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Journal of International Relations

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Preface from Chief Editor

The JAIR welcomes its learned readers, contributors and patrons on the release of the present issue of its Journal of International Relations, third in the series since it was launched last year. Papers appearing in this issue mostly address issues connected with India's neighbourhood policy. Perennial as it is, the basic concern for the policy makers does admit of variations in perspective – particularly so in view of the internal dynamism, making the political terrain look a little unsteady and hence requiring an appropriate change of gear now and again. There is also the important question of neighbours' perception of each other, which cannot be said to have been stereotyped for good. A regime change, for instance, might lead to moderation of strongly held attitudes and, by the same token, cause a little hardening too when circumstances become less than propitious. In South Asia this has been happening for such a considerable period of time that one is likely to find a certain pattern of neighbourhood diplomacy getting firmed up. 'Unobtrusively clever' can be a good approximation of the manner in which New Delhi has been trying to impact the regional political dynamics, admittedly, with reasonable success. This may be valid to some extent with regard to the Trans Himalayan region where Nepal and Bhutan present themselves as significant factors in the overall security environment confronting India. It is conditioned no doubt largely by the dubious behaviour of a powerful third party on the other side of the mountain. But that cannot be the single most dominant factor in conducting India's neighbourly diplomacy through and through. The scenario has been shifting with nearly seven decades of handling each other's concerns. There had to be some kind of a cognitive build up that could act on the positive side in normal times and as an antidote to any prolonged standoff in moments of crisis.

Matters that once seemed to be irreconcilable thus stand a greater chance to be amenable to rational resolution or, short of that, at least keep matters less hotly contested. This salutary trend should be ascribed to the qualitative change occurring in the people's perception due to greater connectivity, mobility and face to face transaction. To the extent political leadership of a country facilitates that process and proves to be responsive to the "other", neighbourhood diplomacy can be seen as capable of achieving a major part of its objectives.

The foregoing observations also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the case of Bangladesh in a substantial measure and with a high probability of success in the case also of Myanmar today. In both these cases confidence building initiatives have yielded the desired outcome and increasingly confirmed the worth of mutually supportive bilateralism. Domestic political aberrations notwithstanding, Bangladesh can now freely engage in partnership of much larger import with India. It can even make itself a co-explorer in tandem with India's recently announced "Act East" policy. Indeed the obvious vicinity of Mizoram and Tripura on India's northeast, Bangladesh and Myanmar can easily consolidate into a zone of common pursuits. There is no reason why state sovereignty would not shed its earlier rigidity and be a facilitator in the promotion of a common cause. Rather the more urgent consideration for this projected regionalisation of certain nationally pursued goals is that of connectivity.

As of now it is the need of greater connectivity in this hitherto disjointed zone that keeps the regional powers seized with the prospects of expanding and creating new access networks. Rail-road-river and allied transport facilities must receive high priority in public policy making. Ferrying both humans and commodities under normal surveillance on all sides has to be a regular feature. Boosters for legitimised border trade and greater flow of FDI from the corporate sector are also on the cards. Promotion of Intra-region and international tourism can be keys to furthering auxiliary information flow, easing the hesitant approaches of the past. The recent string of visits of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister to South Asian capitals not only

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carries good will but lends a constructive vision for the willing nations of the SAARC to work together. The expression “willing” implies that there are still some pockets of resistance, some ingrained rigidities, some negative hangover of the past in the case of one or two nations. That need not be a handicap for others to set a good example.

All said and done, there remains one glitch arising from the bogey of unauthorised cross border human influx that raises certain valid questions as to the limits and safeguards that a frequently targeted nation is entitled to expect or else be a victim of demographic distortion at home originating from a demographic spill over unmanaged by overpopulated neighbours. There is also a high probability of motivated intrusion by undesirable elements including terrorists of every description with sponsors closely around. This constitutes a big head ache impacting a far larger territorial expanse than just two adjacent neighbours. The latter, therefore, are under obligation to ensure strictest possible border vigil without, of course vicariously causing jeopardy to legitimate movements much to the annoyance of authorised immigrants. The visa diplomacy along with check post controls are sensitive instruments that demand very careful and imaginative handling so that unwelcome and dangerous elements do not take undue advantage of laxity at any stage. There is no country in the SAARC region today that can safely go to sleep without fear of smugglers, fake currency exporters, awesome terrorist outfits, and political agent provocateurs with intent to distort and/or derail the normal process of regime change.

A not so typical but rather bizarre and distressingly live instance is the problem of the Rohingyas, territorially displaced for long and now aimlessly floating on sea, finding no nation in the entire BIMSTEC belt to bring them any succour. This continuing human tragedy originated in the forced exodus of ethnic Rohingyas from Myanmar’s border regions to the Chittagong area of Bangladesh and thence to other places. Thanks to intervention by UNHCR those hapless displaced lot has now become a subject of regional conference diplomacy comprising several Southeast Asian nations, probably because they lately realize their obligation under ASEAN pledge to maintain a peaceful environment conducive to development. On a long view, however, there arises the international legal imperative to settle the nationality question of all such ethnic groups in similar distress with reference to the only practically valid criterion of prolonged habitat within the boundaries of a State. India would do well to recall how millions of ethnic Tamils were in the recent past turned into refugees not by choice but by extremely discriminatory and harsh laws of the land on majoritarian insistence in Sri Lanka. India did help relieve the demographic pressure some decades back by absorbing a huge. But there was no guarantee that the larger residue of Tamils would be assured of equal human treatment. The consequence was tragic.

The very recent political change dislodging the near autocratic post civil war regime in Sri Lanka has generated some glimmers of hope for the settled minority there. The present government of India on its part can legitimately claim some credit for having facilitated the return of normalcy in the island state. Occasional capture of innocent fishermen not knowing the vague delimitation on the waves washing the shores of two closely situated countries needs also to be tackled in a reasonable manner – not a big challenge for coastal management of either party.

The other island state on the Arab sea and part of the SAARC formation which is currently in need of some external facilitation to restore a constitutionally sanctioned and politically untamperable governance for the people has not been included in this issue. We shall be looking for some contributors working on this aspect. The obvious reference is to Maldives where there is no mentionable ethnic divide, but a solid Sunni Islamic populace. Internal power contests do not augur well for this otherwise peaceful, little stretch of islets as long as terrorists are being encouraged by nearby powers to look for safe haven and upset the security environment not only of India but of South Asia as a whole. Without being seen as meddling in their internal affairs, India’s external relations managers must be appreciating the need of a more effective and fine tuned approach than has been possible to apply in the recent past.

Requesting at the end the much valued assessment of the readers about the intellectual efforts that have gone into this publication.

Radharaman Chakrabarti

Author Information Guide for Publication in the JAIR Journal of International Relations

Criteria for Publication

The principal criteria for publication of papers (Articles) in **JAIR Journal of International Relations** are that they:

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- Are of outstanding importance in the field of International Relations/related social Sciences
- reach a conclusion of interest to an inter disciplinary readership.

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Format of Writing an Article

Articles are original reports whose conclusions represent a substantial advance in understanding of an important problem and have immediate, far-reaching implications. They do not normally exceed 8 pages and have no more than 50 references. (One page of undiluted text is about 1,300 words.)

Articles have a summary, separate from the main text, of up to 150 words, which does not have references, and does not contain numbers, abbreviations, acronyms or measurements unless essential. It is aimed at readers outside the discipline. This summary contains a paragraph (2-3 sentences) of basic-level introduction to the field; a brief account of the background and rationale of the work; a statement of the main conclusions (introduced by the phrase 'Here we show' or its equivalent); and finally, 2-3 sentences putting the main findings into general context so it is clear how the results described in the paper have moved the field forwards.

Articles are typically 5,000-8000 words of text

The text may contain a few short subheadings (not more than six in total) of no more than 40 characters each (less than one line of text in length). Articles typically may have not more than 5 or 6 display items (figures or tables).

The rest of the text is typically about 1,500 words long. Any discussion at the end of the text should be as succinct as possible, not repeating previous summary/introduction material, to briefly convey the general relevance of the work.

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India's Act East Policy

*Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty**

Any nation that undertakes a change of course in its foreign policy does so under a certain set of circumstances, both internal and external. This usually happens when the international power equilibrium is disturbed by external cataclysmic events, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union or the less cataclysmic and more gradual disequilibrium created by the rise of China. When the world enters such phases of disequilibrium in the international power structure, it forces nations into making policy manouevres, to protect its perceived national interest. Internal developments also impact upon foreign policy. In fact any nation's foreign policy is primarily driven by domestic priorities.

I would argue that the international power structure is currently undergoing a phase of power disequilibrium. We have left behind empires, revolutions, imperialism, colonialism and wars that marked the passage of the last three centuries. We live in a world whose structure is highly integrated technologically, intimately connected with digital information flowing at the speed of light in all directions. This power disequilibrium in the international power structure is likely to lead to a multi-polar world, with 3-4 dominant powers but no single superpower. The management of this emerging international system will revolve on these 3-4 large countries or a group of countries with demographic and economic depth. In fact one such grouping is the G-20, comprising the top 20 countries in the world

as per their GDP which is now a regular forum for discussing economic and fiscal policies.

