much debated in the policy arena since 2014 with submission of the Bezbaruah Committee report on racial discrimination of the people from Northeast India<sup>4</sup>.

### NITI Aayog’s Priorities and Action Agenda

In its chapter on *Regional Strategies*, NITI Aayog has made a strong pitch for connectivity and infrastructure in North East Region. It states that ironing out transit treaties and the development of physical infrastructure will be a top priority for the next three years, and recommends measures to expedite the on-going transport connectivity projects to connect the intra-regional hubs. As a key project for international connectivity, the rail link from Imphal to Moreh and further to Kalay in Myanmar is targeted to link the Northeastern region to the Trans Asian Railway network. Upgradation of Airport of Guwahati, Agartala, Imphal and Dibrugarh are also mentioned in the document. Additionally, creation of 20 new ports in Brahmaputra and Barak rivers for enhancing connectivity across the region and bring down the freight movement costs with extending the protocol for Inland Waterways between Bangladesh and India, securing motor vehicles agreements with Myanmar and Thailand are the core agendas for connectivity and infrastructure. Moreover, the government has also some strategies to increase the forest cover to achieve the goal of 33 percent, upgrading sericulture, floriculture, tea plantations, the silk industry, dairy industry and power generation capacity of the region.

### Limitations of the Agenda

While analysing the NITI Aayog’s vision for the North East, it is essential to look both at the issues that were raised by the ruling party during its election campaign and equally at what had been included in the last five year plan for the North East. As opposed to the Twelfth Five Years Plan (2012-2017) and the vision documents of BJP for different Northeastern states, the strategies proposed by the NITI Aayog have only targeted the connectivity and infrastructure development. The categorization of Northeastern region as special region to be targeted does not only require connectivity, but also some serious strategies to target the problems which make this area a special category region. Drawing from the Twelfth Plan and vision documents of BJP, some major issues have been highlighted in Box 1, which are not covered by the NITI Aayog.

#### Box 1: Major issues, identified in the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17) and vision documents of BJP for different Northeastern states, but not covered by the NITI Aayog

- The first agenda mentioned in the BJP’s vision document for Assam, 2016-2025 was state security, which included insurgency, terrorism, implementing the Assam Accord in its letter and spirit and achieving complete sealing of the Indo-Bangladesh border in Assam.
- BJP Manipur Pradesh Vision Document 2017 has also given top priority to protect Manipur’s Territorial Integrity, culture and its people. Additionally, job opportunity, health insurance, drinking water, housing, all-weather road, education, etc. were major action points of the vision documents for Manipur.
- Twelfth Five Year Plan 2012-17 mentioned the importance of the creation of the Northeast Water Resource Authority for flood moderation. It also considered the flooding and erosion in the North Eastern part of the country a national issue.
- The Twelfth Five Year Plan also mentioned the requirement of special focus on banking and financial development in the Northeast region.
- The Twelfth Five Year Plan 2012-17 clearly mentioned its focus on quality of education and health for North Eastern Region.

<sup>3</sup> Water Resource Department of Government of India, available at: <http://assam.gov.in/web/department-of-water-resource/flood-and-erosion-problem>

<sup>4</sup> “Report of the Committee under the Chairmanship of Shri M.P. Bezbaruah to Look into the concerns of the people of the North East Living in other parts of the Country” available at [http://mha.nic.in/sites/upload\\_files/mha/files/ReportOfMPBezbaruahCommittee.PDF](http://mha.nic.in/sites/upload_files/mha/files/ReportOfMPBezbaruahCommittee.PDF)

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### **Internal security and peace**

The BJP's vision documents for Assam and Manipur Pradesh gave top priority to protecting the integrity, culture, peace and harmony of the area. The NITI Aayog has not covered these problems in its agenda for the next three years. But given the sensitive nature of the problem, ignoring these issues will pose a very big challenge before the government in future.

### **Floods**

In contrast to the Twelfth Five Year Plan, which mentioned the importance of the creation of the Northeast Water Resource Authority for flood moderation, the NITI Aayog has not even mentioned any strategies to solve the problem of flooding in Assam and other North-Eastern states. Considering the fact that every year, many people die and many others lose their property, it is extremely unfortunate that this problem is completely being ignored by the government.

