



CENJOWS

WEB ARTICLE
WA/29/26

TRUST, CONNECTIVITY, AND SECURITY: GENERAL ANIL CHAUHAN'S NORTHEAST INDIA FRAMEWORK

DR ULUPI BORAH



CENJOWS

**Trust, Connectivity, and Security:
General Anil Chauhan's Northeast
India Framework**



**Dr Ulupi Borah is a
distinguished fellow at
CENJOWS**

Introduction

General Anil Chauhan, India's second Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and former General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Command, has consistently viewed national security and regional development as deeply interconnected. Having commanded some of India's most sensitive frontier regions, including the Northeast theatre bordering China and Myanmar, Gen Chauhan developed a strategic understanding of how infrastructure, connectivity, local participation, and border stability directly influence national security. Northeast India occupies a critical place in India's strategic geography due to its proximity to Southeast Asia, its shared borders with multiple countries, and its role within India's Act East and Indo-Pacific policies. Under Gen Chauhan's broader strategic outlook, frontier regions are not merely military buffer zones but spaces requiring sustained economic growth, technological integration, and social resilience. His emphasis on border villages, strategic connectivity, civil-military cooperation, and regional stability reflects a modern security doctrine in which development itself becomes a strategic instrument of statecraft.

Northeast India in India's Strategic Thinking

Northeast India has increasingly emerged as one of the most strategically significant regions in India's national security and foreign policy framework. Connected to mainland India through the narrow Siliguri Corridor, often referred to as the "Chicken's

Neck,” the region shares international borders with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, making it highly sensitive from both geopolitical and security perspectives. Its location at the intersection of South Asia and Southeast Asia gives the region immense strategic value in India’s broader regional and Indo-Pacific engagement.¹

Traditionally viewed as a distant periphery due to geographical isolation, difficult terrain, insurgency, and limited infrastructure, Northeast India is now being reimagined as a strategic frontier central to India’s future connectivity and economic ambitions. The shift has become particularly visible through India’s Act East Policy, which identifies the Northeast as the primary gateway connecting India to Southeast Asia. Connectivity initiatives such as the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway, Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, border trade routes, and expanding rail and digital infrastructure reflect this transformation. These projects aim not only to enhance trade and regional integration but also to strengthen India’s strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific.

The region’s strategic importance has further increased amid growing border sensitivities with China, particularly along Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing continues to claim as “South Tibet.” Simultaneously, instability along the India–Myanmar border, including insurgent movements, illegal trafficking, and refugee flows following Myanmar’s internal political crisis, has reinforced the security dimension of the Northeast. As a result, India’s strategic thinking has gradually evolved from treating the region solely as a security challenge to recognising it as a critical geopolitical, economic, and connectivity hub. In this emerging framework, the development of Northeast India is increasingly viewed as essential not only for regional prosperity but also for strengthening India’s national security and Indo-Pacific strategy.²

It is within this evolving strategic environment that Gen Chauhan’s outlook on Northeast India becomes particularly significant. Having served extensively in India’s eastern theatre, he has consistently viewed connectivity, infrastructure, local participation, and resilience in frontier regions as integral to national security. His broader strategic approach reflects the understanding that the Northeast is no longer merely a peripheral border region but a critical strategic frontier shaping India’s security, regional integration, and Indo-Pacific engagement.

Gen Anil Chauhan's Security–Development Approach

Gen Chauhan has consistently promoted the idea that security and development are closely interconnected, particularly in frontier regions such as Northeast India. Drawing from his experience as former Gen Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Command and later as Chief of Defence Staff, Gen Chauhan has argued that military preparedness cannot be separated from economic growth, infrastructure expansion, and local stability. His strategic outlook reflects a modern understanding of national security in which roads, tunnels, logistics systems, communication networks, and digital connectivity are not merely developmental assets but strategic necessities.

The Northeast occupies a highly sensitive geopolitical position due to its borders with China and Myanmar. Difficult terrain, limited connectivity, and past insurgencies have historically complicated both governance and military mobility in the region. In this context, Gen Chauhan's approach highlights the importance of integrated infrastructure capable of serving both civilian and military purposes. Roads, bridges, advanced landing grounds, and logistics corridors improve troop mobilisation and operational readiness while simultaneously expanding economic opportunities for local populations. This dual-use infrastructure model has become increasingly significant in modern warfare, where speed, connectivity, and resilient supply chains determine operational effectiveness.

