

The Economic and Security Dimensions of the Bogibeel Bridge in Assam

Amit Ranjan

The opening of Bogibeel Bridge will improve connectivity and enhance the economic potential of the north eastern states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in India. At the same time, the bridge will enhance India's military infrastructure at its border with China. This paper examines the economic potential and security dimension of the bridge.

Background

On 25 December 2018, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 4.94 kilometre-long Bogibeel Bridge in India's north eastern state of Assam. It is India's longest railroad bridge, beating the Vemband Bridge in Kerala which is 4.62 kilometres long. The Bogibeel Bridge's foundation stone was laid by then-Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda in January 1997 with construction starting in April 2002.

In 2007, the Indian National Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government declared the Bogibeel Bridge a national project, which assured that funds would remain available for its speedy [completion](#). Nevertheless, it took more than 15 years for the completion of the bridge, mainly due to restricted working conditions as a result of annual floods in the Brahmaputra River. According to the Chief Engineer of the project, Mohinder Singh, the working season was only five months in a year and required the large mobilisation of [construction equipment](#) from one place to the other.

The Bogibeel Bridge, situated over the Brahmaputra River, connects Assam's Dibrugarh and Dhemji districts bordering Arunachal Pradesh. Categorised as a truss bridge, whose load bearing superstructure is composed of a truss, it has been constructed by Hindustan Construction Company, German company DSB Brouckenbau and VNR Infrastructure Company on a [51:20:29 partnership](#).

This bridge has reduced the travel time between the Dibrugarh and Dhemji by four hours, thereby avoiding a [170-kilometre long detour](#). It has also reduced the road distance between Dibrugarh and Itanagar (capital of Arunachal Pradesh) by 150 kilometres and railway travel by about [705 kilometres](#), with a serviceable period of 120 years. Besides providing rail connectivity, the bridge also links the two existing national highways – NH-37 on the south bank and NH-52 on the [north bank](#).

Economic Benefits

With its coming into operation, the bridge will help with the speedy and efficient movement of goods. Earlier, in spite of providing incentives such as fiscal concessions to investors, India's north eastern states were not able to attract much investment, largely due to the high costs of moving goods to and from the region. The lack of connectivity also affected the

[tourism sector](#) in the region which has great potential. In addition to saving time, the bridge is expected to save fuel worth ₹10 Lakh (S\$20,000) per day in the [region](#). The remote districts of Anjaw, Changlang, Lohit Lower Dibang Valley, Dibang Valley and Tirap in Arunachal Pradesh will also benefit from the operation of this bridge.

In its four-and-a-half year tenure, the Modi government has inaugurated a number of infrastructure projects in the north eastern states. Prominent among these projects are a 2.9 kilometre-long Alburi Bridge, which was inaugurated in the Lohit district of [Arunachal Pradesh](#) in 2016, and a 9.15 kilometre-long bridge between Dhola and Sadiya, popularly known as the Bhupen Hazarika Bridge, which was inaugurated by Modi in May 2017. Besides, work is being done on a few connectivity-related infrastructure projects, including two bridges in Assam, the trans-Arunachal highway on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River, and new road and rail links over the river and its major tributaries such as Dibang, Lohit, Subansiri and [Kameng](#).

Military Value

India's prime security concern in its north east region is China with which it has fought a war in 1962 and has engaged in a number of military tensions at the border. In 2017, India and China were engaged in a military stand-off at Doklam in Bhutan, near India's 'Chicken Neck' corridor in the north east. India believed it needed to enhance its infrastructure near the border region and in the northeast so that its troops could be mobilised quickly when needed to meet any untoward military situation. According to a [senior Indian army general](#), "Earlier, military troops and equipment had to cross the Brahmaputra, and Arunachal rivers like the Lohit, only on barges and rafts. The nearest railway bridge at Guwahati was more than 400 km away [from the border], while Tezpur had only a road bridge. Now, trains can cross the Brahmaputra at Bogibeel and then travel further east on the new strategic link."

The Bogibeel Bridge will help Indian military troops, located in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur, to rush to the India-China border at Kibithoo, Wallong and [Chaglagam](#) much quickly during an emergency. Also, the bridge is strong enough for fighter jets to land on during an [emergency](#) situation.

Conclusion

The new railroad bridge, albeit nearly two decades in the making, has provided India much-needed connectivity in the north eastern region. The Bogibeel Bridge, combined with the other infrastructure projects, has increased the economic potential of the north eastern region as well as allowed India to enhance its military posture on its eastern border.

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Dr Amit Ranjan is Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He can be contacted at isasar@nus.edu.sg. The author bears full responsibility for the facts cited and opinions expressed in this paper.