

India's Northeast 2020: Four Alternative Futures

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Introduction

India's internal security environment is being threatened by rising left wing extremism, terrorism and insurgencies in the Northeast.¹ These were also the three internal security threats pinpointed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in his addresses at the Chief Ministers' Conclaves on Internal Security in 2009 and 2010.² The Prime Minister also stated that while left wing extremism was largely indigenous, insurgencies in the Northeast were fostered by a combination of lack of development and external support whereas terrorism was mostly externally supported and funded. This *Occasional Paper* attempts to identify and analyse the key drivers (of change) impinging upon the conflict ridden Northeastern states. These key factors/drivers will then be used to delineate, if not predict, four alternative futures for Northeast by 2020. While each future has individual meaning and purpose, all the four envisaged futures are analogous based as they are on similar drivers of change. However these formulations have a high degree of uncertainty tagged to them. In fact, nothing is more predictable in policy analysis than the unpredictability of the future. No matter how refined the social science methodology, it is an inescapable fact that all knowledge is based on the past and present while all policy decisions are about the future. Scenario-building as a technique is widely accepted and used for making some sense of a complex future. It enables us to take note of a whole range of forces, factors, and possibilities that must be taken into account while planning for the future.

Needless to say, given the continuous low intensity conflicts in India's Northeast involving issues intrinsic to life and death, the strategic and security community is constantly being challenged to decide their future

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1. See "Status Paper on Internal Security" Ministry of Home Affairs, September 1, 2008.
 2. See Man Mohan Singh's address to the Chief Minister's Conference on Internal Security, January 06, 2009 at <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech/content.asp?id=774> (Accessed on January 18, 2009).

course of action in conditions of uncertainty, surprise, and complexity. Scenario building in this respect helps by providing a structured frame of reference. However, scenario building must not be mistaken for trend analysis as the latter tends to reframe past knowledge for making present and future assessments whereas scenarios for the future are wholly imaginary.

The key questions addressed in this paper are:

1. What are the drivers impinging upon the conflict ridden Northeastern states of India?
2. What possible futures can be envisaged on the basis of these drivers?

Before getting on with the subject matter of this paper i.e. the future of the Northeast of India by 2020; it will be pertinent to spend some time on the methodology used for building the four alternative futures. This will not only help the reader to understand how futures are imagined by the method of scenario-building but will also underline the importance of long term thinking on issues critical to the security of India.

The Method of Scenario Building

Scenarios are stories or narratives that portray what might happen, why it might happen, and with what consequences. They are powerful tools for constructing a range of possible futures that could come to pass under the influence of key drivers, events and issues. Scenarios make policy makers aware of where they might be going right or wrong. They also help in developing policy and strategy in order to achieve a particular end state. Scenarios stimulate critical thinking and challenge established assumptions allowing policy makers to explore plausible futures in order to inform their present process of decision-making and planning. In other words, scenarios bring into sharp relief underlying variables/drivers which emerge as a result of interplay between factors that make up the reality of past and present. The key to scenario building is the ability to bring new thinking to bear on a subject. As Ratcliffe says, “Good scenarios always challenge and surprise---bad ones merely confirm current conceptions and perpetuate personal prejudices”.³

Limitations of the Scenario-Building Method

Based on the above, it can be said, without doubt, that scenario-building can be put to good use to identify, test, and develop alternative policy practices or strategies for the conflict prone areas of the Northeast. This method has been used extensively in government, business and other enterprises to facilitate decision-making in a risk prone environment. Since the world around us is uncertain, we assume that human beings are rational and hence will make their decisions accordingly. In this context, 'Game Theory' with its fictitious conceptual frameworks like 'Prisoner's Dilemma', 'Chicken Game' and 'Stag Hunt' were widely used during the Cold War to understand the

3. Ratcliffe, John, “Scenario Building: A Suitable Method for Strategic Construction Industry Planning?” Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland, 2006, p. 3.

implications of a nuclear showdown between the US and the USSR.⁴ They were criticised on the grounds that they were largely fictitious and abstract and had no basis in the real world. This limitation is inherent in the scenario-building method as well. Though scenario-building in the context of the Northeast is based on past and present empirical data, the future is imagined. Nevertheless, scenarios help in planning for the future, enable adaptation to unfavourable circumstances and help in implementing strategies and policies that guarantee maximum success in a politicised and conflict ridden atmosphere.

