

North-East outreach

Newly inaugurated bridge has enormous economic, political and military value

The importance of the 9.15 km long Dhola-Sadiya bridge in the North-East, which has been named after legendary singer Bhupen Hazarika, must be viewed from three critical points of view. The first relates to the benefits the bridge will bestow on the people, the residents and the locals, especially the marginalised, in general. There can be no denial of the fact that the Seven Sister States of India had remained relatively untouched, unexplored and isolated in terms of economic development due to the lack of infrastructure facilities like transportation, communication, market accessibility etc. It is here that the bridge will come a long way to offer connectivity, in the absence of which many important businesses were holed up. The bridge, which connects from Assam to eastern Arunachal Pradesh, will change the entire transportation scenario in the region and reduce the time of travel, thereby facilitating economic prosperity. Most significantly, the bridge will provide road connectivity for the locals, especially the tribals living in remote and backward area. It will offer them an opportunity to tap the tourism potential of the region that had until now remained unexplored. Besides, the bridge will also bring about an economic revolution in terms of opening up of trade, commerce and economic opportunities in the region.



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Second, the bridge itself must be viewed as a vehicle for the BJP's ascendance from the north to the North-East region. Of course, the construction of this bridge did not start when the BJP Government came to power. It was in fact going on since the UPA's time. But certain factors like the lack of political will of past Governments, factional fights on the part of various rebel groups, insurgencies and also slow development had held the integration of this region with the mainstream. The fact that the inauguration of the bridge was done in a high-profile manner, in the sense that the Prime Minister decided to spend

a very important day (that of three years of completion of his Government) by inaugurating the bridge and attending rallies, is indicative of the relevance of the bridge in the BJP's political scheme of things. The bridge is thus an indication of the party's political push in the North-East. From zero States in its bag, the BJP today governs three of the region's States — Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. As a dominant political force in the North-East, the party seeks to make more inroads with the upcoming Assembly elections. The third aspect relates to the strategic importance *vis-à-vis* our neighbours. In view of the regular confrontations along the border with China, though thankfully they have not been violent, the bridge will help strengthen military power by mobilising the movement of defence material — troops, arms and ammunition, heavy equipment etc— to the border areas. Our Army convoys really had a tough time over transportation issues, as the only means available was either the river or the helicopter. This is not to say that the construction of the bridge is an aggressive move against the Middle Kingdom, but that our troops were really hobbled in the absence of infrastructure that helped swift movements.