Border Villages as India's "First Villages"

One of the most important ideas associated with Gen Chauhan's frontier outlook is the changing perception of border villages in India's strategic thinking. Traditionally, many settlements in Arunachal Pradesh and other frontier areas were viewed as isolated "last villages" situated at the margins of the Indian state. However, the emerging strategic narrative increasingly treats these settlements as India's "first villages," representing the country's first line of resilience, connectivity, and national presence along sensitive borders.

This approach recognises that population retention in border regions has direct strategic implications. Migration from remote villages due to economic hardship, weak infrastructure, and limited opportunities can reduce state presence in strategically sensitive areas. In contrast, economically active and connected border communities

strengthen governance, local intelligence networks, and long-term strategic stability. The Government of India's Vibrant Villages Programme reflects many of these priorities by focusing on roads, telecommunications, tourism infrastructure, healthcare, and livelihood generation in border regions. Tourism, local entrepreneurship, and improved digital connectivity are increasingly being viewed not only as developmental measures but also as tools of strategic consolidation in frontier areas.³

Connectivity and Infrastructure in the Northeast

The Gen has consistently viewed connectivity infrastructure in Northeast India not merely as a developmental requirement but as a critical component of national security and strategic preparedness. Drawing from his operational experience in India's eastern theatre, the officer has repeatedly highlighted the importance of roads, tunnels, bridges, logistics corridors, advanced landing grounds, and communication networks in strengthening India's defence posture along the borders with China and Myanmar.⁴ His broader strategic outlook reflects the understanding that in modern warfare, infrastructure determines the speed of mobilisation, logistical sustainability, and operational readiness, particularly in mountainous and remote frontier regions.⁵

Under this approach, infrastructure development serves both military and civilian objectives simultaneously. Improved roads and strategic highways enhance troop mobility, transportation of heavy military equipment, and rapid deployment capabilities in border areas. At the same time, these projects reduce regional isolation, improve access to healthcare and markets, encourage tourism, and strengthen local economies. Gen Chauhan's emphasis on dual-use infrastructure reflects the growing civil-military fusion within India's frontier management strategy, where projects once considered purely civilian are increasingly recognised for their strategic value.

His thinking also aligns closely with India's broader Act East and Indo-Pacific vision. Enhanced connectivity in the Northeast through projects such as the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project strengthens India's access to Southeast Asia while simultaneously reinforcing border management and strategic mobility. In this framework, connectivity is no longer viewed only as an economic tool but also as an instrument of deterrence, governance, and regional integration. Gen Chauhan's approach therefore reflects a larger

transformation in India's strategic thinking, where infrastructure development in frontier regions is increasingly treated as an essential pillar of both national security and long-term geopolitical strategy.

Technology, Youth, and Innovation in Frontier Regions

Gen Chauhan has repeatedly highlighted the importance of technology, youth participation, and innovation in strengthening India's frontier regions, particularly the Northeast.⁶ His strategic outlook reflects the understanding that future security challenges will depend not only on conventional military strength but also on technological preparedness, cyber resilience, digital literacy, and the ability to adapt to emerging forms of warfare. In several public interactions, Gen Chauhan has stressed that India's youth must actively contribute to national development and technological transformation, especially in strategically sensitive regions.

This perspective is particularly relevant in Northeast India, where geography, connectivity gaps, and developmental disparities have historically limited opportunities for local youth. Gen Chauhan's broader security-development approach recognises that skill development, digital infrastructure, and technological awareness can strengthen both regional growth and national resilience. Areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, drones, communication technologies, and digital networks are increasingly becoming part of India's strategic ecosystem. His emphasis on emerging technologies reflects the changing nature of modern conflict, where information dominance, cyber capability, surveillance systems, and unmanned technologies play a central role.

The growing startup ecosystem in parts of Northeast India also aligns with this vision. Improved connectivity and digital infrastructure are gradually creating opportunities for entrepreneurship, innovation, and technology-driven employment. Military technologies and innovation ecosystems may also generate civilian spillovers in sectors such as telecommunications, drone applications, disaster management, healthcare, and logistics. Gen Chauhan's outlook therefore treats human capital and technological empowerment as essential components of strategic resilience, helping frontier regions become more economically stable, socially integrated, and strategically secure.