Origins

As a research technique, scenario building was pioneered by Herman Kahn in the 1950s while working at RAND. He was followed by Ted Newland, Pierre Wack, Jay Ogilvy, Paul Hawken, and Peter Schwartz.⁵ Kahn and Weiner defined scenarios as, “hypothetical sequences of events constructed for the purpose of focusing attention on causal processes and decision points”.⁶ Scenarios are not so much about predicting the future based on a

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4. “The “dilemma” faced by the prisoners here is that, whatever the other does, each is better off confessing than remaining silent. But the outcome obtained when both confess is worse for each than the outcome they would have obtained had both remained silent. A common view is that the puzzle illustrates a conflict between individual and group rationality. A group whose members pursue rational self-interest may all end up worse off than a group whose members act contrary to rational self-interest. More generally, if the payoffs are not assumed to represent self-interest, a group whose members rationally pursue any goals may all meet less success than if they had not rationally pursued their goals individually”, See “Prisoner's Dilemma”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/prisoner-dilemma/> (Accessed on March 20, 2009). The game of chicken implies that each player does not give in to the other and this could result in the worst outcome for both. See “Game Theory.net” at <http://www.gametheory.net/dictionary/Games/GameofChicken.html> (Accessed on March 19, 2009). Stag Hunt is a game which is a prototype of the social contract. Rousseau argues that if a group of people were assigned to hunt a deer with specific positions, it is always possible that one person gives up the fight when a hare is sighted. See Brain Skyrms and U C Irvine, “Stag Hunt”, Presidential Address, Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association, March 2001, pp. 1-20.
 5. Peter Schwartz, *The Art of the Long View: Planning for the future in an Uncertain World*, Doubleday, New York, 1996.
 6. H. Kahn and A. Weiner, *The Year 2000 A Framework for Speculation on the Next Thirty-Three Years*, Macmillan, New York, 1967, p. 12.

short term analysis. Rather, they are about “perceiving” the future based on long term analyses of an issue with a particular purpose/goal in mind. According to Peter Schwartz:

“Scenarios provide a context for thinking clearly about the otherwise complex array of factors that affect any decision; give a common language to decision makers for talking about these factors, and encourage them to think about a series of 'what if' stories; help lift the 'blinkers' that limit creativity and resourcefulness; and lead to organizations thinking strategically and continuously learning about key decisions and priorities”.⁷

Method Design for Scenario Building: Steps

- Step 1: Identifying key drivers/factors of the subject/issue under study;
- Step 2: The storyline/narrative of the scenarios; (critically based on review, field knowledge, discussions and expert opinions);
- Step 3: The relationship of each scenario with the key drivers must be clear;
- Step 4: Alternative scenarios (minimum of three, maximum of five);
- Step 5: Time horizon and time steps;
- Step 6: Highly flexible and adaptable;
- Step 7: The element of uncertainty;
- Step 8: Implications of the scenarios (consequences);
- Step 9: Feed-back the scenarios to target audience;
- Step 10: Discuss the strategic options;
- Step 11: High degree of ownership.⁸

7. Peter Schwartz as quoted in John C. Ratcliffe, “*Scenario-building: A Suitable Method for Strategic Construction Industry Planning?*” No. 4.

8. Martin Rhisiart, “*Scenario Building*”, Futures Workshop, Cardiff University, 2006.

Most importantly, scenarios must not strive to get the right answer in just one single scenario. Instead, the scenario building exercise is mostly geared towards the unfolding of events as they occur. Scenarios must be given vivid and meaningful titles signifying the essential logic driving these scenarios. Vivid titles have better chances of being utilised in policy talk. All the scenarios must, however, have equally meaningful titles and attract equal creativity. Scenarios must be highly researched and imagined. Weak scenarios are those that rely too much on speculation and are poorly researched.

