



# Development In Arunachal Pradesh In The First Quarter Of 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An Analytical Study

**Mr. Jimmy Camdir Tok\* and Dr. Ram Krishna Mandal\*\***

\*Assistant Professor, Department of History, Dera Natung Government College, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India

\*Professor & HoD, Department of Economics, Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India Orcid Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9621-7084>

**Corresponding Author: Dr. Ram Krishna Mandal**

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Different aspects of Arunachal Pradesh's development influenced the way development was accomplished over time: geographical isolation; small population; and the absence of adequate means of transportation. Originally, Arunachal Pradesh was located in an area of India that was very poorly connected and isolated from other parts of India, but with the recent construction of numerous major transport ways (roads, railways, and airports), there has been a gradual improvement in Arunachal Pradesh's connection to the National Development process. **Objective of the Study:** To examine how Arunachal Pradesh has changed throughout the first quarter of 21st Century. **Methodology:** This study utilizes both descriptive and analytical methodologies in order to provide a narrative account of the major changes in Arunachal Pradesh, as they relate to Development. Additionally, this study offers an analytical perspective on the Development Divergence occurring in Arunachal Pradesh, as it has developed under the two separate Government Administrations of Prime Ministers Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi. **Findings and Discussion:** Arunachal Pradesh is presently experiencing a significant transformation with respect to development, particularly since the BJP took control of the Central Government in 2014 and expanded their Political Power throughout Arunachal Pradesh. **Conclusion:** Arunachal Pradesh represents the end of the previous pattern of development - slow geographic development; rather the recent developments illustrate an increasing rate of Infrastructure development towards strategic integration, socio-economic transformation and other types of investment capital.

**Keywords:** Geographical challenges, Transportation, Small population, Development, BJP Government

## I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Arunachal Pradesh, being the northernmost part of India, is expected to be ecologically and strategically valuable in the future due to the nearly 1800 km long international borders that it shares with China to the north and north-east, Bhutan to the west, Myanmar to the east. The developmental trajectory of Arunachal Pradesh has been influenced by various factors, including geography, due to the remoteness of locations, very small population size and inadequate transport facilities. Due to these factors, Arunachal Pradesh's economy and society have been slow to change since its independence, until recently, when the state government has focused on the enhancement of physical infrastructure, improving its fiscal health, and developing its natural resources to promote inclusiveness of income earning opportunities and sustainable economic growth (Arunachal Pradesh Government, 2020; IBEF, 2024). During the first quarter of the 21st century, Arunachal Pradesh is in the process of evolving from being a geographically remote area with little or no connection to

the rest of India, to being integrated into India's national development programs. With the advent of many large and important new roads, railways and airports being built in Arunachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh will be more integrated into India's national development framework (Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 2024).

During this period, interest in the development of the state's border region, as well as the establishment of Arunachal Pradesh as an important part of India's Act East policy and security strategy has increased (Chaudhuri, 2018). Due to significant investment into rural education, health care services, local skill development and livelihoods; there has been Improvement in the scale and reach of the socio economic indicators of this state (Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 2020). Development projects for Hydropower production, horticulture and tourism will bring additional sources of employment and locally owned entrepreneurship opportunities (Dutta & Lepcha, 2020; Das et al., 2022). With the developments that are taking place in conjunction with the protection and preservation of Indigenous cultures also taking place, through Traditional Government Systems and environmental protection (Choudhury, 2018). The strong emphasis of the State on Decentralization and Public Participation while planning for Agricultural Economic Development has led to greater development and governance at the Local Level. This has also led to increased availability and access to State Services in Support of Agriculture (Baruah, 2023). Through both increased digital access for State Services and increased Banking Access, Inclusive Economic Growth will be through improved access to both (IBEF, 2024). The numerous accomplishments that have occurred in Arunachal Pradesh, have also been met with a considerable number of continuing challenges. Specifically, due to the unique Geographical Features and Agricultural Vulnerabilities and the increased Divergent Levels of Development between Urban and Rural Areas, the situation continues to be Complex (Government of Arunachal Pradesh 2024). "This opening period of twenty-five years, so far in our centuries' current era beginning in 2001, has had both extraordinary progress and numerous new challenges arise, while both will work side-by-side towards developing ways of improving tomorrow's world for everyone by creating a fair, sustainable, and interdependent future."

## OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this research is to investigate the changes in Arunachal Pradesh during the first quarter of the 21st Century.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** This study employs a descriptive and analytical research design to provide a narrative account of Arunachal Pradesh's major changes relating to development and to provide an analytical view of the development divergence occurring in this state under the two separate governments of Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi. A descriptive and analytical approach is most appropriate in this situation because it allows for thorough and systematic narratives, explanations, and comparisons of development trends observed in Arunachal Pradesh without conducting any variable manipulations.

**Nature of the Study:** The current study is of a qualitative nature, although there are instances where a few selected indicators are shown using quantitative data from secondary sources. This qualitative analysis takes into consideration the policies adopted to promote development, the building of infrastructure, the evolution of politics and governance, and the performance of socio-economic indicators. The nature of the research problem will be to analyse data that has already been documented and made available to the public through previously published and recorded documents; therefore this study did not include field research to collect primary data.

**Sources of Data:** The data for this research is based on only on Secondary Data which is collected from all published Government reports like the Economic Surveys published by Arunachal Pradesh, Annual Development Report, the NITI Aayog, State Development Report, the publications produced by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Power, Reports produced by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO). All other published Academic References like books and other works written by different authors and published Research Articles in peer-reviewed journals specific to Northeast India, Development Studies, and Public Policy. We have searched institutional and online Sources. Three principal sources were utilised to compile

information about a state's developmental trajectory with respect to economic growth: 1) The India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF) provides credible, current and systematically arranged information about a state's economic development and; 2) Policy Briefs, Statistical Portals and Official Government websites and 3) Reports produced by governmental and parastatal organisations in relation to infrastructure, hydropower and Tourism.

### **Methods Used to Collect Data:**

**Secondary Sources:** The data that are collected through a systematic review of secondary literature are: All relevant government reports like academic publications and other documented evidence produced by institutions related to connectivity, hydropower, border development, digital governance, education, social sector developments (includes tourism), and healthcare.

ii) The information collected concerning each theme is organised according to the following thematic headings for quicker access.

**Verification of Collected Data:** To improve the reliability and accuracy of data collected from various sources, fact verification are made by comparing each fact with at least two other sources providing independent verification of the same data.

**Methods Used to Analyse Data: Thematic Analysis:** A thematic analysis of each major sector will be undertaken to identify areas of development, barriers and impacts. Major sectors include: Roads and Transport, Hydropower, Border Infrastructure, Digital and e-Governance, Education and Healthcare, Tourism and Culture, Government Reforms and Investment Climate.