Civil-Military Cooperation and Disaster Response

Gen Chauhan has consistently emphasised the importance of civil-military cooperation in strengthening resilience and development in frontier regions such as Northeast India.⁷ Given the region's vulnerability to floods, landslides, earthquakes, and other natural disasters, Gen Chauhan has highlighted the role of the Armed Forces not only in national defence but also in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations.⁸ His broader strategic outlook recognises that the effectiveness of the armed forces in frontier areas is closely linked to their relationship with local communities and their ability to respond during crises.

Under this approach, the army's role extends beyond conventional security responsibilities. Military engineering units, rescue teams, aviation assets, and logistical capabilities frequently support civilian administrations during emergencies across the Northeast. Evacuation operations, restoration of communication networks, bridge construction, medical assistance, and supply distribution in remote regions have increasingly become part of integrated response mechanisms. Gen Chauhan's emphasis on preparedness and coordinated response reflects the growing importance of resilience in contemporary national security planning.

Civil-military cooperation also contributes to trust-building between the armed forces and local populations. In regions where difficult terrain and limited infrastructure complicate governance, the Army's role during humanitarian operations often strengthens public confidence and state legitimacy. This reinforces the perception of the Armed Forces not only as security providers but also as developmental and humanitarian actors. Gen Chauhan's perspective therefore reflects a broader transformation in India's security thinking, where disaster response, infrastructure support, and humanitarian assistance are increasingly integrated into frontier management and national resilience strategies.

Conclusion

Gen Anil Chauhan's approach towards Northeast India reflects a modern strategic doctrine where security, development, connectivity, technology, and human resilience are closely interconnected. His strategic outlook moves beyond viewing borders

merely as military frontiers and instead treats them as development frontiers requiring infrastructure, economic opportunity, local participation, and long-term stability. In this framework, roads, digital connectivity, border villages, youth empowerment, civil-military cooperation, and disaster resilience become essential components of national security planning.

Gen Chauhan's perspective also reflects the changing nature of contemporary warfare and statecraft, where governance, connectivity, and public trust contribute significantly to long-term stability. Northeast India's transformation therefore occupies an important place within India's broader Indo-Pacific and Act East vision.

At the same time, his outlook carries a strong human dimension rooted in the Indian Army's ethos of operating among its own people in sensitive regions. His emphasis on civil-military cooperation and humanitarian assistance reflects the idea of the Indian Army as a "moral army", one that seeks not merely to defeat insurgency but to restore trust, strengthen resilience, and integrate communities into the national mainstream while preserving dignity and public confidence.

DISCLAIMER

The paper is the author's individual scholastic articulation and does not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS, the Defence forces, or the Government of India. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished, and it has not been submitted for publication/ web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

ENDNOTES

¹ Tridib Bhattacharjee, "From Frontier to Fulcrum: Northeast India's Indo-Pacific Opportunity," [Observer Research Foundation](#), January 19, 2026

² Ibid

³ Retired Lieutenant General Anil Chauhan of Uttarakhand Became the Second CDS of the Country." Drishti IAS. September 29, 2022. Accessed May 18, 2026

⁴ Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff. "General Anil Chauhan, Chief of Defence Staff India Held an Academia Engagement with Think Tanks from Various Nations Across the Globe, on the Sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue." Facebook post, June 2, 2025. Accessed May 18, 2026. HQ IDS - India Facebook Post

⁵ Ibid

⁶ CDS Anil Chauhan Says Active Participation of Young Citizens Crucial in Shaping Sashakt & Surakshit Bharat." [News On Air](#) January 13, 2026. Accessed May 18, 2026.

<https://www.newsonair.gov.in/cds-anil-chauhan-says-active-participation-of-young-citizens-crucial-in-shaping-sashakt-surakshit-bharat>

⁷ ThePrint, "What CDS General Anil Chauhan Said on the Need for Civil-Military Fusion & India's Efforts." YouTube video, 14:41. Published June 2025, URL:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHi4bXjaT1I&t=90s>

⁸, Press Information Bureau. "India has emerged as first responder in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) at global level: CDS Gen. Anil Chauhan." Government of India, Press release, March 6, 2023. PIB, URL:

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1906761®=3&lang=2>