The first section of this *Occasional Paper*: the future of the Northeast of India by 2020 identifies and describes the positive and negative driving forces. The second section imagines four mutually interactive alternative futures. The last section offers the summary and the conclusion.

Section I: India's Northeast: Time Horizon 2020

The Current Driving Forces (2010)

Positive

1. Strategic Location and the “Look East” Policy: The North-eastern region of India is a rugged territory consisting of 225,000 sq kms of hills and plains located between Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar with 4,500 kms of international border. There is, therefore, an extra incentive for India to utilise this strategic space in the nation's interest and in the interest of the region's inhabitants. The “Look East” policy can offer a frame of reference for “imaging” the Northeast in a strategic sense.

2. Natural Resources: The Northeast is one of the most picturesque regions of India. Its hills, rivers and valleys are a tourist paradise. The region's natural resources like oil, tea, and agricultural goods are exported in large quantities. Mineral resources like coal in Assam and uranium in Meghalaya can also serve the country's interest.

3. Cultural Heritage: The Northeast is home to more than 220 different tribes and communities. Various sub-tribes enrich the region

Negative

1. Transportation and Communication: The transportation and communication systems in the Northeast are under developed. National highways are in need of repair. Movement within the Northeast is especially difficult during the monsoon months when rain wreaks havoc on road and rail infrastructure.

2. Perceived Feelings of Neglect by New Delhi: There is a perceived feeling of neglect amongst the population of the Northeast. People believe that they are and will be neglected by New Delhi due to their peripheral situation and cultural differences.

3. Cultural Differences: The tribes of the Northeast are mostly of Mongoloid stock and they view themselves as different from the Aryan and Dravidian races of India. Due to a lack of a pan-Indian narrative of social and cultural inclusion in mainstream media, entertainment, government and other spheres, the people do not see a bright future if the status quo continues.

with a fascinating array of cultures, festivities, traditions, and ethnography. For instance, ethnographic studies on the Nagas are being extensively conducted in Europe and a large number of people are attracted to European museums showcasing Naga cultural heritage.

4. Youthful Population: The population of the Northeast according to the 2001 census is going to be youth dominated in 2020 as is the case with the rest of India. This youthful workforce can be harnessed as a national asset for nation building. Interestingly, a majority of the work force in the service and hospitality industry in New Delhi or Bangalore, consists of youth from the Northeast.

5. Education Index: The level of education is higher in the Northeast than in the rest of India. Mizoram comes second only to Kerala in the education index whereas states like Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura cross the 60 per cent mark.

6. Diaspora: The Northeast diaspora is gradually increasing in Australia, Europe and North America. Most of the migrant workers from the Northeast are also going to south east Asia. The region can gain a lot from this community.

7. Agriculture: Ninety per cent of the people in the Northeast depend

4. Ethnic Violence: Violence is endemic to the Northeast except in states like Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram where it has been handled more effectively. However, the Indian army's heavy presence in these states makes them prone to future violence. Inciting violence are organisations like the National Socialist Council of Nagalim led by Isak Chisi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah--NSCN (IM) formed on January 31, 1988 as well as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland S.S. Khaplang-NSCN (K) - dominant in Naga inhabited areas. Manipur has also been disturbed by armed violence after the formation of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) on November 24, 1964. The Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) and its armed wing, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have been engaged in armed struggle since 1976. Most feared, however, is the Kanglei Yawol Kunna Lup (KYKL), which has taken up social issues such as corruption, drug trafficking and sub-standard education. Another group, the Peoples' Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) was established in the 1970s with the objective of fighting for Manipur's independence from India. Neighbouring Assam, the most dominant state in the Northeast in terms of demography and resources, has also been plagued by insurgent

on agriculture for their livelihood. The land is fertile and people have a historical dependence on land for survival. This asset can be utilised for maximising the cultivation of pineapples, maize, wheat, and rice.

