

UGC APPROVED JOURNAL
Vol. 22.3-4 – 23.1-2

Rs. 30.00
ISSN : 0973-0095
January-December, 2021

DIALOGUE

www.asthabharati.org

QUARTERLY



A JOURNAL OF ASTHA BHARATI
NEW DELHI

DIALOGUE
QUARTERLY

Volume-22 No. 3,4 – Volume-23 No.1, 2 (Joint Issue)
January 2021–December 2021

Subscription Rates :

For Individuals (in India)

Single issue	Rs. 30.00
Annual	Rs. 100.00
For 3 years	Rs. 250.00

For Institutions:

Single Issue	Rs. 60.00 in India, Abroad US \$ 15
Annual	Rs. 200.00 in India, Abroad US \$ 50
For 3 years	Rs. 500.00 in India, Abroad US \$ 125

All cheques and Bank Drafts (Account Payee) are to be made in the name of "ASTHA BHARATI", Delhi.

Advertisement Rates :

Outside back-cover	Rs. 25, 000.00 Per issue
Inside Covers	Rs. 20, 000.00 ,,
Inner page coloured	Rs. 15, 000.00 ,,
Inner full page	Rs. 10, 000.00 ,,

DIALOGUE

QUARTERLY

Founded by
Late Dr. B.B. Kumar and Late Shri J.N. Roy

Editor
Prakash Singh

Associate Editor
Pranav Kumar

ASTHA BHARATI
DELHI

The views expressed by the contributors do not necessarily represent the view-point of the journal.

© Astha Bharati, New Delhi

Printed and Published by

Dr. Lata Singh, IAS (Retd.)

Secretary, Astha Bharati

Registered Office:

27/201 East End Apartments,
Mayur Vihar, Phase-I Extension,
Delhi-110096.

Working Office:

House no. 167, Sector 15-A

Noida-201301

e-mail : asthabharati1@gmail.com

web-site : www.asthabharati.org

Printed at : Vikas Computer & Printers, Naveen Shahdara, Delhi-32

Contents

Editorial Perspective	7
From the President's Desk	
1. North East Scan	
EIA – A Death Warrant for the Environment	11
<i>Patricia Mukhim</i>	
Pandemic-Economy Contra Cycles: The way they unfolded in India and the Northeast	14
<i>M.P. Bezbaruah and Amiya Sarma</i>	
Manipur's High COVID-19 Death Rate Has Probably to do With Flaws in its Health Services	19
<i>Pradip Phanjoubam</i>	
2. Security Challenges and the Management of India's Northeastern Borders	22
<i>Dr. Pushpita Das</i>	
3. Vapour and Vigour: Life along the Brahmaputra	33
<i>Samrat Choudhury</i>	
4. Act East Policy: Connecting India's Northeast and Southeast Asia	37
<i>Saswati Choudhury</i>	
5. India's Act East Policy and the Northeast: Road to ASEAN	46
<i>Shristi Pukhrem</i>	
6. Northeast and Act East Policy: From Margin to Mainstream	66
<i>Sreeradha Datta</i>	
7. Dealing with Chinese Infrastructure and Propaganda	73
<i>Claude Arpi</i>	
DIALOGUE, Volume-22 No. 3–Volume-23 No. 2	5

8. Dams and Disasters: A Fallacy of Development in
India's Northeast 82
Amita Singh
9. The Tibetan State and its Margins: Encounters
with the Non-Buddhist Societies of Eastern
Arunachal Pradesh 91
Sarah Hilaly
10. Amid Chinese Challenge, Analysing Strategic
Infrastructure in India's Northeast 108
Jajati K. Pattnaik

Editorial Perspective

From the President's Desk

We apologize to our readers for coming back to them after almost a year. The pandemic disrupted our lives in ways we could not have imagined.

Our problems were compounded by the fact that the top leadership of Astha Bharati — rather mysteriously and tragically — left for their heavenly abode one by one. Dr. Jayanta Madhab, the President expired on October 18, 2019 in Guwahati after a prolonged illness. Dr. B.B. Kumar, one of the founders of Astha Bharati, breathed his last in Delhi on December 8, 2019. Shri J.N. Roy, the moving spirit behind the Astha Bharati and a founding member of the organization, also passed away due to Covid-related complications in Apollo Hospital on May 12, 2021.

Astha Bharati was almost crippled with the departure of the aforesaid stalwarts. What was worse, we did not receive any financial grant from the Ministry of Home Affairs during the financial years 2020–21 and 2021–22. Meeting our day-to-day expenses became difficult and even the payment of office rent became unaffordable. The office was then moved to a private accommodation where the landlord was generous enough not to charge any rent.

In the context of our multiple problems, we decided to strike a compromise and bring out just one issue for the entire year of 2021. It is devoted primarily to the Northeast, an area very close to our heart and an area which we have been trying in our own humble way to integrate more firmly with the rest of the country.

The highlights of the current issue of *Dialogue* are summarised below:

Patricia Mukhim notes that the new EIA proposal by Government of India is set to create an unfortunate precedent of ignoring people's voices that were earlier heard in public hearings by government-

appointed EIA agencies. She suggests that the state governments need to impress upon the government the importance of hearing people's voices in the larger interest of maintaining a healthy environment.

Pradip Phanjoubam discusses the health situation in Manipur and notes that the state's high COVID-19 death rate had probably to do with flaws in its health services.

Pushpita Das discusses the border security issues of the Northeast, and the challenges that the country has to face because the boundaries with many neighbouring countries have not been clearly defined on the ground. These boundaries, at places, cut across villages, houses and fields. Terrorist infiltration, drug trafficking, and gun running pose a serious challenge to the management of international borders. It is imperative that India strengthens its border security and redoubles its efforts to meaningfully engage with its neighbours.

Samrat Choudhury takes us on a historical journey along the Brahmaputra river. He quotes extensively from the accounts of Alfred Brame, who in the 1800s was a historian of the India General Steam Navigation Company. He notes that the growth of steamer travel in India took off in earnest after the India General Steam Navigation Company — with the motto of “vapor et vigor” — was formed in 1844.

Saswati Choudhury writes extensively about the government's Look East/Act East Policy, which synchronised with India's structural reforms and liberalization. In the Northeast, there have been large-scale investments in bridging road and railway connectivity besides inland water transport for fostering regional connectivity. To reap the dividends of this development, the inter-state framework of production and value chain network needs to be developed and integrated.

Shrishti Pukhrem discusses the critical importance of the Northeast to India's Act East Policy. Given the increased engagement between India and the ASEAN countries, the Northeast has the potential to become a regional hub in terms of trade and investment. The fact that the NER shares more than 95 per cent of its borders with the neighbouring countries is a favourable condition for the region to integrate with the East Asian and South-East Asian economies.

Sreeradha Dutta discusses the need for the Northeast to play a more meaningful role in the Act East Policy, other than providing transit/

transport corridors. While many plans have been initiated, these need to be fully implemented and well executed to ensure that the Northeast joins the mainstream.

Claude Arpi notes that China is slowly scoring crucial points and winning battles in propaganda/information warfare in the Northeast. Delhi has taken measures to develop the infrastructure on the border, but India should closely watch the Chinese propaganda campaigns about the Lopa and other tribes living on both sides of the border. Chinese propaganda could become a powerful weapon of destabilisation, if not countered effectively.

Amita Singh argues that the Northeast requires special attention and environmentally safe policies of development. It appears that NEEPCO and NHPC may not be the appropriate organisations to be allocated the task of EIA for dams as the plaintiff and the judge cannot be the same. Local communities should find a place in the consultative process and policies should be liberated from the control of engineers, architects and contractors who do not view development as a holistic democratic process.

Sarah Hilaly traces the encounters with the non-Buddhist societies of Eastern Arunachal Pradesh. The detailed narrative of the various modes of encounter of the communities south of the Tsangpo with the Tibetan state played out in many ways. A careful reading of the instruments of colonisation in this region reveals the role of religion in rendering the Himalayas a sacred landscape through which the Tibetans were attracted to the remote spaces. The interventions into the “uncivilised frontier” through the spiritual realm opened up possibilities for commercial and imperial interests in the region.

Jajati Pattnaik notes that India’s strategic infrastructure in Northeast connecting Upper Assam and Arunachal Pradesh was the necessary outcome of the interplay of contemporary geo-strategic/geo-economics discourse. This policy would not only ensure India’s territorial security against Chinese brinkmanship in the eastern sector, but also pave the way for the economic development of the border regions of Arunachal Pradesh and open up the possibilities for cross border cooperation and friendly neighbourhood ties with China.

M.P. Bezbaruah and **Amiya Sarma** analyse the impact of the pandemic. On the whole, the Northeast region fared better during the pandemic

than states like Delhi and Maharashtra. Relatively lower infections and fatality rates meant that the economic impact was also less severe. Further, the economies in the region being more agriculture dependent and agriculture being the sector which did not shrink during this period, the economies of the Northeastern region perhaps had some cushion from the hit. Yet, some states in the region such as Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, which have emerged as important tourist destinations, suffered significantly due to the shrinkage of transport, travel and hospitality sectors.

I would like to place on record my appreciation of Aparajita Singh for her assistance in editing this volume.

—Prakash Singh

EIA - A Death Warrant for the Environment

Patricia Mukhim*

The latest notification by the NDA Government on Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) of projects requiring environment clearance has raised the hackles of all those living in ecologically sensitive zones, especially Adivasi tribals and others in whose areas the earth holds coal, limestone, bauxite, uranium and other minerals. So far, the people of Meghalaya have been able to resist mining of uranium, because the EIA process has always been truncated by pressure groups.

This time the NDA Government has tried to bypass these “impediments” by allowing post facto EIA – meaning thereby that the environmental impacts of any project would be assessed after the project has started. In other words, the Centre will first grant mining rights or rights to create power projects, roads and railways projects et al. and then assess the damage to the environment. The new EIA proposal by the NDA Government is set to create an unfortunate precedent of ignoring people’s voices which were earlier heard in public hearings by the Government-appointed EIA agencies.

However, let us not fool ourselves that the earlier EIAs were in consonance with peoples’ views and that those views were incorporated. Mining in the hill state of Meghalaya has taken place within forest areas and that was done even by redefining forests. That act was executed by the State Forest Department in 2015. Earlier the District Councils had defined an area with 25 mature trees as a forest. In 2015 just after granting mining leases to cement companies, the Meghalaya Government diluted the definition of “forest.” In December 2015 the Forest

*The writer is Editor, The Shillong Times.

Regulation Act of 1973 was amended by adding the phrase a “compact and continuous tract of minimum four hectares” will now be considered as forest in the state. The new definition specifies that an area should have more than 250 naturally growing trees with a girth size of 15 cm or more per hectare (ha) to be regarded as forest. In case of a bamboo dominant patch, more than 100 naturally growing clumps should be present per ha. In case of mixed vegetation, the number changes to 150 trees and over 40 bamboo clumps. Going by the above definition there would be no forest land in Meghalaya and indeed forest land has dwindled considerably. Even within reserved forests there are large scale encroachments.

The irony of it all is that in December 1996, the Supreme Court had passed a landmark judgment, reinterpreting the definition of forest under the Forest Conservation Act of 1980. The apex court said that it would go by the dictionary meaning of forests. The definition not only includes forests mentioned in government records but “all areas that are forests as per the dictionary meaning of the term irrespective of the nature of ownership and classification.” According to Oxford English Dictionary, a forest is “a large area covered chiefly with trees and undergrowth.” There is no demarcation in terms of area or number of trees in the dictionary meaning. Today climate change has affected Meghalaya as much as it has other states in this country. This hilly state has had summer temperatures in the range of 27-30 degrees centigrade in the last few years. The highest temperature that Meghalaya used to have at the height of summer was never more than 24 degrees centigrade.

Scientists have been warning us of the present and imminent dangers of climate change, but governments across the world including our own have preferred to look the other way. One of the reasons for the proliferation of rare infectious diseases is because the environment is fighting back against the propensity of humans to appropriate everything within their sight. They want to conquer all and indulge in profiteering at all costs. This is the mantra today. It is wrong to surmise that the lessons left behind by COVID-19 in these last five months would have taught us humans a lesson in adversity and humility.

So why should we, especially in the North Eastern states be wary of the latest EIA proposed by the NDA Government. And what is the EIA in the first place? It is a vetting process before any project with the potential to hurt the environment (mining, quarrying, sand banking cutting down of forests, diverting rivers, among others) is given clearance

by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change (MOEFCC). The EIA is a meticulous study by environment experts about the effects of a proposed industrial/infrastructural project on the environment. It puts the brakes on a proposed activity/project from being approved without proper oversight or taking adverse consequences into account. Naturally India's new EIA draft has been widely criticized for the drastic change in rules. Experts aver that most of the provisions in the new draft of EIA are a regressive departure from the earlier version.

An EIA is a crucial report that objectively critiques the unintended impacts that a proposed project will have on the ecology of the site with robust action plans on mitigating the negative impacts and with clear and practical points on enhancing the positive aspects. It is a critical step that mining and other companies ought to follow for getting governmental clearance before proceeding with a project. The intent of the EIA is that it be conducted with fairness, equity and transparency, involving stakeholders that should include in the main, the affected people who more often than not are from the most marginalised sections of society. It is this rigorous step that can make projects more sustainable.

The proposed draft EIA on the contrary, allows for post facto approvals, thereby doing away with the act of making assessments and seeking clearances. It shrinks public participation in the process by reducing the notice period for hearings, if not doing away with them altogether in many categories of projects. To be more precise the intent is to make impact assessment itself redundant in many categories of projects. What is even more dangerous for areas like North East, which used to have about 60% of the forest cover of the country, is that all these forests will be denuded with very grim consequences because the new EIA says projects are allowed to secure land for long durations without being accountable for any construction on those lands. This will increase land grabbing that is already happening in areas held by cement companies and coal mining agencies. Further the EIA allows for the Centre to appoint State authorities to oversee this process, thereby reducing local powers and curtailing the rights of local stakeholders to express their rights.

So what's the need of the hour? All state governments of this region ought to impress upon the Government of India the need to hear people's voices in the larger interest of maintaining a healthy environment.

Pandemic-Economy Contra Cycles: The way they unfolded in India and the Northeast

M.P. Bezbaruah* and Amiya Sarma**

The news that Indian economy recorded a negative growth of 7.5 per cent during 2020-21 was reported in media with headlines suggesting that little short of an economic disaster had happened. However, detailed analysis of the facts shows that this was not something which was unexpected; nor was it as bad a news as it was made out to be. Actually, most of the shrinkage of the Indian economy took place in the first quarter of 2020-21, during which the country went into a nation-wide lockdown to counter the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of the outbreak of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown in that first quarter of 2020-21, many of the economic activities came to a standstill. Consequently, the economy recorded a negative growth of 24 per cent in that quarter. This means that compared to the first quarter of 2019-20, the GDP of India in the first quarter of 2020-21 was 24 per cent less in real terms. However, as the country started easing into an unlock process soon after, the economy also started to recover.

In the second quarter, i.e., from July to September 2020, the economy again recorded a negative growth of 11 to 12 per cent. This rate is in comparison to the second quarter GDP of 2019-20. But compared to the sharp fall in the first quarter, this actually meant a recovery of the economy from negative growth of 24 per cent to negative growth of say 12 per cent. The recovery continued in the third quarter also, though the growth rate still remained negative (about -5.0 per cent). Due to continued recovery, in the fourth quarter of the financial year, the growth rate turned positive albeit with a modest rate of 1.6 per cent. This positive growth rate was made possible by 3 per cent

* M.P. Bezbaruah, Professor, Department of Economics, Gauhati University, Guwahati-781014 (Assam). Email: mpb@gauhati.ac.in

** Amiya Sarma, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Gauhati University, Guwahati-781014 (Assam). Email: amiya@gauhati.ac.in

growth of the agricultural sector and about 6 per cent growth of the manufacturing sector in which, of course, growth in the pharmaceutical sub-sector was a major contributor. But some other sub-sectors like automobiles also did well. Service sub-sectors like hospitality, transportation, catering and entertainment continued to struggle.

It is, however, important to note that the impact of the pandemic on the GDP of India in 2020-21 is somewhat more than this -7.5 per cent. Since the middle of 2018-19, the Indian economy had shown a tendency of slowing down from its impressive average annual growth pace of 7 to 8 percent of the previous 25 years. Even with this slowing down tendency, India would have recorded a growth rate of 2.5 to 3 per cent in 2020-21, had the disruptive shock of the pandemic and the lockdown was not there. Thus, the total impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the GDP of India in 2020-21 is the -7.5 per cent of observed fall plus another 2.5 per cent of potential growth that the country had to forgo due to the pandemic. Thus, the total impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the real GDP growth of India in 2020-21 would be around 10 to 11 per cent. As for other parameters of economic performance, let us look at the employment figures which are compiled by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). Before the pandemic broke out, India had an unemployment rate of 6 to 7 per cent. During the first quarter of 2020-21, coinciding with the nationwide lockdown, the unemployment rate shot up to 22 per cent. As the unlocking process started, the unemployment rate returned to its pre-pandemic level of 6 to 7 per cent fairly quickly. Thus, on the aggregate, unemployment may not have increased much as a result of the first wave of the pandemic. However, a recent report based on a nationwide survey by Azim Premji University states that the quality of employment deteriorated during the pandemic as there was further informalization of jobs. It is to be noted that 90 per cent of India's workforce has been engaged in the unorganized sector. The report implies that people who had lost their jobs in the organized sector following the outbreak of the contagion joined the ranks of the unorganized sector workers. This further implies that average earning in the unorganized sector might have come down because of greater competition leading to fall in wages and other forms of income in the sector.

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the report also finds that the income of average households in India decreased during 2020- 21 by about 15 per cent. Compared to GDP loss of 10 per cent, a 15 percent

decline in average household income implies that inequality increased sharply during this year. Households that were just above the poverty line before the pandemic might have slipped back to poverty due to such income loss. For the rich, of course, it was a different scenario. Being unable to spend in luxurious consumption, travels and celebrations due to pandemic related restrictions, many of them diverted their surplus funds to the stock market and increased the value of their financial assets from the bull-run in the stock market.

As the country was heading for a sharp recovery from the battering of the first wave of COVID infections, the second wave of the pandemic struck the country in an even more severe manner. Learning from the recent experience, the country, however, did not go for a total nationwide lockdown this time. Instead, restrictions have been imposed with stringency varying from location to location depending on the severity of the outbreak. Yet, adverse consequences on the economy could not be escaped fully. The unemployment rate during April-May 2021 shot up to 14 to 15 per cent. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has lowered its forecast of the growth rate of the economy in 2021-22 from 10.5 per cent to 9.5 per cent. The World Bank has made a forecast of 8.3 per cent of growth of the Indian economy for the same year. The RBI's or even the World Bank's forecast seem impressive but in usual circumstances. The fact that we have started from a base lowered by negative growth of 7.5 per cent in the previous year, achieving 9.5 per cent in the current year will mean only a gain of 2 per cent compared to the level of 2019-20.

When we discuss the impact of the pandemic on the Northeast Region of India, it is necessary to look at Assam and the mountainous states surrounding it separately rather than taking the entire region as a homogeneous entity. There are at least three important reasons for this. First, Assam is topographically and demographically quite different from the rest of Northeast India. Assam is mostly plain and it is very thickly populated, which makes it more conducive for the virus to spread. The mountainous states are sparsely populated. The populations there are naturally distanced and, hence, the virus has less opportunity to spread quickly. Secondly, Assam and to some extent Tripura are the only states of the region which send out migrant workers. The other states are actually recipients of migrant workers. Since one of the most visible impacts of the pandemic was in the form of reverse migration of workers, the impact of this phenomenon on Assam and the rest of

the states of Northeast India has been different. Assam had to accommodate the returning workers in its labour market. The state was further deprived of the remittances these workers would have sent home. In the other states of the region, this component of the impact of the pandemic was absent. However, the pace of post-unlock recovery in these states was initially constrained by labour shortage as the migrant workers did not immediately return to their earlier workplaces. The third reason why Assam and the other states need to be looked at separately is that all states in the region barring Assam receive favourable treatment in the devolution of central fiscal resources. After the 14th Finance Commission awards, Assam no longer receives a similar favourable treatment. Because of fund constraints, Assam may have had greater difficulty in coping with the upswing of the pandemic and the concomitant downswing of the economy than the other Northeastern states.

On the whole, however, the region fared better during the pandemic than states like Delhi and Maharashtra. Relatively lower infections and fatality rates meant that the economic impact was also relatively less severe. Further, the economies in the region being more agriculture dependent and agriculture being the sector which did not shrink during this period, the economies of the Northeastern region perhaps had some cushion from the hit. Yet, the states in the region such as Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, which have emerged as important tourist destinations, suffered significantly due to the shrinkage of transport, travel and hospitality sector due to Covid-related restrictions.

The estimate of the shrinkage of Assam's economy during the first quarter of 2020-21 was about 15 per cent compared to 24 per cent of the Indian economy. Similarly, the unemployment rate in Assam during the same period went up to 15 per cent compared to 22 per cent for India as a whole.

As the second wave of the pandemic is beginning to wane at the all-India level, it is yet to show the distinct sign of declining in the Northeast Region. The near future seems to be highly uncertain. There is the fear of a third wave of the pandemic surging up sometime later this year. But with vaccination process gathering momentum, it is hoped that the third wave, even if it is going to be there at all, may not be as devastating as the second wave. But given uncertainty of the situation, both households and firms have been hesitant to spend. While

households would like to save whatever they can for meeting impending bad times, firms in most of the sectors do not see the business environment becoming bright. The resulting sluggishness of demand has made recovery more difficult.

It is perhaps fair to expect that at some point, the pandemic will be brought under control. At that point, there will be lots of pent-up demand for travel, tourism, relaxation and other things that will get released in a burst. Since the physical capacity to produce the goods and services is already there, largely underutilized due to the pandemic, it will be possible to make a sharp economic recovery. But till that time, it will be necessary to continue to help the poorer section of the society with relief measures in the forms of subsidized food and income transfers. It will also be necessary to give relief to the MSME sector, particularly the micro enterprises, in the forms of moratorium on their loan repayment and some interest charges.

But we have to understand that the post-pandemic normal is going to be different from the old normal. Some policy interventions will be necessary for enabling the people of India to adjust to the new normal. Getting used to doing things in a digitally enabled way during the pandemic, people all over the world are likely to work and live in more digitally oriented ways even after normalcy returns. In a country like India, where the digital divide is pronounced, this will throw up a policy challenge. Unless this is addressed, India is going to see another dimension of inequality in its post-pandemic society.

Manipur's High COVID-19 Death Rate Has Probably to do With Flaws in its Health Services

Pradip Phanjoubam*

As the COVID-19 curve flattens and is probably set to begin dipping, other than the precautions and preparedness for any possible new waves in the future, there are certain other important things to reflect on for the benefit of the society in the years and decades to follow. The most important of these can begin with a largely ignored question: why has the COVID-19 death rate in Manipur been one of the highest in the entire Northeast and the country? In terms of number of persons infected as well as deaths, Assam is the highest, but this is expected for the state's population is much bigger, more than 11 times that of Manipur, but in terms of deaths per infection, Manipur is ahead. Manipur's population is less than that of Meghalaya and Tripura too, but in terms of number of infected persons, Manipur is ahead of them and second only to Assam. In terms of death per infected, it is only marginally below Nagaland and Meghalaya, indicating that these two states too will need to do similar introspection as Manipur. The most important of these questions is, what possibly can be the explanation for this high death rate.

While the situation in Manipur can be attributed to factors like level of congestion of the living environment, lack of public discipline, and not necessarily only government containment strategy failures etc., the higher rate of deaths can only mean one thing – inadequate or poor health service. From the volume of authoritative literature which has come out in the course of the pandemic, as well as actual experiences of communities during the same period, we now know COVID-19 can be deadly, but it is far from a death sentence. Given timely and proper medical attention, it is generally only a small percentage of patients who do not recover, and most of them have been people already weak with age or other illnesses (co-morbidities). So far, the explanation

*The author is Editor, Imphal Free Press.

forwarded for this unusually high fatality rate is that that many people generally seek hospitalisation only when they are on their last legs, and, therefore become either difficult or impossible to rescue. But the question that should follow naturally is, why or what have made people reluctant to approach hospitals? What are the compelling reasons, if any, for many to delay hospitalisation? Nobody can be averse to have their health taken care of by health professionals unless there are factors inhibiting them. There is of course a small minority who disbelieve in science and live in COVID denial. So long as they do not disrupt public life or COVID battle strategies, they can continue living in their closed cells and should not be anybody's worry.

Serious flaws in health care infrastructure have shown up much more acutely in the past two years or so, mostly in the shape of unruly behaviour of patients and their relatives regarding what they perceive as casualties due to negligence at these hospitals. Related to this in a subtle way is also the phenomenon of the mushrooming of private hospitals, clinics and others providing specialised health-related services, serving as an alternative to tax-subsidised government hospitals. Expectedly, private health facilities are beyond the reach of a larger section of the public. This section is left to depend on government hospitals only for health emergencies. This is understandable to an extent, as private hospitals are also businesses which run on the fees paid by patients, but as in any business, there must be regulatory laws to distinguish between fair profit margins and unscrupulous profiteering.

