NORTH EAST INDIA

Myths & Reality
A Presentation before Officer-Trainees belonging to the Central Services

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Presentation Date: 29th November 2013
Assam Administrative Staff College
NORTH EAST INDIA

- encompasses the easternmost region of India.
- is still a land of mystique and fantasy for many.
What's the General Idea about North East India??
1. Afflicted by Insurgency

Therefore:

- Inadequate Security: Danger to Life
- Threat of Extortion
- Lack of Freedom to move about
2. **Hilly Terrain**

~ filled with Jungles & Marshy Areas

**Therefore:**

- Bad Road Communication
- Lack of Basic Amenities
- Flood Problem
- Vulnerable to Diseases
3. Populated by Violent Tribes

- having Antipathy towards other Indians

Therefore:

- Unfamiliar Land
- No Social Life
- Land in Constant State of Conflict
BESIDES: Such People are different from Mainstream Indians

They:

• have small eyes
• eat anything including insects
• are scantily clad
• are too Westernized to have Indian values
• drink & laze around – yet get jobs due to reservation
4. Lack of Development & Un/ Under/ Mis-Utilization of Fund

As such:

• Fund sanctioned for Development Work – goes down the drain.

• Insurgency [& resultant Extortion], Corruption, etc. responsible
Such pictures of the region are either:

*Myths* generated historically or:

Distorted/ highly exaggerated version of the Actual Facts.
Insurgency is a long-standing problem, but ..... 

- Its intensity is waning with more & more armed groups coming for dialogue.
- CI Operations made effective & people friendly.

BESIDES: The problem is NOT specific to the North East 

It is rather Pan-Indian in nature.
North East is a mosaic of Ethnic Groups ..... 

- Aryan, Mongolian/Austric & Adivasi
- Non-Tribal & Tribal.
- Diverse Tribes of all hues and shapes.
- Multitude of religious & linguistic groups.
Significant number of People are in fact …..

- Tribal of Mongolian origin
- Have special Racial Features including Small Eyes
- Have a Culture distinct from the general non-tribal Aryan.
Yet such people …..

- are NOT homogeneous – and include different groups of wide-ranging types
- *have rich colourful ethnic apparel – NOT scantily clad*
- *have developed culinary tradition – may be different & may include diverse non-vegetarian items.*
BESIDES ..... 

- Missionaries during British Rule may have converted and westernized them. But they have a strong value system and their culture is part of the composite Indian Culture.

- They are hard-working, and problem of alcoholism is not confined to North Eastern tribal people.
People in general are hospitable and friendly ...

- Have vibrant social and cultural life
- Bear no antipathy towards people from Rest of India

Proof: Most of the commercial activities are successfully managed by the Marwaris, Punjabis, Gujaratis and Bengalis.
Infrastructure and Basic Amenities may be poorer compared to the front-ranking states, **BUT** ....

- Slowly but steadily catching up;
- Making headway in the socio-economic sector.

**Eg.:** Mizoram & Tripura are among the most literate states in the country [Census 2011].
Hills and Undulating Terrain cover only parts of the Region; because .......

- Valleys, Plateaus, and other Plain Areas extend in greater measure;
- Cities, Towns and Urban Centres have grown up all around the Region.
- Large Agricultural fields and Cattle Grazing Tracts occupy such Plain Areas.
Jungles & Marshes [or rather – Forests & Wetlands] are a BOON and not a BANE; because ……

- Natural Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Reserved Forests – galore in the Region;
- Having breath-taking natural beauty, along with exotic flora & fauna.
On the whole:
North East India

- *is not a monolithic/homogeneous entity;*

- *comprises 7 states of the Indian Union – known popularly as the Seven Sisters; and*

- *each of such states being heterogeneous itself.*
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<tr>
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<th>State</th>
<th>Capital</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>Dispur</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Mizoram</td>
<td>Aizawl</td>
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<td>Kohima</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>Agartala</td>
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Comparative Area of the States [in Sq. Kms.]

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<th>State</th>
<th>Area (Sq. Kms)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>83,743</td>
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<td>Assam</td>
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<td>Mizoram</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Nagaland</td>
<td>16,579</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>10,486</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Sikkim</td>
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## Comparative Population of the States

[Census 2011]

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<th>Rank</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>31,169,272</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Tripura</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>2,964,007</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Manipur</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Sikkim</td>
<td>607,688</td>
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Strengths of & Opportunities in NORTH EAST INDIA

1. Rich Composite Heritage

- Each State has a rich and diverse history of its own.
- Monuments and historical structures all around.
- CULTURAL MELTING POT.
2. Plantation Agriculture – Tea & Rubber

- Tea Plantation in Assam –
  - *has history dating back to British days*
  - is the world's largest tea-growing region: with 51\% of the tea produced in India and about 1/6th of the tea produced in the world.
Rubber Plantation in Tripura
significant success with

- the second largest production of natural rubber in the country - which is the third largest producer in the world;
- the natural rubber of Tripura being of superior quality.

