

My dear brothers and sisters of the North East,

**Background:**

All fingers of the hand are not alike yet they work together to produce many marvelous and unheard of things. So too are the seven sisters of the North East. Not alike I mean. The table below provides a glimpse into this diversity. While Assam has one third of the population of the North East it has 70% of the population. On the other hand while Arunachal Pradesh has slightly more land than Assam it has only 3 % of the total population. Why so ? While Assam lies in the Brahmaputra plains, Arunachal is mountainous.

Brief Profile of the North East

Sr No.	State	% Geographical Area	% Population	Population Density
1.	Assam	2.4	2.6	397
2.	Tripura	0.32	0.31	350
3.	Meghalaya	0.69	0.25	132
4.	Manipur	0.68	0.25	122
5.	Nagaland	0.50	0.16	119
6.	Mizoram	0.64	0.09	52
7.	Arunchal	2.54	0.11	17

The historical development of mankind shows the pivotal role played by water and topography in availability of food and consequently the demographic growth of populations. As the Honorable Minister Temjen Imna Along said, before going to Old Delhi Station, he never saw so many people in one place. The mountainous North East made dispersed settlement necessary for survival .

The diverse and colourful traditions and cultures of the North East are born out of conditions in which people lived and worked. The North East Indigenous People's Forum, while recognising this diversity calls for Unity on the basis of preservation of this rich cultural and ethnic diversity.

**The arrival of the British and the puncturing of this rich tapestry.**

To pit this quite simply tea plantations and the felling of wood/ floating them down the river Brahmaputra with the help of imported labour and domesticated elephants changed the fabric of the region and necessitating a regime of command and control

Post British, the scenario was no different . the chicken neck corridor, the lifeline of the North East actually served as a conduit for import and export of commodities in and out of the region with the control in the hands of outsiders. Hydro Electric power, Oil and Natural Gas and other mineral wealth have resulted in displacement and low paid jobs for local communities while the wealth gets centralised in the stock exchange of Mumbai for instance.

### **Rediscovering the strength of Indigenous communities**

This North East has politically given a fitting reply to the continued exploitation of the North East . However issues related to preservation of the identity, culture and heritage of the North East remain. It is our contention true dignity of the people of the North East cannot be preserved without recognition of the relevance of the traditional knowledge and wisdom of the people of the North East related to the preservation and management of the natural resources of the region for livelihoods and governance. The recently formed NEIP needs to have a concrete agenda related to the development and conservation of natural resources of this region. Distinct from the exploitative corridor module of development that is being posed as the harbinger of jobs etc.

### **Adivasi Bharat Mahasabha (UF) and Unity in Diversity**

Formed in 2018., Adivasi Bharat Mahasabha recognises the question of consistent marginalisation of the Adivasis under whatever form and pretext. ABM (UF) emerges out of this process as a concrete way to give shape to questions related to unity in diversity. Assertion of community rights to local self governance, using existing provisions for dealing with issues related to livelihood with dignity and raising one's voice against demonisation and alienation of local communities the need of the hour.

The two studies by Tarun Kanti Bose deal with these questions in diverse locations across the country. He will fill in with more details.