On the other hand, government hospitals do not have to worry about earning money for they run on public tax money. What they instead usually lack is accountability and commitment of their health professionals. As in most government services, here too absenteeism and duty neglect are very often a problem. This is accentuated further by the fact many of these professionals also either run their own clinics or else work in other private hospitals to make more money. Can these extra activities simply be classed as private humanitarian practices to meet community demands and not organised business? Not always, although there are many exceptions. Most of these are also run not as non-profit charitable organisations funded by public donations or by basic cost covering fees, but as registered for-profit enterprises. Often this has resulted in those running these enterprises to focus more on their own enterprises, at the cost of their commitment to the government hospitals that employ them. The unfortunate deterioration of the patient-

doctor relationship, which has become a major bane in Manipur today also has this as one of the many factors. It is true patients and their relatives are often unruly and selfish, and do not always understand that not all health casualties can be prevented, but as they say, two hands are needed to clap. Regulating the practice of one professional keeping two jobs will not only ameliorate this situation, but also leave more job vacancies for newer batches of qualified health professionals.

The combination of all these hiccups in this sector probably is behind the general disenchantment with public health services in the state, which has become quite pronounced during the current crisis. People, except the very rich, are reluctant to rush to private hospitals amid the fear of ending up with huge debts beyond their means. They are also reluctant to go to government hospitals unless they desperately begin to need professional intervention, amid concerns that they will not be looked after well. This in all likelihood is the reason for Manipur's very high rate of fatalities in the current pandemic. Once the storm passes, the government will have to take note of this and perhaps institute a high-level committee to look into these matters to evolve strategies to put things on track again for the sake of the future welfare of all.

Security Challenges and the Management of India's Northeastern Borders

Dr. Pushpita Das*

Following the February 1, 2021 coup d'état in Myanmar and the subsequent crackdown on the pro-democracy protesters, thousands of refugees fleeing state repression and violence crossed over to India, especially in the states of Mizoram and Manipur. According to Mizoram's Chief Minister, 9,247 Myanmar citizens have taken refuge in the state, including 24 lawmakers.¹

Most of the refugees belonged to the Chin state (a.k.a. Zo community) of Myanmar and share a common ancestry with the Mizo people of India. While the state governments welcomed these refugees, the Union government raised concerns and instructed the Assam Rifles, which guards the India–Myanmar border, to keep a strict vigil on the international border and prevent the inflow of refugees from Myanmar. That the refugees could still cross the border without much difficulty indicates that securing India's international borders in the Northeast is a difficult task.

The Northeast shares 5,484 kilometres of international boundary with five of India's eight immediate neighbours (Bangladesh: 1,880; Bhutan: 516; Myanmar: 1,643; China: 1,300; and Nepal: 97.8). This constitutes 96 per cent of the total boundary of the Northeast.² As a result, international borders are an overwhelming reality of this region. However, there exists a paradox because most of these boundaries have not been fully crystallised on the ground as lines separating two

* The writer is Research Fellow & Centre Coordinator (Internal Security), Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. Views expressed are personal.

sovereign countries. This results in the unrestricted movement of people and goods across the borders, which has been taking place for decades—even after these boundaries were formally demarcated on the ground. Also, the fact that villages and houses continue to be located right on the international boundary lines reinforces this phenomenon.

The slow process of boundary formation in the region can be attributed to the nature of the boundaries themselves. While some of these boundaries such as those with China are antecedent in nature and have therefore functioned as natural barriers to human interactions for centuries, others such as the India–Bangladesh, India–Nepal and India–Myanmar borders are man-made in nature as they were imposed by the British on the socio-economic landscape of the region during partitioning of the Indian subcontinent. These superimposed boundaries cut across villages, houses and fields, thus erecting artificial barriers, which the people on ground refuse to accept. They continue to travel across the borders and maintain close links with their relations.

Creation of these man-made borders had an adverse impact not only on the socio-cultural ties of the people inhabiting the border areas, but also on the economy of the region. Partition and the India–Pakistan war of 1965 led to the severance of road and rail connectivity between the Northeast and its neighbours. Loss of transportation and communication links sealed off the region's land and sea access for trade and commerce, thus negatively affecting its economic growth. Consequently, the Northeast was reduced from an economically prosperous region to one of the least developed regions of the country. Disruption of road and railways also restricted the movement of people to and from the mainland, and physically distanced the region from the Indian mainland.

Meanwhile, the Union government's efforts to integrate these remote areas into the Indian mainstream were met with resistance from various sections of people leading to the outbreak of a number of insurgencies, some of which continue to rage even today. The fact that the region was surrounded by countries that were hostile to India also helped in sustaining these insurgencies. Further, China's refusal to recognise the McMahon Line as the international border with India resulted in a brief border war. Following the war, the Indian government hardened its border policy with China by placing restrictions on the movements of people and goods and keeping the border areas underdeveloped with an objective to deny China Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) easy access to Indian territory.

The border with Pakistan was also hardened following the war of 1965 and is tightly regulated. At the same time, imperatives regarding open borders with Nepal and Bhutan and a semi-regulated border with Myanmar dictated the policy of keeping these borders soft and lightly guarded to allow easy movement of people.

However, such a restrictive attitude towards the international borders could not be sustained for long as India faced the twin challenges of an underperforming economy and a balance of payments crisis in 1991. Subsequent economic liberalisation since the early 1990s has not only had a positive impact on India's economic growth, but has also orchestrated a qualitative shift in the country's attitude towards the border areas. Faster economic growth meant a huge increase in trade and investment flows. This forced Indian policymakers to look at countries in its immediate and extended neighbourhood as economic partners, and the borders as avenues for easy circulation of goods and people instead of physical obstructions. India gradually started opening up its borders by encouraging cross-border trade and travel and restoring severed lines of connections.

However, given the nature of the India's borders in the Northeast and India's continued encouragement of regional trade and travel, several cross-border threats persist, posing a serious challenge to the security and management of the international borders. Some of these threats are infiltration by terrorist and insurgent groups, illegal migration, drug and narcotics trafficking, gun running, smuggling of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN), depopulation of the border population, and increased volume of passenger and cargo at the entry and exit points.

Security Challenges to the Northeastern Borders

Since the inception of insurgency in the Northeast in the 1950s, the Naga, Mizo, Meitei, and Assamese insurgents have been crossing over into Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan to set up bases, where they rest, recoup, train, plan and launch future offensives, and take shelter when pursued by the Indian security forces. Tacit approval of governments of the neighbouring countries and fraternal ties with other insurgent groups have facilitated the establishment of these safe havens. In fact, the shelter and support that the Indian insurgent groups receive from across the borders have been among the most important factors that have helped them sustain their rebellion even when faced with the superior might of the Indian security forces. Similarly, terrorist groups

active in neighbouring countries also sneak into India for shelter and to perpetrate acts of terror. According to a media report, Bangladesh's government had informed the Indian government that an estimated 2010 Harkat-ul-Jihadi al-Islami (HuJI) and Jamaat-ul- Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) extremists had entered India between 2015 and 2017.³

Gun running

Besides cross border movement of insurgents, rampant gun running and drug trafficking are other significant security challenges emanating across the India–Myanmar border. The Indian insurgent groups have been procuring arms from the black markets of Southeast Asia as well as from Myanmar-based rebel groups such as the United Wa State Army (UWSA). The bulk of the weapons from Thailand and Cambodia are smuggled through the sea route, and are then routed through Bangladesh's Chittagong port to reach the Northeast insurgents through the porous Bangladesh border. Some of the weapons are also smuggled overland through the India–Myanmar border with the help of Chin and Arakanese insurgents. These weapons are often brought in as headloads by the insurgents as well as by the local villagers, who are seldom checked by the guards at the border. Weapons produced in China are also routed across the Myanmar border at Ruili and then trucked via Lashio, Mandalay and Monywa to enter India through Phek, Chandel, Churachandpur and Champai.

Trafficking of drugs and narcotics

Proximity to Myanmar in the “Golden Triangle” makes the India–Myanmar border vulnerable to trafficking of heroin and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) produced in Myanmar. These narcotics are trafficked into India through the states of Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland from Bhamo, Lashio and Mandalay. The most important trafficking route is the one that enters Moreh in Manipur through Tamu and travels thereafter to Imphal and Kohima via National Highway-39. Reverse trafficking of precursor chemicals such as ephedrine and pseudo-ephedrine from India to Myanmar takes place through the same route. Codeine-based medicinal preparations are also trafficked from India to Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. While the bigger insurgent groups are not directly involved in drug trafficking to generate funds, they do so indirectly by demanding protection money from the

drug mafia for allowing safe passage to the drug consignments through their area.

Illegal migration

One of the major consequences of a porous border is the easy and illegal migration across the border. The trend of illegal migration from Bangladesh into the Northeast has continued since Independence. In 2016, Kiren Rijiju, Minister of State (Home), stated in the Rajya Sabha, that there are an estimated 20 million Bangladeshis staying illegally in India.⁴ The riverine border in Dhubri is the most vulnerable to infiltration. At present, however, large scale migration from Bangladesh (as witnessed in the earlier decades) does not take place because of the construction of fences as well as increased vigil along the border. Instead, people are now being smuggled from Bangladesh into India by organised mafias operating on both sides of the border.

Illegal migration impacts the security of the country in many ways. On one hand it results in intense conflicts over resources between the local people and the migrants, which transform into raging insurgencies such as in Assam and Tripura. On the other hand, persistent attacks against illegal migrants have unfortunately given way to radicalisation within certain sections of the Muslim community, with the formation of militant organisations such as the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA), and the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), professing jihad against India to avenge the attacks.⁵ Many illegal migrants also work as couriers for local mafias for money or hassle-free stay in India.

Smuggling of FICN

India's borders have been vulnerable to the smuggling of several items across its borders. While most of these activities are a by-product of the dynamics of supply and demand, others are conducted by smugglers and their handlers with the sole objective of harming India's stability and integrity. One such activity is the smuggling of high-quality counterfeit Indian currency notes that India has been experiencing since the 1990s. Many experts have termed this act as "economic terrorism." The India–Bangladesh border has become particularly vulnerable to the trafficking of FICN, with Kalaichak in the Malda district together with several adjoining areas in Malda and Murshidabad districts becoming nerve centres for FICN trafficking.⁶ Between 2010 and 2015,

FICN valued between Rs 24 crore and Rs 44 crore have been seized inside the country.⁷

Depopulation of the border areas

Abject poverty, lack of employment opportunities, unavailability of basic essentials like food, potable waters, medicines, and inaccessibility have forced people residing in the higher reaches near the border in the states to migrate to the foothills and the urban centres. As a result, the border areas along the India–China border in Arunachal Pradesh are getting depopulated. Such a trend does not augur well for the country when it is fighting a territorial dispute with China because the physical presence of population is necessary to establish India’s claim on the territory.

Increased flow of goods and people

As the Indian economy grows and serves as a magnet for its neighbours, it is likely that there will be a manifold increase in the flow of people and goods across national borders in South Asia. Such an increase is in fact already visible. For example, Bangladesh is India’s largest trading partner in the sub-continent. The total bilateral trade now stands in excess of US\$5 billion. Growth in intra-regional trade is also propelling the development of cross-border connectivity to promote the movement of people, goods and services.

A number of road and rail links between India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal are being developed. The trans-Asian highway, the trilateral highway and the Kaladan Multi-modal project are some such schemes. Managing the overwhelming number of people, vehicles and containers and regulating their movement at the borders poses a challenge. This challenge is further compounded by inadequate infrastructure at the land customs stations and immigration check points located along the borders. Lack of proper infrastructure facilities such as good quality wide roads, screening and detection machines, communication devices, banking facilities, warehouses, parking and quarantine facilities, hampers the efficiency of these stations. In addition, since various regulatory agencies such as customs, immigration, quarantine, etc., are located far from each other, it results in a lack of coordination among these agencies. These gaps not only delay clearance of passengers and cargo resulting in unnecessary hassle and huge economic losses, but also hinder timely detection of contraband items.

These high costs of transactions in the land custom station have also encouraged smuggling.

Management of Northeastern borders

Border management is the fourth stage of boundary formation. The three stages being: allocation, delineation, and demarcation. Border management is the process through which states exercise control over their external borders to maximise the functioning of the borders. These functions include: a) ensuring security by preventing the entry of people or goods that are considered a threat to the domestic territory or population and b) facilitating trade and travel by allowing entry of legitimate people and goods with minimum restrictions. India has devised a comprehensive approach towards managing its international borders which involves guarding the border, regulating the flow of traffic, development of the border areas and constituting bilateral institutional mechanisms.

As far as securing the borders is concerned, India has deployed the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), the Border Security Force (BSF), the Sashatra Seema Bal (SSB) and the Assam Rifles to guard its borders with China, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar, respectively. It is based on the principle of “one border one force” aimed at improving coordination and assigning accountability. These border guarding forces regularly patrol the border areas, collect tactical intelligence, deter intruders and act as the first line of defence. In addition, the Assam and Tripura governments have raised border police and Mobile Task Forces to act as a second line of defence. Furthermore, fences are being constructed along the India–Bangladesh and India–Myanmar borders to prevent illegal migration and infiltration by insurgents. Sophisticated equipment for remote surveillance is also employed for keeping a watch along a riverine border such as at Dhubri.⁸

For facilitating the smooth flow of people and goods through the designated entry points efficiently, the Government of India has upgraded 7 land custom stations (LCS) into Integrated Check Posts (ICP) in Phase I and plans to upgrade 13 more. These ICPs house all the regulatory and law enforcement agencies as well as security personnel under one roof for better coordination. They also have state-of-the-art scanning equipment and support facilities to detect contraband items. India has also launched the Immigration, VISA and Foreigners” Registration and Tracking (IVFoRT) project for tracking foreigners who have entered the country. This is aimed at thwarting the violation

of visa norms and for preventing foreigners from staying illegally in India for a prolonged period of time. India has implemented e-visas for quick and efficient issuance of visas to promote travel and tourism in the country.

Development of the border areas is important to stop depopulation in these remote areas. For this purpose, the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) was extended in the region in 1993–94. Its aim is to meet the special development needs of the people living in remote and inaccessible areas situated near the international border. It also aims at skill development of the border residents to enable them to be gainfully employed besides instilling a sense of security in them. The BADP is implemented in 148 identified border blocks of 44 districts of eight Northeastern states. Along with the BADP, cross-border trade as per the prevailing customary practices including the barter mechanism is also encouraged as an alternative means of earnings for the border people. The idea is to allow the border people to trade their surplus produce in exchange of essential commodities. Accordingly, three border trading points and four border *haats* (traditional/village markets) were opened along the China, Myanmar and Bangladesh borders, respectively. It is a well-known fact that borders cannot be effectively managed without the cooperation of the neighbours.

Towards this end, India and its neighbours have constituted institutionalized bilateral interactions to discuss various border management problems. These institutionalised interactions take place at regular intervals between ministers, government officials, border guarding forces and surveyors general of India and its neighbours. These bilateral mechanisms have been helpful in sensitising the countries about their respective security concerns. Some of the success stories of these institutionalized interactions are the signing of the protocol to the Land Boundary Agreement; the implementation of Coordinated Border Management Plan with Bangladesh; as well as the formalisation of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and cross-border travel across the land border with Myanmar.

Assessment of the Border Management Measures

Although the Government of India has adopted a comprehensive approach towards managing its international borders in the Northeast and has been largely successful in securing its borders, there are few shortcomings.

First, the number of border guarding personnel deployed along the borders is inadequate. This is true especially along the India–Myanmar border. The Assam Rifles, which is the designated border guarding force, deploys only 15 of the 46 battalions for border guarding purposes; the rest are engaged in counter-insurgency operations. These 15 battalions are also not deployed at the border or spread along the entire border, but clustered as company-operated bases (COBs) stationed deep inside, thereby preventing the force from border domination and restricting its ability to prevent illegal cross-border movements. Efforts to build a 10 km fence to prevent cross-border movement of insurgents have also been stalled because of protests by local residents.⁹ Similarly, along the India–Bangladesh border, in some vulnerable stretches inter-BOP distances are significant, which makes it difficult to patrol the border intensively. Fences that are constructed to prevent smuggling and immigration sometimes do not prove to be effective as they are either washed away during floods or are cut by smugglers. Connivance of border guarding personnel in letting migrants, criminals and smugglers pass the fence is also not ruled out. In many places, the local population is hostile towards the border guarding forces as they feel that security measures such as building fences, and deployment of security forces, increasing vigilance, etc. hamper with their day-to-day activities.

Second, the pace of development of ICPs is extremely slow. Delay in acquisition of land and environmental clearance, protests by neighbouring countries and a lack of resources hamper the timely construction of the ICPs. Moreover, the LCSs which are not being upgraded to ICPs do not have any single point of administrative control for their management or development. Their development is the responsibility of the state governments, but they shy away from this responsibility, citing lack of financial wherewithal.

Third, the intended goal of the BADP to improve the living conditions of the border people is far from being achieved. Most of the funds provided remain unutilised due to corruption and faulty schemes. The local people, for whose benefit the entire programme is envisioned, are at best kept ignorant about various schemes as decisions are taken at higher levels. The potential of border trade also has not been fully realised because the trade basket consists of only 30 to 40 items, most of which are of low commercial value. Further, lack of proper infrastructure, tariff hikes imposed by countries together with restrictions placed on the value of goods to be traded under a barter system further undermine the growth of border trade.

Fourth, delays in implementation of various plans because of lack of adequate resources, stringent rules and regulations, bureaucratic hurdles and the indifferent and non-cooperative attitude of the state governments towards various centrally sponsored schemes have adversely affected border management. Fifth, lack of coordination between various agencies is another major problem. Turf wars, absence of effective communication and understanding among the agencies are mainly responsible for such a situation. Last but not least, India's limited influence with its neighbours in sensitising them about India's security needs is also responsible to a great extent for India's inability to fully secure its borders.

The Way Forward

Given that poor security along the borders in the Northeast poses a challenge to India's security, it is imperative that India strengthens security of the border and redoubles its efforts to meaningfully engage its neighbours. To begin with, the Assam Rifles should be given the sole responsibility of guarding and strengthening the India-Myanmar border with adequate manpower and equipment. Border guarding personnel should not be pulled out for internal security duties. They should be trained properly so that they are sensitised about local culture and are successful in garnering local support. At the same time, through sustained community interaction programmes, the border community should be sensitised to participate in the nation building project. They should be also encouraged to participate in their own economic development so that they do not indulge in criminal activities. Further, the Union government should impress upon the state governments the importance of border management and persuade them to cooperate in implementing the schemes and programmes crafted to better manage the country's borders. Better coordination between various agencies can be ensured by establishing coordination committees at the district level of organisations concerned with border management.

International borders are best managed when neighbours cooperate to secure their mutual borders. For such cooperation to materialise, political and diplomatic initiatives require to be carefully crafted. India has been constructively engaging its neighbours so that they remain sensitive to India's security concerns. Along with it, India should assist its smaller neighbours to strengthen their border guarding capabilities so that terrorist and criminals do not cross and take shelter across the

border. It is important for India to build constituencies in its neighbours. During the last decade, India has highlighted the need for a peaceful periphery. It has offered unilateral economic concessions to neighbours, unveiled plans for the modernization of border infrastructure, promised to resolve long-standing political disputes and accelerate the pace of regional integration in order to create enduring constituencies across the borders for political and security cooperation. The pace and scope of these initiatives have to be rapid and broadened.

Notes

1. "Myanmar's Chin state CM among 9,247 refugees in Mizoram following military coup," *The Print*, Aizawl, 15 June 2021 (accessed on 5 July 2021).
2. *North Eastern Region Vision 2020*, Agartala: Ministry of the Development of the North Eastern Region, 2008, p.1.
3. "Jihadis entering India, warns Bangladesh" *The Times of India*, Kolkata, 21 March 2017, at https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/57741565.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst, accessed on 6 July 2021.
4. "Two crore illegal Bangladeshis living in India: Government," *The Indian Express*, November 16, 2016, at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-India/two-crore-illegal-bangladeshis-living-in-India-government-4379162/>, accessed 6 July 2021.
5. "Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam," *South Asia Terrorism Portal* at http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist_outfits/MULTA.htm, accessed on July 6, 2021.
6. "Fake Indian currency smugglers find new routes along Border," *India Today*, Kolkata, November 10, 2018, at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/fake-Indian-currency-smugglers-find-new-routes-along-border-1385543-2018-11-10>, accessed July 6, 2021.
7. "Starred Question No. 287: Counterfeit Currency," *Lok Sabha*, December 6, 2016, <http://164.100.24.220/loksabhaquestions/annex/10/AS287.pdf>, accessed 6 July 2021.
8. "Shri Rajnath Singh to inaugurate BOLD-QIT project along international border in Dhubri, Assam tomorrow," *Press Information Bureau*, Delhi, March 4, 2019, at <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1567263> (accessed 6 July 2021).
9. *Annual Report 2014-15*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, 2015, p. 35.

Vapour and Vigour: Life along the Brahmaputra

Samrat Choudhury*

Travel on the river, especially before the advent of steamers, was an experience so distant from ours as to be unimaginable. Writing in the closing years of the 1800s, Alfred Brame, historian of the India General Steam Navigation Company Ltd., which ran steamer services from Calcutta to Dibrugarh and Allahabad, wrote, “The India of the early years of the present century (1800s) is so far removed from the India of today as to make one marvel how our predecessors of but a generation or two back managed to make life worth living.”

“The Ganges,” wrote Brame, “was then the great highway from Calcutta into the interior; for although the Grand Trunk Road was in existence, it was used in cases of great emergency only and involved the utmost discomfort. The civilian, the soldier, the planter and trader all journeyed to Patna, Allahabad, or Delhi by water, in pinnaces, bauliahs or budgerows, according to their means and station in life.” These different kinds of wooden boats, all powered by oars and sails, differed from one another in size. The budgerow was the big boat, one with a cabin and a roof, both vital for long journeys on the river where the sun beats down mercilessly and the rain comes lashing. It was the boat the wealthy took.

“The boats were generally tracked along the bank by ropes when ascending the river, unless the wind was favourable, when sail was set and the weary crew had a welcome rest,” wrote Brame. “Government servants had a fixed allowance for boat-hire when moved from station to station; so much per month according to the rank of the traveller.”

* The writer is a journalist and an author. Excerpt from “The Braided River,” published by Harper Collins in 2021.

There was also a scale of time allowed between different points. “Calcutta to Monghyr (Munger) 1 month 8 days, Calcutta to Buxar 2 months, Calcutta to Allahabad 3 months ... Calcutta to Dacca took 1 month in those days, and such far-away places as Assam or Sylhet were beyond the range of any fixed timing.” Basically, until the early 1800s, if you were going to Assam or Sylhet from Calcutta, or vice versa, you set sail hoping you would eventually reach someday, months hence. For example, when the first American Baptists made the journey from Calcutta to Sadiya, the journey took them four months from December 1835 to March 1836.

The advent of steamers changed that. It revolutionised travel. “It was only in 1828 that it took 3 months to make a journey that is now traversed in 18 hours,” wrote Brame in 1899. The specific route he was referring to was the journey from Calcutta to Allahabad. It had taken seventy years, and the Industrial Revolution, for the distance between these hitherto remote lands to shrink to practically nothing.

The first steamer to reach India was called the *Enterprise*. It was a steamer of the East India Company built in England that reached Calcutta in 1825, after a sea journey of 113 days. It ran between Calcutta, Rangoon, Penang and Singapore, which by Brame’s time were known as the Straits Settlements, and were parts of the British empire. The first inland steamer, named the *Lord William Bentinck* after the Governor General who had proposed introduction of such services, was launched in 1834. By 1836, there were four government steamers in India, all plying on the Ganges. Those early steamers were large paddleboats with a chimney stack rising into the air at one end, and masts and sails at the other. They only carried cargo and provided quarters for the ship’s officers, wrote Brame, while a separate “accommodation boat” that was tugged along by the steamer “conveyed passengers who occupied cabins of various classes, but messed at the captain’s table on the steamer, the communication between the two vessels being provided by a gangway.” Travel from Calcutta to Allahabad in those early steamers took between twenty-two to twenty-eight days. It also cost what was then a minor fortune; a first-class passage including meals was worth around Rs 400, and Brame lamented that this did not even include wines.

The growth of steamer travel in India took off in earnest after the India General Steam Navigation Company — with the motto of “vapor

et vigor” — was formed in 1844 due to the efforts of Carr, Tagore & Co., a large partnership firm set up by William Carr and Dwarkanath Tagore, grandfather of poet Rabindranath Tagore. The same year, it purchased a steamer and a flat (a boat with a flat deck rather like a barge) called the Assam and Naga, respectively, from the Assam Company, the first commercial tea company in the world, of which Dwarkanath Tagore was also a founder. The two companies shared close links and had a common chairman in John Storm.

The steamer business soon faced competition from another new technology. By the 1860s, the railways had begun to expand in Gangetic India. Steamer traffic was affected. “About the same time that trade on the Ganges was declining, the tea industry of Assam was beginning to show signs of development, and India General, slowly driven from the Ganges, held council whether the Brahmaputra might not find employment for some of their vessels,” wrote Brame. “Assam at this time was a most forsaken province. The only means of communication was by a government steamer which left Calcutta once in six weeks.” This government steamer service had been launched in 1847, and ran from Calcutta to Guwahati, covering the distance in roughly sixteen days. The India General steamer company worked out a deal with the government by which the government steamer service was withdrawn and the company was given the monopoly, on an experimental basis for six months, to run a steamer and flat from Calcutta to Dibrugarh once every six weeks.