8. Historical Ethnic Communalities: The Northeast has been geographically so placed that apart from being a target for invaders it has also been one of the most vibrant centres of trade, movement of people from south east Asia and beyond. The cross-cultural heritage and inter-cultural social memory can be utilized for the future of the region in terms of deeper engagement between the North Eastern states and neighbouring countries.

9. India's Rise: The rise of India on the global stage as an economic and potential military powerhouse is proving to be an inspiration for the people of this region. The rise, however, has to be inclusive and must benefit more people throughout the region by 2020.

10. Self Image Construction: People of the Northeast have high self esteem which makes them averse to accepting the diktat of imagined "others". This stems from the culture of democracy and discussion prevailing within tribes. This aspect can be leveraged by the state to foster a sense of responsible autonomy and self advancement.

violence since 1979 with the formation of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). The hill districts of Assam, North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong, also witnessed the rise of armed groups in the 1990s like the Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) and the United Peoples' Democratic Solidarity (UPDS).

5. Pressure on Land: Due to increasing population, lack of state land reforms, oral traditions of land ownership, jhum cultivation, migrant population, and intensive cultivation, the pressure on land for food and livelihood is on the rise. The inability of the state institutions to efficiently settle these land related insecurities has created tribal and ethnic "security dilemmas".

6. Ethnic Security Dilemmas: Security dilemmas in multi-ethnic and multi-tribal societies arise when one ethnic group harbours armed members. This leads to arming by rival ethnic groups which leads to classic security dilemmas.

7. Militarisation of the State's Presence: The overt presence of the armed wing of a democratic state like India, i.e. its army has fostered the idea of a militarised India amongst the population. Hence, while the society is aware of political corruption on the part of their local political representatives, they still prefer civilian representatives to the

11. Strong Local Communities:

Various community organisations like peace reconciliation bodies, student bodies, tribal councils, etc in the Northeast handle issues of violence, land disputes, trade and cultural festivities. Music also plays an important role in conflict resolution in the Northeast especially amongst the youth who strive to promote peace through concerts. Participation in shows like 'Indian Idol' at the national level have enabled many Northeastern youths to acquire a pan Indian profile.

12. Governance: Though the lack of governance is usually identified as one of the key negative drivers of violence and insecurity in the Northeast, good governance in states like Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura has resulted in a better life for the people. This study, therefore, views governance as a positive driver. Hence, governance, factored around the following elements could make a difference by 2020:

- i. Policy implementation.
- ii. Motivated public administration.
- iii. Economic development.
- iv. Security management.
- v. Provision of basic amenities like health, Public Distribution Systems (PDS), transport, housing, etc.

armed forces.

8. Negative Political Culture:

The political culture in most of the Northeastern states is fraught with corruption, a lack of representation in power structures at the centre, and linkages between politicians and insurgent groups. This has resulted in an insecure society and an insecure state structure. The foundations of democracy in the Northeast are therefore based not so much on values and principles but on political expediency. Laws like the Inner Line Permit of 1873 and the Restricted Area Permit, which inhibit access of outsiders into the region, also creates a “siege mentality” amongst the people.

9. Insurgent Extortion

Networks: The “extortion” networks run by the insurgent groups have resulted in almost every citizen having to pay some percentage of his/her income to the insurgent exchequer. This has intensified insecurities and fears of the insurgent gun.

10. Economic Backwardness:

Though most of rural India suffers from economic backwardness, it is more glaring in regions, which are prone to violence. Because of this economic backwardness and lack of infrastructure development, most of the Northeastern states are heavily dependent on the centre for their political survival.

vi. A visible and sensitive state structure.

vii. Law enforcement mechanisms.

viii. Accountability.

A committed and pro-active political leadership.

Source: Literature Survey on Northeast (See References), Author's Field Experience in the Northeast of India and collective Expert Opinions

11. Image of a Frontier (too peripheral): The isolation, geographic fragmentation, and the problems associated with being viewed as peripheral to India's imagination of itself are dominant drivers of alienation in the Northeast.

12. Quality of Education: Despite the high literacy levels identified as a positive driver, the absence of quality education has resulted in a dearth of well qualified people to run the affairs of the state and the economy which is yet another negative driver.