In a sense, no one wants to be a superpower today. The USA is a receding power, content to 'lead from behind' and entrusting more security and military responsibilities to its allies. Europe is in the throes of an economic downturn and busy trying to save the Euro and the imploding economies of Greece and other southern European states. The other great powers are not in a position to take over the role of a global hegemon or a manager and run the world as per a particular template or ideology. Neither is any nation today powerful or capable enough to enforce its worldview in a manner that the USA was able to do in the post world war-II era. China is certainly flexing its muscles and pushing the envelope, particularly in the South China Sea. But China is quite careful in not going beyond a point because it worries about other major powers joining together to restrain, if not contain it. China's adverse reaction to the USA's 'pivot to Asia' is a clear indicator of China's discomfort.

Another significant marker of the post Cold War world is the adoption of capitalism or liberal market policies by virtually all countries. China, though still run by a one-party communist government, presides over the world's fastest growing economy that has fully embraced liberal market policies. It can be classified as an authoritarian capitalist state. The same holds true for Vietnam. Russia,

* Former Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

though no longer under a one-party communist rule, can also be classified as an authoritarian and oligarchic capitalism. Capitalism has many hues and is certainly not monolithic. Democratic capitalism and social democratic capitalism are other manifestations in this economic spectrum with the USA, India, Brazil, Egypt, Japan, Germany, France, Nigeria, South Africa and many other countries in this category of nations.

In setting the context, let us recall that more than two decades ago, at a lecture in Singapore in September 1994, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao adumbrated a vision of building closer relations with the countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations or ASEAN. This vision came to be called the Look East Policy or LEP. The renewed vision to seek closer relations with countries in India's extended eastern neighbourhood was quintessentially India's response to domestic economic challenges and an external environment, marked by a Unipolar world, brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Thus the economic reforms of 1991 and the opening up of India's economy provided the impetus for reworking India's foreign policy. Faced with multiple problems, economic and political, India adopted two parallel new paths - a domestic policy path of economic liberalization and the external policy path of the LEP to help expand India's trade and investment with the dynamic ASEAN region. These two choices have transformed India's economy and foreign policy in the past 20 years. Prime Minister Rao's statement in 1994 in Singapore is justifiably regarded as a major shift in Indian diplomacy, comparable to non-alignment during the Cold War era. The economic reforms, initiated in 1991, started the process of integration of the Indian economy with the global economy. India's search for expanding global markets for Indian products, services and investments led to the LEP. It was a logical outcome of domestic compulsions and a changed external environment

Was India engaging with its eastern neighbourhood for the first time? No, certainly not. Indian ports along the Coromandal Coast

and the coast of Orissa and Bengal, were trading with East and South East Asian ports since the beginning of the Christian era or even earlier. Cultural and religious influence went along with maritime trade. Odisha's folklore has many references to merchants sailing to this region, the most famous of which is the annual festival of Bali jatra or Voyage to Bali, the Indonesian island that is still predominantly (95%) Hindu. The rise of the powerful Chola Empire in southern India in the 11th and 12th centuries continued this strong maritime tradition. Last year marked the 1000 years of the Raja Rajendra Chola's famous naval expedition to the south-east Asian islands, to protect trade routes. It was not for conquest of territory. Over several centuries on interaction with India, much of Asia had embraced Sanatan Dharma and Buddhism. Indelible imprint of Indian culture remain to this day. Hinduism, Buddhism, Sanskrit, Pali, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are living examples of this influence. Angkor Wat in the Cambodian town of Siem Riep, Borobudur and Prambanan in Jog Jakarta, Indonesia, the temples of the Champa Kingdom in Vietnam are world heritage sites, inspired by the philosophy, art, architecture and sculpture that flourished during the reign of the Guptas and the Cholas. Even in Catholic Philippines, they have a version of the Ramayana that is performed as a ballet. The King of Thailand Bhumibol Adulyadej or in Sanskrit "Bhoomi Bal Atulya Tej" is also known as King Rama XI. Bangkok's international airport is called Suvarnabhumi (Golden land). The national airline of Indonesia is called Garuda, the mythical bird from the Ramayana. The establishment of the Muslim Sultanates in Delhi did not cut off Indian influence in South East Asia, even after the Cholas. Muslim merchants, Islamic scholars and Sufi mystics travelling from India, continued the maritime trade and helped spread Islam in the Malayan peninsula, Sumatra and Java. India's strategic outreach into East and South-East Asia is unique in world history. It is, therefore, important to remember that the LEP is, perhaps the 4th phase of India's outreach to the East.

Western imperialism and colonial rule in Asia undermined India's maritime links with East and South-East Asia, as Europeans usurped the maritime trading routes by force and destroyed these ancient links. The post World War-II era and the beginning of the Cold War witnessed many countries of East and South-East Asia become independent of colonial rule in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Many of these countries entered into alliance relationships with the USA, placing them outside the non-aligned group. Post independent India's multifarious challenges of governance and the domestic policy of economic insularity and non-alignment, distanced India from the countries of the South-East Asia. British colonial rule had linked India's economy to the West and India's economic engagement with South-East Asian nations decayed during colonial rule. Prime Minister Nehru's efforts at the Asian Relations Conference and the Bandung Conferences for an Asian consensus were dealt a grievous blow by the 1962 India-China war. Asian nations were taken aback by India's reverses in this war and India's image plummeted. The policy of non-alignment and the Western alliance system, led India to look at the South-East Asian countries increasingly through the prism of the Cold War. As allies of the USA, India viewed them as Western lackeys. The historical hiatus and the Cold War led to cool relations between India and countries of this region. This situation continued for almost four decades till the beginning of the 1990s.

As early as 1992, India had joined a limited "Sectoral Dialogue" with the 10-country grouping ASEAN. India's strategic engagement with ASEAN began with our membership of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996. ASEAN overruled objections from some of its other partners, particularly China, on India's admission to the ARF. The LEP, thereafter, started merging trade and economic engagement with issues of geo-strategic significance. The geographical outreach extended further eastwards towards Australia and Oceania. We celebrated the 20th Anniversary of the ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership and the 10th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Summit-level partnership by

hosting the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi in December 2012 under the theme 'ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace and Shared Prosperity'. Our interaction with ASEAN was also elevated to the level of a Strategic Partnership in 2012. The core of India-South East / East Asia relationship is the India - ASEAN equation. A variety of institutions are now operational for holding regular dialogue. The annual summit is the highest body. Separately, India is also a member of ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM) + 8 where the focus is on security, defence and strategic issues. As a Strategic Partner of ASEAN, India is actively associated with various ASEAN-led fora dealing with defence and strategic issues. These include the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, ADDM+ (ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus) and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum. Our defence ties with the region have expanded significantly. We have bilateral defence cooperation activities with ASEAN and other regional countries.

Trade and investment are two important pillars of the Act East Policy. ASEAN is India's 4th largest trading partner. Bilateral trade has topped US\$ 75 billion in 2013-2014, with both sides committing themselves to reach a trade turnover of US\$ 100 billion by 2015 and US\$ 200 billion by 2022. Investment from ASEAN into India was around US\$ 25 billion in the period 2007-14, while from India into ASEAN, it was over US\$ 30 billion. We have a Free Trade Agreement on Goods with ASEAN. The recently concluded Agreement on Trade in Services and the Agreement on Investment of the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between ASEAN and India and their early operationalisation, should allow for greater opportunities towards expansion of trade and economic cooperation between India and ASEAN. At the ASEAN Summit in Myanmar, the importance of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) as a key instrument in realizing the ASEAN Economic Community was emphasized with a need to expedite the ongoing RCEP negotiations. The RCEP involves ASEAN and its six Dialogue

Partners (China, Japan, ROK, India, Australia and New Zealand).

Beyond ASEAN, the East Asia Summit (EAS) has emerged as the larger institution, with ASEAN as its driver and hub. It includes not only ASEAN member-states but also China, Japan, and South Korea as well as India, Australia and New Zealand. This institution is now includes the USA and Russia. Thus, as a part of the Act East policy, India has to nurture bilateral relations with ASEAN countries and others, deepen cooperation with institutions such as BIMSTEC, ASEAN and EAS and to craft strategic understandings with major powers such as China, Russia and the USA on the future of Asia. The architecture of Southeast and East Asian relationships has become complex and so has the evolving architecture of relations between India and countries in these regions. Whether EAS will someday pave the way for the formation of East Asian Community (EAC) or Asian Economic Community (AEC) or eventually even to Asian Community (AC) remains to be seen. Besides, India is also a member of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and is also interested in joining Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

The LEP's changing profile and its increased geo-strategic significance has led to the demand for a more pro-active approach which has now referred to as the "Act East" policy. In its essence it means that India has to energize it LEP and act with more dynamism. The appointment of an Indian Ambassador to deal exclusively with ASEAN and the East Asia Summit signals this pro-active policy. This aspect has received much attention from Prime Minister Modi's government. The re-calibration of the LEP into Act East is visible. At the 12th ASEAN-India Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated:

"Externally, India's 'Look East Policy' has become 'Act East Policy.'"

