Syllabus subtopic: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the move and its significance; about NEC; SASEC; North east gas grid project

News: The Union cabinet on Wednesday allocated 30% of the North-Eastern Council’s (NEC’s) budget for developing deprived areas and integrating them with the mainstream.

- The government believes a portion of the funds can be utilized for building roads in remote hill regions and for addressing climate change challenges in the North-east.

- The balance allocation shall be bifurcated in the existing two components—state component 60% and central component 40%.

- The move, seen as part of the government’s Act East policy, will benefit marginalized and vulnerable groups of people in backward and neglected areas of North-eastern states.

Background

- The special allocation issue was discussed in September when Union home ministry officials had met with governors and chief ministers of the eight North-eastern states as part of the North Eastern Council in Guwahati. Home minister had then described the region as pivotal to India’s growth story.

- The Union cabinet’s decision comes close on the heels of the Centre stepping up its initiative to consolidate and integrate North- East India with the heartland. On Monday, the Centre signed the tripartite Bodo agreement with the banned National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Assam government, ending a decades-old standoff with separatist groups and clearing the decks for further development of the Bodo regions of Assam.
• The agreement with NDFB highlights the Centre’s attempts to pump greater infrastructure and economic support into the region and comes just days after the Centre signed a pact to permit the settlement of 30,000 Bru tribal refugees in Tripura.

• Earlier in January, the Centre had announced the earmarking of ₹5,559 crore towards the construction of the North East Gas Grid project across the eight states, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura.

Other initiatives taken by the government for improving regional connectivity:

• With an eye on China: India is also working on a number of road and bridge projects to improve connectivity with Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar. These include road networks connecting Aizawl in Mizoram with Kaladan in Myanmar and Imphal in Manipur with Tamu, also in Myanmar.

• India is also expediting the South Asian Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) road connectivity programme. Japan, too, has joined hands with India to develop infrastructure projects in the region with the setting up of the India-Japan Coordination Forum for Development of Northeast.

About North-Eastern Council’s (NEC)

• NEC was established under the North Eastern Council Act, 1971 as an apex level body for securing balanced and coordinated development and facilitating coordination with the States.

• Subsequent to the Amendment of 2002, NEC has been mandated to function as a regional planning body for the North Eastern Area and while formulating a regional plan for this area, shall give priority to the
schemes and projects benefiting two or more states provided that in the case of Sikkim, the Council shall formulate specific projects and schemes for that State.

- The Union Cabinet, in June 2018, approved the proposal of Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) for the nomination of the Union Home Minister as ex-officio Chairman of North Eastern Council (NEC). The Cabinet also approved that Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of DoNER would serve as Vice Chairman of the Council.

- All the Governors and Chief Ministers of North Eastern States will be its members.

About South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC)

- It is a subregional program, set up in 2001
- **Headquarters**: Manila, Philippines
- **Members**: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (BBIN-MMS)
- **Objective**: promote regional prosperity by improving cross-border connectivity, boosting trade among member countries, and strengthening regional economic cooperation
- **SASEC priority areas of cooperation**
  1. Transport
  2. trade facilitation
  3. energy
  4. economic corridor development (ECD)

- In 2016, the SASEC countries approved the **SASEC Operational Plan 2016-2025**, a 10-year strategic roadmap.

- **SASEC Secretariat** — ADB serves as the SASEC Secretariat