13. Porous International Border: The porous nature of the 4,500 km international border between India and its neighbours in this region has resulted in the easy flow of drugs, arms, illegal migrants and establishment of underground insurgent bases in countries like Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Also, the influence of the notorious "Golden Triangle" [Myanmar, Laos and Thailand] and the drugs trade spilling over into Northeast has resulted in high drug addiction amongst the youth of the Northeast. The involvement of insurgent groups like the UNLF, NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) along with the Karens and the Kachins in Myanmar in the drug trade has stigmatised these groups and given them criminal identities.

Based on the drivers⁹ (both positive and negative), identified above, four alternative futures for the North East in 2020 are given below. While the four alternative futures have been imagined based on both positive and negative drivers, it must be noted that some of the drivers are more crucial for one unfolding future than another and so forth. Hence, the mix of drivers for each alternative future differs depending on their impact on a particular future.

9. These drivers have been identified by the author after conducting research on the Northeast over a period of four years. Seminars, workshops, literature survey and fieldwork have added to the author's knowledge base on the region.

Section II: Four Alternative Futures for the Northeast in 2020

The four alternative futures for 'Northeast 2020' are:

1. Destination Northeast (A future based on tourism development).
2. Island Northeast (A future based on fear of domination by 'outsiders' and ethnic violence).
3. Multi-Cultural Northeast (A future based on the success of democracy).
4. Global Northeast (A future based on the success of India's "Look East" policy)

Future 1: Destination Northeast

Key proposition in 2010: The natural, ethnic and cultural heritage of the Northeast makes it a tourist destination of choice for people in India and across the globe. The revenue earned from the tourism industry is employed for the overall development of the region.

Key Positive Drivers

The drivers mentioned below can have a strong impact on the possibility of this future unfolding in 2020.

- ◆ Strategic Location and the "Look East" policy
- ◆ Cultural Heritage
- ◆ Youthful Population
- ◆ Diaspora
- ◆ India's Rise
- ◆ Governance
- ◆ Strong Local Communities¹⁰

10. For a relook at the drivers identified in each scenario, please kindly return to page 9-13 of the same paper.

Story/Narrative (Timeline: 2010-2015-2020)

Northeast India is considered to be one of the most favoured tourist spots in India by Globetrotters and Discovery Network's *Travel & Living* channel. People are attracted to the region by the richness of its culture and the sheer variety of its festivities, dress, cuisines and ethnicities. The Barail and the Patkai ranges, and the eastern Himalayas offer adventure activities like rafting, trekking and mountaineering. The state governments are however environmentally conscious and make sure that tourist ventures do not destroy fragile eco systems. Therefore, eco-tourism, a concept made popular in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh has been adopted by the states. To encourage tourism the state governments have undertaken reforms in the state's bureaucracy and developed tourism infrastructures like hotels and resorts. Consequently, the monetary benefits accrued from tourism flow to the people. Local involvement in the tourist industry makes the process smoother and attractive for grass root participation. States like Assam and Meghalaya are already earning good revenues from the tourism industry. Shillong and Cherrapunji in Meghalaya are frequented by tourists because of their pleasant climate and picturesque landscape. Assam has developed many new tourism spots in areas like Tezpur, Kaziranga, Shonapur and Karbi Anglong. Jatinga in North Cachar hills with its romantic setting amidst the Barail ranges and rich variety of migratory birds becomes a destination for ornithologists around the world. Haflong and Diphu, the two hill towns of Assam, join the list of hill stations with their picturesque landscape, trekking routes and lodging facilities. The states of Nagaland and Manipur also attract tourists for their culture, landscape and world-class resorts. Arunachal Pradesh is considered the queen of the Northeast because of its starkly beautiful Himalayan landscapes and cultural variety. Besides tourists from other parts of India and the world, tourists from south east Asian countries also flock to the region. The Inner Line Regulation of 1873 and the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) is revoked by the central government to facilitate tourism in the Northeast. The Guwahati airport is a world class international airport and the infrastructure of other regional airports in Imphal and Dimapur is good. Budget airfares are available due to the tourism boom with private airlines like Jet Airways and Kingfisher competing to attract consumers.