### **Financial Inclusion**

The other critical area not covered by the strategy paper is the financial institutions and credit availability. The Twelfth Five Year Plan also mentioned the requirement of special focus on banking and financial development in the Northeast region. The main impediment for banking and financial development are topography of the region, sparse population settlements, infrastructural bottlenecks, smaller size of the market, lack of entrepreneurship, law and order conditions in some part of the region and geographical condition etc. The slow penetration of banking in this region, particularly in the rural area has completely been ignored by the NITI Aayog document.

### **Education and Health**

Lastly, the key issue not covered by the NITI Aayog is education and health care facilities in the region. The Twelfth Five Year Plan has clearly mentioned its focus on quality of education, investment in teachers' training and evaluation, distance education infrastructure for quick completion in the Northeast with special attention in social, gender and regional gaps in education. Additionally, the plan had also mentioned about the operationalisation of PPP models in school, higher education and increase seats in medical colleges, nursing colleges and other licensed health professionals. Moreover, the plan document had also proposed some health related strategies including improvement in the quality of NRHM services. But these issues have completely been ignored in the NITI Aayog document.

### **The way forward**

While the present government may have had concerns about the efficacy of the Five Year Plans and the Planning Commission, surely it cannot be of the view that the recurring problems highlighted by the Commission and mentioned in the BJP's documents are no longer issues of concern for the region and the country as a whole. Therefore, the fact that the strategy paper focuses on infrastructure development in the Northeastern region, while almost ignoring all social sector issues including health, education, job, peace and harmony in the area, seems to indicate that the Government has not taken full cognisance of all the issues that impact the region. Worst still a strategy that seems so distant from the real issues on the ground would even lend credence to the belief of the people of North East that New Delhi does not give much heed and importance to the region.

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## Headlines

### Dissent and Aadhaar

(Jean Dreze, *The Indian Express*, May 08, 2017)

India is at risk of becoming a surveillance state, with faint resistance from libertarians, intellectuals, political parties, the media, or the Supreme Court. Very soon, almost everyone will have an Aadhaar number, seeded in hundreds of databases. Most of these databases will be accessible to the government without invoking any special powers. Permanent surveillance of all residents becomes a possibility. Only a simpleton would expect this possibility to remain unused.

With everyone on the radar, dissent is bound to be stifled. As it is, many people and institutions are anxious not to get on the wrong side of the government. NGOs are afraid that their registration might be cancelled if they antagonise the authorities. Vice-chancellors and principals are unable to stand up for their students' right to hold public meetings on sensitive issues. Newspapers treat the government with kid gloves, especially on security matters. Investigative agencies target or spare Opposition leaders at the government's bidding. Nationalism is confused with obedience to the state. With Aadhaar immensely reinforcing the government's power to reward loyalty and marginalise dissenters, the embers of democracy are likely to be further smothered.

Read More: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/dissent-and-aadhaar-4645231/>

Date Accessed: 08.05.2017

## Economy

### India must Oppose Surging Protectionism

*(The Livemint, May 8, 2017)*

India will have to tread carefully, given this situation. Union commerce minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently hinted at counter moves against US companies operating in India. Indian policymakers should avoid taking such measures for multiple reasons. First, Indian IT services companies have themselves to blame in part at least for not realizing in time that the labour-cost arbitrage model has limitations. Second, the US is not the only country which is making movement of professionals difficult. Third, India needs foreign direct investment (FDI) to fund its growth.

Read more: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/KiQ9DtZ5XCKPFzm0FkA0yK/India-must-oppose-surging-protectionism.html>

Date Accessed: 08.05.2017

### This time with feeling: RBI's new power must be accompanied by wider reform

*(The Hindu, May 08, 2017)*

The Centre has empowered the Reserve Bank of India to get banks to take tougher steps, including insolvency and bankruptcy proceedings against defaulters, to address the growing volume of bad loans on their books. An ordinance to amend the Banking Regulation Act of 1949 has been issued to quell doubts whether the existing provisions allowed the RBI to direct banks to deal with specific stressed assets. The RBI has also been vested with the power to form oversight committees wherever it deems fit. Currently such committees exist only for loans brought into a scheme for sustainable structuring of stressed assets, also known as S4A. Now the RBI can bring in such panels to monitor the alphabet soup of other mechanisms for tackling non-performing assets (NPAs) such as SDR (strategic debt restructuring) through the JLFs, or joint lenders' forums.