Prime Minister Modi also said that '*India's Act East starts with Bangladesh*', firmly indicating that Bangladesh will be integrated with the Act East policy.

Addressing the India-U.S. Business Summit on January 26, 2015, during President Obama's visit Prime Minister Modi said:

'For too long, India and the United States have looked at each other across Europe and the Atlantic. When I look towards the East, I see the western shores of the United States'.

The Joint Statement - 'Shared Effort; Progress for All' issued during the US President's visit on January 25, 2015 recalled:

'Noting that India's 'Act East Policy' and the United States' rebalance to Asia provide opportunities for India, the United States, and other Asia-Pacific countries to work closely to strengthen regional ties, the Leaders announced a Joint Strategic Vision to guide their engagement in the region'.

The LEP's new orientation as the 'Act East' policy is well underway. It is in fact a maturing of the LEP. But for the rhetoric to meet reality adequate resources have to be pumped into energizing this policy. There are two dimensions to this policy; one the overland connectivity and the other the maritime domain. India has to provide adequate resources to make our country a maritime power in the Indo-Pacific region and pursue the overland option with greater vigour. In my view, Myanmar is the key to the future of this policy. Myanmar is India's land-bridge to South-East Asia. The investment climate in Myanmar has improved with a more democratic regime in that country. Trade at the border town of Moreh is opening up and informal trade may soon come down, improving revenue and living conditions in our north-eastern states. Myanmar is already India's chief source of imported pulses. India-Myanmar trade has more than doubled in the last seven years and has crossed \$2 billion in 2013-14. But India remains Myanmar's distant 11th trading partner, despite being a neighbour with a 1700 Km shared boundary.

The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral highway is a game-changer to connect India's north-east with East Asia. This 1360 km long

highway would establish seamless territorial connectivity when it is completed by 2018. It is a challenging task which requires substantial financial outlays with matching political commitment from all stakeholders. India is a party to the ambitious Trans-Asian railway project. Myanmar is not yet linked by railway to India or Thailand. The difficult hilly terrain would require major investments. A 180 km segment from Assam to Moreh via Imphal is under construction and the pace of work needs to be speeded up. Without adequate cross border connectivity, it would be very difficult for our north-eastern states to reap the benefit of our Act East policy. The other major infrastructure project is the industrial corridor linking the Myanmar's port of Dawei with Thailand. India must take a deeper interest in this project that has attracted Japanese, Korean and Thai companies.

Myanmar exports 25 percent and imports 15 percent of its total trade through the border from India. While security and the infrastructure deficit remain bottlenecks, maritime trade is not hobbled by these constraints. Hence, Act East should include setting up subsidized shipping links, to put in place this vital connectivity. India today is the 12th largest investor in Myanmar with a cumulative investment of US\$ 1.89 billion from 1989 to 2012. Foreign direct investment in Myanmar has topped US\$ 6 billion in 2014-2015. The Act East policy must utilize the immense potential of border trade along the India-Myanmar land boundary. There is, however, only one operational border trading post at Moreh-Tamu in Manipur. Trade between India and Myanmar through the border trade points of Moreh and Zokhawthar in 2012-13 was only US\$ 6.5 million. Informal trade across the border is several times higher posing a major challenge to both governments. India's engineering exports have a good potential in the Myanmar market and oil and gas companies ONGC Videsh and GAIL are aggressively scouting for more exploratory blocks in Myanmar. The new Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) law in Myanmar allows 100 percent FDI in textiles, 80 percent in food and beverages and production and distribution of fruits and vegetables. Indian companies can

invest in the textile, food and beverages production sectors.

The opportunity that Myanmar presents for Indian companies is immense and, I believe, Poshimbongo can utilize these opportunities for economic benefit. I have always maintained that Poshimbongo has a vital role to play in our Act East policy. The Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project (KMMTP) that connects Kolkata port with Sittwe port in Myanmar presents such an opportunity. Also important would be the Chennai port for sea links with ports of Yangon and Dawei. As India's Ambassador to Thailand I had visited Kolkata to speak to all stakeholders to take interest in the Dawei Industrial corridor which will provide considerable economic opportunities to companies in Poshimbongo. The time is ripe for Kolkata to take a lead role in India's Act East policy.

The Act East policy has huge significance for our north-eastern states also. I have, therefore, emphasized the importance of overland connectivity, since maritime trade bypasses the north-eastern region. In the context of cross border transformation in the north eastern region of India physical connectivity is a very important component. The security dimension in the north-east of India has had a dampening effect on infrastructure projects and they are facing delays due to political, security and financial problems. Because of security concerns, the only infrastructure projects in the North-East so far, have been undertaken by Government's own agencies. While the Moreh-Tamu-Kalemayo Road, has been completed, other projects like the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, Kaladan multi modal project, Tamanthi hydroelectric project etc are facing delays due to political, security and financial problems. Partnerships with the Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore can generate healthy competitive impulses to get some of these projects moving faster is a new focus of the Act East policy.

The geo-strategic landscape of Asia-Pacific or the Indo-Pacific region is changing rapidly. This region is today the most dynamic, with three of the World's largest economies and

several other dynamic economies. The power shift that is taking place from the trans-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific is inducing a disequilibrium in the international system. While the LEP began with a predominant economic objective, India's strategic objective was latent, in the beginning. In the back drop of the rise of China as a booming economy and a manufacturing superpower, there were also compelling factors that made ASEAN reciprocate India's outreach to it. The need to balance China's rapid rise, by inviting and facilitating a stronger engagement of India and others with the region was a strong motivation. Also, two years before the Singapore lecture, India had shed her old Myanmar policy and started to engage pragmatically with the ruling military junta.

China's assertive behaviour in the South China Sea, where it is embroiled in disputes with almost all littoral nations, has peaked recently, with the stand-off between China and Vietnam, over oil exploration attempts by China at a site, claimed by Vietnam, as falling within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Chinese moves have raised the ante and disputes and conflict brewing in the South China Sea are worrying for all countries. India is encouraging all claimants to the disputed islands to maintain peace and find a solution within the UN's Law of the Seas and ASEAN's Code of Conduct. With China's assertive behaviour throwing up red flags for all countries, India can push ahead with its Act East policy since the incentive to engage India in a countervailing strategy will be appealing to most countries in Asia. Indeed this is already happening. The USA will play an important role in this countervailing strategy, alongwith other Asian nations.

The future of our Act East policy has to be woven by the twin strands of economic engagement and strong security ties. India must build a web of relationships with all countries, including China. With the historic visit of the Emperor and Empress of Japan to India, our Act East policy has moved into a faster lane with respect to Japan, the 3rd largest economy and a technological power which is already playing a transformational role in

building infrastructure in India (Delhi Metro and the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial corridor). Security relations are also growing and India and Japan are on the verge of reaching agreement on a civil nuclear agreement. Prime Minister Abe of Japan was the Chief Guest for the Republic Day celebrations in January 2014. Japan has a key role to play in our Act East policy as a partner in economic and security cooperation, including defence supplies. The Republic of Korea (ROK) has also acquired a crucial profile in our policy. ROK has steadily invested in sectors like automobiles, white goods, electronics and mining, making a mark in the manufacturing sector. Apart from the free trade agreement with ASEAN, India has Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPA) with Japan and Korea. India is a founder member of the East Asia Summit (EAS) and is a member of the ongoing Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership negotiations which groups together the 10 ASEAN countries, China, Korea, Japan, Australia, India New Zealand. From the geo-strategic point of view, Indonesia and Vietnam are also key countries. India will have to nurture these three crucial relationships because of the added dimension of security while building web of relationships with major countries, including China which is increasingly taking the lead in initiating moves for a larger economic and security architecture in Asia.

Act East policy will also have to meet the challenge of how to deal the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), led by the USA with 12 Asian-Pacific countries that include some ASEAN countries, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. If China joins the TPP, then India will be marginalized since China's trade with ASEAN and the USA US\$ 450 billion and US\$ 516 billion respectively. China-Japan, trade volume is over US\$ 300 billion. India is way behind but can hope to catch up if India's domestic economic growth picks up and we can sustain a GDP growth rate 7+%. The other domain from which new challenges to our Act East policy is likely to spring up is security. The rise of China has led to a military buildup in Asia and arms transfers have gone up

manifold, underlining the unstable security situation. China's Maritime Silk Route proposal involves building ports and other infrastructure assets in the sub-continent. China is preparing to deploy its maritime capability in the Indian Ocean. Our Act East policy must, therefore, incorporate countervailing measures which build military cooperation with the USA, Japan, Korea, Australia and ASEAN countries. The goal will be to inhibit China's projection of power and at the same time build cooperation on common areas of interest like combating piracy, maritime disaster management and keeping the Sea Lanes of Communication open for trade. India must also leverage its considerable cultural influence to engage all Asian countries. This aspect has so far not been fully leveraged

The Act East policy has acquired great relevance in the global geo-strategic space. Indubitably, it a pillar of India's foreign policy, competing with our South Asia policy and our policy towards the USA, Russia, China, Japan, the European Union and other Emerging Economies, giving India the necessary space to play its legitimate role as

an emerging great power. Let me end by quoting to you an introductory paragraph written by American scholar Dr Timothy Hoyt, Professor of Strategy and Policy at the US War College, to a recent study on India's Grand Strategy:

'India's emergence as one of the great economic powers in the international system and its military strength, position it to be a major player in the international system in the twenty-first century. However, its current policies, rooted in a vision of India's role in the international order that once reflected a consensus of Indian elites, appear to reflect a mismatch between its growing means and its overall role in international affairs. The emergence of *'new thinking'* and debates are gradually breaking down the consensus of India's founding generations. Drivers of change are many, but it remains to be seen which tips India from a passive regional power to a more assertive global one.'