2020: We are in 2020. The tourist industry is flourishing and the benefits are visible in terms of better per capita purchasing power for the local people,

education, health facilities and livelihood. People see the possibilities in the tourist industry and are attracted to this sector. It is an accepted fact that tourism has enabled the Northeast to be responsible for its own development and prosperity.

Key Negative Drivers or Uncertainties

The drivers mentioned below could however pose obstacles to this future:

- ◆ Transport and Communication
- ◆ Ethnic Violence
- ◆ Insurgent Extortion Networks
- ◆ Negative Political Culture
- ◆ Image of Frontier
- ◆ Militarisation of State Presence
- ◆ Pressure on Land

Future 2: Island Northeast

Key Proposition in 2010: Ethnic differences, political distrust between communities and demand for either ethnic based separate states within India or outright secession dominate public discourse in the Northeast. The state's inability to provide an alternative emancipating ideology and unimaginative bureaucratic structures reinforce the feeling of neglect and hostility towards imagined "others". As a result, the writ of insurgent groups like the NSCN (IM), UNLF, DHD, UPDS and ULFA runs through the establishment of parallel governments, extortion networks and violence.

Key Negative Drivers

The following drivers are likely to play a role in the creation of Island Northeast in 2020.

- ◆ Perceived Feelings of Neglect
- ◆ Cultural Differences
- ◆ Pressure on Land
- ◆ Militarisation of the State's Presence
- ◆ Quality of Education
- ◆ Ethnic Violence
- ◆ Insurgent Extortion Networks

- ◆ Ethnic Security Dilemmas
- ◆ Negative Political Culture
- ◆ Economic Backwardness
- ◆ Porous International Border

The Story/Narrative (Timeline: 2010-2015-2020)

The rise of India and its subsequent economic development creates a strong paranoia about the peripheral status of the Northeast. The apprehension is that the more prosperous communities in India will migrate to the Northeast and take over its land, resources and businesses. Various ethnic communities in the Northeast view 'others' in the classic Huntington “Clash of Civilisations” hypothesis with “us versus them” at the core.¹¹ The region continues to buy into the exclusivist social narratives of cultural differences and territorial separateness. Reservations in political and social life are the norm. Favouritism along ethnic and tribal lines is also a dominant trend in public and personal life. The Nagas support a Greater Nagalim which includes territory which is inhabited by other tribes; The Meiteis view the Nagas as adversaries. Smaller tribes like the Kukis, Dimasas and Karbis demand separate states for each within India. There is strong resistance to the “Look East” policy for fear of being dominated by outsiders. The pressure on land for livelihood also renders tribal communities wary of imagined or real 'others'. The heavy presence of the Indian army in their midst makes the common man suspicious of India's democratic ethos and intent. Certain states like Manipur lack law enforcement mechanisms and hence suffer multiple insurgencies. The NSCN (IM) is dominant in the Naga areas followed closely by the NSCN (K). Inter-factional violence is routine as is violence between insurgent actors like the NSCN (IM) and UNLF aligned along tribal lines. The state continues to “manage” the conflict through peace negotiations, setting up of designated camps, and use of overt military force without making any real effort at conflict prevention or resolution. The state's security forces are incapable of thwarting the various extortion networks run by insurgent actors. Laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958, amended in 1972, further promote the idea of India as the “other” amongst the common people. The local state institutions are linked up with insurgent actors and do precious little to improve the image of India in these areas. Instead, local politicians use the problem of insurgency to get more “unaccounted for” Central

11. Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?”, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993 at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/48950/samuel-p-huntington/the-clash-of-civilizations> (Accessed on December 4, 2008).

development funds for the region.