It was with much trepidation that the company’s directors launched the service. “Unlike the Ganges, which flowed through thickly populated districts, and had an enormous volume of trade ready to hand, the Brahmaputra passed through a practically unknown country; there were no towns of any note on its banks, the districts on either side were sparsely peopled with inhabitants, whose wants were small; and leaving out the item of tea, the exports were practically nil,” Brame observed. The Assam line, as it was called, however, proved a commercial success. By 1862, the service was increased to monthly instead of six-weekly. In 1864, Brame reported a “great rush of capital into the tea industry, and the best steamers of the company were placed on this service.”

This created new business opportunities for the steamer company. It also changed the design of the steamers, which until then had been fitted with cabins — typically four first class, four second class, and

six third class. “Assam itself supplies no labour, and every coolie employed on a tea garden has to be imported, as is also every maund of food stuff on which he is fed,” Brame wrote. “The vessels of the company had at this date very little accommodation for passengers of this class, and there was a rapid rush towards fitting upper decks to both steamers and flats, to accommodate the crowds of labourers proceeding to the newly opened tea gardens of the province.”

Act East Policy: Connecting India's Northeast and Southeast Asia

Saswati Choudhury*

Prelude

That India's East Asia engagement is strategically driven is a foregone conclusion. The Annual Report for 1985–86 of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) noted: "There were hardly any high-level contacts between India and ASEAN over the previous five years, but of late, a definite trend has emerged, which indicates that the ASEAN nations are interested in bringing bilateral relations back to the old level with the re-establishment of political dialogue."

China, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, had pushed itself on the path of economic recovery and was steadily forging cooperation with its neighbours in the region. China's pragmatic move to gradually withdraw its support given to communist regimes in the region and substitute the same by opening up economic engagement brought it closer to its neighbours. India realized the necessity to engage with its immediate neighbours and a new track of Sino-Indian relations since the mid-eighties focussed on resolving border disputes and exploring the prospects of bilateral economic cooperation. In the immediate post-Cold War period, India explored opportunities within its Asian neighbours especially in Central Asia not only to retain the captive markets of the Soviet period for its products and services, but also to meet country's growing energy needs. As the USSR fragmented into independent nations, India realised the critical importance of engaging with her neighbours in east and south-east Asia.

* The writer is with the OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati. She can be reached at saswati.choudhury@gmail.com. Views expressed are personal.

On the domestic front, by the mid-eighties India realized the fallacy of controlled development strategy and the ills of the License Raj. The fallout of the overstretched control for reaching commanding heights was the slow growth rate of around 3.5 percent usually referred as the Hindu rate of growth during the first three decades of the planned development era. Soon reforms were initiated in the mid-1980s in industry, trade, taxation and exchange rate management in a gradual manner. In March 1985, the government announced de-licensing of 25 broad categories of industries; by 1990, the number of de-licensed industries rose to 31. Industrial reforms were followed with other reforms — a long-term fiscal policy was announced in December 1985; the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) was formed in 1988–89; and the Unit Trust of India floated the India Growth Fund in 1988 to offer non-resident Indians (NRIs) and foreign investors an opportunity to indirectly invest in Indians stocks. All these measures led to acceleration in economic growth to more than 5.5 percent. The big push came with the structural reforms and liberalisation of the economy in 1990s. Notwithstanding the “substantial reforms” that have been undertaken, India still continued with the persistent problems of bureaucratic inertia, poor inter-ministerial coordination and complications associated with forging public-private partnerships. Infrastructure deficits especially in transport and power remained barriers to accelerating connectivity and investment. Yet, over the years, India’s policy of creating Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and Export Processing Zones (EPZ) across the country have played an instrumental role in attracting foreign investment and expand its economic cooperation with Southeast Asia. It is pertinent to mention here that India’s economic engagement with other countries and regions is contingent to its internal economic reforms and, therefore, the pace of Look East/Act East Policy would largely depend on this. Like China, India’s coastal and industrial regions provided the growth impetus and fostered regional economic cooperation in the Southeast Asian region especially with ASEAN countries. Infrastructure development has been one of the primary drivers in expanding regional cooperation.

Spatiality and Connectivity

The market is greatly influenced by spatial or geographical location. Surfeit of literature on economic geography that has flourished since 1990s brought to fore the increasingly obvious importance of geography

and location specificity in explaining trade and investment trends. The competition between individual regions of the same country is as important and complex as competition between two countries. For example, Radelet and Sachs (1998)¹ find that access to the sea and distance from major markets have a strong impact on shipping costs, which in turn influence success in manufactured exports and long-term economic growth. They conclude that every 10 percent increase in sea distance leads to a concomitant increase of 1.3 percent in shipping costs. Further the shipping cost of landlocked countries is 5.6 percent higher than that of a coastal economy, which leads to an increase of 63 percent in freight and insurance.

Therefore, for a given distance from main markets, countries with a higher proportion of transit by land routes tend to have higher overall shipping costs. Sachs, Mellinger, and Gallup (2001)² have shown that regions from tropical areas or with desert ecology, which are further handicapped by distance from sea trade, are the very poorest regions in the world. As sea trade has a comparative cost advantage over land or air-based trade, economies near coastlines have a greater advantage over hinterland economies. This clearly justifies the importance of cross-border road transport infrastructure for landlocked countries or regions within a country. It may however be noted that the transport costs of the landlocked regions will tend to increase with the administrative and regulatory costs of crossing borders, which calls for institutional arrangements regarding cross-border transport. For any region, being landlocked raises its trade transport costs compared to a region that is closer to or has easy access to coastal areas. Further, the origin country's own infrastructure has a higher influence on the transport cost than the transit infrastructure (Limao and Venables 2001).³ For exporters of primary products, higher transport costs reduce the rents earned from natural resources and thereby lower aggregate saving rates and investments. High transport costs lead to an increase in the price of imported capital goods, which in turn reduce real investment and slow the process of technology transfer (Radelet and Sachs 1998). There is a strong negative relationship between transport costs and economic growth. The gains from integration are likely to be large for landlocked countries and regions that need transport corridors as feeder lines to export and import their goods (Schiff and Winters 2002).⁴

It is worth noting that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been its major thrust in expanding its regional engagement in Asia ever

since it began its move towards market-led growth since the 1990s. China's aggressive investment in expanding the BRI has contributed in developing its northwest frontier and the same is now pursued for its north eastern region for integrating it to Northern Asian sub-region. In Southeast Asian countries too, roads and connectivity constructions have served as an instrument for economic development. For example, governments in Thailand, Indonesia and Laos focussed on developing road connectivity to secure political control in insurgency-affected areas and channelize investment in these areas for economic growth. In the countryside of Northern Thailand, upgrading the road connectivity by developing all-weather roads transformed the local rural economies. Improved road connectivity helped village women access the market for their agricultural produce in the nearby city of Chiang Mai. Over a 30-year period, roads were constructed, which created aspirations among villagers who sought better schools in the city, employment in services and industrial units in urban areas chiefly because the commuting time to the city of Chiang Mai was reduced (Rigg 2002).⁵ The experience of the European Union (EU) regarding development of an internal market space shows the significant positive impact of regional integration of hitherto peripheral economic areas, as evident from the case study of the Baltic countries.⁶

Connectivity in the Northeast of India

The Northeast region had been part of the South-West silk route that connected the region to China through Tibet. It is therefore no surprise that the region has been portrayed as natural adjunct to India's neighbourhood in the east. The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 reduced the region to a hinterland and severed its access to the coastal trade route through East Bengal. The region became a laggard, with a large development deficit due to its remoteness and transport bottleneck that adversely affected industrial or production investment. The region which nearly fell to the Chinese aggression in 1962 was placed within geopolitical security frame in foreign policy priorities. Further, insurgency movements and use of Burmese soil as the safe hideout by the insurgents brought in stricter vigil in the development of transport network in the region especially in the border states of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. As Sanjib Baruah writes, retired Generals from the Indian army were appointed as Governors in the states of Northeast India, which underscored the overriding security

concerns of the Indian Government for the region.⁷ However, decades of isolation and the perception of security threats that hovered over the region began to change since the mid-nineties after India began its economic liberalisation and also amid improvement of its relationship with Myanmar. Accelerated road development and connectivity projects were taken up. The NER Vision 2020 recognised three Cs viz., connectivity, culture and cooperation in trade and commerce as essential for reducing development deficits and economic backwardness.

Economic liberalization created synergies between productivity and trade output and development of roads and other connectivity infrastructures. This phenomenon is not unique for Indian states. China is the best example where its road and infrastructure development and economic engagement in Asia is deeply rooted in the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative linked to the long-term development of China's own regions. Enlarging of transport and communication infrastructure networks due to its role in improving trade transits has constituted part of the post-liberalization development model for India too. Since the early 1990s, with the opening up of trade and foreign investments, there has been a clear divergence in incomes between states due principally to the rapid growth of the coastal areas along the south eastern region. Two key factors have been ascribed for the rapid growth of the coastal provinces — (1) the policy environment, especially the Special Economic Zones and other related incentives for FDI and (2) the favourable geography of the coastal provinces with easy access to the coast and better road connectivity to the production centres, which strengthens international trading networks.

The Look East Policy (LEP), which synchronised with India's structural reforms and liberalization factored in the significance of infrastructure and connectivity for trade growth. In the periphery states of India's northeast, there have been large-scale investments in bridging road and railway connectivity besides inland water transport for fostering regional connectivity through three important corridors. These include: (1) A 1,360 km long Trilateral Highway connecting India with the ASEAN region through the land corridors of Northeast India and Southeast Asia, (2) The Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Project for cargo movement from the eastern ports of India to Myanmar and to Mizoram in Northeast India through Myanmar. This would open connectivity between Indian ports and the Sittwe port in Myanmar and road and inland waterway connectivity from Sittwe to the states in Northeast

India through Mizoram. (3) A combination of road, rail, water and air linkages in the region. BCIM–Economic Corridor via Kolkata – Dhaka – Silchar – Imphal – Mandalay – Tengchong – Kunming. A large part of this route overlaps with the Trilateral Highway (TH), and follows AH-1 (Asian Highway) up to Mandalay and AH-14 from Mandalay to Kunming. The intra-region road network promoted under Special Accelerated Road Development Programme (SARDP) among the major towns of Northeast would connect to the BCIM corridor.⁸

The growth of economic corridors has improved transport links to remote and landlocked locations in the neighbouring Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) of northeast India and the GMS has been connected to the Asian value chain networks. The linkages into East Asian production networks have been facilitated by international shipping from the main ports located in the GMS, and the land routes serve as feeder services from the production hubs located inland to the ports.⁹

Value Chain Network: Northeast India

The states in Northeast India face major challenges in improving connectivity which inter-alia include road congestion, delays in railway freight movement, long turnaround time at ports, fast-growing but highly strenuous airport sector, which leads to capacity constraints. Land acquisition is yet another major challenge and often results in significant time and cost overruns for railways, roads, ports and airport developers. Notwithstanding these challenges, the region has seen large investments in transport connectivity since the late-nineties, which has created better accessibility to the region. It is well known that besides the short-term impact of investments in connectivity, there are also medium- and long-term effects for future economic growth by making the labour markets more efficient and productive. Global value chains (GVCs) have emerged in tandem with improvements in transport and communication linkages, and this has led to strong economies of scale by fragmenting the production and value addition to commodities by relocating them across different locations. Taglioni and Winkler (2016)¹⁰ argue that governments aspiring to join GVCs need to create world-class relationships and frameworks for foreign tangible and intangible assets. The connectivity of production hubs across countries and regions are key determinants of GVCs as decisions are taken by firms located across diverse locations domestically or internationally. Corridor development through the Northeast is a move towards breaking free

from the limitations of geographical isolation. To reap the dividends of corridor development, the inter-state framework of production and value chain network needs to be developed and integrated to overcome the market rigidities in the region. This would bring down high transaction costs and yield higher growth in the future while ensuring access to regional networks and collaborations.

The agro climatic conditions have endowed the Northeast region of India suitably with horticultural products, plantation crops, vegetables, spices, rare herbs and medicinal herbs. This provides enough scope for value addition and for creating regional value chain networks, and the region has the potential for developing into an export hub as well. A study by FICCI on Gateway to the ASEAN India's North East Frontier in November 2014 identified strong prospects for developing export potential of the region in edible fruits and nuts, apparels, beverages, lime and cement, fish and aquatic products, salt and stone. These are high-potential items as there is strong demand for such products in the neighbouring countries which at present is met by other states from India.¹¹ The industries for these items, if located in the region, will also have a significant logistical advantage vis-à-vis other regions. Besides, a value chain network within the region can be developed by exporting semi-finished and finished products rather than exporting raw materials.¹² Sustained economic growth in the region is possible through economic upgrading and local intensification.¹³ Upgrading need not necessarily lead to a transition from an agricultural economy to a services one; rather it may also include taking up value-added production with better skills and technology. The case of Denmark in global food production is an example in this respect.

With transport connectivity getting strengthened, the possibility of Northeast India entering GVC would call for pro-Investment, pro-skills, pro-jobs, and pro-growth reforms across the states of the region. The region has a reservoir of educated unemployed youth, (e.g., the graduate-and-above unemployment rate in Assam is 8.11 percent, CMIE: 2021), which can be utilised for augmenting skills and employability across sectors and activities. The low wage rate in the region may be an advantage to enter GVCs, which can help in relocating industrial jobs in the region (e.g., motor parts manufacturing units) and step up from subsistence agriculture and low-skill service jobs. It is important

to note that in the GVC what matters is unit labour cost and not the wage rate. Apart from its BRI, the other advantage for China is its labour productivity, which increases with rising wages. In other words, the dividends of transport connectivity in the region post Act East Policy can create the synergy for economic resurgence through GVC if policies on agglomeration economies in the northeast region of India can be taken up on the basis of economic units rather than political units. Such agglomeration would require reforms across states in labour laws, skill formation, business environment and infrastructure, with effective regulatory mechanisms to attract foreign capital and investment.

There is a need to bring in inclusiveness and competitiveness in the policies for the region by weaning it away from years of soft cajoling due to its geographical and cultural isolation from mainland India. The region's uniqueness and remoteness from the rest of India should instead be seen as the catalyzing factor for integrating it with the fast-growing markets in Southeast Asia. The State Governments in the region can begin by learning from the experiences of neighbouring Southeast Asian countries where the synergy created by infrastructure development and required intervention in the economy helped reduce many challenges such as backwardness, insurgency, and ethnic strife in these countries.

Notes

1. Radelet, S. and Sachs, J. 1998. "Shipping Costs, Manufactured Exports, and Economic Growth," Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Economics Association, Chicago, January 3-5. <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8J39081>
2. Sachs, J., Mellinger, A., & Gallup J. 2001. "The Geography of Poverty and Wealth," *Scientific American*: 284, 70.
3. Limao, N., and Venables, A.J. 2001. "Infrastructure, Geographical Disadvantage, Transport Costs and Trade," *The World Bank Economic Review*: Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 451-479.
4. Schiff, M. and Winters, L.A. 2002. "Regional Cooperation, the Role of International Organizations, and Regional Integration," Policy Research Working Paper 2872. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
5. Rigg, J. 2002. "Rural Areas, Rural People and the Asian Crisis: Ordinary people in a Globalising World." In Pietro P. Masina (eds.), *Rethinking Development in East Asia: From Illusory Miracle to Economic Crisis*, pp. 241-60. Studies in Asian Topics Series, No. 29. Copenhagen: NIAS and Curzon Press.

6. Brunner, H. 2013. "What is Economic Corridor Development and What Can It Achieve in Asia's Sub-regions?" Working Paper Series on Regional Economic Integration, No. 117. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
7. Barua, S. 2001. "Generals as Governors," June 1. <https://www.himalmag.com/generals-as-governors/>
8. Sarma, A. and Choudhury, S. 2020. "Three Decades of Look East/Act Policy: Where does Northeast India Stand? CSEAS, Guwahati University, Occasional Paper No. 3.
9. Ibid.
10. Taglioni, D. and Winkler, D. 2016. "Making Global Value Chains Work for Development." Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/450521467989506537/pdf/106305-PUBADD-ISBN-DOI-AUTHORS-SERIES-ABSTRACT-OUO-9.pdf>
11. Choudhury, S. 2018. "Locating North East India in the Look (Act) East Policy of India" in Sarma, A and Choudhury, S. (eds.), Mainstreaming Northeast India in India's Look (Act) East Policy. Palgrave Macmillan.
12. Ibid.
13. Economic upgrading refers to gaining competitiveness in higher value-added activities, products and sectors. Intensification refers to engaging more local firms and workers in the GVC network. Often, this could mean that performing lower value-added activities on a larger scale can generate large value addition for the state/region.

India's Act East Policy and the Northeast: Road to ASEAN

Shristi Pukhrem*

The centrality of India's Northeast is critical in the pursuit of the country's Act East Policy (AEP). Given the increased engagement between India and the ASEAN countries, the Northeast has the potential to become a regional hub in terms of trade and investment. However, the formal trade links between India and its two neighbours, Bangladesh and Myanmar, have remained much below potential. In 2009–10, Bangladesh's share in India's total trade was about 0.6 per cent, while Myanmar's share was just about 0.3 per cent. In absolute terms, India's bilateral trade with Bangladesh increased from US\$1.8 billion in 2005–06 to US\$4 billion in 2010–11. In the same period, India's bilateral trade with Myanmar grew almost three-fold between 2005–06 and 2010–11 to reach US\$1.4 billion. These low levels of trade do not include the informal sector, which has grown due to the shared economic and cultural links and interdependence of the peoples living on both sides of the international boundaries.

Much of the cross-border trade is through informal arrangements whose importance has not diminished despite the restrictions that have been imposed in the past few decades. However, border trade involving both Bangladesh and Myanmar has a plethora of problems including poor transport and communication infrastructure, lack of institutional support, etc. Field surveys show that the Land Custom Stations (LCSs) in the NER suffer from lack of infrastructure. Inadequate supply of electricity, poor road conditions, lack of office automation, manual handling of goods, institutional deficiencies (banks), unfriendly exchange

* Dr. Shristi Pukhrem is a Senior Research Fellow at India Foundation. Views expressed are personal.

rate, and other barriers weigh on border trade. Government of India has taken policy initiatives aimed at promoting trade on the borders with both Myanmar and Bangladesh (RIS 2011).

Border Trade between NER and Myanmar

Border trade through the NER bears considerable relevance in India's foreign policy dynamics with Myanmar. There are four LCSs through which trade between the two countries is conducted. Moreh in Manipur is the busiest LCS, handling about 99 per cent of the trade. As in the case with other LCSs in the region, the LCS at Moreh is yet to be enabled. Loading and unloading of goods is done manually by casual labourers. It takes a month to get certificates for consumption of items like betel nuts and dry ginger from Guwahati. Food testing laboratory and animal quarantines facility are not available either. Integrated Check Post (ICP) is yet to be established near the LCS. The trade centre set up at Moreh is not fully functional. Trade at Moreh LCS suffers not only due to a lack of modern trade infrastructure, both hardware and software, but also the absence of adequate security. Informal trade through Moreh–Tamu is thriving on the back of supplies from China and Thailand. Since such traditional trade practice is influenced by historical and cultural links that existed between the communities living in the border areas, it may make economic sense to impose barriers through government policy.

Moreh is handling about USUS\$3.59 million India–Myanmar merchandise trade, of which exports and imports contribute 41 per cent and 59 per cent, respectively. Export through Moreh LCS increased from USUS\$0.14 million (Rs. 0.46 crore) in 1995–96 to a peak of USUS\$13.52 million (Rs. 61.27 crore) in 2006–07 and then fell to USUS\$1.47 million (Rs. 6.55 crore) in 2009–10. Imports, on the other hand, witnessed relatively milder fluctuations, and increased from USUS\$1.66 million (Rs. 5.39 crore) in 1995–96 to USUS\$2.12 million (Rs. 9.42 crore) in 2009–10. The second half of last decade witnessed an increase in Indian exports through Moreh, compared to the previous two periods, whereas imports declined consistently from USUS\$72 billion in 1995–96/1999–2000 to USUS\$38 billion in 2005–06/2009–10 (RIS 2011).

On the one hand, the restricted trade practice has been hindering growth of India–Myanmar border trade, and informal trade has been growing, on the other. Myanmar insists that its traders importing goods from India have to first procure orders for export of equivalent volume.

Similarly, Indians can export if they can ensure imports of equivalent volume within a specified time frame. Myanmar generally overvalues its currency, thereby causing a wide differential between official and market exchange rates and problems in settling trade exchanges. Third-country goods, especially Chinese products like electric appliances, plastic goods, garments and blankets are widely traded on both sides of the border — Moreh, Imphal and other towns in Manipur (India) and Tamu in Myanmar, although it is difficult to make authentic estimates of informal trade in the absence of official records. To expand cross-border trade, it would be necessary to streamline the procedure of financial settlements, upgrade trade infrastructure and other facilities including logistics. Both Government of India and Government of Manipur have been facing the challenge of addressing supply bottlenecks that have caused a trade imbalance against India. Since there is demand for a wide range of Indian products, it is important to develop the market for these products. Local industry like agro-processing, horticulture, and textiles should be promoted through the regional market to substitute imported products with local produce and also service external demand. There is ample scope for the development of manufacturing/processing units for medicines, rubber goods, cycles and cycle parts, pharmaceuticals, edible oils, petroleum products, cement, cotton yarns, etc. (RIS 2011). On the other hand, the states in the NER, which are facing challenges of transporting food grains and other essential goods from the rest of India, can meet a substantial amount of their requirements from Myanmar faster and at much lower costs, provided such commodities are included in India–Myanmar trade.

AEP and other trade promotion initiatives for enhancing trade links with South-East Asia provide Manipur, among other Northeast states, with a comparative advantage. India–ASEAN has also opened up new vistas for trade with ASEAN. However, although bilateral trade with neighbouring countries has improved over the years, its impact on the Northeast economy is nominal because much of the expansion has been through sea ports. Despite enormous potential, Indo–Myanmar trade remains insignificant. The traded items are mostly third-country products, and there is no concerted effort by the government to develop the border regions and expand the tradable items (Haokip 2011). For instance, indigenous items that are traded with Myanmar are locally produced commodities, mainly agricultural produce and minor forest products. For almost two decades, trade was restricted to 22 items, which was recently

increased to 62. If the current trend of border trade is an indication, there is little scope for the NER to have direct gains in trade unless there is a dramatic improvement in infrastructure and production. In the absence of the required economic infrastructure and trade promotion policies, the region would simply turn into a transit port without any concurrent benefits to other sectors. There is an apprehension that with the Asian Highway providing an efficient international transport system, the Northeast will become a virtual transit route for Indian and ASEAN goods. The is because it is a landlocked region that needs access and is overlooked by entrepreneurs (Goswami 2009). Within the seamless web of trade, India's Northeast forms the weakest link because of lack of infrastructural and industrial development. The growth in NER's trade with Myanmar during the last decade and a half has not been commensurate with its potential (Table 1.0).

Table 1.0: Trends in NER's Trade with Myanmar

Year	Export Volume (Rs.in million)	Share (%)	Imports Volume (Rs.in million)	Share (%)	Total Trade Volume (Rs.in million)
1995-96	104.53	65.98	53.90	34.02	158.43
1996-97	337.05	95.69	15.18	4.31	352.23
1997-98	224.47	39.02	350.83	60.98	575.31
1998-99	50.25	44.82	61.86	55.18	112.11
1999-00	33.11	33.13	66.82	66.87	99.93
2000-01	55.28	30.91	123.54	69.09	178.81
2001-02	12.27	13.91	75.95	86.09	88.71
2002-03	50.02	29.72	118.31	70.28	168.32
2003-04	94.06	51.51	88.54	48.49	182.60
2004-05	64.87	54.66	53.82	45.84	118.69
2005-06	38.67	42.59	52.12	57.41	90.78
2006-07	612.67	95.78	26.97	4.22	639.64
2007-08	30.95	18.69	134.67	81.31	165.62
2008-09	10.26	63.76	5.83	36.24	16.09
2009-10	21.50	20.55	83.15	79.45	104.66

Source: Compiled from data collected from the Office of the Chief Commissioner of Customs, Shillong, Office of the Customs, Moreh, Manipur, Yumnam (2005).

ASEAN today remains an association of 10 diverse nations with internal contradictions. Even the claim that India–ASEAN FTA is a step forward to the AEC may remain a distant goal. The FTA can be a potential factor in materializing the concept of AEC. However, ASEAN first needs to complete its own integration process. While setting an optimistic target for implementation of the AEC by 2015 the ASEAN Charter (2007) states that ASEAN economic integration would not go beyond ASEAN+3. The Charter is a blueprint for the AEC that aims at transforming ASEAN into a single market. However, it is imminent that the process will take shape in the form of an ASEAN-centric grouping.