The Fragmenting of America: Problems in the Assimilation of Latinos in the United States

Saumyajit Ray*

ABSTRACT

For the first time in their history, Americans were faced with an immigrant community – the Latinos – many of whom were not only unable but unwilling to learn English. Though English was not the official language of the United States, it was acknowledged widely as the “language of America”. Refusal to learn English, thus, evoked a strong response from mainstream Americans: state after state began declaring English as their official language to compel Latinos to assimilate into American life and society, just as generations of non-English speakers had done before them. Bilingual education and multilingual ballots further discouraged English acquisition among Latinos and other language minorities. A new Americanization movement arose in the 1980s – the Official English movement – to make Congress declare English as the official language of the United States, abolish these federal programs and measures, end poverty and joblessness among Latinos, and bring them into the national mainstream.

Key words: *Assimilation, Latinos, immigration, Americanization, English proficiency, Official English, Amero-conformity*

The Immigration and Nationality Act (1965) opened the doors of the United States to a large number of immigrants from Asia and Latin America. Those from Latin America flooded American towns in search of jobs, never snapping ties with the Old country. Those who settled were either unwilling or unable to learn English, leaving a big unassimilated section within American society.

Latinos, the fastest growing ethno-lingual minority in the US, presented a unique problem: most of them not only refused to assimilate, but insisted on the retention of dual identities (eg. Mexican & American). Worse, instead of adopting the culture and learning

the language of the host society, they made mainstream America accommodate their culture and learn their language. America, once English-monolingual, has moved toward public and official bilingualism. This has threatened to split American society as never before. Cultural pluralism has thoroughly undermined America’s assimilationist ethic, raising questions about the desirability of immigrants from Latin America. A swift assimilation of Latinos by declaring English as the nation’s official language and eliminating illegal immigration from Latin American countries is also seen as means to prevent the ethnic segregation and segmentation of American society.

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This paper would argue that cultural pluralism is divisive, and a privately native and publicly American lifestyle can keep the United States from getting ethnically fragmented. Otherwise, large concentrations of unassimilated Latinos in certain regions of the US can one day lead to a demand for secession reminiscent of Quebec.

The Founding Fathers and Assimilation of Non-English-Speaking Immigrants

The Founding Fathers did not want the King to meddle in matters relating to immigration; that they too were opposed to unbridled immigration, once the new republic came into existence, is borne out by their statements and testimonies quoted in the preceding section. As Milton M. Gordon has suggested, there is no reason to believe that the Founding Fathers looked upon the newly created United States as an impartial melting pot for the merging of the various cultures of Europe, or as a new "nation of nations", or as anything but a society in which Anglo-Saxon speech and institutional forms would be standard.¹ In fact the Founding Fathers felt that there was no need for encouraging immigration from Europe, since immigrants tended to retain the language habits, and principles which they brought with them.

The Founding Fathers' idea of assimilation, of the right of the English-speaking to inculcate non-English speakers with English culture and language, was even expressed by leaders like Benjamin Franklin a quarter of a century before independence.²

Though Germans were the largest language minority during the revolutionary years and even after independence and though the contribution of the German-American community to the revolutionary war and the subsequent building of the new republic was enormous, any encouragement to German language and culture was seen by the Founding Fathers as a step toward creating social and political divisions. Instead, Germans were expected to adopt the language and culture of the majority English-speaking population, with national unity as the ultimate goal. The same was expected of the French,

the Dutch, the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Swedish and other language groups.

The idea that non-English speaking immigrants should adjust themselves to the culture, institutions, and language of the United States continued well into the 19th century; what is more, suggestions were even made that they should leave America if they failed to reconcile themselves to the new situation and still continued or insisted or continuing with the language and culture of the old country.

The message was loud and clear: if immigrants failed to abandon their native culture and loyalties, they were unwelcome to the United States. The junior Adams, who was to become president himself seven years later, was then Secretary of State under James Monroe. His views acquire added significance, coming from the highest diplomatic officer of the United States. Not only government officials and political figures, but even the American intelligentsia of those times professed similar assimilationist beliefs.

Thus, assimilation of immigrants remained the over-riding concern of politicians and intellectuals alike. It was very important to ensure that non-English-speaking immigrants adopted the English language and imbibed English manners (as modified in America).

Despite these concerns, however, immigration to the United States continued. In fact, few restrictions were imposed on immigration in the decades following the revolution, and during most of the 19th century. The result: immigrants from all over Europe flocked to the United States.

The Old Americanization Movement

Countries of Southern and Eastern Europe began to be represented significantly for the first time in the immigration of the 1880s. In the next decade immigrants from these sources became numerically dominant, and Italians, Jews and Slavs began to outnumber the English, Irish, Germans and Scandinavians. The new immigrants were poor, worked in lowly paid industrial jobs and lived in urban slums. The nativist scorn for them began to border on racism: a doctrine arose that the

English, Germans, and others of the “old immigration” constituted a superior race of tall, blonde, blue-eyed Nordics or “Aryans”, whereas the people of Eastern and Southern Europe made up the darker Alpines or Mediterraneans – both inferior races whose presence in America threatened the traditional American racial stock and superior culture. But alongside such racism, realization also dawned that the “new immigration” was irreversible, and that the new immigrants were in America to stay. The only way to deal with the problem, then, was to assimilate them.

Just before the outbreak of World War I, a movement – better known as the Americanization movement – started in the United States to make the immigrant forget his native culture and attachments and mold him into an American along Anglo-Saxon lines. And since all this was to be accomplished as rapidly as possible, a conscious and deliberate drive to hasten the assimilative process emerged. Americanization, thus, was an organized and articulate movement.

Thus the Americanization campaign made the same assumption as the earlier nativist movement: that there was a core culture – largely Protestant and Anglo-American – on which the successful operation of republican government must be based. But Americanization also believed that most immigrants and their children could become part of that core if their environment was properly arranged through education, training, and supervision. Even President Woodrow Wilson believed that “hyphenism” kept Americans segregated; the need of the hour was to give up ethnic identities: “You cannot become Americans if you think of yourselves as groups. America does not consist of groups”.³

Suspicion regarding the intent of the large German-American population produced in the minds of many American citizens of that period the menace of “hyphenated Americans”. Accordingly, hatred of German cultural manifestations and persecution of Germans in the United States began to rise. This suspicion grew into a general concern for assuring the loyalty of all those who had

come recently from other lands. Not only did the Americanization movement foster a militant nationalism, Americanizers generated the current of “100% Americanism”.⁴ As John Higham said:

By threat and rhetoric 100 percent Americanizers opened a frontal assault on foreign influence in American life. They set about to stampede immigrants into citizenship, into adoption of the English language, and into unquestioning reverence for existing American institutions. They bade them abandon entirely their Old World loyalties, customs, and memories.⁵

Americanization, as a movement and as a practical program to assimilate immigrants, was pursued by a partnership of public agencies and private organizations. The emphasis was on instruction in the use of the English language, cultural indoctrination, elementary American history and “patriotic” political science (the nature of the American system of government). The assumption underlying all these was that such domestic cultural missionary activity would transform immigrants into Americans and preserve the national character. The Committee for Immigrants in America, which grew out of the North American Civic League, in its journal *Immigrants in America Review*, spoke of a “conscious effort to forge the people of this country into an American race that will stand together for America in time of peace and war”.⁶ Thus, federal agencies like the Bureau of Education, the Bureau of Naturalization, and the Committee on Public Information, state governments, municipalities and a host of private organizations like the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Young Men’s Christian Association, the National Americanization Committee, and Henry Ford’s Ford English School joined the effort to persuade immigrants to learn English, take out naturalization papers, buy war bonds, forget their former origins, and join the nationalist wave that was generated in the wake of the great war.