2020: We are in 2020. Fear and distrust of “others” renders bleak any prospects for the success of tourism and vocational activities in remote areas of the Northeast. The people continue to view state forces as a negative presence and are resentful of the overt presence of the Indian army in these areas. The local people have lost trust in the state to provide them with basic security. Hence, in order to preserve their own lives and the future of their children, they make compromises with the insurgents as well as the state. The loyalty of the common man is neither to the insurgent nor the state as both are viewed as insensitive to their needs.

Key Positive Drivers or Uncertainties

The drivers mentioned below could create obstacles leading to uncertainties about this future.

- ◆ Natural Resources
- ◆ Youthful Population
- ◆ Education Index
- ◆ Historical Ethnic Commonalities
- ◆ Rise of India
- ◆ Diaspora
- ◆ Governance
- ◆ Cultural Heritage
- ◆ Strong Local Communities

Future 3: Multi-Cultural Northeast

Key Proposition in 2010: The self image of the Northeast is confident due to widespread liberal education, good governance and economic development. As a result, violence is no longer an accepted means of expressing dissent and people use non-violent avenues like the media and peaceful protest. The local political leadership has a vision, a sense of purpose, and the state structures are inclusive.

Key Positive Drivers

The drivers mentioned can ensure that this future comes about in 2020.

- ◆ A Committed and Pro-active Political Leadership
- ◆ Education Index

- ◆ India's Rise
- ◆ Natural Resources
- ◆ Youthful Population
- ◆ Diaspora
- ◆ Strong Local Communities
- ◆ Good Governance

Story/Narrative (Timeline: 2010-2015-2020)

The Northeastern states benefit from the rise of India as an economic powerhouse. The natural resources of the region are harnessed and the revenues earned are used for infrastructural and social development. Universities and schools are better financed with a high emphasis on liberal education. The opening up of the Northeast also creates a diaspora which is progressive and sees itself benefitting from India's progress. Talented youth find a place in the music and entertainment industry in Mumbai. Dominant local communities are inclusive and thus the smaller communities inhabiting the common landscape feel secure.

The source of this confidence is the development of the agricultural sector: the mainstay of the economy. Hence, state funding for agriculture is enhanced and streamlined with very good oversight mechanisms for ensuring financial accountability. This has resulted in eradication of poverty, and reduced the attraction of insurgency as a means of livelihood for the rural youth, while boosting other sectors like education and infrastructure development.

2020: We are in 2020. The liberal progressive nature of the Northeastern states reflects an inclusive politics. Economic opportunities, a confident self image, infrastructural and agricultural development as well as better education leads to a more assertive and confident individual. A culture of social inclusion and progress is the order of the day.

Key Negative Drivers or Uncertainties

The drivers mentioned below could create uncertainties about this future.

- ◆ Perceived Sense of Neglect by New Delhi
- ◆ Cultural Differences
- ◆ Ethnic Violence
- ◆ Ethnic Security Dilemmas

- ◆ Insurgent Extortion Networks
- ◆ Militarisation of the State's Presence
- ◆ Quality of Education
- ◆ Negative Political Culture
- ◆ Image of Frontier
- ◆ Porous International Border

Future 4: Global Northeast

Key Proposition in 2010: The Northeast is strongly linked to the prosperous south east Asian states like Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. There is increased cross-border connectivity in terms of trade, and movement of people and capital. These countries invest heavily in the region resulting in infrastructure development, better transport and communication systems as well as revival of age old cultural and historical ties. Educated youth from the Northeast are able to benefit from employment opportunities in the south east Asian job market.

Key Positive Drivers

The drivers which can bring this about in 2020 are:

- ◆ Strategic Location and the “Look East” Policy
- ◆ Natural Resources
- ◆ Youthful Population
- ◆ Education Index
- ◆ Diaspora
- ◆ India's Rise
- ◆ Good Governance
- ◆ Committed and Pro-active Political Leadership

The Story/Narrative (Timeline: 2010-2015-2020)