Read More: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/this-time-with-feeling/article18404974.ece>

Date Accessed: 08.05.2017

### Should India Inc. bid for Westinghouse?

*(W.P.S.Sidhu, Live Mint, May 08, 2017)*

Within days of the announcement on Westinghouse, which is slated to build six nuclear reactors in India at Kovvada, Andhra Pradesh, several prominent voices called for India not to enter into a contract with the bankrupt company. This conventional wisdom notwithstanding, it is worth exploring whether India might be better off taking a bold step by bidding for Westinghouse instead.

Prima facie there might be very little financial logic for India trying to acquire a bankrupt US company. Yet, the Indian government has a long record of bailing out several loss-making public enterprises, the sum of which is, doubtless, more than any bid it will need to acquire Westinghouse. Of course, the counter-argument would be that India should not be bankrolling loss-making Indian public sector companies in the first place, let alone throwing a lifeline to non-Indian companies. However, some investments inevitably need to transcend short-term financial reasoning to secure long-term strategic and economic gains.

Read More: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/2q7eIAL1DroD6Ua0SQpdgN/Should-India-Inc-bid-for-Westinghouse.html>

Date Accessed: 08.05.2017

## Governance & Development

### *POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE*

#### **India is a secular state with no state religion: AG Mukul Rohatgi to UNHCR**

(PTI, 5 May 2017)

India on Thursday said it is a secular state with no state religion and safeguarding the rights of minorities forms an essential core of its polity, as it came under criticism from Pakistan over treatment of minorities. Speaking at the 27th session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group at the UNHCR in Geneva, Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi said that the Indian Constitution enshrines various provisions for the protection of the rights and interest of the minorities.

Read More: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-is-a-secular-state-with-no-state-religion-ag-mukul-rohatgi-to-unhcr-4641345/>.

Date of Access: 8.5.2017

### *SECURITY*

#### **Decoding the Joint Indian Armed Forces Doctrine**

(Dinakar Peri, *The Hindu*, May 08, 2017)

“Surgical strikes”, probably the most abused term of 2016, are now the new norm. The Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces 2017, released in April, has formally embedded them as a part of sub-conventional operations — meaning that from now on, they are among a range of options at the military’s disposal to respond to terrorist attacks.

The more interesting aspect in the second such joint doctrine since 2006 is that the scope of “surgical strikes” has been left open. There is no mention of their employment being within the country or beyond its borders — the ambiguity is intended to send a message in the neighbourhood.

Read More: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/decoding-the-doctrine/article18404994.ece>

Date Accessed: 08.05.2017

### *SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EXCLUSION*

#### **Rising Income Levels, Stability Linked To Declining Female Workforce Participation In India**

(Devanik Saha, *IndiaSpend*, May 4, 2017)

Rising income levels and stability in families are disincentivising women from joining the labour force, according to *Reassessing Patterns of Female Labor Force Participation in India*, a March 2017 report by the World Bank, which analysed government data from 2004-05 to 2011-12. As many as 19.6 million women—equivalent to the population of Romania—dropped out of the workforce during this period, of which rural women accounted for 53%, the report said.

In its three year (2017-20) ‘action agenda draft’ released on April 23, 2017, NITI Aayog, a government think-tank, stressed on the importance of promoting equal participation of women in the Indian economy.

Read More: <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/rising-income-levels-stability-linked-to-declining-female-workforce-participation-in-india-84594>

Date Accessed: 08.05.2017

### *EDUCATION*

#### **HRD Ministry Asks IITs to have Revenue Model**

(*The Tribune*, May 8, 2017)

The HRD Ministry has directed the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) to come up with a revenue model for their operations. The move comes after the IIT directors had approached the ministry, saying the 122 per cent fee hike introduced last year did “no good” to the institutes revenue-wise as lots of concessions were announced simultaneously.