Prospects of Other Types of Plantation in the Region.
3. Horticulture and Potential for developing Food Processing Industries

- Fruit Trees and Plants *flourish in the Climate of Superfluous Rain*
- Food Processing Industries – *great potential*.
4. Abundance of valuable minerals

- Petroleum in Assam:
  - First state in the country where oil was struck in 1889;
  - Has the oldest refinery in the country: Digboi – which started commercial production in 1901.
  - produces 15% of the country’s Crude Oil
4. Abundance of valuable minerals

- **Natural Gas in Assam**
  
  *has a share of 8% of the country’s production*

- **Coal in Assam & Meghalaya**

- **Limestone & Uranium in Meghalaya**

  *etc. etc.*
5. Potential for developing Hydro-Electricity.

- Has multitude of Natural Water Falls, Gushing Streams, etc.
- Ideal for harnessing Hydro-Electricity.
- *Just* proper Exploitation of Potential by Infrastructural Development required.
Strengths of & Opportunities in NORTH EAST INDIA

Besides – there’s potential for other sources of power as well.

- Thermal Power from the available Oil/ Natural/ Gas/ Coal in Assam
- Solar Power and Wind Power
- Nuclear Power from the available Uranium in Meghalaya.
6. Tourism Potential

- Breathtaking and Pristine Natural Beauty – with Hills & Valleys, Natural Water Falls & Lakes, etc.
- National Parks/ Wildlife Sanctuaries/ Reserved Forests with Rhinos, Elephants, Tigers & host of other exotic fauna.
- Several Heritage Sites.
- *Just* proper Exploitation of Potential by Infrastructural Development required.
7. Gateway to South East Asia

- NE India: Land Locked but has Proximity to the fastest growing economies of South East Asia.

- India’s ‘Look East Policy’ targets Commercial Relationship with South East Asia through NE India.

- Proposed Asian Highways and Trans Asian Railways to pass through NE India.
Facets of Assam in Particular

- LARGE STATE having HISTORICAL LINKS with Rest of the Country
  - Legend of Aniruddha & Usha – Tezpur
  - Earlier known as Kamrup, finds large number of references in Mahabharata
    - Legend of Bhima & Hidimba
    - Bhagadutta – participated in Kurukshetra War
Facets of Assam in Particular

- LARGE STATE having HISTORICAL LINKS with Rest of the Country
  - Bhaskar Barman – *established ties with Harshavardhana*
  - Rudra Singha – *established ties with Shivaji*
  - Maniram Dewan – *participated in & got executed during India’s First War of Independence [1857]*
Facets of Assam in Particular

PEOPLE: generally Indo-Aryan originating from North India [UP, Kannauj & Bengal]

- Tea Garden Labourers brought from Chotanagpur Area.
- Even Mongolian origin people Aryanized by a process known as Sanskritization.
- Large Presence of People with roots in Marwar, Bengal, Bihar & Punjab
Facets of Assam in Particular

- LARGE Towns & Cities – very much like the Rest of the Country.
  E.g. Guwahati, Tezpur, Dibrugarh, Silchar, etc.

- FAMOUS for OIL & TEA

- NATIONAL PARKS: Kaziranga, Manas, Nameri, Dibaru Saikhowa & Orang – famous for One-Horned Rhinoceros

- PILGRIMAGE SITES: Kamakhya
THUS: *there is an – Information Gap* 

*between the North East India & the Rest of the Country*
.... & Resultant Misconceptions about the NE Region
This is on account of the:
Ignorance fuelled by
selective & generally
prejudiced coverage of the
region by the Mainsteam
Media.

and ~ the historic
Physical Separation
Thanks to the Partition of India

- NE Region remains connected to the Rest of India by a 5 Km width corridor in northern West Bengal –
- known as Chicken Neck Corridor.
CONSEQUENCES:

Mental Separation:

- Question of We & They
- Thought of Mainstream INDIA and Peripheral North East India
- Glass Ceiling for *North Easterners* in mingling with People of Rest of India
It is evident that the region needs to be integrated with the Rest of the Country.

- The PHYSICAL GAP can be bridged by better surface communication, air connectivity, transit facility through Bangladesh, *as well as* the upcoming tele-communication revolution.

- *But* it is the PSYCHOLOGICAL GAP *that* needs to be addressed. That is possible through –
  
  - Proper IEC mechanism
  - Understanding One another
  - Establishing a sense of *WE* *rather than* “*WE & THEY*”
  - Creating a feeling of One Country amidst the Diversity!
All said and done, it is clear that the North East Indian region is rich in potential but slow in harnessing that potential. Once the people of the region and that of the rest of the country are united in mind and spirit, then steps can be taken to exploit the various avenues of development in the region. Then why not the region emerge as the dark-horse at the forefront of India’s developmental journey!

Hope for the Future:
THANKS