



# INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN BORDER AREAS: REQUIREMENT OF HELIPADS AND “DRONEPADS”

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## The Address

On July 12, 2018 the Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh while launching the online management system for the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) interacted with the field and state level officers responsible for implementing the central government scheme.<sup>1</sup> He termed the border populace as a ‘strategic asset’ of the country and an important element of the security apparatus. He also launched the BADP online management system to monitor the progress of various projects under the programme which was initiated in 1986-87.<sup>2</sup> One of the key elements of the BADP programme concerns the connectivity of the border areas and promotion of tourism. However, under the scheme the need to include development of infrastructure which promotes air connectivity in terms of helipads and designated areas for drone operations needs to be examined.

## The BADP & “Border Guarding Forces”

In June 2015 a report<sup>3</sup> was submitted by the Programme Evaluation Organisation (PEO) working under Niti Aayog in which the PEO was tasked to evaluate the implementation of the BADP as well as its convergence with other government schemes aimed at developing the infrastructure in border areas of the country. The study covered 17 states and covered factors as diverse as socio-economic issues as well as the security ones affecting the populace in these strategically important areas. The recommendations included the need to address connectivity issues (all weather roads/bridges/footpaths) as well as addressing the requirement of creating employment and skill generating schemes.<sup>4</sup> What is of significance is that under the scheme, the “Border Guarding Forces” as well as the Armed Forces are also authorised to undertake infrastructure work under this central government funded scheme in

coordination with the respective state governments.<sup>5</sup> Thus the BADP becomes an important platform for an interface between the central government, security forces and the state administration. The PEO report further identifies significant tourism opportunities in many of the states as a means to improve the socio-economic status of the population as also the need to provide basic medical care to these regions. It is significant that, while the BADP aims to promote infrastructure in these strategically important areas it is silent on the aspect of providing aerial connectivity.

As regards the aerial connectivity, while the Armed forces and the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) have a network of helipads catering to their specific requirements, the helipads intended to be used by civil helicopters need to conform to the Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) issued by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).<sup>6</sup> This aspect is under the purview of the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) which had launched a scheme to provide aerial connectivity to these remote areas through its Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) on October 21, 2016.<sup>7</sup> In addition, on November 02, 2017 the MoCA had also issued the draft regulations of CAR on civil use of drones and invited comments and suggestions from public.<sup>8</sup> The final CAR for civilian operation of drones is still awaited. However, in order to fully exploit the expected spinoffs from the RCS as

well the BADP, necessary infrastructure must be created in these border areas.

### **Border Infrastructure: Helipads & “Dronepads”**

Aerial connectivity provides an ideal opportunity for improving the Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>9</sup> of the communities living in the strategically important border areas often isolated by rugged terrain and bad roads. Two of the important aspects to improve the HDI identified in the PEO report mentioned earlier in the paper are promoting tourism and providing access to medical facilities. This would also in turn translate into improving the sense of security and belongingness among the populace in these isolated areas which is also one of the aims of the BADP. Both these can be achieved by creating necessary infrastructure for operations by helicopters and drones. One such example is the delivery of medical supplies being undertaken in Rwanda, Africa under similar conditions by a logistic firm called “Zipline International Inc.”.<sup>10</sup> Operating 15 battery powered drones from a small base, it has logged over 2000 medical flights and delivered medical supplies including blood platelets and lifesaving equipment to remote areas across rugged terrain.

While the regulatory approvals (civilian drone operations) are accorded, infrastructure needs to be created in these strategically important regions. The BADP, thus, is an ideal

platform which provides an interface of all the stakeholders viz. Union Home Ministry, the security forces as well as the State government. In order to further enhance the effectiveness of the BADP, under the infrastructure works authorised to be undertaken under this programme,<sup>11</sup> construction of helipads and designated drone operating areas needs to be included and access to these areas through the aerial route be promoted to improve connectivity.

These sparsely populated areas also provide near ideal conditions and an opportunity to test the efficacy of civil drone operations (mini and small category) which may initially be permitted as a pilot project prior to their implementation in other parts of the country.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> PIB,GoI, "Border Population is our strategic asset :July 12,2018", <http://pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1538442> accessed on July 22,2018

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Niti Aayog, "Evaluation Study on Border Area Development Programme (BADP):PEO Report No.229, June,2015", [http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/document\\_publication/report-BADP.pdf](http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/document_publication/report-BADP.pdf) accessed on July 24, 2018

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.6

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.88

<sup>6</sup> DGCA, "Heliports: CAR Aneex 14 Vol-II Section -4, Aerodrome and Licensing Series 'B',Part III, November

10,2016", <http://dgca.nic.in/rules/car-ind.htm> accessed on Jul 25,2018

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Civil Aviation,GoI, "Regional Connectivity Scheme", <http://www.civilaviation.gov.in/sites/default/files/RCS.pdf> accessed on July 27,2018

<sup>8</sup> PIB,GoI, "Draft Regulation of CAR on Civil Use of Drones Announced", <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=173164> accessed on July 27,2018

<sup>9</sup> UNDP, "Human Development Index", <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi> accessed on July 28,2018

<sup>10</sup> Robert Lee Hotz,The Wall Street Journal, "In Rwanda,Drones Deliver Medical Supplies to Remote Areas", <https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-rwanda-drones-deliver-medical-supplies-to-remote-areas-1512124200> accessed on Jul 29,2018

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, n.3, Annexure III & V