Read more: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/hrd-ministry-asks-iits-to-have-revenue-model/403742.html>

Date Accessed: 08.05.2017

## Governance & Development

### HEALTH

#### Getting Narendra Modi's Generic Medicines Policy Right

(*The Livemint*, May 8, 2017)

In what has come to be recognized as his signature fashion, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently put forward another disruptive policy prescription—this time in healthcare. Doctors will now be required to prescribe generic formulations of medicines, as opposed to specific brands. This is an initiative that goes beyond attempts by institutions like the Medical Council of India to encourage the prescription of generic names, and instead works towards creating a formal legal framework for such a practice.

Read more: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/8xB2gKzKrngvjFlm951DXO/Getting-Narendra-Modis-generic-medicines-policy-right.html>

Date Accessed: 08.05.2017

### LAW AND JUSTICE

#### Hanging the Rapists: Nirbhaya Verdict Through Eyes of Kant & Camus

(*Akriti Paracer & Abhilash Mallicki, The Quint*, 8 May, 2017)

Thousands cheered in solidarity with Jyoti Singh's parents on 5 May, when the Supreme Court upheld the death penalty awarded to the four convicts who brutally gangraped the 23-year-old student in December 2012. Nirbhaya's parents had sought justice for their daughter in the form of death penalty for the convicts. Their demands were echoed by many who opined that the convicts deserved death by hanging. However, there were some who argued in favour of the convicts being granted life imprisonment instead.

Read More: <https://www.thequint.com/india/2017/05/08/nirbhaya-verdict-death-penalty-right-or-wrong>.

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## INDIA AND THE WORLD

### *EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA*

#### **To Meet Indian Concerns, China Offers to Re-Name China-Pakistan Economic Corridor** (Devirupa Mitra, *The Wire*, 8 May 2017)

With the Belt and Road summit set for May 14-15, Chinese officials have increased their lobbying, through public diplomacy and behind closed doors, to get New Delhi to attend. Even as India shows no sign of changing its decision to keep off the international conference China has called for later this month to promote its flagship One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, Beijing has for the first time offered to re-name the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – a key component of OBOR – to allay Indian objections.

Read More: <https://thewire.in/133138/china-pakistan-india-obor/>.

Date of Access: 8.5.2017

### *EUROPE*

#### **What Macron can do for Free Markets Everywhere**

(*The Bloomberg Quint*, May 8, 2017)

If the internal political disruption France and other Western countries are experiencing delivers higher and more inclusive growth, it will mark a revitalization of liberal democracies in a pro-market fashion. If it fails, it is just a matter of time before France will be dealing with a more mainstream National Front, more inward anti-establishment forces, and greater sympathy for the view that the Eurozone is about the past and not the future. And that is an outcome that markets would find destabilizing.

Read more: <https://www.bloombergquint.com/politics/2017/05/07/what-macron-can-do-for-free-markets-everywhere>

Date Accessed: 08.05.2017

#### **Macron Beats Marine Le Pen With Emphatic Margin to Win French Presidential Election**

(*Reuters*, 7 May 2017)<sup>2</sup>

Emmanuel Macron was elected president of France on Sunday with a business-friendly vision of European integration, defeating Marine Le Pen, a far-right nationalist who threatened to take France out of the European Union, early projections showed. The centrist's emphatic victory, which also smashed the dominance of France's mainstream parties, will bring huge relief to European allies who had feared another populist upheaval to follow Britain's vote to quit the EU and Donald Trump's election as U.S. president.

Read More: <https://thewire.in/133131/macron-beats-marine-le-pen-handily-early-count-win-french-presidential-election/>.

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## Opinions/ Books

### OPINIONS

#### When Kashmir's Spiralling Out of Control, Why Use Military Means?

(Jyoti Malhotra, *The Quint*, 5 May 2017)

As Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti grapples with the deteriorating crisis in the valley, the BJP leadership in Delhi is said to have given her an unequivocal message that first tasks her with bringing the situation under control. Mehbooba was in Delhi last week to meet her coalition partners, followed soon after by J&K governor NN Vohra, to request the senior BJP leadership to initiate a dialogue process with Opposition mainstream parties as well as the separatist Hurriyat leadership. But both the chief minister and the governor are being given the same answer: Get the situation back in control. Law and order must prevail. Talks can follow later.

Read More: <https://www.thequint.com/opinion/2017/05/05/kashmir-valley-centre-military-approach-not-working>.

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