Since Americanization, as a movement to further ethnic unity, initially relied on the common school as the most potent medium

during the war years and after, state governments centered their principal effort on immigration education. More than twenty states passed laws authorizing night school classes in English for immigrants. Idaho and Utah made laws requiring non-English speaking "aliens" to attend Americanization classes. The governor of Iowa issued a proclamation banning all non-English languages in schools, church services, and conversations in public places or over the telephone. In 1919, fifteen states enacted laws to the effect that English must be the sole language of instruction in all primary schools, public and private. Nebraska stipulated that all meetings of a public nature, except religious or lodge meetings, be conducted in English. Oregon required that all foreign language publications display prominently a literal English translation of all their contents.⁷

Americanizers were harried when the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia in 1917 after a protracted civil war. Socialism and communism were regarded as corrupting foreign ideologies from which Americans had to be insulated at all costs. Lenin's open letter *To the American Workers* were regarded as a direct appeal to unassimilated and under-assimilated ethnic Americans of East European descent. Any sympathy for socialism was treated as an example of incomplete Americanization. But as World War I came to an end, the Big Red Scare also passed with it. An economic depression also set in that forbade the business classes from funding the Americanization effort. The crusade for Americanization suddenly lost all urgency. Americanization had taken permanent root as a workday endeavor to teach English and political science to immigrants in the public evening schools, and it endured. But as a major expression of militant American nationalism, Americanization swiftly faded during the later half of 1920 and 1921.⁸

Since the struggle to culturally transform the foreign-born was now deemed not worthy of the time, energy and expenses that it required, attention turned to keeping the immigrants out of American shores. In the place of

indoctrination of immigrants which Americanization championed, there arose a new wave of restrictionist sentiment, a demand for restriction of the influx of new immigrants. Based on the assumption that the inherent inferiority of East and South Europeans made them unassimilable, the goal of the restrictionists was not only to affect a decrease in the total number of immigrants to the United States, but to set up a formula that would favor and enhance the entry of immigrants from Northern and Western Europe (who were considered culturally superior and perfectly assimilable). Beginning 1921, a series of immigration laws passed by Congress set out to do just that.

Assimilationists were also convinced of the cultural superiority of Anglo-Saxon institutions as developed in the United States. Those among them who did not harbor such prejudices believed simply that since English culture has constituted the dominant framework for the development of American institutions, immigrants should adjust accordingly. Accordingly, assimilationists demanded that immigrants to America abandon the cultural forms of their native lands and adopt the behavior and attitudes of the dominant Anglo-Saxon mold of their new country.

The maintenance and continuation of ethnic identities were construed as a threat to American national unity. The fact that America was a nation of immigrants kept the suspicion alive in the minds of assimilationists that persistence of "hyphenism" was proof of extra-territorial loyalties of the new immigrants, be it support of the Irish Roman Catholics for a "Free Ireland", or that of other immigrants of East and South European descent for the nationalist aspirations of peoples in their homelands. What assimilationists wanted was "America first": assimilation was the way to a socially and politically united America.

For Samuel P. Huntington, Americanization was the other name of assimilation in America: "Historically America has thus been a nation of immigration *and* assimilation, and assimilation has meant Americanization."⁹

He has identified certain factors that had facilitated assimilation of immigrants into American society, namely, most immigrants were from European societies with cultures similar to or compatible with American culture, immigrants wanted to be Americans, immigrants came from many countries with no single country or language predominant at any time, immigrants dispersed to ethnic neighborhoods throughout the United States with no single group of immigrants forming a majority of population in any region or major city, immigration was not a continuous process, immigrants died in American wars and shared a common concept of American identity.¹⁰

Huntington also points to certain ideas and influences that have disrupted the process of Americanization, and hence assimilation.¹¹ The first was the idea that immigrants may assimilate into American society and yet not assimilate America's core culture. The other idea, says Huntington, was that Americanization was unnecessary. The third disruptive belief, according to Huntington – and this was comparatively new historically and ideologically – was that Americanization was undesirable and un-American, floated by theorists like Michael Walzer. Wrote Walzer not very long ago: "A radical program of Americanization would really be un-American... America has no singular national destiny."¹²

Because of these ideas, concludes Huntington, assimilation was no longer synonymous with Americanization by the end of the twentieth century but had taken several forms like *segmented assimilation* (assimilation not into mainstream American society but into a marginal segment of that society), *nonassimilation* (the perpetuation in the United States of the culture and social institutions the immigrants had brought with them), and the *ampersand* phenomenon (dual citizenship, dual nationality, dual allegiance).¹³

On the ground, this meant 21 million immigrants in 2000 said they did not speak English very well.¹⁴

The Immigration and Nationality Act (1965)

The Lyndon Johnson Administration had decisively put an end to discrimination in American society through the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965). Now it was his turn to end discrimination in immigration. Like John F. Kennedy before him, LBJ gave high priority to immigration reform. And like JFK before him, LBJ wanted to scrap the National Origins Quota System.

President Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act (PL 89-236) at a ceremony in Liberty Island in New York Harbor, describing the passage of the legislation as rectifying "a very deep and painful flaw in the fabric of American justice"¹⁵, and removing forever the twin barriers of prejudice and privilege. America was reasserting itself as a "nation of immigrants", despite the fact that that nearly a third of Americans wanted continuance of the National Origins Quota System. But then, the threat of "invasion" by "undesirable" immigrant and ethnic groups was not as great as in the past, and American attitudes toward race and national origins were undergoing a slow but gradual change.

PL 89-236 indeed abolished the National Origins Quota System and set up a new system to grant entry to persons "whose special skills would be especially advantageous to the United States". Country-by-country quotas were scrapped and replaced by hemispheric quotas (overall ceiling of 120,000 for the Western hemisphere, 170,000 for the rest of the world), to be filled by a "first-come-first-served" basis. The law became fully operational after June 30, 1968, at the end of a three-year transition period.

The Act of 1965 considerably increased overall immigration from Asia and Latin America. As a result of the Act, entries from northern and western Europe reduced significantly. For the first time in American immigration history, an applicant from Asia or Latin America was treated at par with an applicant from Europe. Interestingly, the proportion of the foreign-born population rose dramatically. Whereas in 1960, those who were foreign-born

comprised only 5.2% of the population, in 1990, they had increased to 7.8.

Changing the Face of America

The euphoria generated by the Act of 1965 left its impact on all aspects of American life: it increased population growth and influenced politics, education, and religion as never before, and changed American food habits, dress habits, and music; the diversity it created also altered the nation's racial and ethnic make-up and, most importantly, its perception of itself.¹⁶

The image of the United States as a land of abundance and opportunity created by mass media, books, magazines, radio and television programs, American movies and music videos and also by private remittances and letters sent by friends and relatives settled in the United States stimulated a growing eagerness among the peoples of the Third World countries to seek a share of the American Dream.

The new influx, however, raised a plethora of questions, all regarding the future of the United States and the uncertainty that the surge of aliens created: how many immigrants and of what kind did the country actually need, and how many was it capable of absorbing? Could millions of people from such a variety of races, languages, and cultures, be assimilated into American society? Was it desirable that they should be?

English Proficiency Among New Immigrants

The biggest casualty of the 1965 Act was English proficiency. Many countries of Asia and Africa—former colonies of Great Britain—had eliminated the use of English after the coming of political independence. Immigrants from those countries had little or no English proficiency. On the other hand, English proficiency of immigrants from countries that had continued with the use of English even after political liberation—in the form of an associate official language and/or as a second language in schools, like India—was high. But Asian Indians were an exception. The Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians could neither read, write or

converse in English fluently. Added to Asians were Latin Americans—Mexicans, Cubans, Salvadorans—for whom English was an alien tongue. But English was the language of America. A new problem arose for the United States, and for the new immigrants: the problem of language.

For the new immigrants, the melting process was not always smooth. A majority of these newest arrivals were Latin Americans and Asians. In fact, Latinos, or Hispanics—Mexicans, Cubans, Salvadorans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Ecuadorians, Colombians—are the largest immigrant group and ethnic community in the United States. They are drawn from twenty-three different nationalities, but speak a common language: Spanish. Their numerical strength has made the United States the fourth-largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world.¹⁷ And Hispanics are determined to preserve their culture, especially their language. Today, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000 report), among those who spoke a language other than English at home, 59.6% spoke Spanish, rising from 54.5% a decade earlier.¹⁸

If Hispanics are zealously clinging to their native language and are consequently unwilling to learn English, Asians harbor no such prejudice; it is only that they find language a great barrier because English is vastly different from their native speech. The countries they come from either do not encourage the use of English or, even if they do, the immigrants' families in their native lands could not afford to send them to expensive English-medium schools. Accordingly, barring Asian Indians, all Asians—Chinese, Koreans, Filipinos, Japanese, Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis—find it difficult to learn English. Most of them do not understand English when they arrive, and the continued use of native languages at home further discourages the acquiring of English. This, despite being aware that English was the language of America.

But immigrants themselves are not solely responsible for their limited proficiency in the English language. The federal government of

the United States, believing as it does that a child can be best educated in his/her native language—even if it was not English—and a citizen's constitutional right to vote can be best exercised if he/she was supplied with voting materials in the native tongue, has contributed largely to this minority language maintenance and limited English proficiency of non-English speaking immigrants, keeping them from assimilating into the greater American society.