The India–ASEAN market will accelerate South Asian economic integration. A South Asian FTA has been taken forward in the last few years. However, the India–Pakistan conflict could become a potential deterrent. Organisations like the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement and BIMSTEC bring together some parts of South Asia with parts of South East Asia. Batra (2009) argues that greater links with South-East Asia, through the FTA, will help India's Northeast, which shares its borders and several potential complementarities with South-East Asian countries. While this may be seen as an important byproduct of the India-ASEAN FTA, the advantages of the potential connectivity (million) offered by the FTA will only contribute positively to the region's growth process if it is first lifted out of its current low economic equilibrium.

Prior development of India's north-east is a precondition to its ability to exploit the ASEAN countries. There have been earlier agreements — the Bangkok Agreement and BIMSTEC — which have member nations from across the two regions and for which connectivity has been a special focus area. If these agreements have not been able to accomplish what is desired for the northeast region, how would the India-ASEAN agreement make it possible calls for some introspection (Batra 2009: 4). It is for the Indian state to ensure that no one, including the North East, loses out as a consequence of the FTA in the long run. India's relations with South East Asia have now been embedded in pragmatism and shared interests, such as resource interdependence and economic integration to build a strong foundation. The Asian Highway network could open up new avenues for strengthening linkages between India and South East Asia. Economically, India has emerged as Asia's third-largest economy after Japan and China and has forged numerous FTAs with East Asian economies,

including a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement with Singapore and an Early Harvest Scheme with Thailand. More agreements with Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN are in the pipeline, which clearly portrays the economic interdependence between the regions. Improved regional connectivity opens up borders for greater trade and transit. Road connectivity also contributes to reducing development gaps between the rich and poor by spreading the benefits of economic development. This will facilitate the process of regional integration as it is politically much easier to promote regional economic integration across countries with fewer inter-country development gaps. Nonetheless, without adequate road connectivity to link national markets, future progress in integration between regions may get subdued (ADB 2009).

Recent studies suggest that improvement of travel conditions resulting from investment in transport infrastructure may have wider implications for the network by improving reliability and quality of transport service, accessibility, efficiency and social inclusion. Improvement in accessibility will increase the size of market for manufacturing, tourism and labour, leading to increased competition. For industry, increased accessibility and reliability arising from improved transport infrastructure would enhance productivity gains through increased production and distribution. For the regions facing from social and economic challenges, e.g., India's Northeast, better transport infrastructure could solve the problems of isolation by improving accessibility and mobility. Integrated connectivity can provide substantial benefits to landlocked and small countries by giving them access to the global market at lower costs. The experience of Europe, where there is greater presence of cross-border infrastructure, would reinforce the argument that regional cooperation promotes greater prosperity for the participating countries.

Connectivity, if well achieved through regional cooperation between India and South East Asian countries, should be a major step in enhancing the growth potential of the region and transforming its socio-economic landscape. In India's LEP trail, it is economic diplomacy that has provided the main catalyst. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the fifth India-ASEAN Summit in 2007 at Cebu, Philippines emphasized the need for "greater connectivity" in the India-ASEAN Region (Bhattacharya 2008). Dr. Singh stated that "The age-old India-ASEAN linkages have been about our people mingling and interacting with each other... this should remain a priority area of cooperation and,

in fact, be given even further impetus” (Singh 2007: 1). For a region to develop, economic integration has been a basic necessity (Singh 2009). Therefore, connectivity diplomacy becomes the main tool for India to further enhance the importance of effective roadways. Linking itself to far flung areas in South East Asia will not only help integrate India into the region, but also offer decisive economic and strategic advantages. One of the most prominent aspects of engaging with South-East Asia is free trade and transport facilitation between the countries of Bay of Bengal grouping and other ASEAN countries. It has been found that trade and transport facilitation is already receiving attention across the world and also that improved connectivity and trade facilitation can complement the effort of trade liberalisation and enhancement (De 2011). Regional and bilateral trade agreements need to be integrated into India’s trade liberalisation strategy. While emphasising the critical role that an efficient and effective logistics system can play “in supporting economic and trade growth, and developing regional production and distribution networks” Woo (2013) argues that high costs and poor performance of the logistics industry would have a significant adverse impact on the growth potential of the economy, and hinder the contribution of the industry to economic and social development.

The Asian Highway is a major connectivity project and an initiative linking South Asia, South-East Asia and China with Europe. Such an Asia-wide connectivity project needs to be complemented by cross-border intermodal transportation projects. A shared strategic vision would be an enabling factor in the initiatives for regional connectivity. India and ASEAN have become increasingly integrated. Notwithstanding the ASEAN’s principle of “ASEAN way” of aversion to intervening in the sovereign affairs of member countries, a much stronger India–ASEAN cooperation that hinges on a shared strategic vision is needed to capitalise on the synergies of regional infrastructure initiatives and enabling policies and institutions. The challenge for Asian countries is then to consolidate the improvements in cross-border infrastructure, including logistics services. The challenge is also the huge infrastructure investment needs of the region and insufficient resources. As De (2010) also suggested, a viable strategy could be the public private partnership and, by implication, collaboration with donor agencies like World Bank, ADB, USAID, ESCAP, JICA and other agencies engaged in international and regional cooperation and development programmes.

ASEAN: Integration and Connectivity Within

South-East Asia's changing economic landscape, mainly in the face of emerging economic powers like China and India, has been urging the ASEAN to augment its competitiveness by deepening regional economic integration as well as enhancing regional connectivity. This has provided a new opportunity for ASEAN to physically anchor itself as the transportation, ICT, and tourism hub of the region. Comprehensive ASEAN connectivity is, therefore, a necessary condition for deepening economic integration within ASEAN. Improved connectivity would also help reduce the costs of cross-border trade in goods and services between ASEAN member states. Deeper economic integration resulting from enhanced connectivity and free trade can significantly factor in bridging development gaps, through expansion of production and distribution networks. On the whole, connectivity leading to economic integration is crucial to the ASEAN Community building. The ASEAN leaders issued a statement on ASEAN Connectivity (October 2009) and defined the objective of the ASEAN transport cooperation "to develop an efficient and integrated transport system which will support the realisation of the AEC and will help ASEAN to integrate with the global economy" (ERIA 2010).

ASEAN is a vibrant region of more than 600 million people with an estimated GDP of US\$1.5 trillion and total trade of US\$1.7 trillion, and its 10 Member States are moving progressively towards building the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and also strengthening relationship with its dialogue partners. Strategically positioned to link with the whole of Asia and growing at fast pace, ASEAN's combined market is poised to become the world's ninth largest economy (Chirathivat and Masali 2012). While attributing the remarkable economic growth in the region largely to rapid improvement of connectivity, the challenge of accelerating the process of regional economic integration and enhancing the prospect of the South East Asia as a "production, tourism and investment destination" factored in the adoption of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) during the 17th ASEAN Summit held in Vietnam (2010). The AEC is the goal of regional integration that the ASEAN leaders proclaimed to create by 2015, and the MPAC identified three modes of connectivity — physical connectivity, institutional connectivity and people to people connectivity — to expedite realisation of the ASEAN community

(Kimura and Umezaki 2011; Das 2012: 3-8). It is through the three dimensions of connectivity that the MPAC links together the three pillars of the ASEAN Community—ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), AEC and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), (Pipoppinyo 2013: 165-174). Since ASEAN is currently facing the challenge of bridging development gaps among the member countries, it has embarked on inclusive growth and regional economic integration programmes. It was in this perspective that the AEC Blueprint, which was adopted at the 13th ASEAN Summit held in Singapore (November 2007), defined the goals of “(i) single market and production base, (ii) competitive economic region, (iii) equitable economic development, and (iv) integration into the global economy” (ERIA 2010: 1-12). There is an increasing recognition of the transport sector as a critical factor in achieving the AEC goals. Das argues that connectivity is not only expected to “reduce business transaction cost, time and travel cost,” but also to connect the “core” and the “periphery” in ASEAN, “thus distributing the benefits of multifaceted growth wider in the region and reducing the development divide in ASEAN” (Das 2012: 2). It is further argued that “better connectivity within ASEAN is essential for further connectivity with other regions, such as East and South Asia, which will help ASEAN to maintain its centrality in the evolving regional architecture” (Das 2012: 2).

The ERIA Report 2010 suggests a framework for enhancing ASEAN–India connectivity. The framework identifies two main routes—the sea route as the “west link of the Mekong–India Economic Corridor (MIEC)”, and the land routes along the trilateral highway linking Thailand, Myanmar, and India (Figure 5.1). The west link of MIEC, from Bangkok to Chennai via Dawei, would enhance the connectivity between the two vibrant regions of the manufacturing industry. Since MIEC is not sufficient to fully meet the challenges the region is facing — a significant gap in the connectivity between India’s Northeast and Myanmar — the Trilateral Highway, which has been identified as Asian (and ASEAN) Highway No. 1, connecting Thailand, Myanmar and India’s Northeast, is expected to fill the gap. In short, the west link of MIEC and the Trilateral Highway are critical to the enhancement of ASEAN and India connectivity (Kimura et al. 2011). Land transport projects like ASEAN Highway Network (AHN) and other critical sections of AH1 in Myanmar, and the Singapore Kunming Rail Link (SKRL) are prioritised projects in the MPAC. Construction of new

ports in Dawei and Kyaukphyu (Myanmar) and Pakabara (Thailand), and upgrading existing ports, such as Yangon and Sittwe in Myanmar, and Chennai (India) are projects identified for promoting maritime transport. Inland waterways along the Kaladan River (Myanmar) and Ganga have the potential to enhance connectivity between India's mainland and North East via Myanmar and Bangladesh, respectively. There are also plans to construct or upgrade airports in Chennai and Dawei. The initiatives to establish the ASEAN Single Aviation Market (ASAM) and the ASEAN's air transport agreements with its Dialogue Partners including India, China and Korea would enhance the regional air transport network.

An integrated connectivity approach will be crucial to enhancing ASEAN integration. It is argued that an improved (physical connectivity) infrastructure alone is not adequate to foster regional integration unless it is widely complemented by appropriate policies and regulations, and participation of the private sector. "Harmonising and simplifying the customs procedures, information sharing, customs modernisation, establishing transparent transit rules, and improving logistics in general" will facilitate cross-border movement of goods, services, and people (De 2011: 95-150). Integrated trade and transport facilitation, while addressing the issues of simplification, harmonisation and automation, will help lower transaction costs, improve the investment climate and create new commercial opportunities (ESCAP 2004).

India and ASEAN need to do more to promote trade. Trade between India and ASEAN increased substantially during the last decade. The total trade between ASEAN and India which stood at US\$3,151 million in 1990 reached US\$56,789.33 million in 2010, crossing the US\$50 billion mark. India had signed the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in goods with ASEAN in August 2009, and in January 2010 it became operational with Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. The Agreement, which is in consonance with India's LEP, signals New Delhi's intent "to move ahead with economic liberalization and integration with the global economy" (Batra 2010: 1). India accords recognition to "ASEAN as a vital hub in the process of regional cooperation." As a result of the institutionalisation of its economic relationship with ASEAN, India has now found both justification and opportunity to play a more significant role in determining the design of the emerging regional architecture. India has "a late mover disadvantage vis-a-vis China" due to the fact that the India-ASEAN FTA has come six years after the Framework

Agreement was signed. “The time that has since elapsed may have given China, owing to its prior entry, the time to garner greater market share in ASEAN” (Batra 2010: 2). India is among the leading services exporting countries, whereas ASEAN is a major importer. However, given the delay in finalising the goods arrangement, India may have lost ground even where it has the comparative advantage. Therefore, the economic gains of the FTA in goods need to be evaluated in the context of a more comprehensive agreement inclusive of services and investment liberalisation which is expected to happen soon. The ASEAN–India FTA creates space for India’s in the process of regional cooperation in Asia, and enhances its image globally, especially at the regional level. As Batra (2009) also suggests, greater links with South East Asia, which may be facilitated through the FTA, will help transform India’s strategic North East. It is, therefore, in the interest of both ASEAN as a community and India as an emerging Asian power to work towards building improved connectivity infrastructure and deepening regional integration.

Lack of financial resources is a major constraint in developing the transport infrastructure and expanding India’s trade with the neighbouring countries. Given the huge infrastructure investment needs of the region on the one hand and insufficient resources of the government on the other, “the role of the private sector and public-private partnerships in enhancing regional and national infrastructure facilities in Asia is very crucial” (De, Samudram and Moholkar 2010: 3). However, as the prolonged conflict situation has adversely impacted the economy of India’s Northeast and most of the infrastructure projects in the region are not likely to generate high profit in the near future, there is a challenge of attracting private sector investment or raising money from local capital markets.

The strategies to achieve enhanced ASEAN connectivity as envisaged in the MPAC involve key actions like speedy implementation/completion of the land transport projects, e.g., the AHN and the SKRL, developing an efficient and integrated inland waterways network and maritime transport system, building integrated multimodal transport corridors, accelerating development of ICT infrastructure and services, and resolving institutional issues in regional energy infrastructure projects. In fact, the upgradation of existing infrastructure, construction

of new infrastructure and harmonisation of regulatory frameworks are critical to efficient and smooth movement of goods and services within the ASEAN region and beyond. Although ASEAN has been effectively eliminating tariffs, it is struggling with the non-tariff barriers to trade and investment. While some such barriers are considered necessary in select cases, for example, to protect environment and (health of) human beings, animals and plants, there is risk of other barriers unnecessarily distorting trade flows and restricting competition. It is, therefore, important that ASEAN address issues relating to harmonisation of “standards and conformity assessment procedures,” and making key transport facilitation agreements operational as that will help reduce the costs of moving goods across borders.

The ASEAN member countries implementing their “National Single Windows” can facilitate realising the “ASEAN Single Window by 2015.” Implementing the three Framework Agreements on transport facilitation; initiatives to promote cross-border passenger movement; establishing an ASEAN Single Aviation Market and an ASEAN Single Shipping Market; eliminating barriers to trade; developing an efficient logistics system towards trade facilitation; capacity building for border management; and Member States’ “openness to both intra-regional and extra-regional investment” are some of the key strategies to enhance institutional connectivity in ASEAN region. The people-to-people connectivity strategies include promotion of tourism and deeper socio-cultural linkages to promote greater intra-ASEAN mobility among the people (Basu 2013: 5). In consonance with the strategies, MPAC has identified certain priority projects encompassing each of the three dimensions of connectivity which would provide key building blocks to ASEAN Connectivity, e.g. Completion of the AHN and SKRL missing links; and upgrading transit transport routes (under physical connectivity); developing and operationalizing mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs) for prioritized and selected industries; establishing common rules for standards and conformity assessment procedures; operationalizing National Single Windows (NSWs) by 2012; operationalisation of the ASEAN Agreements on transport facilitation (institutional connectivity); easing visa requirements for ASEAN nationals; development of ASEAN Virtual Learning Resources Centres (AVLRC); Developing ICT skill standards; and the ASEAN Community Building Programme (under people- to-people connectivity) (ASEAN Secretariat 2012).

ASEAN–India Connectivity

The Vision Statement (Annexure-VII) issued at the ASEAN–India Commemorative Summit (New Delhi, India; 20 December 2012) reaffirmed the commitment of the Heads of State/Government of ASEAN and India to “enhancing ASEAN Connectivity through supporting the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity and the ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2015,” and their determination “to cooperate and make the best use of all available resources, including financial and technical assistance, investment and public-private partnership to achieve physical, institutional and people-to-people connectivity within ASEAN and India” (ASEAN 2012: 5). The Vision Statement of the further stated the commitment of ASEAN Member States and India to their “efforts in advancing economic cooperation and engaging the emerging regional economic architecture, including organising multi-sectoral strategic economic dialogues” and “reaching greater trade volume through their FTA and realising their trade and economic potential under their strategic partnership by expanding trade facilitation initiatives” (ASEAN 2012: 3). They are, therefore, committed to achieving a target of US US\$100 billion for ASEAN–India trade by 2015, and also expect tariff-free lines to increase beyond the existing level in subsequent years.

While addressing the 10th ASEAN–India Summit at Phnom Penh on 19 November, 2012, Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh reaffirmed India’s endorsement of the objectives of the “ASEAN Community by 2015”, the “Initiative for ASEAN Integration” and the “ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity”, and emphasised connectivity with ASEAN in all its dimensions — physical, institutional and people-to-people — as a strategic priority for India. The Indian Prime Minister’s statement complements the MPAC adopted in the 17th ASEAN Summit (2010). As stated in the ASEAN–India Connectivity Report India Country Study (De 2012: 9), connectivity “promotes trade, brings people closer, and integrates the economies,” and an integrated connectivity between India and ASEAN “can infuse new dynamism in the region’s production network,” which in turn “would enhance trade and investment”, thereby deepening the “East Asian integration process.”

With greater connectivity, ASEAN would be better positioned to strengthen connections with the rest of the world and reduce economic distance within and beyond ASEAN. Improved connectivity is of critical importance for the region’s prosperity, continued growth and poverty

reduction. Improved connectivity lowers costs, increases reliability and enhances a region's trade prospects, and "Asia's aim to establish a single market would depend on the existence of a seamless, flexible and efficient logistics and transportation system" (De 2011: 96).

Both CADP and MPAC emphasise the growing importance of ASEAN's connectivity with the neighbouring countries like China, India, and other EAS member countries. Both China and India are the emerging global powers in Asia and also the immediate neighbours to the ASEAN region. However, compared with China, India's exposure in ASEAN is still limited. Since India is at a comparative disadvantage vis-a-vis China, mainly due to historical factors and lesser physical connectivity with ASEAN countries, it is critical to develop a strategy to enhance the connectivity between ASEAN and India towards regional integration. The strong growth of India's economy has already made a significant impact on the Asian economy. De (2011) suggests that India's trade, primarily due to FTAs, is expected to increase manifold in the coming years. ASEAN-India FTA is central to India's expanding engagement with her eastern neighbours. Accompanying this will be an increase in the demand of both national and international infrastructure, for both production and consumption, and international trade purposes. Any failure to respond to this demand will have a negative impact on India's trade and hamper growth. Therefore, the challenges of transport infrastructure — both hardware and software — confronting India require better understanding and adequate support, and it is important to develop a viable strategy to enhance ASEAN-India connectivity and integration. Connectivity between ASEAN and India is through two main axes: "the sea route, as the west link of the Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC), and the land routes, with various optional routes, along the trilateral highway between Thailand, Myanmar, and India" (Kimura, Kudo and Umezaki 2011: 21).

As already discussed, the west link of MIEC, from Bangkok (Thailand) to Chennai (India) via Dawei (Myanmar) will enhance connectivity between Bangkok and Chennai — two important Tier 1 regions. There remain significant missing links, including the lack of a Mekong bridge in Cambodia and the lack of a gateway port in Dawei. Keeping in view the promising benefits of connecting the two regions, ASEAN Leaders agreed to promote the completion of MIEC in the MPAC (ASEAN 2012). According to ERIA's analyses, port projects provide the most immediate economic benefits, as most trade is seaborne,

and upgrading ports in east India and building new ports in Myanmar–Dawei and Sittwe—can provide a significant boost to connectivity. MIEC has the potential to effectively impact Cambodia, followed by Myanmar, Thailand, and Lao PDR; allowing the transit transport in Myanmar is critical for other countries, Thailand in particular. The Dawei project in Myanmar will likely have larger impact than the Pak Bara project in Thailand, and West Bengal and Tamil Nadu will have a positive impact. The major land route involves upgrading road infrastructure of the Thailand-Myanmar-India section of Asian HighwayNo. 1 which has been identified as the Trilateral Highway. As the road infrastructure in Thailand is already well developed, the focus is on upgrading infrastructure in Myanmar and India’s Northeastern Region. The heads of the states/governments in the summit further affirmed their commitment to “assisting in the completion of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and its extension to Lao PDR and Cambodia and the new highway project connecting India-Myanmar-Lao PDR-Vietnam-Cambodia as well as developing the Mekong–India Economic Corridor (MIEC)” (ASEAN 2012: 5) in order to add momentum to the growing trade and investment linkages between ASEAN and India. In substance, ASEAN and India are committed to building a Regional Architecture for “a stable and peaceful regional environment for the pursuit of sustainable development in the region” (ASEAN 2012: 5).

Fukunari Kimura and So Umezaki suggest a multi-modal approach to regional connectivity that covers all modes of transportation, viz. land (including road and railways), maritime (including inland waterway transport), and air. In land transport, the MPAC has identified the completion of the AHN, including the upgrading of the weak link along the EWEC between Thingannyinaung and Kawkareik (AH1), and other sections in Myanmar such as Dawei-Kawthaung (AH112), Dawei-Maesameepass (AH123) — an integral part of MIEC, connecting Dawei and Thai border near Kanchanaburi — Chaun U-Kalay (AH1), and Kengtong-Taunggyi (AH2) as one of the prioritised strategies. Besides SKRL, which is a prioritised MPAC project, there is another ambitious plan to establish a rail link from India to Ho Chi Minh City crossing the Indochina Peninsular. In maritime transport, there is proposal for construction of new ports in Dawei, Kyaukphyu, and Pakbara, and expansion of existing ports — Yangon, Sittwe, and Chennai. Inland waterways along the Kaladan River and Ganga can potentially connect India’s mainland and its Northeast via Myanmar and Bangladesh

respectively. There are plans to construct or upgrade ports in Chennai and Dawei. Since physical infrastructure alone is not adequate to fully explore and exploit the potential of enhanced regional connectivity, the existing restrictive institutional arrangements need to be addressed. For instance, the connectivity between Myanmar and North East India has been restricted not only by the poor physical infrastructure but also by the institutional restrictions on Indo–Myanmar border trade. With enhanced connectivity, India’s Northeast and Myanmar, which are endowed with natural resources, can expand their economic activities. The economic potential of the economic corridors, e.g., GMS, could be explored and harnessed by upgrading maritime connectivity. Enhanced maritime connectivity in ASEAN will enhance the connectivity among various economic corridors, and thereby promote the integration between archipelagic and mainland ASEAN. This is clearly an integral step for ASEAN to become a single market and production base, as envisaged in the AEC Blueprint, which in turn will spread the benefits of economic integration to throughout ASEAN and India.

As discussed in the preceding section, physical infrastructure alone is not sufficient to harness the full potentials of improved connectivity. There is a need for adopting a multifunctional approach and addressing the transport and trade facilitation issues. People to people connectivity could be a strong facilitating factor, particularly in the case of border trade (Kimura and Umezaki, 2011). In addition, BIMSTEC would brighten the prospect for India to access Myanmar’s gas resources, to obtain transit rights to facilitate trade through important land routes connecting India’s Northeast with Myanmar via Bangladesh, and strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation with its neighbours. Thus, BIMSTEC was aimed at bridging South and South-East Asia, leading eventually to a wider ASEAN–SAARC regional community. Substantive relations between SAARC and ASEAN would then anchor India’s position in South-East Asia. More importantly, this would serve India’s strategic intent in preventing a tilt in the region particularly smaller countries like Bhutan and Nepal, towards China (Yong and Mun 2009: 35-36).

The Northeast and Myanmar, which are currently among the poorest regions with high deficits in transport/connectivity infrastructure, have the potential to play a very critical role as the connecting nodes in ASEAN–India connectivity. Surrounded by powerful economies like China, India and ASEAN, infrastructure development for Myanmar

and Northeast India could be at the core of the regional strategy to enhance ASEAN–India connectivity. The creation of transport infrastructures like the building of the Trilateral Highway Project (THP) linking India and Thailand through Myanmar will facilitate India’s engagements with South East Asia. However, financial constraints apart, issues like illegal trade, drug and arms smuggling, cross-border insurgency, India’s security concerns, and China’s ambition in Northeast India and Myanmar’s Northwest have hampered infrastructure development in the region. Notwithstanding the constraints and concerns, India is keen to broaden economic ties with a strategically potential Myanmar. The Trilateral Highway Project suits India’s interests in terms of seeking its economic and strategic objectives. The THP will be crucial to the economic development of India’s NER and to securing critical trade routes that will link the region with the South-East Asia. The highway will enable India to not only access Thailand by land, but also to play a balancing role vis-a-vis China’s growing influence that region. In fact, the economic gains from the completion of the THP apart, closer cooperation between ASEAN and India will demonstrate their “interest in the peaceful management of future power balance in Asia” (Parameswaran 2010).

The core policies governing Thailand–India relations remain Thailand’s “Look West” policy complementing India’s AEP. An important factor of Thailand’s “Look West” policy is, among other things, India’s vast market of 1.1 billion. Thailand also recognises India’s geo-political and economic weight in the region, as well as the extension of that weight in global affairs. Both countries are important regional partners linking South and South-East Asia. They cooperate closely in the ASEAN, EAS and BIMSTEC groupings as well as the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC). The implementation of the India–ASEAN Agreement on Trade in Goods from January 2010 is an important milestone of this partnership. An Early Harvest Scheme under the proposed India–Thailand FTA has been in place since September 2004 covering 82 products. Bilateral trade has multiplied six times since 2000 to cross US\$6.6 billion in 2010. With the signing of the FTA, bilateral trade will increase, and new infrastructure will be needed to facilitate and sustain connectivity linkages between India and Thailand. Another significant element has been the active promotion of trade and investment linkages between the North Eastern states of India and Thailand. If the Dawei deep sea port is completed, it could become

an effective link with the ASEAN countries and help increase linkages to many destinations located in the west of Thailand, such as India and countries in South Asia, Europe and the Middle East, due to lesser time and shorter distance needed for sea freight. In regard to people-to-people connectivity, the long history and rich cultural heritage shared between India and Thailand can strengthen the India–Thailand partnership. Thailand has a huge market for tourism and views Indian tourists as the fastest growing segment (Banomyong, Varadejsatitwong, and Phanjan 2011: 205-242).