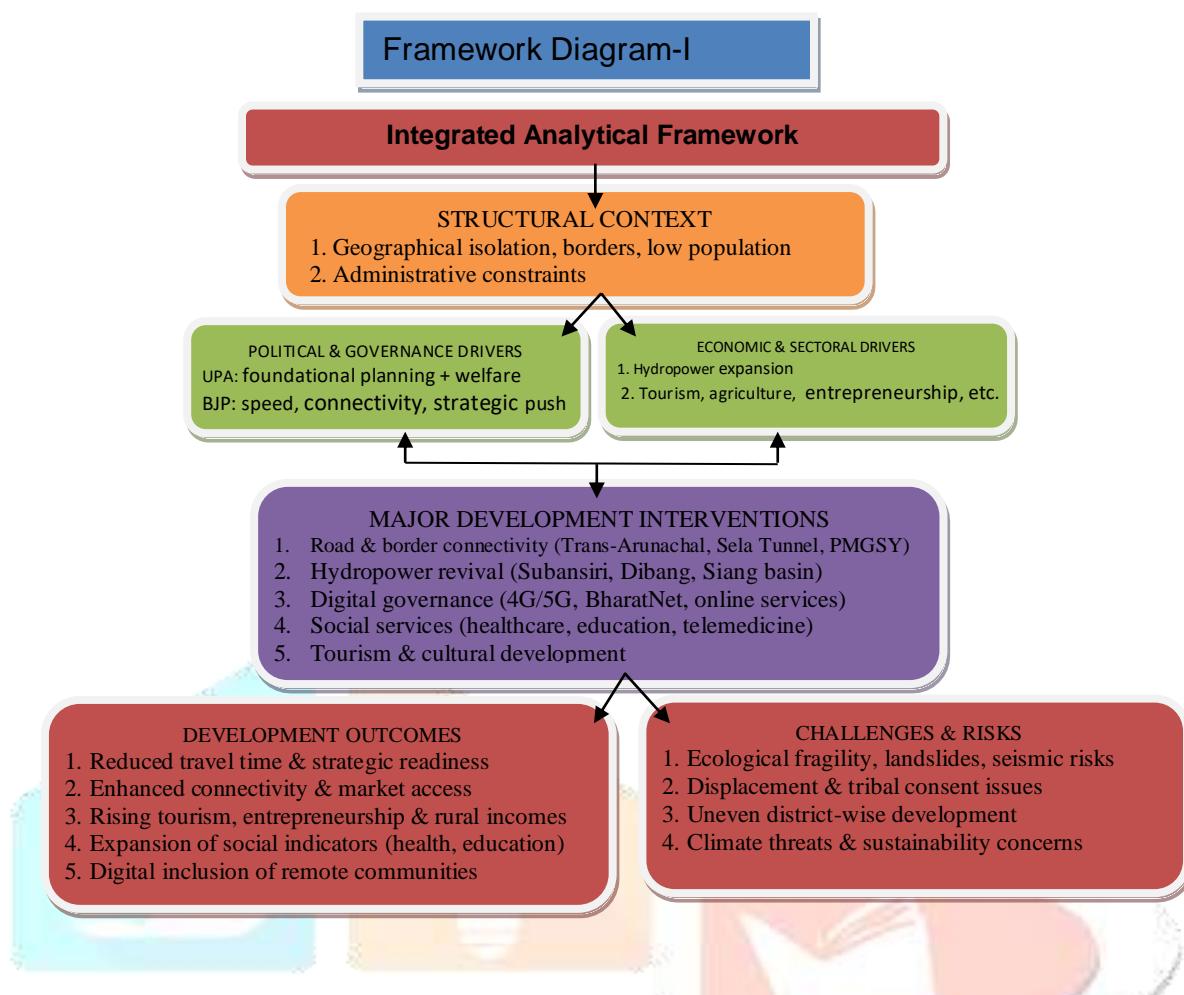
**Comparative Method:** The comparative method compares the developmental patterns under: The Manmohan Singh Government (United Progressive Alliance – UPA Period) and The Narendra Modi Government (Bharatiya Janata Party – BJP Period).

The comparative approach allows for a comparison of how different governments have different areas of focus in regard to policy making and implementation, as well as the speed of implementation, and the expansion of infrastructure and strategic focus.

The analysis of each of the three major types of sources of information, i.e. policy statements, academic studies, and government statistics, allows for the identification of trends and patterns in the formulation of public policy, the establishment of strategic priorities, and the impact of the implementation of such policies upon the progress of the various developmental sectors.

### **III. FRAMEWORK FOR ARUNACHAL PRADESH DEVELOPMENT (2000-2025)**

This analytical framework summarises the dynamic changes in Arunachal Pradesh's development during the early years of the 21st Century as a function of the various themes and trends described in this report. It describes the major factors contributing to the development of Arunachal Pradesh as well as the roles of politics, economics, society and ecology in shaping that development.



#### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

##### The development under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government

The BJP Government has made significant headway with respect to developing Arunachal Pradesh's potential and capacity since coming into power at a National level in 2014 and increasing its political presence within the State. A number of academic and official reports have described an extraordinary level of progress over this period concerning: infrastructure; governance; border access; electricity generation by means of hydropower; and investment in social programs (Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 2024; NITI Aayog, 2023). A distinctive feature of developments during the BJP period is the rapid expansion of the State's road system, both in terms of additions and rehabilitating existing roads. It has been said that this modernising of the road system is a reflection of the foundational ground-up development of the State of Arunachal Pradesh, which serves to eliminate the long-standing physical isolation of the state.

Major projects have included the Trans Arunachal Highway system of road construction, a proposal for a Frontier highway system of road construction, and the upgradation of Strategic Border Roads by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), as well as the Construction of an extensive PMGSY system of Rural Roads.

Travel time has been decreased through the opening of new markets for local goods and services, while remote tribal villages have become connected to district headquarters through improved connectivity with the completion of various projects. Analysts feel that in addition to providing connectivity to transport goods and services, improved connectivity has been a factor in enhancing Arunachal Pradesh's capability to defend its territory along the Indo-China border (Baruah 2022).

The BJP government has prioritized the expansion of hydropower generation as part of its strategy for economic development as well as connecting people in remote areas through improved road networks in Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh is the largest producer of hydropower resources in India (more than 50,000 MW). Several hydropower projects that were previously on hold have now been put back into operation and new hydropower projects have been announced. Tato- I, Heo, Subansiri-Lower, and projects in the Siang basin are all expected to contribute to the state's economy through creating jobs from being able to

use hydroelectric power to generate revenue (Patir 2019; Sharma 2020). The financial benefits to be realized from hydropower projects may create some concern over potential ecological impacts resulting from these developments, such as displacement of communities, susceptibility to seismic activity, and ecological vulnerability, as well as highlight the need for continued diligence in the planning and implementation of these projects by the States and Local Governments (Gohain 2021).

In addition to the benefits gained from the generation of energy and transportation services, the government has also made substantial progress in healthcare, education, and digital infrastructure by facilitating the implementation of e-Governance systems through investment initiatives. As a result of these initiatives, the construction of new district hospitals, increased use of telemedicine in rural areas, the enhancement of government schools, and improved access to 4G and 5G telecommunication networks in rural border belt communities have had a positive impact on communities where chronic shortages of public service delivery have previously occurred (Arunachal Pradesh Government, 2023; Rai, 2022).

The implementation of e-Governance platforms, online Grievance Redressal Systems, and Digital Service Centres has allowed for improved local-government transparency and increased opportunities for interaction between the citizen and the Government (NITI Aayog, 2023). The government of the BJP has placed emphasis on the growth of tourism in their approach to taking care of Bhutan's economy as one of the main areas of development. Investment into such things as sites where people can gather for meetings/conventions, areas for cultural ceremonies, Eco-tourism circuits with roadside facilities, roads to allow easy access to important Buddhist sites Monasteries, Lakes, Passes, and Native Indian sites (The Source, 2022). Research shows that this growth of tourism and economic development, including a number of home-stays (Dutta 2021) has improved household income levels and restored local crafts and the use of the tradition of hospitality.

Investments made by the BJP's government are an extension of economic growth by facilitating investments through entrepreneurial activity, building capacity through skills programs, and creating the necessary environment to develop the start-up ecosystem. Initiatives established under the Arunachal Pradesh Entrepreneurship Challenge as well as support of SHGs through funding from DAY-NRLM, and industrial corridor development reflects a shifting of Arunachal Pradesh's dependency on Agriculture and Government Employment towards a more diversified economy (Khan 2022). Opportunities for Rural Development through Agriculture (Horticulture), Organically grown products, Value-added co-operatives, and Community Based Forestry Initiatives, are expanding additional livelihoods opportunities, especially for Women and Youth (Baruah 2023).