Even former president Theodore Roosevelt came out strongly against the persistence of non-English native tongues and any attempt to use them to thwart the process of assimilation of immigrants.¹⁹

Ironically, President Barack Obama, who during his highly divisive 2008 campaign for the White House had declared that it was more important for English-speaking Americans to learn Spanish than to insist that Spanish-speakers learnt English, recently stated that America's 12 million mostly Hispanic undocumented workers needed to learn English before they could even be considered for citizenship.²⁰ Coming from a Democrat, this is revolutionary. Obama is the first Democratic president in the bilingual education era to make the acquisition of English a pre-condition for being considered for U.S. citizenship, a far cry from his fellow Democrats in the U.S. Congress and outside who famously insist that it was not necessary for Hispanics to learn English at all even after acquiring citizenship of this country.

The Failure of Bilingual Education

Bilingual education—*transitional* bilingual education—had a simple and limited mission: to teach children of Mexican descent in Spanish while they learned English. That was the position of the federal government in 1968, and especially after the amendments of 1974. The method was simple too: to have students take subject matter courses in their native language while learning English as a second language. The idea was that these children's lack of proficiency in English should not hamper their progress in learning.

But *transitional* bilingual education had fallen victim to *facilitation theorists* who claimed that children could not learn a second language until they were fully proficient in their first. This process was supposed to take six or seven years during which students were taught only in their native language. English was not be taught at all during these years, but worked into the curriculum slowly once the threshold was crossed. In other words, children were to learn English by being taught in Spanish! Since the basic postulate of the facilitation theorists was that children would be cognitively deprived if they were not taught in their native tongue, students (most of them Hispanics) were not allowed either to learn in English or to learn English in their years in bilingual school.

Both the early proponents of bilingual education (who championed *transitional* bilingual programs) and the later *facilitation theorists* (who introduced native language instruction) can be seriously disputed with regard to their basic premises. If lack of proficiency in English hampered the process of learning of limited English proficient (LEP) students—as the early bilingual advocates had claimed—then the only way of overcoming that drawback would be to teach such students in English in either traditional all-English classes, structured “immersion” programs in English, or in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. In this way, LEP students would successfully make the crossover to English because such instruction would allow them to learn in English and learn English (as a language) at the same time. In fact, the longer students stayed in segregated bilingual programs, the less successful they were in school. After thirty-six years of bilingual education, the dropout rate for Latinos was the highest in the country: among Hispanic immigrant children in the age group 16 to 19, 34% were dropouts in 2000, whereas among US-born Latinos of the same age group, 14% were dropouts in that year, among all Hispanics 16-19, regardless of where they were born, 21% had dropped out in 2000, down from 21.6% in 1990.²¹

Worse, only about 5% of children enrolled in bilingual classes ever make it to English-speaking classes each year. Needless to say, most of them are Hispanics. In fact, Hispanics constitute about 75% of all students enrolled in LEP programs.²² Hispanic students, despite bilingual education, consistently perform below the national average, as shown by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Disparities begin as early as kindergarten and remain through age 17. Hispanic students lag behind their non-Hispanic peers in reading, mathematics and science proficiency throughout their years in school. And most of them leave school unable to read or write English, the language of the United States.

According to the *National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education*, California accounted for 40% of the 3,452,073 LEP students reported during the '96-'97 school year.²³ The 1997 Language Census of the California Department of Education put the number of LEP students in California at an alarming 1,381,393.²⁴ Along with it, Texas (15%), Florida (8.4%), New York (7.2%), and Illinois (3.4%) accounted for almost 75% of LEP students in the United States. Again, according to the U.S. Census Bureau Report (2000), 17.6% of the American population spoke a language other than English at home, up from 13.8% in the 1990 census. Among them, those who spoke Spanish at home rose from 54.5% in 1990 to 59.6% in 2000.²⁵

To understand how well immigrants in the United States spoke English, says Gillian Stevens, it is necessary to take into account the native lands of immigrants. Potential immigrants born and raised in countries in which English was a dominant or official language had a large advantage over potential immigrants born and raised in non-English-language countries. If English was the dominant language of an immigrants' country, which made the immigrant a native speaker of English, his linguistic assimilation in the United States would not be much of an issue. Countries like the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand fell into this category. Even immigrants from countries like

India, where English was not a dominant language but an official language used in important social institutions such as the government and the educational system, arrived in the United States with prior knowledge of English and hence would not find living and working in their new country a difficult proposition. On the other hand, immigrants from the remainder of the world's countries, where they were much less likely to learn English as a first or second language or to use English in major social institutions, were less apt to be proficient in English on their arrival in the United States.²⁶ These include immigrants from Vietnam, Korea, and China. And these also include Hispanics. Spanish-speakers in the United States are drawn from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela.²⁷ Though frequently referred to as *Latino*, a term used to denote US residents of Latin American origin, *Hispanic* is a more preferred designation for this very diverse and multi-racial population of which Mexican-American (earlier known as *Chicanos*), Cuban-Americans, and Puerto Ricans are the largest groups according to national origin.

No doubt, then, that Hispanics would find linguistic assimilation and adaptation in the United States difficult; English is neither a dominant nor an official language in any of their countries of origin. The task of linguistic assimilation, however, has been made impossible by bilingual education through native language instruction. If mastery of both the native language and English, and not just English, was the goal of the facilitation theorists and their *maintenance* approach to bilingual education, that goal is yet to be achieved; Hispanic students in primary and secondary schools (K-12) in the United States master neither language after years in so-called *bilingual* classes. Even if they become proficient in Spanish, that is of little use in the United States. Despite the recent tendency in government, business, and politics to publish Spanish translations of their literatures, American society remains overwhelmingly

English speaking. One thing is certain: Hispanics seem condemned to lifelong limited English proficiency and, by extension, to continued marginal and subordinate positions in American economy and society.

Horace Mann, a prominent public figure of 19th century Massachusetts and an observer of the American system of education, argued that public schools in the United States should take the lead in assimilating immigrant populations into American economic life.²⁸ Clearly, because of bilingual education, public schools have failed to fulfill that obligation.

Bilingual Education: The Biggest Obstacle to Latino Assimilation

Why, then, has the federal government continued in its support for bilingual education? According to Governor Richard D. Lamm and Gary Imhoff, bilingual education exists for political, not educational, reasons like giving jobs and local power to members of the non-English-speaking community who work in the bilingual schools, reinforcing children's identification with members of their own ethnic groups, and preserving the distinguishing characteristics of those ethnic groups, which in turn served as a power base to those who identified themselves as leaders of those groups.²⁹

Not only did the Hispanic community monopolize political lobbying for bilingual education—through groups like the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), and the National Council of La Raza—an overwhelming majority of Hispanics also started supporting bilingual programs. A survey, commissioned by the Spanish language television station *Univision* and covering 755 eligible Hispanic voters in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Chicago, Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio between April 5 and 18, 1998, found that 83 per cent of those polled either strongly or somewhat supported bilingual education.³⁰

Imhoff, in fact, views bilingual education as an element of a political movement, providing a power base for mostly Hispanic local and national ethnic organizations regardless of its

efficacy or desirability for Hispanic students.³¹ The politics of bilingualism, Imhoff accurately points out, is rooted in a particular social theory, namely, that of *cultural pluralism*, first articulated by Horace Kallen in the 1920s in his seminal work, *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (1924). Sociolinguist Joshua A. Fishman—author of *Language Loyalty in the United States* (1966) and numerous other works on pluralism and languages—till date remains the high-priest of the social theory of bilingual education.

The problem arose, says Imhoff, when Hispanics began to be treated not as immigrants but as a minority ethnic community. The primary effort and the primary credit for an immigrant's success in American society belonged to him or her. The immigrant learned the language of the new society, along with its customs and folkways, and the skills that were useful to make a decent living in the new land. His or her success in achieving the American Dream depended on hard work, sometimes even harder than that of native-born Americans. If treated as a minority, however, this type of effort was not necessary on the part of the immigrant.

Going by the cultural pluralist model, the problems that arose between a minority and his/her society were presumed to be caused by that society. The responsibility for solving those problems, therefore, lay with the society. Applying this to the American situation, if Hispanics in America were a minority community and not an immigrant group, then the responsibility of learning a new language lay with American society and not Hispanics. Not only that, society's responsibility to the immigrant was to provide opportunity whereas society's responsibility to the minority was to provide entitlements. Bilingual education was one of the foremost entitlement programs that could be afforded to Hispanics.³²

Worse, as political support to bilingual education was aimed at creating a power base for its supporters, it was not concerned with the success of bilingual programs, but with their indefinite continuance. This, despite the fact Hispanic organizations very well know

that bilingual education was unpopular with the American people, especially when Americans understood its underlying theory of cultural maintenance. They could not have cared less, as the bilingual education movement is just an arm of a much wider power struggle wherein Hispanic leaders try to preserve their power by maintaining the separate identity of their ethnic group.