ASEAN–India and the Strategic Northeast

The strategic importance of the NER came to the fore during the Second World War. It was then the last frontier of British India. After the fall of the British Burma to the Japanese forces, and cutting off all the supply lines to the numerous entrapped allied bases, it was through North East India and western province of China, by constructing the famous Stillwell Road, that the supply line was restored and rescue mission re-launched. With Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, China and Nepal sharing its international border, Northeast India could be used as a vantage point for entry into the South-East Asia and Indo-China. However, the conceptualisation of Northeast India as a frontier region by the British and the legacy of such geo-strategic concerns persisted even after India's Independence as major impediments in integrating the region with South-East Asia. Thus, after the Partition of India (1947), Northeast India got cut-off from the rest of the country as well as the rest of the world — countries on the eastern borders. Since then, the region became a man-made landlocked area. The larger geo-political considerations of the country took precedence over local (economic development) issues and aspirations. The colonial regulations such as Inner Line Permit, Protected Area Permit, Restricted Area Permit and prohibition of land ownership by non-tribal communities in the tribal regions have continued to be enforced in the Northeast. There was very limited infrastructure development in the region — transport and communication infrastructure; power infrastructure; industrial infrastructure; and basic services infrastructure. The infrastructure deficit in the strategically important The North East was a major factor in India's humiliating defeat in the China–India war of 1962. Strategic analysts caution that in the event of a simultaneous thrust, both by Pakistan and China, towards this region, India would not be in a position

to hold it. The India–Pakistan war of the 1970s and subsequent creation of Bangladesh further isolated the NER from mainland India. Polarisation between India and Bangladesh had worsened the situation. Large-scale illegal infiltration of Bangladeshis into the already volatile region makes it more vulnerable. On the other hand, many insurgent groups have established their bases in Bangladesh and Myanmar, which have also been used as transit for smuggling arms and narcotics and become a fertile ground for many insurgent groups. In these circumstances, India is wary of the growing clout of China in the South-East Asia both economically and militarily. It is, therefore, imperative that Northeast India, which is strategically positioned vis-a-vis South-East Asia, and is properly secured and developed.

India relies on crude oil imports. To meet its ever-increasing energy demand, India has been looking for alternative sources for as much as of 70 per cent of its energy requirement. The gas deal with Iran and the proposed pipeline through Pakistan stumbled upon many diplomatic hurdles. India turned to Myanmar and proposed a gas pipeline that would run from Arakan State (Myanmar) through Bangladesh to Kolkata. As Bangladesh was found too demanding in a quid pro quo bargain, India has been considering an alternative pipeline through its NER. Enhancing physical connectivity infrastructure is an important objective of regional energy cooperation. Since energy is a critical production input, any disruption to its supply can have serious economic consequences. The Asia-Pacific region has both large energy importing and exporting countries. Therefore, enhancing physical connectivity and building institutions to promote cooperation between the region's energy exporters and importers can ensure increased energy security. The Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway could provide viable models for an integrated regional power grid linking the demand and supply sources (UNESCAP 2012). Engaging Myanmar will benefit India in many ways: a land route through Myanmar to South-East Asia; gaining Myanmar support in dealing with armed separatists in Northeast India as well as Myanmar (Verghese 1998: 77-98).

Besides, India's greater economic and political engagements with Myanmar would help counter China's influence on the country. Of late, there has been a greater realisation of the strategic importance of the NER in the context of India–ASEAN relations. Insurgency, infrastructure deficits and underdevelopment across the region are the key deterrents that India should urgently address in order to remain a major power in

South-East Asia, Asia-Pacific and the world. In other words, development of the NER, through greater intervention in key areas like upgradation of infrastructure, improving connectivity and containing insurgency, is crucial to achieving the long-term economic goals of the country.

Participatory growth, which is the key to peace and prosperity in the conflict-ridden NER, would depend, inter alia, on initiatives taken to improve connectivity. Even in the context of India's LEP, it would be the improved infrastructure and connectivity that can significantly provide impetus to trade and other strategic engagements with South East Asian countries. This is a development strategy that will require huge investment in transport infrastructure. Establishment of well-equipped and efficient ICPs and LCSs, which are critical components of trade and transport infrastructure, at the border trade centres in the NER can help realise the full potential of border trade with Myanmar and Bangladesh, and, in the process, facilitate India-ASEAN integration with India's North East as the hub. Besides, the fact that the NER shares more than 95 per cent of its borders with the neighbouring countries has already provided the favourable conditions for the region to integrate with the East Asian and South-East Asian economies. This would call for a qualitative change in the relationship with the neighbouring countries and also for a defence-centric approach giving way to the one based on mutual economic gains. The peace and development of Northeast India critically depends on ending the region's economic isolation. The question is whether underdevelopment is caused by insurgency. If so, the development vision for NER should focus on containing insurgency and securing peace simultaneously.

The other view is that underdevelopment is the cause of insurgency, thereby suggesting the primacy of development in seeking an end to insurgency. However, the causality runs both ways. This is a situation where insurgency and underdevelopment feed on each other. The current official position advocates rapid economic development through huge public investment in infrastructure. Thus, the NER has been accorded priority in the new paradigm of India's LEP. However, private capital is unlikely to flow into the insurgency prone Northeast India. Therefore, public investment has to play a major role in transforming the Northeast. Thus, the states should ensure free and unhindered mobility of goods and services infrastructure across and within the region.

Northeast and Act East Policy: From Margin to Mainstream

Sreeradha Datta*

The Partition of India caused the severance of the inland water, road and railway communication between India and Pakistan. This had a drastic effect on the Northeast region, and closing the borders added to the isolation of the region. All these factors had an effect on the traditional economic linkages with the neighbouring areas and the Northeast (NE) region faced severe consequences and trauma.

While the Northeast region faced geographical isolation, the seeds of separateness during the colonial rule contributed to the cultural chasm and lack of psychological integration with the rest of the country. The nationalist struggle for freedom, which otherwise unified the diverse Indian population, did not touch the Northeast. The British encouraged the growth of tea plantation at the cost of other industries in the region; thus, with the partition, which cut off the existing transport and communication facilities, the economic prospects of the region plummeted further. Alongside sluggish economic growth, poor infrastructure, lack of market accessibility and under-utilisation of the natural resources of the region have plagued the economies of the states of the region. The region has long remained on the margins for a variety of reasons. But there has been a renewed interest in the Northeast, which is now showing signs of slowly moving out of its marginal status to emerging as a mainstream partner in India's growth story.

* The writer is Centre Head, Neighbourhood Studies and Senior Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation, and Non-Resident Senior Fellow, ISAS-NUS, Singapore. Views expressed are personal.

The Northeast region has assumed greater salience in contemporary times on account of three broad underlying foreign policy issues. First, India's keenness to deepen its engagement with its neighbours both with the South Asian and Southeast Asian economies; and for its newfound interest in making regionalism and sub-regionalism become effective in and around its neighbourhood. But more importantly, with recent global developments, especially in the Indo-Pacific region, India staking its rightful claim in the extended littorals is also a factor in its management of the Northeast states and how that region can dovetail with its larger leadership role in Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean.

For long, the Northeast region remained distant from mainland India and the issue of unresolved international borders also weighed on its deeper engagement with the rest of the country. For New Delhi, the NE became the domain for the security establishment to engage with. It was only when the "Look East Policy"(LEP) was initiated in the early 1990s, coinciding with the liberalising of the economy, that the view about the region changed, and the various stakeholders began an earnest discussion about its development and growth.

In the past, the North Eastern Council that was set up in the early 1970s, did not do much to change the popular narrative of a region that was troubled and isolated. Subsequently, the region received greater attention with Development of North East Region (DONER), a relatively new ministry that focused on the region's potential and examined ways and means to encourage economic development of the region. While the LEP did actually lead to establishing substantial terms of engagement with economies of the East and Southeast Asian countries, the growth in trade and commerce bypassed the northeast region. This gap was then attempted to close through the re-coined "Act East Policy" (AEP) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the post 2014 period, to include the Northeast region (NER) in India's outreach with the immediate and extended neighbourhood.

Making Northeast a Stakeholder

Towards actualising the "Act East Policy" (AEP), PM Modi unveiled a strong developmental plan in the Northeastern region including building a network of roads and highways, organising investments fairs, encouraging tourism and building high level of educational institutions for not only establishing connectivity within the region and to the rest of India, but also with its immediate neighbourhood, especially those in

the East. This dovetailed into the government's "Neighborhood First Policy" (NEP) which has been able to reach some clarity in its bilateral ties with Bangladesh, Myanmar in the East, as well as Nepal and Bhutan, its Himalayan neighbours. Thus, cross-border infrastructure development including improving physical connectivity between the neighbours and progress towards building an energy grid has seen new momentum in recent years.

According to the ongoing developmental plans under the Act East Policy and Neighbourhood First policy, some of which are already implemented and many underway, a network of transport corridors will connect the Northeast region with rest of India as well as the neighbourhood. Given the geography, the Northeast provides a natural corridor for India to the Eastern and South-Eastern neighbours. Certainly, as all economists and connectivity theorists have explained, transport corridors have tremendous potential for turning around the economy it traverses through, and undoubtedly the Northeast will feel the impact too. Thus, developments of road, airports, Inland water ways and railways that has been undertaken will ensure that the region is not only better connected with rest of India and within the Northeast region itself, but also with the neighbourhood. One of the Northeast Council reports, called for inclusive governance and rural development and identifies the single biggest constraint to accelerated growth as being poor infrastructure, which affects all the sectors of transport including road, rail, air, inland waterways, power and cyber and telecom connectivity.¹ There has been, a focussed attempt to address that anomaly. The entire transport network will take time to fully develop and be fully operationalised.

Roads

As per data from 2017, only 28.5% of the road in North-East states is paved (63.4% is average for the whole country) and only 53% of the national highway has more than 2-lane roads.² And as projected by several reports, road and growth of infrastructure is essential to the development of the NER economy and its ability to catch up with the national average. Thus, the "special Accelerated Road Development Program for North-East" in the "Twelfth Five Year Plan (from April, 2012 to March, 2017) was expected to change that.³ In recent times this region has seen an expansion of road networks as well as better maintenance, in some areas. One of the first significant road

expansion projects and upgradation plans begun with the implementation of Special Accelerated Road Development Programme (SADRP) in 2006. The first phase envisaged a 6,500 km (approved) network to be completed by 2016. Approximately 1,000 km of the proposed network had been completed till early 2014.⁴ Out of total length of 5,723 km (sanctioned), a length of 3,029 km, by end March 2019, has been completed against total expenditure of Rs. 30,315 crore.⁵ However, progress under the DONER scheme, including Arunachal Package of Roads and Highways, 1,514 km of road length worth Rs. 20,065 crore was completed in the last five years.⁶

Airports

A significant number of airports have been added in recent years. However, the weather conditions and terrain have made it difficult to maintain the operability of many of these airports. In 1970 Assam had Dibrugarh, Guwahati, Jorhat, Lilabari, Silchar, Tezpur, Imphal, Dimapur and Agartala. This became 18 stations in 1980s. In the 1990s air service continued in Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura; Arunachal and Meghalaya were discontinued as Vayudoot helicopter stopped their services.⁷ Presently, there are a total of 23 airports in the Northeastern region, of which 11 are operational.

Inland Water Transport

The Northeast region being riverine offers immense scope for development of Inland Water Transport (IWT). IWT has not received its due importance in the scheme of transport planning, fund allocation and policy priority after Independence.⁸ Presently, of the existing 111 National waterways, 20 are in the NE.⁹ During 2016, 20 waterways of NER were declared as National Waterways by National Waterways Act, 2016. These include one existing (NW2) and 19 new NWs (11 in Assam, 5 in Meghalaya, 1 each in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland). NW-2, i.e., River Brahmaputra between Dhubri (Bangladesh border) and Sadiya (Assam) was declared as NW-2 in 1988 and several projects for developing inland water transport infrastructure, namely fairway terminals and navigation aids, have been completed by Inland Waterway Authority of India (IWAI) thereafter.

Many projects are also under implementation. The River Barak (NW- 16) is being developed and feasibility studies for the remaining

18 NWs are underway.¹⁰ These NWs together provide hinterland connectivity to states of Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh also and connect these States with mainland India through the India–Bangladesh Protocol route. Northeastern waterways also hold significant importance in terms of enhanced trade & commerce across neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan and ASEAN nations.¹¹

The present government seems keen to consolidate and strengthen its position in the Northeast states. Having formed governments in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh the Bharatiya Janata Party hopes to consolidate its hold over the other states. The electoral gains in the region are considered critical in sending a strong message to its detractors as well as in implementing some of its national and foreign policy promises. Ensuring the success of Nagaland peace talks and moving towards a comprehensive agreement seems critical to its plan for the region.

The thrust on border and infrastructure development was necessary. India's engagement with Bangladesh and Myanmar was critical to the region's development. The changing political landscape in both of India's eastern neighbours have led to positive bilateral relations and also opened up the scope to widen the connectivity linkages to sub-regional levels.

The government has not only positioned the Northeast as the gateway to Southeast Asia and beyond but, through its multi-pronged efforts of a sustained engagement, developing physical connectivity and encouraging greater investment flows, has given rise to a distinct upbeat mood about the region. Presently this region has assumed unprecedented prominence for domestic and foreign policy factors. The new projects and policies involving the NER are a serious attempt to change the erstwhile narrative into a positive story in the journey of making of a new India. Hopefully this time round, the time is ripe for the drawing board plans to be finally translated into a reality towards substantially changing the scope and ethos of the Northeast region.

Presently, the Northeast economy is largely agrarian and dependent on mainland India for essential consumables, and there appears limited scope for exports emanating from this region. Somenoteworthy studies from the 1970s have identified the tremendous scope and potential that exists in NER. However, the potential in the NE needs to be tapped more fully. This is not to argue that the states have not developed and

not recorded some progress but their scope to engage and contribute to the economic corridors connecting the region to the neighbourhood seems minimal in the immediate context.

It needs to be remembered that the implementation of the entire corridor network through the NER will actualise over a decade or more. And for a fully functional cobweb of multi-modal transport network to develop that would take this much time, if not longer. The planned transport projects and the economic corridors have a significant gestation time and it any significant changes are unlikely immediately towards transforming the economy and making NER a stakeholder in the AEP or similar government policies. Although incremental successes in regional transportations have already been noted, for the NE economies (barring Assam, which has a larger role) to be an integral partner with India's outreach to India and the neighbouring states will be a work in progress.

The Northeast needs to play a more meaningful role in the AEP other than providing transit and transport corridors. The region will fully move from the margins to the mainstream when their economies are better integrated with the rest of India. While many of the plans have been initiated, they need to be fully implemented and well executed to ensure that NE joins the mainstream.

Notes

- ¹ Report, Northeastern Region Vision 2020, NEC/DONER, May 2018 at http://necouncil.gov.in/sites/default/files/Vision_2020.pdf.
- ² Preparatory Study for North East Connectivity Improvement Project in India, GOI, Nov. 2015
- ³ Preparatory Study for North East Connectivity Improvement Project in India Nh54 Bypasses Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Nippon Koei Co., Ltd. Nippon Koei India Pvt. Ltd. June 2017, https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/social_environmental/id/asia/south/india/c8h0vm00009um3lw-att/c8h0vm0000bchor8.pdf.
- ⁴ Ashwani Gupta. 2014. "Infrastructure Development in Northeast India: Ushering Peace in the Region." CLAWS, April 19.
- ⁵ Road network for development of North Eastern Region, Press Information Bureau. 4 July 2019.
- ⁶ North Eastern Region Vision 2020, Press Information Bureau. 25 July 2019. <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=192227>. In the last five years under the schemes of Ministry of DoNER, road projects worth Rs.1711.19 crore were sanctioned and under schemes of North

Eastern Council (NEC) Rs.1573.56 crore was released for development of infrastructure like roads and bridges, ISBT, airports, railway in North Eastern Region.

7. Air Connectivity in the Northeast Region.7 May 2007. DONER. https://mdoner.gov.in/contentimages/files/5_3.pdf.
8. Inland Waterways In NER, DONER. <https://mdoner.gov.in/infrastructure/inland-waterways-In-ner>.
9. National Waterways Projects in the North. July 26, 2018. East <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=181103>.
10. 100% subsidy is being provided by the Ministry of Shipping under a CentralSector Scheme for the development of IWT infrastructure in North Eastern States. <http://iwai.npglobal.in/departments/north-east-region-cell/north-eastern-waterways>.
11. North Eastern Waterways, IWAI. <http://iwai.npglobal.in/departments/north-east-region-cell/north-eastern-waterways>.

Dealing with Chinese Infrastructure and Propaganda

Claude Arpi*

Though the Himalayas are said to be impregnable, for centuries the border populations, including in the Northeast, have had close contacts with their kin on the “other side of the hill” as an author has put it. Till the mid-1950s, it was often for the good of both sides: exchanges, whether religious or spiritual, often Buddhism as a medium (i.e., the Tsari pilgrimage); economic, i.e., trade between the Indian and the Tibetan sides; or simply civilisational, have existed for centuries.

All this changed with the invasion of Tibet by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in 1950/51; even more unfortunately, contacts came to a complete halt in 1962 after the short border war between India and her new Northern neighbour, China. The Tibetans were no more the masters in their own country and were forbidden to meet their southern neighbours.

India’s Northeast, as well as Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim are still affected by these historical events; but it does not mean that the populations in the South are not aware of what is happening in the North.

Certain developments which have taken place in southern Tibet, mainly the Nyingchi and Shannan (Lhoka) Cities (formerly called Prefectures) of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), need to be looked into and analysed in this perspective.

The Xiaogang Villages

First and foremost are the Xiaogang villages. For the Communist Party, an important event took place in 1978: 18 farmers in a Xiaogang

* The writer is a noted author, journalist, historian, Tibetologist and China expert. The views expressed are personal.

village in the Anhui Province, signed a secret agreement to divide collectively- owned farmland into individual pieces and drop the collectivization of the Great Leap Forward (GLF), which between 1958 and 1960 resulted in some 40 million casualties; in Xiaogang itself, 67 villagers out of 120 had died of starvation between 1958 and 1960.

Forty years later, the name “Xiaogang” is being used for a different project: the building of several hundred “model” villages in Tibet, many along the border with India. This has extremely serious implications for India’s defence as well as for the local populations at the borders.

Yume, Xi’s Model Village

How it started? Soon after the conclusion of the 19th Congress, President Xi Jinping wrote a letter to two young Tibetan herders who had written to him introducing their village, Yume, north of Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. Let us not forget that some of the circles of this district are the most remote and under-developed of the country, the road hardly reaching Takshing. Any major development of the northern side can only create envy on the Indian side, even if the development on this side has greatly accelerated during the past couple of years.

To come back to Yume, in 2017 Xinhua reported that Xi “encouraged the herding family in Lhuntse County, near the Himalayas in southwest China’s Tibet Autonomous Region, to set down roots in the border area, safeguard the Chinese territory and develop their hometown.”

Xi acknowledged “the family’s efforts to safeguard the territory and thanked them for the loyalty and contributions they have made in the border area. Without the peace in the territory, there will be no peaceful lives for the millions of families,” he wrote. The two Tibetan girls, Drolkar and Yangzom had told Xi about their “experiences in safeguarding the border area and the development of their township over the years.” It appears that many Tibetans from the nearby villages now want to move their homes to Yume.

Govern Borders, Change Demography

For years, Xi’s plans for Tibet have been clear; the “core” leader had declared: “Govern the nation by governing the borders; govern the borders by first stabilising Tibet; ensure social harmony and stability in Tibet and strengthen the development of border regions.”

Over the last few years, the authorities in Tibet have started implementing the emperor's theory, while the Party's propaganda was doing its best to entice the local Tibetan population to side with the Communist Party; this is a serious development, unfortunately largely ignored in India.

Another important way to "govern the borders" is the development of strategic Xiaogang model villages. Since the village was adopted by President Xi Jinping, Yume had become the Model Township for the 200 or so other "Xiaogang" (moderately well-off) villages near the Indian border. If you look at it at the level of the entire Sino-Indian border, it probably means that China will have a new population of "migrants" selected for their "good behaviour" on the Indian border, a majority of them being Han. It includes workers who have come for the construction of these villages and who often stay on, marrying local Tibetan, Monpa or Lopa girls. The Xiaogang scheme was linked with two issues, namely, poverty alleviation and the defense of the borders. The new villagers are also known as "The guardians of the sacred land and the builders of happy homes."

Apart from Yume and Lepo and Marmang (the latter two in the Tawang sector), the mushrooming of new "model" villages on the Tibetan side of the Indian border has taken place along the entire border of Arunachal Pradesh till north of Kibithu in the east (with a War Memorial for the soldiers who died in Walong in 1962 as a bonus), passing by Metok, north of Upper Siang district. "Model villages" have also been built in the Chumbi Valley (Yatung), near the trijunction Nepal-India-Tibet (Purang) and on the Ladakh border (Chiakang).

2015: The Sixth Tibet Work Forum

Few realised that the Sixth Tibet Work Forum, held in Beijing on August 24 and 25, 2015 would be a turning point for the plateau. Tibet Work Forums are large meetings called every 5 or 10 years to discuss the CCP's Tibet policies. They are attended by all the members of the powerful Politburo's Standing Committee, members of the Central Committee, senior PLA generals, United Front Work Department officials, regional leaders, etc.

The gathering was presided over by President Xi Jinping. Addressing the Forum, Xi spoke of the promotion of the economic and social development of Tibet; he asked for more efforts to promote economic growth and all-round social progress in Tibet and Tibetan-inhabited areas.

The TAR and Tibetan-inhabited areas in four provinces (Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai and Yunnan) were clubbed together as far as Beijing's policies for Tibet are concerned. Xi said that Tibet "has entered a critical stage toward fulfilling the country's goal of building a moderately prosperous society in a comprehensive way." "Moderately prosperous society" would become the leitmotif of the central government in the following years.

The Chinese President asserted: "Development, which aims to improve living conditions for various ethnic groups and beef up social cohesion, should be advanced in a prudent and steady manner, and all measures taken should be sustainable."

The dual objective of improving the "local conditions" and "beefing up social cohesion" pervaded the speech of the President who urged "bettering basic public service and adopting targeted measures to alleviate poverty."

All this is linked with the decision to develop tourism as the main activity on the borders, with the area soon becoming a large entertainment park, thousand times larger than Disneyland. Beijing began marketing the Land of Snows and the Southern borders as the ultimate "indigenous" spot for the Chinese to spend their holidays, it is Southern Tibet's USP (Unique Selling Proposition).

President Xi and his colleagues have found a sophisticated way to submerge (or immerse) the Tibetan population under waves of Han Chinese and simultaneously creating envy on the Indian side of the border. It was a turning point because for the first time perhaps "dual-use" of infrastructure was institutionalized. Any road, airport, railway line built thereafter would be for dual-use, civilian and military. From a strategic point of view, this move would completely tilt the balance in favour of China, vis-à-vis India which was (and still is) struggling with an Inner Line Permit system and an extremely slow infrastructure development in border areas. An unsaid objective is to tell the populations the south of the McMahon Line: "Look how much better your kin under the Communist Party of China are faring compared to you in India."

New Railway Lines on the Plateau

On June 25, 2021, the Lhasa to Nyingchi ("Lalin") railway was put into operation "marking an end to the history of railway inaccessibility in the southeastern part of Southwest China's TAR," stated the China

National Railway Corporation (CNRG). According to a statement given to *The Global Times*: “Its completion and opening to traffic is of great significance to strengthening contacts and exchanges between Tibet and other provinces and regions, and plays an important role in maintaining ethnic unity, consolidating stability in the border areas, as well as boosting rural revitalization.”

The “Lalin” section is an important part of the Sichuan-Tibet Railway; though relatively easier to build than the eastern section (Nyingchi-Chengdu), it has a total length of 435 kilometers with 34 new stations. It starts in Lhasa with the terminus will be at Nyingchi City and follows the Yarlung Tsangpo River on most of its route. The construction of this section started at the end of 2014; it took some seven years to complete the entire project and the speed of the train will be 160 km/hour; it is the first electrified railway in Tibet.

The Railway line crosses the Yarlung Tsangpo 16 times. The railway bridges use large-span bridge structures: “The mountains are high in water depth, the rivers are rushing, the technology is special, and the construction is extremely difficult. There are 14 high-risk tunnels out of 47, of which 7 are extremely high-risk tunnels,” explained China Railway’s 11th Bureau.

A few years ago, Shen Yubin, a project manager for the China Railways Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway Second Division had affirmed: “The total length of bridges and tunnels on the Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway is 331 km, 75 per cent of the total distance of the line. Of these, there are 120 bridges totaling 84 km, which accounts for 21 per cent of the length of the line. As a single-track railway, there have been difficulties in construction and logistics transportation while building the Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway.”

The objectives of maintaining ethnic unity, consolidating stability in the border areas and boosting rural revitalization, should be kept in mind while analysing the implications of the new development.