Regardless, the presence of significant investment and the rapid construction of infrastructure has created imbalances with respect to the Districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Key structural obstacles exist with respect to agriculture, difficult terrain conditions, a sparse Population Base, Climate Change, and Limited Industrial Bases, thus inhibiting the actualisation of balanced growth across Arunachal Pradesh's Districts (Singh, 2020; Rai, 2022). Environmental Scholars warn that the rapid development of Hydroelectric Plants, Roads, and Deforestation may lead to increasing Ecological Pressures on an area of the World that includes some of the most sensitive mountain ecosystems located on Earth (Gohain 2021). Sociologists believe the long-term success of BJP led Development will be dependent upon the successful engagement of Community Participation, Tribal Approval, and Culturally Synchronized Implementation of Major Projects (Mibang, 2022).

Under the BJP's government, the direction of development in Arunachal Pradesh has shifted from being slow and incremental to one that is characterised by improved infrastructure developments, development of network connectivity through the state, increased development of hydroelectric power and the use of digital governance systems as well as the expansion of social services and focus on development in the border communities. While there is still ongoing debate about the sustainability and inclusiveness of these initiatives, there is no doubt that the last period has been one of the most intensive stages of development in the short history of Arunachal Pradesh following Independence (Sharma, 2021; Govt. of A.P, 2024).

## V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES UNDER TWO GOVERNMENTS

We now compare the developmental Activities done under the Manmohan Singh Government (2004 - 2014) and the Narendra Modi Government (2014 - Present). The last two decades in Arunachal Pradesh have experienced developmental activities that fall into two distinct phases. Both the Manmohan Singh Government (2004–2014) that focused on welfare development and capacity building, and the Narendra Modi Government (2014–Present) whose main thrust has been on the rapid provisioning of physical infrastructure, advancement of border security, promotion of hydroelectric energy, and implementation of Digital Governance - have provided a continuum of development changes to Arunachal Pradesh.

**(1) The Last Phase of the Development of Transport Infrastructure/Recreation of the Manmohan Singh Govt (UPA):** The Manmohan Singh Government (UPA) was responsible for laying the foundation for the much-needed network connectivity to the north east region and construction of the much needed transport infrastructure, through the SARDP-NE Programme. The Manmohan Singh Government (UPA) had provided funding to construct over 3000 Km of new roads as part of SARDP-NE. The Trans-Arunachal Highway was, in part, sanctioned and conceptualised at this same time; however, as is the case with many large scale infrastructure projects, was delayed due to land acquisition & administrative bottlenecks that delayed the completion of the same. The emphasis of this period (phase of development) was on long term planning and construction of road networks to support future economic activities, as opposed to delivering these networks as rapidly as possible.

**BJP's Modi Government:** The Sela Tunnel and Nechipu Tunnel, as well as parts of the Trans-Arunachal Highway, have been developed as the Modi Administration constructed the necessary infrastructure for these projects through the Border Roads Organisation (BRO). More than before assuming office, the Modi Government was able to improve the speed with which these projects were able to be completed and expanded their investment and logistical capabilities (Singh; Prasad).

**Comparison:** The difference in project completion times between the UPA and the current government of Modi is due to the improvements made by the BJP. The BJP has been able to achieve a higher level of efficiency, speed of completion, and investment into Hydropower Development than the UPA government.