But two observations of Imhoff stick out as remarkably unique and accurate as assessments of bilingual education. First, he views bilingual education as an attempt at ethnic segregation of American society, on the same lines as the racial segregation of the 1950s and 60s; only that the segregationists of today call themselves progressives or leftists rather than as conservatives. The other is the misleading nature of the term *transitional* bilingual education. The term, Imhoff says, was invented in the late 1960s to make bilingual education politically acceptable; no difference in educational theory actually distinguished *transitional* from *maintenance* bilingual education, but the term implied that the purpose of these *transitional* courses was to enable students to move from their native languages into English.³³ It would be pertinent to mention here that Senator Yarborough had confidently declared that the purpose of S.428 – which became the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 – was “not to stamp out the mother tongue”. No doubt, then, schools providing bilingual education have succeeded in preserving and promoting the divergent cultures and languages of their students, at the cost of preparing them for life and citizenship in America.

Noel Epstein, an education writer for *Washington Post*, not only questioned the rationale for preferring bilingual education over other instructional approaches but also relentlessly criticized minority-language *maintenance* programs. The government was yet to demonstrate whether *transitional* bilingual education made much difference to the students’ achievements, to their acquisition of English, or to their attitude toward school, says Epstein. Despite that, Congress had rapidly and regularly increased its

commitment to bilingual education and even to “bicultural instruction”, where language-minority students were taught about their own ethnic groups.³⁴

Epstein questions the criteria for eligibility of students for bilingual education programs. According to him, students who were otherwise proficient in English (even though they may also speak another language) had been admitted to bilingual programs based on their surnames, Census Bureau data, and other grounds which do not necessarily measure a pupil’s proficiency in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing English. This, coupled with the absence of generally accepted and validated tests to measure language proficiency of students, have ended up in the admission of many English proficient language-minority students to bilingual programs, leaving out the most needy in their midst from the purview of such programs.³⁵

Epstein attacks advocates of bilingual-bicultural education for wanting to provide such instruction to students who were already proficient in English, for opposing the use of the native language only temporarily as a bridge to English instruction, and for seeking to give equal importance to the mother tongue and culture through language and cultural *maintenance* programs. Beneath the arguments and justifications in favor of *maintenance* programs, says Epstein, was the idea that it was for the federal government to finance and promote student loyalties to their ethnic languages and histories while at the same time going through the process of learning the common English language and the common national history. Epstein calls this phenomenon *Affirmative Ethnicity*.³⁶

If language and cultural *maintenance* programs, says Epstein rightly, were the goals of bilingual-bicultural education, then it would become the responsibility of the federal government to maintain other languages and cultures regardless of a student’s degree of fluency in English. The ostensible purpose of bilingual education – to help LEP children achieve English proficiency and learn subject matters in English – would be defeated. That

is exactly what has happened, even if one forgets Epstein.

But Epstein makes a more fundamental point: was it a federal responsibility to finance and promote student attachments to their ethnic languages and cultures, a task long performed by families, religious groups, ethnic organizations, private schools, and ethnic publications? Certainly not, when one considers the divisive nature of *maintenance* programs; Epstein, like Imhoff, cites evidence about maintenance efforts being highly segregated. In the same vein, Samuel P. Huntington calls bilingual education “educational apartheid.”³⁷ It really is.

What is more alarming is that ideological support to cultural maintenance has led extremists among Latino activists not only to push for civil rights for illegal immigrants and protection of Spanish language and culture in the United States but also to demand the return (*reconquista*) of the southwest US provinces—lost by Mexico to the United States in the war of 1848—with the avowed objective of establishing *Aztlan*, a pan-Mexican homeland. A radical group formed solely for the purpose of achieving *Aztlan*, the *Movimiento Estudiante Chicano de Aztlan (MECHA)*, launched a political party, *La Raza Unida*, in 1970. *La Raza* tried converting Crystal City (Texas) into a Chicano city after wresting control over it in local elections. English-speaking Americans united with Latinos in singing *Viva Mexico!* at a meeting of the National Council of *La Raza*. The Mexican flag adorns the office of the mayor in El Cenizo (Texas). The Democratic Party had repeatedly branded Republicans as anti-Latino for sponsoring Official English measures and opposing bilingual education at various levels. The radical Mexican-American separatist group, *MECHA*, accused the Republican Party of being made up of racist/fascist European settlers.³⁸ In the end, despite the best of intentions, ideological and political support to cultural pluralism has led not only to social conflicts but also to secessionist tendencies among Latinos in the United States. Bilingual advocates have failed to recognize that repeated reminders of ‘rich’ cultural diversity

actually undermined assimilation; cultural homogeneity was the basis of social and political unity.

Multilingual Ballots and the Making of “Permanently Alien” Voters

Minority language rights, the federal government decided in 1975, could not be given legal protection without extending them to the realm of voting. The right to vote in the United States was extended and expanded by several constitutional amendments since the early days of the republic so that universal adult franchise could be exercised by American citizens regardless of race and color (Fifteenth Amendment, 1870), sex (Nineteenth Amendment, 1920), tax status (Twenty-fourth Amendment, 1964), and age i.e. eighteen years (Twenty-sixth Amendment, 1971). The Voting Rights Act of 1965 temporarily suspended literacy tests required for voter registration, enfranchising large numbers of illiterate African Americans in the South. As a result, the New York State Constitution’s English literacy requirement for voting got nullified under the Act, giving the right to vote to Puerto Ricans who were literate in Spanish but not in English.

But it was the first time that voting rights were sought to be expanded in the United States by effecting a fundamental change in voting practices. In 1975, Congress admitted that language minority citizens continued to be excluded from the electoral process through the use of English-only elections.³⁹ Accordingly, Congress held extensive hearings about voting discrimination suffered by Hispanics, Asian Americans and Native Americans because of English-only elections, and the 1975 Amendments to the Voting Rights Act (1965) added protections for minority-language citizens from voting discrimination.⁴⁰ The 1975 Amendments explicitly required that written voting materials and oral voter assistance be made available in languages other than English in jurisdictions where a single language minority group constituted more than 5% of its voting-age citizens and where the English literacy rate of such persons was below the national average. Also, such jurisdictions must have conducted the 1972 elections in English

only and attracted the participation of fewer than 50% of potential voters. In such jurisdictions, state and local governments were required to provide voting materials in the voters' native or primary language.⁴¹

In 1980, 386 such jurisdictions—most jurisdictions are counties or towns—were set aside to meet the 5% figure. In 2002, 335 jurisdictions in thirty states were still providing written voting materials and oral voter assistance in languages other than English, out of which 220 were doing it in Spanish.⁴² The multilingual voting system has brought about a significant increase in voter participation by non-English-speaking communities across the United States and helped them to win public office as never before.

El Cenizo: An Example of Blatant Latino Refusal to Assimilate

'Spanish is the official language of one part of the American polity,' wrote Nathan Glazer way back in 1966.⁴³ At that time, there was no Official English movement in the United States, and only three states—Louisiana, Nebraska and Illinois—had adopted English as their official language (Illinois had declared "American" to be its official language in 1923 which it changed to English in 1969). But more than three decades later, Spanish became the official language of a small town on the Mexican-American border, confirming the worst fears of Official English advocates about the future of English in America. The name of the town: El Cenizo.

A city council meeting held on August 5, 1999 passed an ordinance declaring that all city meetings and functions and all city government business in El Cenizo, a ramshackle blue-collar town of 7800 residents (90% of whom spoke Spanish only) just 15 miles downriver from Laredo along the Rio Grande in south Texas, would be conducted in Spanish. There was little discussion and no dissension as the city council voted to make Spanish official.⁴⁴ The council's decision also made El Cenizo the first in the country to declare a language other than English as official.

Another ordinance declaring El Cenizo as a "safe haven" for undocumented immigrants was also passed. This Safe Haven Ordinance forbade city employees and officials to ask residents whether they were illegal immigrants or citizens or to help an agency like the dreaded Border Patrol, the *La Migra*, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service apprehend illegal entrants; city employees who violated the ordinance were to be fired.⁴⁵

Mayor Rafael Rodriguez, who spoke Spanish only like most of the town's residents, had reportedly illegally crossed over from Mexico in 1979 and had become a U.S. citizen only in 1995.⁴⁶ Worse still, Rodriguez flew the flag of Mexico over City Hall along with the Stars and Stripes.⁴⁷ Elected as mayor along with two city commissioners in November 1998, Rodriguez declared that Americans who came to his town would need to learn Spanish. But he refused to tread a path of confrontation with anyone, least of all the federal government. His only intention, as he put it, was to make Spanish-speaking people participate meaningfully in city council meetings.⁴⁸ City Commissioner Flora Burton said that for several years, meetings of the city council have been bilingual since residents regularly asked commissioners to explain things in Spanish; some Spanish-speaking residents even stopped attending the council's meetings because of the language barrier. The Spanish-only measure, said Burton, was meant to ensure popular participation in city business.⁴⁹ The other commissioner, Gloria Romo, reasserted her colleagues' stand that it was aimed at making people more comfortable and enhancing their participation and cooperation in running El Cenizo's affairs.⁵⁰

John Crawford, that one-man army against Official English, could not have agreed more. But with one important difference: he accused "Right-wingers" (read Republicans and Official English advocates) of making a hue and cry out of a non-issue.