Sinicisation of “Indian” Tribes

On August 1, 2017, Chairman Xi Jinping officiated during the mega parade at the Zhurihe Combined Tactics Training Base in Inner Mongolia on the occasion of the PLA’s 90th anniversary. That day Xi ordered the PLA to be prepared for battle and to defeat “all enemies that dare offend” his country. Was India, who had dared to challenge the mighty PLA when Beijing tried to change the status quo at the tri-junction

between Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim, targeted? It was indeed a huge display of military power; Chinese state agencies reported that some 40 per cent of the weapons on show had never before been seen by the public.

Well, Chairman Xi has a problem; a serious problem. Can he speak of a “Chinese Dream” or “Peaceful Rise” while threatening to go to war against those who dare to oppose China? It explains why Beijing wages other types of war. After the Gulf War, two senior Colonels (corresponding to brigadiers in India), Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, wrote a modern war treatise entitled, *Unrestricted Warfare: China’s Master Plan to Destroy America*. Their book was widely read among the strategic community who saw in it the way China would fight tomorrow’s war. One chapter is consecrated to “Ten Thousand Methods Combined as One: Combinations That Transcend Boundaries.”

China knows that a conventional war would bring chaos to its economic development, the leadership in Beijing believes that a few “cuts” here and there, could teach India a severe lesson; one of the “methods” could be to influence Tibet’s Southern neighbours. The recent construction of two villages in Bhutan (one on the Amo chu in the South and one in the northern part of the Dragon Kingdom), reported in the Indian media are an indication.

At the same time, Beijing discretely put pressure on some “Bhutanese liberals” to reject India’s support. Just go to Thimphu, you will see a huge statue of Buddha dominating the entire valley. Ask who financed it? People usually remain vague: “Probably money from the North”, some Bhutanese will finally tell you; it gives the direction from where the pressure comes.

The Three Warfares

In 2003, China’s Central Military Commission approved the concept of “Three Warfares”; one is “the coordinated use of strategic psychological operations.” In recent years, Beijing has intensified the implementation of this military doctrine of different warfares; the border populations are particularly susceptible to being targeted by China.

To give an example, a couple of years ago, an article published in the *China Travel Guide* magazine promoted Ziro as a tourist destination for Chinese travelers. Why “promote” Ziro, headquarters of the lower Subansiri of Arunachal Pradesh?

The answer is simple: For Beijing, Ziro is part of southern Tibet and the local population hence is Chinese. Six pages of the magazine describe in detail the “Chinese” tribe, the Lhoba Apatanis. Lhoba (or Lopa) are usually diverse Tibetan-speaking tribes living around Pemako, a region in south-eastern Tibet, north of the McMahon Line. Wikipedia says: “The term is obscure ...largely promulgated by the Chinese Government, which officially recognises Lhoba as one of the 56 ethnic groups in China.”

In its introduction, the article explained that the Apatanis are “the most beautiful ethnic people” ...of China of course, adding that “in the Tibetan area of southern Tibet, there is a tribe named Apatani. The women of this tribe are known to be the most beautiful of all Tibetan tribes. But their beautiful appearance can also become a burden. In order to protect themselves from other tribal intruders’ attacks, they make themselves less attractive, by plugging a big cork into the nose... but for the Apatanis in southern Tibet, this is considered as a protection to live a longer life.”

The article described the most important Apatani settlements “in the valleys of the southern mountainous region of Tibet, where 26,000 Apatanis live.” It meant that though a part of Arunachal Pradesh, China considers Ziro as Chinese. This article seems a determined step toward the assimilation of Arunachal Pradesh.

That is not all. In recent years, China has released a series of professionally produced films on the “tribes of southern Tibet.” It makes many in the border areas of Arunachal Pradesh envious: “Why is China promoting our culture better than our own Government?” This has been passionately debated on social media.

The fact that the Union government has so far ignored the issue is dangerous to say the least. While the officers in Delhi have not paid adequate attention to the Tanis or other tribes of Arunachal (or elsewhere in India), China is slowly scoring crucial points and winning battles in propaganda/information warfare. How long can Indiacomplacently ignore the danger?

Why can’t Doordarshan start documenting the rich culture of Arunachal (and the Northeast in general) and invite Indian and foreign visitors to come and see for themselves the beauty of the people, their culture, their villages ...and their wiser sustainable way of life?

For this, New Delhi would have to liberalise the antiquated Inner Line Permit/Protected Area Permit system and replace it by e-passes

based on valid India identification documents such as Aadhar or PAN Cards.

Is the Chinese Model a Success?

On June 25, an article on a Chinese website,¹ explained that rural tourism in the TAR brought CNY1.217 billion as revenue in 2020; it observed: “In recent years, rural tourism has gradually become a popular tourist method. Rural tourism is a new bright spot in the economic growth of the TAR. According to statistics, in 2020, rural tourism in the TAR has received 10.61 million tourists. ...The tourism industry has driven 125,000 farmers and herdsman to transfer employment.”

This raises a serious question: Are the Tibetan populations happy to be displaced in such a brutal manner?

On June 14, *China News Network*² tells the story of the “last hunter in Metok” who had to “fast forward” from primitive hunting to modern rural life in 20 years. The article takes that the example of 48-year-old Tashi in Metok County of Nyingchi City who is from the Lopa ethnic tribe: “Around the fall of 2006, he hunted a medium-sized black bear who came to steal corn on his farm by using a trap set. This became his last hunt. After that, putting down his bows and arrows and putting away the hunting organs, Tashi transformed into a farmer.” It is not mentioned if it was from his own free-will; but considering other cases, he was probably forced.

The article describes the surroundings: “primitive forests and wild bananas are lush, and cuckoos can be heard in the village. The road from Damu town to the outside world is built on a steep mountainside, which looks extremely thrilling.”

Tashi told the interviewer that in the forest, everything was abundant: “deer, wild boar, takin, black bear, musk deer, bison... Although my family was poor when I was young, but because of the rich local products, I would not go hungry.”

The Forestry and Grassland Bureau of Metok County has depicted Tashi as the last professional hunter in Tibet: “Metok has superior climatic conditions, forming a unique typical three-dimensional climate with tropical, subtropical, temperate and frigid zones coexisting, and the resources of wild animals and plants are extremely rich.” Now Tashi only works for Han tourists.

Though he can't answer the question, is he really happy?

The tribal populations of the Indian side, though they often (rightly) complain about the lack of facilities on the borders, should also look at this aspect. It is of course not a reason for the government to not improve their lives. In the meantime, Delhi has taken some measures to develop the infrastructure on the border; it is a first step, but India should nevertheless closely watch the Chinese propaganda campaigns about the Lopa and other tribes living on both sides of the border.

Chinese propaganda could become a powerful weapon of destabilisation, if not countered effectively.

Notes

1. See: <https://www.tibet3.com/news/zangqu/xz/2021-06-25/225864.html>.
2. The last hunter in Metok, Tibet: “fast forward” from primitive hunting to modern rural life in 20 years; see: http://m.tibet.cn/cn/news/zx/202106/t20210614_7018739.html.

Dams and Disasters: A Fallacy of Development in India's Northeast

Amita Singh*

Abstract

India's Northeast is privileged to have ample natural resources such as hills, rivers and forests. It is extremely rich in socio-cultural life and traditions, which generate high reverence for their sacred land. Much of their land is still under community ownership. The communities over the hills and those in the plains have different interests as the latter is politically stronger than the hill inhabitants and this impacts disaster management. The best dam sites are obviously found on the hills inhabited by tribes, but which are also key areas where land acquisition at times takes place against the wishes of local people. Considering the fact that almost 168 old, new, and under-construction hydroelectricity projects are coming up in this region which appears to be unbridled growth after the announcement of government's "Look and Act East Policy" there is greater need to open these projects to local consultative processes in Environment Impact Analysis (EIA). There are several hydroelectricity projects in the Northeast, which are allegedly for the benefit of those outside the region. Several organisations have protested against these projects highlighting many lacunae to be treated in dam and disaster policies. Government needs enlightened leadership besides the indispensability of clear accountability, appropriate EIA and consultative decision making to lift the opaque veil that hurts the northeast when dams are built over their rivers.

* The writer is former Professor of Law, Governance & Disaster Management, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Views expressed are personal.

Northeastern India as India's future powerhouse

Of all the renewable sources of electricity generation, hydropower is globally considered as one of the most cost-effective. The prosperity of the US, Canada and many other developed countries has been attributed to their power sufficiency achieved through large reservoirs over river valleys to tap hydro-electricity generation. Given the comparative benefits, the cost of hydroelectricity is relatively low, pollution is minimal, but its installation cost is one of the highest and dam-led disasters are some of the most threatening to surrounding life and property. Therefore, despite being a competitive source of renewable electricity with minimal operating costs, these dams have provoked some of the most disconcerting people's movements across the world. In India's Northeastern states, which lie over the Himalayas with many river basins fed by glaciers, dam sites carry a high threat perception for local residents.

Dam Scare in the Northeast

Manipur has witnessed severe protests by locals of Ukhrul, Churachandpur and Thoubal against dams which have spread to North Bengal. The Loktak Hydroelectric project over Leimatak river in Manipur followed by Mapithal and Khuga dams forced local communities to raise their voice against what they saw as a rush for dams without full evaluation of their seismic and environmental impacts. Similar deficits in procedures were found in the Mawphu dam across river Umiew and Myntdu dam across river Myntdu in East Khasi Hills and West Jaintia Hills districts, respectively in Meghalaya or Mizoram's Tlawng Damover Tlawng River near Lungleng and the Lower Suabansiri hydropower project being conducted in Assam without adequate study on its downstream impact in Assam. The Lepcha community felt affected when the Teesta III project was brought to Sikkim's Teesta river. These protests were led by local groups such as the Centre for Research and Advocacy Manipur, an indigenous rights organisation in Manipur to Assam-based organisations such as the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), All Assam Student Union (AASU), Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba-Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) along with several others.

The media pays inadequate attention to the problems related to the development of the Northeast. In 2018 both Kerala and Nagaland suffered flash floods causing high damage and losses. Yet, the media

highlighted the Idukki dam mismanagement behind the Kerala floods, there was no mention of Nagaland's Doyangdam floods. The Nagaland flood was so severe that it cut off three districts of Tuensang, Kiphire and Phek from the rest of the state for about 15 days, yet it missed the attention it deserved. This makes the dam in the northeast a living fear for the local communities for the price they pay in terms of devastating disasters while the benefits are reaped by outsiders. At least in a preliminary observation, a loss of three major resources is a direct consequence of dams; loss of forest and wild life, ravaging landslides in inundated villages, and a loss of traditional livelihood.¹ Villagers found a drastic reduction of fish in downstream flow of rivers and also sandstone, which was washed downstream and provided livelihood for the catchment communities.

The Northeast, especially Arunachal Pradesh, is called India's future powerhouse with the government's plan of generating 63,000 MW of hydel power through 168 dams on its perennial rivers. There has been a cumulative impact on the region through proliferating dams such as 26 dams on Teesta river basin alone, and additional 150 in the Brahmaputra basin since the Central Electricity Authority's (CEA) "Preliminary Ranking Study" ranking the Brahmaputra river system as the highest-ranked site for dams. The Brahmaputra river system is distinguished by its glacial origins, location in a highly seismic zone, heavy and intense rainfall resulting in "flashy" rivers, a high sedimentation rate which demonstrates aquifer connect with the wetlands in the plains. The basin of the Barak river is building up Tipaimukh Dam, which threatens to disrupt local ecological processes providing several ecosystem services to communities. Notwithstanding the power generation² of approximately 19,098 MW from these dams in the Northeastern states, the region itself barely needs more than 5,700 MW, almost one-third of what they are producing.

These dam schemes are being developed by agencies such as the National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC), North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO), the Brahmaputra Board and State Electricity Boards, which are all located in the northeast but looking after power generation largely for the rest of India. There are 900 mini and micro hydel projects as well which do not bring much anxiety and protests. Government has been adamant in insisting on a growth-oriented development of the region, but local communities have repeatedly insisted on more benign alternative strategies which

incorporate the region's fragility, vulnerability and culture in the developmental framework of the region.

The two imperatives of hydroelectricity projects in the northeast which generate local antagonism against Delhi-based government are:

- 1.Land Acquisition & Loss of Livelihood
- 2.Socio-environmental Impact Analysis of Dams

Land Acquisition & Loss of Livelihood

Northeastern states have largely been pursuing land-based occupations and so their land matters to them as much as their lives. This region of India, composed of eight states, which are one of the country's richest biodiversity terrain with unique flora, fauna and nature-friendly community practices, has the largest number of community-based indigenous practices as part of their development. The fact that land matters more than any other resource in lives of northeast communities is evident by several "do or die" land-based movements in the region. Their livelihood is severely affected³ once dams are built over their sacred land of forests and rivers.

Land acquisition is perceived as life threatening by local communities. This threat is further increased when there is an impression that the government is bypassing the consultative process to change relationships over land. Since 2019, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has been insisting that the North-eastern States bring their infrastructure projects under the purview of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA). Governments of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim were instructed to emulate the RERA models of other states like Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. The government's "Look and Act East Policy" has been given high priority to the development of the North-eastern States and RERA would facilitate in the task of land-based development. The concern among the local communities is that the Rs 13,000 crore investment proposed from the Government of Japan will be used for expanding implanted projects. This form of development ignores a large number of diverse tribal communities with distinctive socio-cultural practices which have influenced land relations, land use and ownership of land in the North-eastern States. Traditional land ownership is a custom based feature coming down from previous generations. In Assam, all tribal land belonged to the District Council and the village chieftain distributed the land among the villagers. The holders of these lands did not have any

rights of heritability or transferability over the lands that they could use. The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1886, was instituted to restrict the transfer of land rights to tribals and non-permanent residents. Arunachal Pradesh with 65% of tribal population has hierarchies of customary laws to manage land, but no individual ever had land ownership. It was only in 2018 that the Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement and Records) (Amendment) Bill, 2018 was passed by the state Assembly to confer ownership of land for the first time to citizens. The Khasi community of Meghalaya administered its land through the Dorbar Shnong (village councils) and forest land was converted to community land by these councils while working in tandem with the elders of the tribes.

Different community cultures, traditions and environmental practices have flourished in building the resilience of local inhabitants. Once a dam is built over a river it's not one but many communities which at one stroke are divested of their livelihood, cultural practices and a historical context of their lives. If we take just one example of the Barak river, which starts at district Senapati of Manipur, we would know how a network of various tribal communities remain aligned to their different cultural practices around river usage. At Senapati district of Manipur the dominant tribes of Poumai, Mao, Maram, Thangal, and Zeliangrong Naga tribes inhabit its catchment but from here the river enters district Tamenglong inhabited by Zeliangrong (Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei) and Rongmei tribes. The river then moves to Churhandpur district where the Thadou, Hmar, Paite, Vaiphei and Zou tribes are linked to the river in their own cultural manner. The river takes a right turn to enter Cachar area of Assam where Barman's of Barak valley and Dimasa of Dima Hasaocomplete right turn, it enters Assam in the Cachar plain where, again, The Kacharis, who call themselves Barman in Barak valley and Dimasa in the Dima Hasao, district use its waters before the river enters Bangladesh. With so many dominant voices affected by one dam over one river alone to influence its flow, it calls for a greater consideration towards diverse cultural forms which may be threatened due to a rapidity of constructing mega dams in the region.

It is amply demonstrated in the above section of this paper on why northeast has a long history of community led protests against landacquisition. In 2013 the eviction of indigenous communities of Singda New Bazar for the expansion of Singda dam area by the Government of Manipur affected communities belonging to Vaiphei,

Kharam, Ireng Naga, and Meitei tribes of Singda New Bazar, Senapati and Imphal West District of Manipur. A more recent protest against land acquisition was in 2015 against the three contentious bills affecting tribal rights over their land. Nine young boys from the protesting local community were killed in an encounter with the police and the communities kept their bodies for 600 days till the government withdrew the order for acquisition in 2017. In such a background it may not be a smooth ride for the government to declare land acquisition for even one-third of 168 hydroelectric projects in the region as it is sure to cause anxiety, disruptions and a feeling of exclusion.

Socio-environmental Impact Analysis of Dams

The North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Ltd (NEEPCO), which has the highest potential to construct and operate hydro projects in highly difficult and geo-technically sensitive terrain of this region acknowledges in its opening objectives that “the relationship between the indigenous people of North East India and the available natural resources around them is multi-faceted. The people are dependent on the God gifted natural resources in general and forests in particular for their livelihood and habitation. Their very existence may be threatened by unplanned development leading to the destruction of forests and other natural resources.”⁴ At the ground level there is more defiance of established EIA practices than a thought for sustainable development.

Most dam-related projects have been conducted without adequate standards of local community consultative and geo-seismic technical process. When the Citizen’s Concern for Dams and Development (CCDD), a coalition of about 45 organisations in Manipur, demanded that NEEPCO should present before them the Environment Impact Assessment report for the Tipaimukh Dam, their demands were brushed aside as the reports were too technical and since the region is politically sensitive such reports are protected under strict confidentiality.

The most troubling aspect of EIAs conducted for the dams was their oversight or skirting of the serious aspect of geo-seismic studies. As a result, many critical issues such as the rapid recession of glaciers, which could have significant impacts on river regimes by forming glacial lakes, flash floods and also massive landslides has not attracted attention and safety measures to protect local people from ever increasing disasters. Many of the rivers of the Brahmaputra basin have their origin in glaciers in the eastern Himalayas and are sustained by glacial melt, snow melt run-off and monsoon rainfall. Glaciers have already melted

into half their earlier surface area in a span of around 100 years and Himalayas have been on the forefront to have retreated faster than any other snow frontier in the world. The Working Group on Himalayan Glaciology headed by Syed Iqbal Hasnain at the International Commission for Snow and Ice (ICSI) of 1999 had warned that at this rate glaciers are likely to disappear by 2035. This ironically falls around the time when each country would be displaying the progress they have made in adhering to the objectives of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by the 2030 deadline. A 1999 study of the International Commission for Snow and Ice had warned of short lives for glaciers in the Himalayas.

This would lead to increased summer flows in some river systems for a few years, followed by a reduction as the glaciers disappear. However, the EIAs conducted for most dams lacked in collecting information such as quantity of melt water yield, water's chemical and sediment characteristics which is vital for the safety and maintenance of the hydroelectric installations and reservoirs in the Himalayas. In recent years, there have been no serious efforts to investigate the impact of Himalayan glaciers on the hydrological regime and climate even though after the tragic Kedarnath floods of Uttarakhand in 2013 and the latest February 2021 glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF) at Dhauli Ganga river of the same state washing away the Rishi Ganga and Dhauli Ganga Hydro Power Projects. This GLOF in the northeast may not be a localized incident and may have international repercussions affecting Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar as well. (see Map 1)

Map 1: Network of Rivers in the North Eastern India which have 168 dams



Source: Rivers of North East India available at <https://www.google.com/search>, accessed 10th July 2021.

It's noteworthy that GLOFs and associated risks have not found a mention in the risk assessments and EIA reports of dams over the northeastern rivers. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) took many decades to come up with basic guidelines to manage GLOF in October 2020. However, the Incident Response System (IRS) coordinated by the local administration through the Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) is still a far cry in the northeastern hills. It was left to the State governments to commission and maintain EOCs for the coordination of human resources, relief supplies and equipment alongside the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the EOCs but these have not even started in the northeast. The state governments were expected to take advantage of modern technologies and tools, such as GIS maps, scenarios and simulation models for effectively responding to disasters but this depends upon how serious the NDMA is for monitoring and supervising these initiatives at the state levels as per the Disaster Management Act of 2005 and how far is the State Government ready with time, resources and knowledge to lead these developments through their respective State Disaster Management Authorities.

One last factor which has been ignored in the northeast is that of Early Warning Systems (EWS) to control floods. Communities could stay prepared if EWS are installed in flood vulnerable areas. Dams increase vulnerability to floods and therefore EWS should get a priority if dams are being pushed into northeast. It is not only about human lives but most communities are emotionally and economically dependent upon animals of all types and a sophisticated installation of EWS in villages could provide time for rescue operations which could save them of much loss and damage. Smaller initiatives as grain storage centres, safe shelter home for animals, dispensaries, epidemic control measures are yet to be taken up even in the catchment of dam areas. Rehabilitation centres and orphanages have mostly been managed by the local church and state governments have yet to focus in this area. EIAs are ritually done without a heart that could resonate with the needs of local communities and consequently produce more antagonism, increased project cost and debris of failed initiatives.

Conclusion

The Northeast is a land which requires special attention and environmentally safe policies of development. It appears that NEEPCO

and NHPC may not be the appropriate organisations to be allocated the task of EIA for dams as the plaintiff and the judge cannot be the same. This defies a basic principle of governance, which derails accountability and transparency in the process of decision making. Local communities should find a place in the consultative process and policies should be liberated from the control of engineers, architects and contractors who have not been able to view development as a holistic democratic process and not an ambition for cash returns.

References

1. Sharma, C.K. 2020. “Building India’s Future Powerhouse, Discourses of “development” and popular resistance in Northeast India” in Manisha Rao (ed.) *Reframing the Environment: Resources, Risk and Resistance in Neoliberal India*. Routledge.
2. Kothari, S. and Wangkheirakpam, R. 2003. Dams in the north- east will also ruin livelihoods, *Down to Earth*, 31st Dec. Available at <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/dams-In-the-northeast-will-also-ruin-livelihoods-13890> (accessed on 6th July 2021).
3. *Ibid.*
4. NEEPCO website available at <https://neepco.co.in/projects/hydro-projects>

The Tibetan State and its Margins: Encounters with the Non-Buddhist Societies of Eastern Arunachal Pradesh

Sarah Hilaly*

Introduction

State-making is a complex process where a polyglot of communities are incorporated as unities within a sovereignty: an extractive tax regime, organisation of corvee labour, legitimation achieved through organised religion, administrative, fiscal discipline and warfare are some of its key characteristics. In the discourse of James Scott (2009), the Zomia represents the state and its margins straddling across the highlands of Vietnam to north-eastern India across the five Southeast Asian nations of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Burma and the four provinces of China viz., Guangxi, Yunnan, Guizhou and parts of Sichuan. These non-state spaces are characterised in this schema by altitude and the territorially marked periphery of nine pre-modern agrarian states, a transnational space with multiple ecological niches. To Scott, the state cosmologies reflected either the Indic or Chinese centred on the mandala structure in the lowlands, which have existed in symbiosis with the hill societies.

In this representation of Southeast Asia, East Asia and South Asia, what has been missing is the story of the Tibetan State straddling a vast plateau and its periphery in the southern Himalayas. Is this exclusion because Tibet is not considered a state? Within the scholarship of Tibetology explorations on the polity formation in Tibet and the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan and Sikkim does unravel the existence of a sophisticated state structure within the cosmology of Buddhism.

* The writer is professor, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh)

Yet the discourse of this state and its periphery seems to take little cognisance of the operation of the mandala structure and its implications for the relationship with the self-governed and stateless in its south and the east.

In the colonial discourse prior to 1950, Tibet received labels of being either “stateless” or representative of a “feudal structure.” According to Georges Dreyfus (1995: 122) Tibet is depicted as a “unique civilization” thus escaping any fixed categorisation. Being represented as a “Buddhist society” the complex interaction of the monastic structures and the polity offering ideological legitimation has escaped scrutiny. The model of the union of the political and temporal power became a central template in the organisation of the political and legal system in articulating the Buddhist doctrine. In the seventh century Songstan Gampo a local king of Yarlung valley unified not only the tribes along the Tsangpo, but non-Tibetans as well, along its west and north where Buddhism assumed a unifying force, acquiring strength in the eighth century, till the collapse of the Empire in 842. (Aris 1987: 134). The current monastic tradition on which the polity is centred on the Dalai Lama evolved after the collapse of this empire.

The contradictions between the Buddhist preceptors (who were awarded royal patronage and granted land) and ordinary subjects and political nobility supported by the Tibetan kings was at the heart of the power struggle. The early kings were viewed as incarnates of a celestial bodhisattva. (Dreyfus: 125-126). This struggle to reconcile the specialised spiritual and temporal planes within the institution of the king resulted in the collapse of the dynasty and the Empire. Buddhism too was eclipsed with the polity fragmented among local power structures and even scions of royal families held power. With the revival of Buddhism in the late tenth and the early eleventh century, the remnants of royalty evolved a system of vesting power to fully ordained priests. The institution of the Dalai Lama derived its legitimacy from the patron Buddhist saint of Tibet Avalokiteśvara. (Dreyfus). The power structure thus rested in the nexus of the old ruling families and the monks. This unity of the sacred and secular power led to local polities being controlled through the principle of heredity.

The strengthening of the strategy of reincarnation undermined the authority of the royal families, and the triumph of the Gelugpa sect in

1642 marked the dominance of a religious genealogy. This shift from a clan based non-religious political authority to an authority based on religious genealogy provided a new dimension to the unity of religion and the political sphere. In 1751, with the formal declaration of this ideology, a “limited bureaucracy with financial and judicial powers emerged providing a definite structure” (Dreyfus: 135). The realm of the religious and the secular was segregated, which was manifested within the administrative structure and replicated over all territory under the control of the Lhasa Government. The key functions of the government were to administer, collect taxes, store and redistribute revenues and adjudicate based on the Buddhist legal codes.