India's improving relations with south east Asia inevitably draws the Northeastern region into the overall “Look East” policy given its geographic proximity to south east Asia. With Myanmar alone, the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland share a 1643 km long land border. Consequently, several projects like the Asian Highway, the Asian Railway Link and the Natural Gas pipeline are near completion. Imphal (in India)-Tamu(in Myanmar) are connected via the Kalemryo

railway with Mandalay in Myanmar. The four lane Asian Highway between New Delhi-Singapore will be linked to Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vientiane, Yangon, Mandalay, Kalemmyo, Tamu, Dhaka, and Kolkata. The 1,360 km Trilateral Highway from Moreh (India) to Mae Sot (Thailand) through Bagan (Myanmar) has opened to traffic. Moreh in Manipur is a smart border town with good infrastructure. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Facility which will connect Indian ports on the eastern side and Sittwe port in Myanmar through a river transport corridor and road in Mizoram and provide an alternate trade route to the Northeast is near completion. The largely illegal flow of goods through Moreh (Manipur) into Northeastern states from south east Asia has been legalised. The Northeastern states develop independent economic relations with south east Asian countries thus strengthening the federal structure of India. The region also benefits immensely from water sharing. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and the Kunming Initiative undertaken by India and China respectively to reach out to ASEAN is progressing smoothly.

2020: We are in 2020. The Northeast is prospering from the optimal implementation of the policies and various developmental schemes under the “Look East” policy. The trade with south east Asian nations constitutes 65 per cent of the trade in the region.

Key Negative Drivers or Uncertainties

The drivers mentioned below could create obstacles leading to uncertainties about this future.

- ◆ Transport and Communication
- ◆ Ethnic Violence
- ◆ Insurgent Extortion Networks
- ◆ Militarisation of the State's Presence
- ◆ Negative Political Culture
- ◆ Quality of Education
- ◆ Image of Frontier
- ◆ Porous International Borders

Since futures/scenarios are mostly constructed to formulate strategies towards a particular end state, the four interactive alternative futures for the

Northeast in 2020 raise two fundamental strategic questions. These are:

1. How best can the Northeast develop and progress?
2. What are the identifiable strategies, which can best guide the region towards a conflict free future?

Basic Elements of an Imagined Strategy

- ◆ Prepare a SWOT¹² analysis of the region.
- ◆ Identify the niche areas which can help develop human capabilities and infrastructure.
- ◆ Foster competition amongst the Northeastern states in areas of governance and human development. Rank each state and institute rewards at a national level.
- ◆ For example, visibly reward the conflict prone state which has successfully implemented Disarmament, Demobilisation and Rehabilitation (DDR).
- ◆ Strong onsite inspection of development projects with fortnightly assessments of progress made by the central government.
- ◆ Encourage innovation at the grass root level for conflict resolution, development schemes and security.
- ◆ People first policies. Invest in the Northeastern population; allow more individual, social and political autonomy and reduce state intrusion in economic and social spheres.
- ◆ Provide competent and competing educational institutions across the Northeastern states.

What Kind of Future to Expect?

When one compares the four alternative futures constructed in the earlier sections, the first, third and the fourth futures are “ideal” while the second future is pessimistic. Also, the negative drivers identified in the paper starkly question the probability of the three optimistic futures. Uncertainties about a positive future persist due to the existing conditions of instability and violence in the region. Negative drivers like ethnic violence, negative political culture, porous borders, poor transportation and communication, ethnic security dilemmas and insurgent extortion networks can negate the positive drivers like strategic location, cultural heritage, historical ethnic

12. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

commonalities, governance and the rise of India. The hope is that the interactions between the positive and negative drivers can be turned into progressive forces of change if the Northeast can have a 'willed political leadership' at the individual state level and the region is imagined as a "core" area for India at the national level by 2020. In that light, we need to address Future Two on a war footing if we want to ensure that the other three futures become a reality in the Northeast of India by 2020.

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Field Visit to Assam, January and February, 2008 (studied ULFA and DHD)

Field Visit to Manipur, August 2008 (studied UNLF, NSCN (IM) and KNLF)

Field Visit to Assam, February 2009 (studied DHD).

Field Visit to Assam, December 2009 (studied ULFA)

**These visits included extensive participative observation of civil society organisations and insurgent camps. Extensive interviews were also conducted with the security forces and local*

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