**(2) Hydro Power Development:** The Government led by Manmohan Singh (UPA) entered into numerous MoUs with NHPC and private power developers for the development of Hydro Power in Arunachal Pradesh. They developed and began many Hydro Power Projects during this period, including: Lower Subansiri Hydro Power Project, the Dibang Multipurpose Hydro-Power Project, and other projects in the Siang Basin (Rahman; Misra). However, as a result of numerous Environmental Conflicts, Backlash from the Community, and Changes/Delays in Regulations, the Rate of Construction of hydro power was significantly lower than it had been previously. The BJP led administration of Modi also started to bring back into production larger numbers of dormant Hydro power Project's in Arunachal Pradesh - this was due to a renewed commitment from the Central Government towards Building Strategic Development of the Border Area of the State (Dutta, 2020 and Baruah, 2023) and also due to substantial improvements by the BJP in mobilizing Investments and improving the Policy Framework of Hydro Power Development - this evidence is supported by the visible Developments taking place across Several District in Arunachal Pradesh.

**Comparison:** Planning for Hydro Power Development was taken under UPA while the BJP continued to re-initiate and clear non-nationalized hydro power projects which are falling behind in completion timeline rate.

**(3) Development of Border Infrastructure with a Security Orientation:** The development of border roads (BRO) and strategic infrastructure under the Manmohan Singh administration during the UPA was at a lower rate than the current Modi Administration because of the conditions of the terrain, a lack of funding support, and the lower priority placed on defense-oriented development in the UPA Administration's development strategy. Research has shown that, as a result, the connectivity of border villages was very poor during the UPA administration (Hazarika, 2019 ).

The Modi Administration placed a focus on border connectivity. During the Modi administration, a large number of roads were built, as were many forward posts, as well as many bridges along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) (Prasad). In particular, the Vibrant Villages Program (VVP) was created to enhance the growth

of border settlements that are remote by providing housing, solar energy, roads and telecommunications (Singh, 2021).

**Comparison:** While under the BJP era, each of the previous administrations in Arunachal Pradesh has shown tremendous growth and increase of strategic infrastructure compared to the current BJP Administration.

**(4) Digital Connectivity & E-Governance:** Manmohan Singh Government During the government of Manmohan Singh, there were few digital infrastructure projects in Arunachal Pradesh, with a low level of internet penetration, limited use of ICT (Internet Communication Technology)-enabled governance and limited telecommunications in rural and border areas (Goswami, 2020).

The Modi Government is committed to eliminating the digital divide and has significantly increased the number of towers in India that support 4G and 5G mobile technology, as well as the number of BharatNet and digital technology payment systems, and tele-governance applications (Dutta, 2017).

A significant accomplishment of the Modi Government has been to digitize many public services in Arunachal Pradesh. Examples include the delivery of social services, telemedicine, digital high schools, and e-Government Portals to numerous remote villages in Arunachal Pradesh.

**(5) Social Sector Development:** UPA Government: With a focus on Welfare-oriented policies (for example SSA, NRHM, MGNREGA) that positively affected the early health and education indicators of Arunachal Pradesh (Baruah, 2016), the UPA Government was successful in building institutions and providing service access to the people of Arunachal Pradesh (Baruah, 2017).

On the other hand, the Modi Government has taken significant steps to transform the social sector from the foundations laid by the previous governments through initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat, New District Hospitals, Telemedicine Centers, Skills Development Programs, and Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) (Singh, 2018). With this infrastructure improvement there was also a significant increase in Tourism-related employment and Micro-entrepreneurship opportunities in Arunachal Pradesh.

**Comparison:** The UPA Government built Welfare Systems, while the BJP Government combined Welfare Systems with Livelihood Creation and entrepreneurship.

**(6) Tourism Development:** The UPA Government pioneered eco-tourism and enhanced the accessibility of places such as Tawang and Ziro (Goswami, 2020).

But Modi Government has expanded rapidly the tourism infrastructure with the development of better road systems, additional Cultural Centres, promotion of Homestays, and establishment of new festivals in Mechuka, Ziro and Tawang, resulting in substantial increases in arrival numbers for tourists (Prasad, 2021).

**(7) Governance and Investment Climate:** The connectivity challenges of the Singh Government and structural barriers were major limitations on Government investment. Furthermore, a result of these limitations there has been low levels of Private Sector Investment (Misra, 2018).