Scholars who argue about the nature of the state structure classify it as a semi-bureaucratic state with centralised control over finance and the judiciary. The system represented a balance between aristocratic and monastic elements and between centralised and decentralised authority. This structure was accepted and incorporated into the governance structures in Central Tibet, Khams and Amdo. The attempt of the various schools of Buddhism to expand their sphere of influence in the neighbourhood embroiled the country in conflicts with Mongolia and China. Without going into the debate whether it was a state or a galactic polity as discussed by Stanley Tambiah, it needs to be argued that this religious state also colonised at multiple levels along its fringes. In the realm of religion, the Lamaist pantheon developed a complex iconography, which incorporated a stratum of pre-Buddhist deities of the localities.

The transplantation of the monastic structure into newer areas meant an expansion into areas through religion and the introduction of fiscal regimes. Population expansion was another means of colonisation. Trade too was a crucial instrument to control communities on the periphery of the state. The association of the state religion with notions of non-violence and renunciation made it difficult to visualise the Tibetan state representing an extractive regime based on taxation and corvee. The current status of Tibet, with governance being under stress due to their loss of independence to the Chinese, has nuanced our ways of understanding the Tibetan state vis-à-vis its neighbours in its southern Himalayan borderlands. I wish to contextualise the mechanisms of control adopted by the Tibetan state in dealing with the tribes occupying the eastern most part of Arunachal Pradesh within the framework of colonisation.

The Spatial Dimensions

Arunachal Pradesh is situated in the easternmost extremity of India. It shares an international boundary within the contiguous Himalayan range with Bhutan, the Tibetan plateau in its north until it reaches the tri-junction comprising of shared place with Southeast China, Tibet and Myanmar. Here it turns towards the south, sharing space with Myanmar till the borders of present Tuensang district of Nagaland. It skirts the Brahmaputra valley on its south. As many as 26 tribes and 110 sub-tribes inhabit the state of Arunachal Pradesh with communities continuously coalescing identities as well splitting identities to create new ones. The dominant communities inhabiting the region are the Monpa, Aka (Hrusso), Miji (Dammai), Khoa (Buguns), Sherdukpen, Nyishi, Hill Miri, Apatani, Adi, Mishmi, Noctes, Tangsa, Wancho, Memba, Khamba, Mayor, Jakhring & Na. Mid-20th century migrants are the Lisu, Chakma and Hajong. Tibetan refugees were settled in specified areas in a few places in Arunachal Pradesh.

With numerous passes across its eastern and western frontiers, Arunachal Pradesh received populations from both the north and the east. Its spatial dimensions have rendered it possible for migration of population sharing physical features, religion, livelihood and socio-culture of Tibet among those inhabiting its extreme north viz., the Monpas, Sherdukpens, Membas, Khambas, Meyor and Zakhring. A few tribes in the east like the Khamptis and Singphos as 18th century migrants from Myanmar reflected aspects of livelihood, religion, polity formations and socio-cultural facets of the Shan states in the east. Tribes like the Noctes, Tangsas and Wanchos share the culture of the Nagas reflected in their traditional everyday practices, while among the Noctes the influence of Vaishnavism from its south is found. Spatial contiguities have resulted in shared cultural and religious affiliations of the ethnic communities living on its fringes.

In the context of the Tibetan state apparatus and everyday socio-religious practices have been replicated among the tribes mentioned as sharing contiguous areas in the north of Arunachal Pradesh. Many non-Buddhist communities have been within the Tibetan state through the apparatus of trade and extension of the taxation net. It would be pertinent to look at how the structure of taxation was extended and the incorporation into the cultural matrix through the concept of the "hidden land" (Pemako) as an ideological instrument for active colonisation. According to R.A. Stein, for all Tibetan speaking populations, the

pervasive cultural motif consists of taming the mind through monastic discipline and taming the landscape through the taming of demons and spirits through the mediation of figures like Padmasambhava and others (Hay-Edie 2001:48). I discuss in this paper the non-Buddhist highland communities south of the McMahon line excluding the present district of Tawang, Menchuka (Pachaksiri) and Mago (Huber 2011: 261). In conformity with the characteristics of pre-modern states, which have not been defined by boundaries, the control of Lhasa over its peripheries operated “through a complicated network of overlapping alliances” (Dreyfus: 136). The result of these encounters in the cultural attitudes displayed by the Tibetans influenced the social-cultural practices along with creation of hybrid identities at the points of contact need to be explored. Despite intervening periods of stress in the relationship with the self-governed through subtle state interventions, trade links were maintained.

Alistair Lamb in his book *The China-India Border*, according to Toni Huber, has laid bare the social attitudes among the Tibetans towards the highlanders of the south (Huber). The generic term *Loba* or *Klopa* meaning barbarian/savage within their civilisational discourse was in currency regarding the communities inhabiting Arunachal Pradesh. The Tibetan’s attitudes towards such communities were marked by aloofness based on notions of cultural and ethnic superiority. The visits of the southern neighbours into Tibetan territory for trade were generally restricted to travel within one day’s march, within the first Tibetan settlements in the frontier. They were also dissuaded from halting overnight within the frontier settlements (Huber). Among the merchandise traded, there was a demand for slaves who were incorporated into the Tibetan domestic and agricultural labour network. These fringes in their vocabulary of the state constituted a liminal zone “beyond the pale” of their society and here socially and politically ostracised people were incarcerated in penal colonies located along this zone. This space represented a zone of relative freedom from the forces of the state and its ideology, hence holding the promise for expansion, exploitation and adventurism (Huber). A nexus of political, economic and religious expansion of the network of holy places took place across the northern frontiers of Arunachal Pradesh. The fact that the “Outer Line” was not demarcated till 1911 when the “McMahon Line” came into being facilitated these intrusions into the areas through multiple instruments.

Ideology and Control in the Southern Highlands

The upper reaches of undivided Subansiri, Siang and Lohit districts have witnessed various forms of colonisation. The tribes in question are the Na and Mra in Upper Subansiri, the Bokars of in the upper reaches of Siyom, the Pemako region in Upper Siang and the Idu Mishmis of the Lohit district. At a distance of approximately 120km in the southern Tibetan Himalayan borderlands within the Tibetan religious cosmology is the region of Iho-kha along the upper reaches of the Subansiri to the Tsari region, evident from a visual depiction of a pilgrimage place of Tsari *rong skor* (Huber 1992:9).

A monastery was funded in the sixteenth century by the Tibetan Brug-pa school of Buddhism, which sustained the cultic traditions of the famous sanctuary of Tsari. With the religious and the fiscal regimes interacting, the local officials as representative of the aristocracy levied heavy taxes on the local populace.

The other popular pilgrimage site in the Tsari was along the frontiers in the “unoccupied, nine passes and nine valleys” (Huber 1992). Central within this site was the mountain dedicated to the Buddhist deity Cakrasamvara referred to as Dagpa Shelri or Takpa Shiri. Circumbulation of the mountain through the *rong-skor* or the ravine circuit took place once in twelve years attracting a large number of pilgrims from all parts of Tibet (Huber). A large section of the territory traversed lay within Arunachal Pradesh. There were a number of rest houses or tshul-khang along the southern section of the Tsari *rong skor*. The Tibetan text while referring to the local population as Klopa, refer to the specific group they encounter as *lDing-klo* or *gTing-klo* (Huber: 18). The encounters between the Tibetan and the local populace have been marked by stress, which repeatedly erupted into armed conflicts. During a visit to the region by Ludlow and Sheriff in 1936 found abandoned *Klopa* village of Klung probable fallout of the conflict, though it continued as a transit point for traders en-route. Within the sacred geography of the Tsari *mandala* is the Kala Dung-mtsho which has a temple site and a pilgrimage site in a sacred lake called Lagyap Thungtso under which lies a long trumpet (Huber: 19). Tron, the last frontier village on the Upper Subansiri was a trading point, and its inhabitants derived income from the servicing the pilgrims during the Tsari-rong-khor, which doubled up as a penal colony.

These descriptions are derived from Toni Huber’s reading of the Map, which also identifies a settlement as *sMag-gso* or *rMag-sgo* or

Mago, a frontier district of pastoralists between Monyul and southern western Loro. The area is populated by people acculturated to the Tibetans, yet distinct from the Tibetans or Monpas. This area was an estate of an aristocratic family of Lhasa and its inhabitants paid taxes to the authorities on both sides of the Himalayan divide (Huber:21-22).

In the Tsari region the tribes that inhabited the space of the *Rongkor Chenmo* were the Mra (Tibetan: *Morang Loba*) inhabiting the area along the valley of the Tsari Chu till its junction with the Subansiri at Geling Sinyik. The inhabitants of Taksing were the Na, (Tibetan: *Khalo, LungtuLopa*) whose territory extended upstream along the course of the Subansiri in the westward direction towards Tibet. The Ganden Phodrang made payments called *lodzong* to both these tribes in recognition of assistance rendered to the pilgrims and ensuring their safe passage during the Rongkor Chenmo (Huber 2011:264). In addition, such payments were made to a collective referred to by the Tibetans as Tinglo or Tingba who lived lower down along the Subansiri and upper Kamlariver. Both these valleys offered access to trade routes across a wide region devoid of high-altitude snow-clad passes. With the physiography enabling trade for a greater portion of the year the Na and the Mra maintained a monopoly over trade through their territory.

The relationship with the officials at the frontier and the administrative centre of the Ganden Phodrang often assumed violent dimensions. In 1906, a major conflict erupted because of a major trade dispute with the Tibetans at its centre. The Na population in Upper Subansiri, around Lung were continuously subjected to attacks by the Chayul Tibetans and the Ganden Phodrang troops and their population decimated substantially. A certain section settled lower down the Subansiri valley while another group lived inside Tibet. The conflict between Tron Tibetans and the Na resulted in the officials at Namgye Dzong to send 500 troops to end the conflict. A few years preceding the visit of the commander-in-chief of the Tibetan army Dasang Drandul Tsarong, Mra Pusing and his clansman belonging to the warrior Tapuk sub-clan were murdered during a feud with the Migyitun Tibetans. The subsequent decades witnessed a chain of retaliatory killing of Tibetans by the Mra at Tsari Chu.

In the Winter of 1919, the Tsarong travelled from Lhasa to Tsari with an armed force in preparation for the ensuing *Rongkhor Chenmo* in 1920. He distributed the security tax among his troops and undertook the task of providing security with sophisticated arms. The payment of

the lodzong was withheld, a local thief was flogged and later shot in a display of power. A massive retaliatory action sparked across the Subansiri where a large number of pilgrims were killed and wounded and large number of women were taken prisoners. This conflict resulted in the communities withdrawing further south into the densely forested gorges of the Subansiri (Huber 2011:265).

The Tsarong and his troops stayed back at Chame as the abandoned broader and open expanse of the Subansiri valley held the possibility of being converted into a tea garden. The forest clearings for swidden were used and extended along to Kepembe — between the present habitat of the Na at Taksing and Lengbeng — into a tea garden. For this venture the narratives mention the participation of Indian employees. Drawn from oral traditions, claims are made about the contribution of the Na settled in Tibet in the setting up of the plantation, while the Na of Subansiri continued to resist by destroying many tea plants by burning. The Dzongpon of Chayul attests to reports of atrocities on the southern highlanders by the Tsarong in the late 1920s. The prisoners from the south were also tied to trees and used as bullseye for Tibetan archers. Such lores of excesses by the Tsarong echoed from other parts of Tibet too (Huber).

As mentioned earlier, in the upper reaches of Siyom, the Yargap Chu and the Yomgong river drain the valleys of Pachaksiri in the east and Monigong in the east. An estate of the Lhalu family in Lhasa was managed by Gashi Depa who was stationed at Molo. The inhabitants of Menchuka of Tibetan Buddhist lineage are the Membas. They maintain their socio-cultural and religious ties with Tibet through the Lho La Pass. The Bokar of northern Siyom inhabit the Monigong area. This non-Buddhist population lives in permanent enclaves along the Neyu Pu Chu north of the Dom la pass to trade with the adjacent Tibetan settlements. They did represent a hybrid culture by adopted aspects of Tibetan culture in the form of dress and jewellery. The Bokars paid an annual tax to the Nekhu of Neyu. They along with the Ramos migrated seasonally close to the Tibetan settlements for trade and also worked for the Tibetans as free workers. The 1920s were crucial for the Tibetan polity as it sought to extend both its political and economic sway into the hinterlands of Himalayas (Huber).

An official (Depa) of a small hamlet Shoka on the Tsangpo in conjunction with Gasha Depa with a small armed contingent crossed the Lho La pass and at Pachaksiri enlisted services of porters and

guides to embark on an expedition further south to the Yargap Chu. Tamdin, the Shoka depa embarked on the expedition based on a Tibetan document which registered the territory held by Pangdu or Padu-coterminous with the Ramo habitat-as a tax paying enclave. The Ramos was suspicious that the Tibetans sought to subjugate them and warned the Pailibos of such a possibility.

Both the communities killed Tamdin, disarmed the Tibetan bodyguards and the porters from Pachaksiri were sent back to their habitats. In early 1930, Tibetan troops were dispatched from Molo to Pachaksiri to punish the Pailibos. As the Tibetan forces returned subduing the Pailibos, a retaliatory attack was launched on settlements of Tibetan allies. Thereafter the Tibetans did not seek to expand beyond Pachaksiri and Monigong. As the Tibetan officials were deprived of their traditional source of taxation, new custom dues were enforced on the Pachaksiriwa and the Bokar traders. In this frontier zone along a pristine valley, Tibetan Buddhist populations were transplanted. Seeking to expand the trade network deeper into the stateless region inhabited by clan-based communities, graduated into expanding the tax network too. Such attempts met with resistance resulting in armed conflicts (Huber). Oral narratives of the everyday reveal that the Tibetan officials and lamas were keen to impose Tibetan administrative structures and also convert them to Buddhism.

“Hidden Land” and Colonisation

A potent medium for expanding the Tibetan cultural presence was the instrument of prophesy where a contemporary spiritual figure tries to mediate through the figure of Guru Padma Sambhava in converting his prophecies into reality. This medium is effectively used in deciding political succession or in the creation a new lineage to rule a new state. A particular body of religious literature in Tibet point to the existence of “hidden land” or *beyul* in pristine locations. Locations of these lands are unravelled through visions of contemporary holy figures, which refer to specific markers which holds the key to the hidden treasures (*gterma*). It is in these spaces that Tibetan rulers and their subjects would seek refuge at junctures when their religion and society is faced with the possibility of extinction. Such imaginings provided the basis on which certain Himalayan locales were incorporated into the states. The notion of a “hidden land” as a sacred geography not only provides the core component of the social memory and discourse of a place, but

also served as an ideological function in the context of the development of its socio-political structures. This exploration was not achieved through a single act, but through revelations and actions of successive masters, their disciples and the laity.

Within this frame of reference is the discourse “hidden land” of Padma-bkod or Pemako located where the Tsangpo enters into Indian territory around Gelling is examined. The legends of the Pemako circulated within Tibet in the middle of the seventeenth century. The prophetic revelations of the Nyingmapa *gterston* Rindzin Jatshon Nyinpo who lived in the turbulent times of the 5th Dalai Lama (Sardar- Afkhami 1996:1-2). He revealed about the ultimate pilgrimage to this hidden land would take place during periods of crisis within Buddhism particularly in the Kali Age. Anyone entering this domain would obtain the “vajra body” acquiring the power to be reborn in this pure realm by just entering it.

The mid-17th century crises in Tibet arising out of the Qosot Mongol conquest led Jatshon Nyinpo to appoint his disciple Rigdzin Dudul Dorje to convert the communities along the Brahmaputra gorge to Buddhism and open a route to the hidden land. He journeyed to Spobo/Powo located at the entrance to the vast wilderness of the Brahmaputra gorge and is believed to have mapped a circumbulatory path around Padma-bkod or Pemako. Tagsham Nuden Dorje (Samten Lingpa) a Nyinmapa master of Spobo received teachings from Jatshon Nyinpo and is credited with having unravelling eight hidden lands. Central to this hidden land was the Pemako, which is further subdivided into “12 outer territories, the 40 inner ravines and the 16 secret territories” (sic). (Sardar-Afkhami: 2). This landscape represented the body of the goddess Vajravarahi and the “cakras” of her body along its central channel is visualised by the Brahmaputra with its head in Tibet and the womb located in the jungles of north India. Such a visualisation of the landscape and the physical journey became synonymous with the inner journey of self-realisation.

The crisis within the Tibetan state, perceived as indication of the decline of the teachings of Buddha, was when the Dzungar Mongols sacked Lhasa. Chorjee Lingpa the Kargyud master of Yarlung prophesised that it was an appropriate time to escape to the hidden land despite belonging to a different school of thought. He was designated by Tagsham Nuden Dorje to open the doors of the hidden land. He entered into the land of the Klopa hunters identifiable with the

Mishmis and Adis, but soon passed away of a rheumatic attack in the damp and humid climes of the land. His lineage endured and became the bedrock of Buddhism in the land of the tribes. Kunzang ozer GarbangDorjee born into a Monpa family showed keen interest in mapping the sacred geography of the hidden land. He is credited with opening the “cakras” of the heart and throat of the hidden valley and attracting both Klopa and Mon into the fold of Buddhism. Despite the subsidence of the Mongol threat, in the late eighteenth century, Tibetan yogis representing a form of adventurism continued to be attracted to this land with recurring visions. In succession, they received directions from their masters to open the door to the hidden land by performing fierce magical rituals (Sardar-Afkhami: 5-7).

The Gurkha invasions of Tibet 1788–92 unleashed a cycle of visions predicting the end of Buddhism and the 5th Gampopa proceeded to Spobo and with the support of the local king Nyima Gyalpo attempted to open hidden sites of Pemako. He also travelled south of the Brahmaputra gorge to reveal the site and following a dream sequence, he built a temple on an adjacent hill shaped like a rice heap, a hunting ground of the tribes. Fearing that the drum beating and conch-blowing tradition at religious sanctuaries would drive away wild game they submitted a list of demands to the custodians of the temple. It included demand for cows, yak half-breeds, pigs, chicken, woollen attire, swords, knives, axes, copper utensils and silver ornaments (Sardar: 8). To the laity this land represented the ultimate exercise for pure vision. Such was the hold of the visions, that disjuncture in the physical plane were internalised as experiences of pleasure. The tribes were visualised as protectors of the sacred land, the venomous snakes as supports for mindfulness and the leeches as instruments of sucking away sins. Every year pilgrims set forth to circumbulate the mountains under the threat of the Mishmi arrows. The religious preceptors continued their missionary work among the Monpas and tried to bring the Klopa population within the fold of Buddhism.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, a recognisable group of migrants claiming descent from eastern Bhutan and adjacent Monyul settled in Pemako and are known as Membas. In the following centuries, it served as a space for expanding horizons for population movement due to heavy taxation, labour exploitation, to escape foreign invasions and an escape from natural disasters. This rugged landscape ruled by Spobo or Powo offered refuge for persecuted population including

criminals. There were also population movements from Poyul and Kham where people undertook arduous and dangerous journeys to settle at Pemako and constituted the Khampa population. The Klopa population constituted of the Asing and Tangams (Tibetan: Lokarpo), Shimong (Tibetan: Lonakpo), the Minyongs and some Idu Mishmis (Tibetan: Tana). Each of these populations has interacted in various ways (Huber 2011:265-66).

The earliest migrants are conjectured to have settled between Pemako and Mayum in the early 1880s as encountered by Kinthup an explorer with the Trigonometrical survey team. The first group of Tibetan migrants entered the upper valleys of the Pemako through Andra, Yongap and Tsangkhang passes at the head of the Dri, Mathun and Tsu valleys in 1902 (Miso 2011:78-79). They had migrated from the neighbouring districts of Chimdro, Powo and Kongpo. The following year 2,000 Tibetans migrated from Kham, Derge and Pome in southern Tibet. Chinese expansion into eastern Tibet was construed as a sign for fleeing in search for the "Promised Land" of Pemako (Miso:2). This colonisation pushed the Idu Mishmis away from Mipi, southwards as Tibetans expanded into Mihundo, Wanli, Angrimbolin, Elembro, Akobe, etc. A temple was built at Mipi called Karmoling. Forced by reports of Tibetan forays across the Outer Line Noel Williamson undertook tours of the area and encountered Tibetan settlements along the upper reaches of the Dibang river (Miso:3).

In 1913 Bailey during his attempt to identify Pemako explored, the Upper Mathun Valley encountered Kham settlers at Mipi. They were identified as refugees escaping the devastation floods at Yidong valley in Pome. He reported Powo, which was a prominent frontier kingdom, extracting taxes from the Memba and Klopa settlers along the Siang and the Yang sang Chu valley. In the Mishmi region, they faced resistance from the Idus so many bypassed the route to move in the northern direction to the source of the Dri river to reach the Tibetan province of Zayul (Kerstin 2012:34).

The leader of the Tibetans settled in Chimdro, Jedrung was forced to abandon his search for Pemako when the Kuomintang army overran Powo and the king sought refuge within British territory in Sadiya. He returned to Kham to help rebuild in the aftermath of Chinese attack, where he was charged with sedition. The population stranded in the Brahmaputra were left leaderless and at the mercy of the Klopa. (Sardar-Afkhami: 13-14). Certain sections of the colonisers unable to adapt to

the climatic conditions abandoned many sites leaving behind the old, women and children. The British failed to negotiate a lasting truce between the Tibetans and the Idus Mishmis despite undertaking an expedition to Yangap-la and Pungpung-la in northern Pemako (Sardar-Afkhami).

These intrusions resulted in constant friction over control of resources and extension of agriculture between the Idu Mishmis and the Tibetans. It unleashed a cycle of killings, burning of houses and fields by the Mishmis. The Tibetans were armed with guns, swords, and the Idus with bows, arrows, knives and spears, including poisoned arrows and employment guerrilla tactics. Each village was encircled with palisades and each house stockaded with bamboo spikes (Miso: 3). Traditions in circulation alluded to attempts of Tibetan priests to proselytise. Their rituals were ridiculed and condemned on grounds of being expensive. The custom of burying the dead with beads and silver vessels was construed as unproductive, with suggestions that they refrain from such practices and trade such items instead. Hints regarding even opening up graves to extract the buried objects for trade hurt the sensibilities of the communities (Miso: 3).

The frontier became a zone of constant conflict with the non-Buddhist groups. The Adis had been constrained by the Memba settlement over the already scarce land resource. According to Bailey in 1905, the Adis raided up the valley, burnt the village of Hangjo below Rinchenpung and proceeded as far as Gelling. The Tibetan administrators at Powo who had earlier kept away from intervening, sent troops to help their subjects. The Adis were ruthlessly suppressed and lore's of the victory are in currency among the Membas (Kerstin 32-33). A military outpost Kala Yong Dzong was set up at Nyereng in the Yang sang Chu valley in 1908, to protect the Buddhist settlers and pilgrims coming down from the Tsangpo and Chimdro valleys. During the following decades, the taxation regime of Powo extended far south to the villages of Karko and Shimong. In the later part of the 1920s, the Powo kingdom collapsed and in the power vacuum new Tibetan Dzonpons emerged to administer Pemako, who extracted high level of taxes in kind and corvee labour from the Membas and their non-Buddhist neighbours (Huber 2011:266).

Oral traditions allude to reports of Shimong and Karko seeking help from the forces of Pemako to defend themselves against other Adi groups in the long duration "Pangi-War" (1926-36). The Pangi War

between the Padam-Minyongs and the Panggi dragged on with reports of increasing interference of the Membas on behalf of the Shimong and Panggis. It was reported in 1933-34 that 300 Membas under 14 leaders came down to Karko and Shimong fully armed and said to have shot a Komkar man. Licensed arms found their way into this unadministered villages through this armed conflict (ASA 1933-1934:3). It is conjecture that taxation in these regions was in lieu of the war. Reports of taxcollection at a distance of 60-70 km below the McMahan line and the appearance of oppressed Membas in Sadiya as refugees prompted annual tours by British officers accompanied by troops stationed at Sadiya into areas just south of the McMahan line (ASA). The local communities were apprised of British control over them and were dissuaded from paying taxes to the Tibetans. Yet, pressure through armed tax collectors compelled tribes to pay tribute on many occasions. The indirect impact of these collection drives on the local populace with meagre resources was immense. Often the collectors with their armed contingent travelled with no food supplies extracting it from local villages, on many occasions leading to a depletion of their food-stocks. In such an eventuality, the community lost its members to starvation. To ensure compliance not only were they threatened by arms, but also issued warnings of closure of access to passes on salt trade route.

The last major movement into Pemako occurred during Chinese occupation of Tibetan in 1949-50. Streams of refugees from Eastern Tibet moved on to temporary settlements along the Metog Dzong and the Chimdro valley keeping open the possibility of return to their homeland later. The constant flow of migrants resulted in open conflict in 1959 between Rekho Khambas and Riwoche Khambas, where the former were massacred by the latter. It prompted the fleeing population to move south along the Yang Sang Chu Valley where land was available and the primary pilgrimage sites were located (Kerstin 36-37). The nascent Indian state had set up a post at Tuting in 1953, rendering it difficult for a free movement of population. Occasionally the residents of northern Pemako were issued permits to visit the pilgrimage sites. Spurred by the apprehension that these groups might settle within Indian territory, the Dzonpon of Pemako requested the Indian government to refrain from permitting new settlers (Kerstin). The flow of refugees commenced with the Dalai Lama seeking exile in India in 1959. An estimated 7,004 refugees entered Indian territory between mid- 1950s

and 1962 entering Siang along Menchuka, Monigong, Tuting and Gelling. These populations were eventually relocated in different settlements across India. Thereafter Tuting became the central location in southern Pemako for the Buddhist population (Kerstin 37-38).

Conclusion

The detailed narrative of the various modes of encounter of the communities south of the Tsangpo with the Tibetan state played out in many ways. There were areas like the Tsari where the instrument of religion was used to enter the domain of the communities, which transformed into a relationship based on unequal trade and extraction. It appeared that clan-based communities too wielded substantial power by virtue of control over trade routes and pilgrim circuits, yet they became subjects of violence by the instruments of the state. At these frontier zones the Tibetan local administrators as representatives of Lhasa and managers of private monastic estates acquired control through leases, secured at a premium. Hence their administration was driven by purely profit motive. Armed guards for hire supported the extraction regime making it crucial to undertake tenacious collection drives across difficult terrain. The thread of religion was deftly woven into the fiscal regime providing an enduring legitimacy for allowing adventurism at the frontiers. These frontier zones enjoyed a substantial degree of autonomy till the consolidation of the colonial state intensified in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

A careful reading of the instruments of colonisation in this region reveals the role of religion in rendering the Himalayas a sacred landscape through which the Tibetans were attracted to the remote spaces. The interventions into the “uncivilised frontier” through the spiritual realm opened up possibilities for commercial and imperial interests in the region. At the second site on Pachaksiri the settlement of Tibetan speaking populations is a clear instance of colonisation in the zone beyond the pale of civilisation. The key to such an expansion was that the valley intersected an important route for trade with the southern Himalayas. The environment within this valley had the possibility for sustaining large agro-pastoral communities making settler colonies like Pachaksiri viable.

The concept of *beyul* or the “hidden land” an idea among the adherents of the Nyigmapa school developed between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. In the search for signs for this earthly paradise,

the teachings of Buddhist saint Padmasambhava were invoked and re-invented. This was done within the structure of fulfilment of prophecies through contemporary interventions of séances of masters. It is linked with rediscovery of texts where details about the land are found. The conceptualisation was backed by the idea of an ideal model of Tibetan political organisation to be replicated in this paradise on earth. It was triggered on one hand by real threats to the Tibetan state perceived as an indication of an imminent threat to the practice of Buddhism itself. All these narratives served to legitimise expansion for religion, with a mission to proselytise and bring them under structures of administration and taxation.

In the context of Pemako appearing as a vision is paradoxical given the contours of the landscape, which does not subscribe to the imagery of a perfect land. For the traveller, religious and laity, the route was through fair weather high and snow-capped mountains, not accessible on horses or yaks. The presence of dense sub-tropical forests with equally dense undergrowth and overgrown trails often blocked by landslides, did not conform to the ideal of a paradise.

Conditions of perpetual rain, the presence of wild animals, venomous reptiles, leeches and fierce communities appeared contradictory to the ideal. Rather, the hardships endured in this hidden land were argued to be a test for the human spirit. Even habitable land was at premium, as it had to be wrested from the forests. Amidst all the conflicts that played out between the Tibetans representatives and the tribes, trade continued to thrive. Traders from Zayul and South-eastern Tibet visited Sadiya and as well as Calcutta each winter. They continued to appeal to the British to facilitate a track for pack-transport. Tibetans inhabiting the bend close to Tsangpo desired facilities to descend to the land of the Adis through the Dibang valley (ASA 1926-27:4).

In the Arunachal Himalayas, most of these intrusions are identifiable with the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century coincided with the political consolidation of the Tibetan state. It also was a period when the state was confronted with expansion of its neighbours the Mongols who recurrently attacked. In the twentieth century, it was fallout of British intervention for trade and control coupled with expanding Chinese control. Therefore, these enclaves of Tibetan control and oppression sought to expand their horizons for greater control of the frontier for resources.

Notes and References

- Scott, J. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. Yale: Yale University Press.
- Dreyfus, G. 1995. "Law, State, and Political Ideology in Tibet," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Vol.18, No.1, Summer, 117-38.
- Aris, M. 1987. "The Boneless Tongue": Alternative Voices from Bhutan in the Context of Lamaist Societies, *Past & Present*, No. 115.131-64. May.
- At its zenith the Empire received tribute from the Pala kings of Bengal and the T'ang dynasty of China, it controlled the Indo-European Kingdoms of Turkestan, the Kingdom of Nanchao situated in present-day Yunnan and a chain of countries in and around the Pamirs to the west.
- Quoted from Edie, T. 2001. "Protecting the Treasures of the Earth: Nominating Dolpo as a World Heritage Site", *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*, 20(1), 46-76.
- Huber, T. 2011. "Pushing South: Tibetan Economic and Political Activities in the Far Eastern Himalayas, ca, 1900-1950, in McKay, A. and Balicki-Denjongpa, A. (eds). *Buddhist Himalaya; Studies in Religion, History and Culture, Proceedings of the Golden Jubilee Conference of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology*, Vol.1, Gangtok, 259-275.
- Huber, T. 1992. "A Tibetan Map of lHo-kha in the South-Eastern Himalayan Borderlands of Tibet," *Imago Mundi*, Vol.44, 9-23.
- Sardar-Afkhami, H. 1996. "An Account of Padma-Bkod: A Hidden Land in Southeastern Tibet," *Kailash-Journal of Himalayan Studies*, Volume 18, Number 3 and 4, pp.1-2.
- Miso, R. 2011. "Aspects of Society, Economy, Polity and Culture of Idu Mishmis: A Historical Outline upto 1947," Unpublished PhD Thesis, Rajiv Gandhi University. p,78-79.
- Miso, R. "Mathun and Dri Valley: Memories of Trade, Tibetan Intrusion, Impasse and Retreat," *The Mishmis.Com*, [http:// www.themishmis.com/](http://www.themishmis.com/) 2-3.
- Grothmann, K. 2012. "Population History and Identity in the Hidden Land of Pemako," *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol. 26, Summer, 21-52.
- "Extract from the General Administration Report of the Sadiya Frontier Tract for the Year 1933-34" in Annual Report on the Frontier Tribes of Assam for the Year 1933-1934, Assam State Archives (ASA), Guwahati.
- "Extract from the General Administration Report of the Sadiya Frontier Tract for the Year 1926-27" in Annual Report on the Frontier Tribes of Assam for the Year 1926-1927, Assam State Archives (ASA), Guwahati.
- This is a revised version of a paper that had been presented at an International Seminar International Conference on State and Society in North East India, organised by the NEISP, JNU, February 2014.

Amid Chinese Challenge, Analysing Strategic Infrastructure in India's Northeast

Jajati K. Pattnaik**

Strategic infrastructure, an essential element of the contemporary geo-economic/geo-strategic discourse, entailed de-territorialised economic cooperation and free trade as distinguished from the traditional geopolitical discourse which thrust upon the interplay of power, leadership and hegemony in international relations. Much to the contradictions of economic integration dialogues, the aspiring powers like China sought to dominate the world order through a new hegemonic doctrine called “Belt and road Initiative” (BRI)¹ under the garb of “initiative for economic cooperation and development.” In practice, China is pushing its own geopolitical interests through cross-continental road and sea corridors. Based on the changing dynamics of such geo-economic/geo-strategic configurations, Indian strategic thinking has blended both the geo-strategic and geo-economic factors in the canopy of neo-realist paradigm to maintain its strategic interest, economic development and strong neighbourhood ties.

India's Northeast shares 98 percent of its land borders with Bangladesh (1,880 km), Bhutan (516 km), China (1,300.35 km), Nepal (97.8 km) and Myanmar (1,643 km).² Out of this, Arunachal Pradesh shares a land border of 1,080 km with China. In this context, India's strategic infrastructure viz., Dhola-Sadiya Bridge, Bogibeel Bridge and Frontier Highway connecting Upper Assam and Eastern Arunachal Pradesh could be a catalyst to protect India's strategic as well as economic interests in the Eastern sector bordering China.

* Dr Jajati K. Pattnaik is Associate Professor, Centre for West Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067. E-mail: jajatipattnaik2017@gmail.com

Dhola-Sadiya Bridge

India's longest bridge, Dhola-Sadiya bridge, named as Bhupen Hazarika Setu,³ which was built over Lohit, a tributary of the Brahmaputra River in the Tinsukia district of Assam bordering Arunachal Pradesh was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on May 26, 2017. The bridge, spanning over 9.15 km, connects Dhola in the southern bank and Sadiya in the northern bank of the river. The bridge is significant from the geostrategic angle, given the nature of the controversial Chinese claims⁴ over Arunachal Pradesh. In this context, the Dhola-Sadiya Bridge in India's Eastern sector could be a strategic counterweight to Beijing. Moreover, strategic experts emphatically believe that its engineering marvel has the capacity to resist 60-tonne battle tanks and can give logistic support to the deployment of the Army in the border areas of Arunachal Pradesh.⁵

Notwithstanding its strategic domain, the bridge has deeper economic connotations for the region in terms of cross-border trade and economic collaboration. The Dhola-Sadiya bridge would give easy access to Anini⁶ and Kibithoo,⁷ which are less than 300 km away from the bridge point. So, it would facilitate several economic/industrial corridors and provide shorter and faster access to the Indian industries to tap the South-Western and South-Eastern Chinese markets.

As Lt. General (Retd.) J. R. Mukherjee said, "Tezu-Hayuliang-Walong-Dichhu pass-Rima is the shortest route to mainland China and offers tremendous potential to both Look and Act East for the entire region provided the Indian government wishes to do so."⁸ He argued, "with the current state of Sino-Indian relations, in my view it is most unlikely that the Kibithoo route would be opened for border trade in the foreseeable future. The bridge would however result in more trade between Assam and Arunachal."⁹

Giving a perspective on the impact of India's longest bridge for the region, Rajiv Miso, an academic from Arunachal Pradesh opined, "The "historic" opening of the Dhola-Sadiya bridge has given a ray of hope to the people of Arunachal Pradesh in general and the people of the districts of Lower Dibang Valley and Dibang Valley in particular. This is one of the major developments of the Government of India's initiative of "Act East Policy." These districts of Arunachal have already had a taste of investment of corporate houses in hydro-power and related infrastructures. They hope for such major investments by other corporate houses soon to bring in development."¹⁰

He also added, “In general, the development has broken the myth that the Government of India is reluctant to develop Arunachal Pradesh considering the nature of its relationship with China. Optimistically, it is a positive sign for both the countries to cement the age-old ties and move ahead. The 1962 hangover can be laid to rest. The onus is on both the countries to open up avenues of trade and opening of cultural centres and exchanges for mutual benefit.”¹¹

Corollary to this, India’s second longest bridge (6.2 km)¹² over Dibang river in the Lower Dibang Valley district of Arunachal Pradesh which was commissioned in 2018 has also paved the way for intra-state connectivity for the border areas of Central and Eastern Arunachal Pradesh. This bridge also has immense strategic connotation in terms of providing military materials and supplies to the Indian defence posts in the Eastern sector.

Bogibeel Bridge

India’s longest rail-road bridge, Bogibeel bridge,¹³ spanning over 4.94 km connects the Dibrugarh district in the southern bank of Brahmaputra River with Dhemaji and North Lakhimpur districts of Upper Assam in its northern bank bordering the districts of Central and Eastern Arunachal Pradesh. It has double track 1,676 mm gauge railway on the lower deck and a three-lane road on the upper deck.¹⁴ The bridge was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 25, 2018.

The bridge is significant from a geo-strategic perspective. In case of any border skirmish or Chinese intrusion, it would facilitate quick movement of military vehicles, arms & ammunitions and supplies to the Indian military posts in Arunachal Pradesh along the international line. A senior General opined “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, 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.”¹⁵

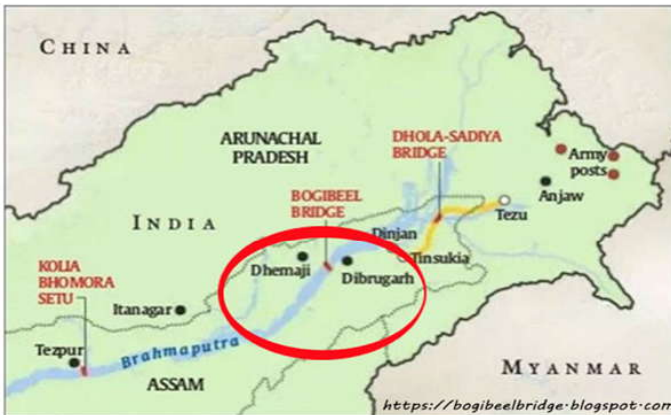
In this perspective, Tapir Gao, Member of Lok Sabha from 2-East Arunachal parliamentary constituency said, “Arunachal Pradesh is a sensitive state in the Northeast. The proposals for rail projects are not only important for the people of Arunachal Pradesh and the Northeast (NE) as a whole, but also for national security and for the military and paramilitary forces.”¹⁶ He added, “absence of connectivity, especially

railway connectivity, was one of the factors behind India's loss in the 1962 war."¹⁷

Hence, in his opinion "a new railway route could be laid from Pasighat to Roing and from Roing to Tezu and Chongkham, which is important not only for economic reasons, but also for the security of Arunachal Pradesh."¹⁸ It is pertinent to mention here that the Lhasa section of Qinghai-Tibet Railway QTR railway line is also being extended up to Nyingchi in Southeast Tibet nearer to the Indian border in Arunachal Pradesh.¹⁹ Hence, India should expand the railway network in the frontier areas of Northeast to counter such Chinese advancement.

Notwithstanding the strategic significance of the Bogibeel bridge, it would also be a medium for the economic development of the Northeast, specifically Upper Assam as well as Central and Eastern Arunachal Pradesh. Moreover, the bridge would connect Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Dhemaji, and North Lakhimpur cities of Upper Assam with those of Pasighat, Roing and Tezu in the Eastern sector and Aalo in the central sector of Arunachal Pradesh through a vast network of industrial and economic corridors.

Dhola-Sadiya and Bogibeel Bridges



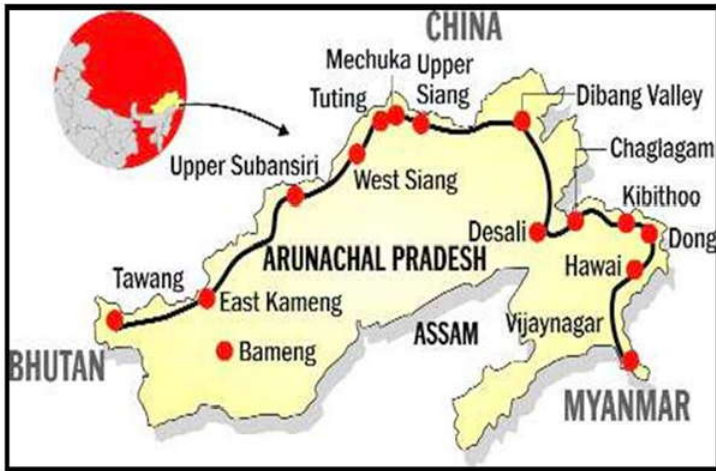
Source: https://www.google.com/search?q=bogbie+lbdridge+map&zrl=1C1GIWA_enIN808IN808&btm=sich&source=ui&cixt=1&r=ifscUUK6gS9PH4DM%253A%252CyKEVnfxQueyZgM%252C_&ve=t1&usg=AI4_kTzm4DWHR0GZEXm4nSsEPcGi_iGKg&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjL-paPxMHoAhXEXisKHQI4DVkQ9QEwAXoECAUQBw#imgrc=scUUK6gS9PH4DM (accessed on March 15 2020).

Frontier Highway

Construction of the Frontier Highway along the India–China border is strategically important for India. This highway spanning around 2,000 km starts from Mago Thimbu (Tawang district) in Western Arunachal Pradesh to Vijayanagar (Changlang district) in Eastern Arunachal Pradesh. This project is also necessary for the economic development of Upper hill areas of Tawang, West Kameng, East Kameng, Upper Subansiri, West Siang, Upper Siang, Dibang valley, Anjaw and Changlang districts of the state. Speaking on the development of Frontier Highway, the Deputy Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh Chowna Mein recently mentioned, “survey and investigation work for the 2,000 km long Arunachal Frontier Highway along the India–China border has been completed and it will not take long to start the ambitious road project.”²⁰

Subir Bhaumik, a prominent media person from Northeast remarked, “The frontier highway was long overdue and did not happen because of muddle headed defence strategists who felt keeping infrastructure poor in Arunachal Pradesh was a good way to slow down a possible Chinese advance in the event of a war. It should be developed but not only for defence purposes. It should have suitable arteries emanating from it longitudinally to facilitate border trade with Tibet, much as the Nathu-La pass was reopened to facilitate Sikkim–Tibet border trade. Once the Chinese allow border trade with Arunachal Pradesh on a large scale, it serves to dilute their strident position about Arunachal Pradesh being southern Tibet and weakens their claims.”²¹ So, the development of Kibithoo as an entry point would give chance to both India and China to switch their priorities from security to trade or economic collaborations based on sustainable engagement paradigms. In this context, Nathula model may be emulated in Arunachal Pradesh in order to boost trade and commerce across the political boundaries. As Chinese scholar Kuei-hsiang Hsu remarked “China and India began to see signs of healthy progress in border talks in 2003.

Frontier Highway



Source: Tribune India.

Both countries smoothed the way for a friendly relationship by agreeing to put aside border disputes and concentrate on economic cooperation first. While there was some tug-of-war over the reopening of Nathula, economic considerations finally drove both countries to come to terms with each other. China recognised India's sovereignty over Sikkim and India recognised Tibet as a part of Chinese territory in exchange."²² On the other, the former Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Mukut Mithi opined that "like Nathula, India should also open up trade points at Tawang and Kibithoo in Arunachal Pradesh. But the recent Chinese assertion over Arunachal Pradesh does not provide any congenial atmosphere for cross border initiatives. It may be a difficult proposition at the present moment due to the security issues."²³

While concluding here, it could be observed that India's strategic infrastructure in Northeast connecting Upper Assam and Arunachal Pradesh was the necessary outcome of the interplay of contemporary geo-strategic/geo-economic discourse. This policy would not only ensure India's territorial security against Chinese brinksmanship in the eastern sector, but also pave the way for the economic development of the border regions of Arunachal Pradesh and explore the possibilities for cross border cooperation and friendlyneighbourhood ties with China.

Notes

- ¹ Belt and Road initiative (BRI), earlier called OBOR (One Belt, One Road) is a transnational connectivity project initiated by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 to connect China with Asia, Europe and Africa through the land corridor (SREB-Silk Road Economic Belt) and the sea corridor (MSR-Maritime Silk Road) to augment global trade and economic cooperation.
- ² "International Border," Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India, 2015. <http://mdoner.gov.in/node/202> (accessed on January 14, 2021).
- ³ Dhola Sadiya Bridge was approved by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government in 2009 and its construction started under the same political dispensation in 2011. The bridge was completed under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government in 2017. The author visited Dhola Sadiya bridge and interacted with the local persons on February 23, 2020.
- ⁴ Chinese claim over Arunachal Pradesh is totally unfounded. It is disproved on both historical and politico-strategic grounds. Arunachal Pradesh is an inseparable part of the Indian Union. The state is inextricably interwoven with the deep socio-cultural milieu of India. The historical records and scholarly works substantiate the Eastern sector being integral part of India. The British war office, which published the maps in 1907, illustrated the Eastern sector lying within Indian Territory. See, Bose, M.L. 1997. *History of Arunachal Pradesh*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1997, p. 147. The works of Francis Young husband on "India and Tibet as well as Charles Bells on "Tibet: Past and Present" clearly marked the tribal area within Indian territory. The border was brought into line applying the watershed principle as generally practiced in mountainous terrain after giving due consideration to historical, ethnic and strategic factors. The Shimla Agreement (1914) did not create a new boundary; it only formally delineated "the natural, customary, traditional boundary in this sector." During the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962, China unilaterally made cease-fire and withdrew beyond the McMahon line, which confirms India's North East Frontier along the McMahon Line" (Ibid.:147-9). The Chinese withdrawal legitimised and vindicated the McMahon line as the international boundary between India and China.
- ⁵ Pattnaik, J. 2017. "Dhola-Sadiya Bridge: India's Strategic Corridor to China?" *Mainstream Weekly*, June 8.
- ⁶ Anini is the District headquarters of Dibang Valley District.
- ⁷ Kibithoo, which is situated in the Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh, is important from a geo-economic perspective. It is situated at an altitude of

4,070 feet above sea level as compared to Nathula Pass (Sikkim), which lies at an altitude of 14,400 feet above sea level. Even in Arunachal Pradesh, the low elevated mountain range of Kibithoo has greater advantages over other mountain passes such as Bumla, Taksing, Mechuka, Monigong and Gelling. Visited Kibithoo and interacted with the local persons on December 26, 2016. For details see, Pattnaik, J. 2017. "Kibithoo Land Bridge to India—China Economic Corridor", *The Arunachal Times*, February 6. Also refer, *Sangai Express*, February 21, 2015.

⁸ Collected an electronic mediated response from Lt. General (Rtd.) J.R. Mukherjee on "The Potentiality of Kibithoo as Trade Corridor" on November 28, 2015.

⁹ Collected an electronic mediated response from Lt. General (Rtd.) J.R. Mukherjee on May 29, 2017.

¹⁰ Collected an electronic mediated response from Rajiv Miso on May 29, 2017.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Dibang bridge over Dibang river was approved by the UPA Government in 2010, and the construction of the bridge which started in 2013 was completed in 2018.

¹³ The foundation stone of the Bogibeel Bridge as part of the Assam Accord 1985 was laid by the Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda in January 1997. Subsequently, the construction of the bridge, which was inaugurated by Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2002, was completed under the NDA Government in 2018. Visited Bogibeel bridge and interacted with the local persons on February 23, 2020. Also see, "Even after a Decade, Bogibeel Bridge Waits to See Light of the Day". *The Sentinel*, April 22, 2012.

¹⁴ "Engineering Masterpiece Bogibeel Opens," *Railway Gazette*, January 9, 2019, <https://www.railwaygazette.com/asia/engineering-masterpiece-bogibeel-bridge-opens/47837.article> *tribuneindia.com* *tribuneindia.com* (accessed on March 12, 2020).

¹⁵ Shukla, A. 2018. "Bogibeel Connects Arunachal through New Strategic Railway Line," *Business Standard*, December 26. https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/bogibeel-bridge-to-link-arunachal-pradesh-via-strategic-railway-line-118122500484_1.html (accessed on March 15, 2020).

¹⁶ "Gao Proposes Laying New Railway Lines in Arunachal." *The Arunachal Times*, March 13, 2020.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ "China to Construct New Rail Line in Tibet Close to Arunachal Pradesh," *The Economic Times*, October 31, 2014. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/china-to-construct-new-rail-line->

In-tibet-close-to-arunachal-pradesh/articleshow/44996098.cms?from=mdr.
(accessed on March 21, 2020).

- ²⁰ “Survey for 2000-km Long Frontier Highway Complete: Mein,” *The Arunachal Times*, January 5, 2020.
- ²¹ Drew from an electronic mediated response from Subir Bhaumik against e-mailed questionnaire on February 18, 2016.
- ²² Hsu, K. 2005. “Impact of Opening up Sikkim’s Nathula on China-India Eastern Border Trade.” <http://www.mtac.gov.tw/mtacbooke/upload/09411/0202/2.pdf> (accessed on July 22, 2016).
- ²³ Interview with Mukut Mithi, former Chief Minister from Arunachal Pradesh at his residence in Roing on December 9, 2017.

FORM IV
(See Rule 8)

1. Place of Publication : Delhi
2. Periodicity of Publication : Quarterly
3. Printer's Name : Dr. Lata Singh
Secretary, Astha Bharati
- Whether Citizen of India? : Yes, Indian
Address : 222, Sector 15-A
NOIDA-201301
4. Publisher's Name : Dr. Lata Singh
Secretary, Astha Bharati
- Whether Citizen of India? : Yes, Indian
Address : 222, Sector 15-A
NOIDA-201301
5. Editor's Name : Shri Prakash Singh
- Whether Citizen of India? : Yes, Indian
Address : 3C, SDF, Sector 15A
Noida-201301
6. Name and address of individuals who own the Newspaper and partners or shareholders holding Total Capital : Astha Bharati,
27/201, East End Apartments,
Mayur Vihar Phase-1 Extension,
New Delhi-110096

I, Dr. Lata Singh, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true and to the best of my knowledge and belief.

March 18, 2022

(Sd) Dr. Lata Singh
(Signature of Publisher)

R.N.I. Reg. No. DELENG/1999/1799

www.asthabharati.org

Printed and published by Dr. Lata Singh, IAS (Retd.), Secretary for and on behalf of Astha Bharati, the owner, at 27/201 East End Apartments, Mayur Vihar Phase-1 Extension, New Delhi-110096 and printed at Vikas Computer and Printers, E 33 Sector A5/6 UPSIDC Ind. Area, Tronica City, Loni 201103 Dist. Ghaziabad (UP). Editor: Prakash Singh