By implementing initiatives focused on improving connectivity through Administrative Reforms, the Modi Government has generated greater levels of Investor interest in the Private Sector for Hydropower, Agriculture processing, tourism, and logistics investments (Dutta, 2020).

**Comparison:** The Singh Government focused on increasing the provision of welfare to society, building strong institutional frameworks and developing foundational infrastructure that would support future growth. The Modi Government has focused on creating Speedy and Strategic Integration along with Large-Scale Development of Infrastructure. As a result there has been significant acceleration of the introduction of initiatives associated with developing Connectivity, Hydropower, Border Infrastructure and Digital Transformation.

The UPA era established the foundational infrastructure that supported the development of social-sector investments while the BJP era established the most comprehensive and rapid investment drive of both Physical and Digital Infrastructure.

## VI. LIMITATIONS

- (i) The study was carried out using just secondary sources. Depending on how detailed the papers are, the information found in different sources may differ.
- (ii) The research does not cover micro-variations at the district level.
- (iii) The lack of primary data limits the extent of insight into Local-Level Experiences. However, the comprehension of information at the macro level is extensive.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In Arunachal Pradesh, the direction of development over the past few years marks the end of a slow developing road project across a number of geographically dispersed locations and the start of an accelerated pace of developing infrastructure, as well as a number of socio-economic changes resulting from accelerated development. Over the last ten years, the development of road networks and improvements to border infrastructure, Power gen/distribution and the growth of telecommunication ability of the state has addressed many barriers associated with slow developing geographical areas such as being geographically isolated and limited by administrative access.

The creation of major highways, tunnels (including the Sela Tunnel) and bridges is affecting travel times to markets and reducing administrative access to areas that were once inaccessible. The construction of the Trans Arunachal Highway and tunnels such as Sela Tunnel has transformed the economic geography of Arunachal Pradesh. In addition, the development of large hydroelectric facilities, border area development and improved Border Roads Organisation capacity are also evidence of the increasing importance of Arunachal Pradesh as a national strategic and economic area. At the same time as infrastructure development and improvements in connectivity, there has been an increase in the efficiency of government through e-governance platforms and improved telecommunication systems. By improving both the efficiency and inclusiveness of administration, e-governance can provide increased opportunities to benefit from development for rural and border areas.

Through the enhancements of their cultural heritage, tourism provides new avenues for income to be derived from rural areas and is associated with cultural diversity and the safeguarding of this diversity through increased and enhanced economic opportunities. By establishing new district hospitals and improving existing district hospitals through telemedicine services and enhanced medical facilities, the continuous expansion of the health and education infrastructure indicates a sustained increase in human development indicators. Improved quality of life will be achieved through the creation of an enhanced infrastructure of healthcare and education in Arunachal Pradesh.

Ongoing concerns regarding the impact of the environment on Arunachal Pradesh's growth will positively affect the continuing growth of this region through continued improvements in communication between communities displaced by the construction of new infrastructure, and an increased public understanding of the importance of integrating Arunachal Pradesh's economy with the national economy in a much more equitable way. These are the first examples of changes to the traditional structures which have been established as the basis for Arunachal Pradesh's evolution over the past decades. Traditional barriers to long-term development that have previously existed will now be broken down as the outcome of new infrastructure, better connectivity, larger scale projects, enhanced governance, and enhanced human capacity will allow Arunachal Pradesh to utilise the benefits of these changes to overcome the centuries of separation from the rest of India that have been caused by the difficulty of travelling through the natural barriers created by the Himalayan mountain range.

When this transformation is accompanied by sustainable policies, the state's ability to involve all sectors of society through consultation and incorporate environmental considerations into the design and implementation of infrastructure projects will provide a foundation for the future sustainable development of Arunachal Pradesh and enable the region to be a leader in the evolution of the border regions within the Himalayas of India.

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