Crawford's ardent and spirited multiculturalism may not have allowed him to see any wrong in El Cenizo's Spanish-only ordinance, but the fact remains that the town's

officials did not “add Spanish as an official language”; they *made* Spanish the official language of El Cenizo. More importantly, El Cenizo’s was not a “bilingual approach”: it wanted to make the town Spanish monolingual. Even though the ordinance had made a provision that English translations of council proceedings would be made available if a request was made 48 hours in advance, the fact that the residents were overwhelmingly Spanish-speaking meant that such a request was seldom going to be made, thus making the provision meaningless and the town officially Spanish monolingual.

Surprisingly, though the federal government led by multiculturalist President Bill Clinton maintained absolute silence over the development—as did the then Texas governor, Republican George W. Bush—many federal officials heartily endorsed El Cenizo’s Spanish-only policy, among them Israel M. Reyna of the federally funded Texas Rural Legal Aid who curiously called America a ‘developing democracy’ where it was important to get people involved.⁵¹ But he conveniently overlooked the fact that the United States was a developed democracy, and immigrants—especially from undemocratic nations or developing democracies—were expected to be able to read and understand the laws and the Constitution of the United States in the language in which they were written if they wanted to fully and meaningfully participate in the political process.

Not only was El Cenizo precariously close to the Mexican border, the fact that the Safe Haven Ordinance had made scouting for illegal immigrants itself illegal in the eyes of local law would definitely encourage illegal immigration from Mexico. That would not only mean continuation of El Cenizo’s Spanish-only policy but also trigger a demand for a similar policy for other Hispanic-majority border towns and pockets with large Russian, Cambodian, Korean, and Arabian populations. Jim Boulet, executive director of the Virginia-based advocacy group, English First, echoed such a fear. Calling El Cenizo America’s ‘very own Quebec’, Boulet said that its Spanish-only policy would encourage a separatist attitude among non-English speakers.⁵²

Mauro E. Mujica, Chairman and CEO of U.S. English—who himself migrated from Chile in 1965—expressed similar fears, pointing out that it was the Mexican Americans’ refusal to assimilate that was behind El Cenizo’s Spanish-only ordinance.⁵³

Governor Bush refused to intervene, calling El Cenizo’s Spanish-only ordinance a local matter. The result: he won a huge chunk of the Hispanic vote in the 2000 presidential elections. By passing Executive order 2417 in 2001, which required federal agencies to produce all public documents in both English and Spanish by 2005 and directed federal employees to undergo mandatory Spanish language training,⁵⁴ he was hoping to improve his Hispanic vote-share during his re-election bid in 2004.

A U.S. English official, in a personal communication with this author, asserted that if English was declared the official language of the United States, it would prevent Spanish-only laws from being passed at the local level.⁵⁵

Clearly, till the time English becomes the official language of the United States, the danger of local level non-English language laws would remain.

This danger is a real one: the danger of linguistic separatism that can plunge the United States into turmoil unprecedented in its history, seriously undermining American identity and the unity of the country. A nation of immigrants like the United States cannot afford to be officially bilingual or multilingual. In the aforesaid personal communication, James Crawford wrote, “The claim that there are significant separatist tendencies among Latinos is laughable.”⁵⁶ If El Cenizo’s Spanish-only ordinance does not indicate a separatist tendency, what does?

In September 1995, nearly four years before El Cenizo passed its Spanish-only measure Republican presidential candidate Robert J. ‘Bob’ Dole had warned that ‘ethnic separatism’ was a threat to national unity and called for making English the official language of the United States.⁵⁷ Evidently, Dole was farsighted.

Need of the Hour I: A New Theory of Assimilation

The New Immigration that spanned the last two decades of the 19th century and continued into the next brought hordes of South and East Europeans to American shores. The leaders of the old Americanization movement believed that the American national character that had emerged as a result of “melting” of cultures of people who belonged to the Old Immigration was irrevocable and immutable, and should not be altered whatever the provocation; all new immigrants should Americanize themselves by abandoning their native cultures and loyalties. This theory of assimilation—different from “Anglo-conformity” and the “Melting Pot”, yet a combination of the two—is what I call *Amero-conformity*, relevant to the present situation.

It is in the aftermath of the New Immigration that Horace M. Kallen developed his theory of “cultural pluralism” in his 1915 essay in *The Nation*, “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot”. As is evident from the title, Kallen had evolved a critic of the Melting Pot theory. Not only that, he saw in each group in America a tendency to preserve its own language, religion, communal institutions, and ancestral culture while at the same time learning to speak English as the language of general communication and participating in the overall political and economic life of the nation. What Kallen saw is still true for many ethnic groups—nay families—in the United States, but this tendency cannot be regarded as a model of assimilation under any stretch of imagination; in fact, it is an evidence of a refusal to assimilate by certain groups of immigrants. These unassimilated sections of the American population have most unfortunately not completed their journey from immigrant to American; they have transformed themselves from immigrants to ethnics under the disruptive influence of Cultural Pluralism and governmental policies based on it.

As far as Americanization is concerned, it would be wrong then to consider it to be Anglo-conformity. ‘100% Americanizers’ believed in the pot that melted Euro-Americans of the Old Immigration into one national

whole, racially and culturally. For them, the American national character that had evolved as a result of this melting was final, irrevocable, and immutable. Any effort to change it in any way by subsequent immigrants from southern and eastern Europe was blasphemous. Instead, Euro-Americans of the New Immigration should undergo a process of supplanting completely their particular national characteristics with elements from the American national character: a love of individual liberty, free enterprise, limited and efficient government, freedom of worship, the English language. Even if none of these were found—and they were not—in the national characteristics of South and East European immigrants, they should make an effort to acquire them as soon as possible (the sooner the better).

This principle of *Amero-conformity* was to apply to Americans of the Newest Immigration—those from Asia and Latin America—who came in after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 became operational in 1968. If Slavs, Greeks, Poles, and Jews of the New Immigration had to abide by the rules of *Amero-conformity*, Asian-Indians, Arabs, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, and Filipinos, and Hispanics had to so as well. The American national character that had evolved as a result of the melting of Europeans of the Old Immigration—English, Welsh, Irish, Scot, Scotch-Irish, German, Dutch, and Huguenot—was to be regarded as the standard to be followed by subsequent generations of immigrants regardless of where they came from. Seen in this light, Cultural Pluralism does not appear to be a model of assimilation, but a depiction of the failure to assimilate by certain sections of immigrants. Needless to say, Cultural Pluralism encourages hyphenism among immigrants, their ethnic identity becoming equally—sometimes more—important than the American identity. Theodore Roosevelt said “A hyphenated American is not an American at all.” Accordingly, I consider the late president to be the chief proponent of the theory of *Amero-conformity*. He recognized that language was the most important ingredient of national

character; if there was to be one nation, there had to be one language on which to base it: "We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house."

Cultural Pluralism depicts a sad reality harmful to American society and polity. It does not believe in any wall of separation between public and private and acts as an impediment to the complete merger of ethnic communities with the American national whole. In fact, the highlighting of ethnic backgrounds that the theory engages in, in the name of democracy, tends to create ethnic enclaves and leads to the emergence of ethnic politics which is dangerous to democracy itself. Cultural Pluralism perpetuates cultural plurality which, in turn, sustains Cultural Pluralism as a political philosophy. Celebration of ethnic diversity produces a sense of ethnic and language separateness feared by the Founding Fathers, and detested by subsequent generations of patriots. A *lebensraum* was not what the Founding Fathers had envisioned. Along with the establishment of the republic in 1776 the process of evolving a new nationality had begun. America has renewed itself through subsequent waves of immigration, but what was new was the composition of the population and not elements of its national character; presidential form of government, federal polity, free market economy, individual liberties, and the English language were not replaced or supplanted in any way.

A change in the national character would lead to a change in the nation itself: the form of government, the type of economy, the rights and freedoms enjoyed by the people, the language commonly used, all would change. The foundations of the state would be fundamentally altered. As far as the United States is concerned, such a change is not only undesirable, but inconceivable as well. In fact, it is the American national character that has attracted generations of immigrants from across the world. Giving up old loyalties and attachments for realizing the American Dream

should not be a big price to pay. If an immigrant finds it difficult to overcome loyalties associated with the old country, he has to make a hard choice: to live in America like Americans for the sake of becoming a successful American himself, or to leave the shores of America for where he had come from. Cultural Pluralism manifested through native language and cultural maintenance is the biggest obstacle to immigrants becoming successful Americans. The problem gets complicated when the failure to conform, under the influence of ideologies and leaders, becomes the refusal to conform.

But why isn't the Melting Pot an ideal for Americans of the New Immigration? Why is a complete renunciation of the immigrants' ancient cultures in favor of the values and behavior of Americans demanded from them? '100% Americanizers' believed that the Melting Pot would boil over if the national characteristics of the New Immigrants were added to it; for the ingredients in the Melting Pot to melt completely, they must have melting qualities. Otherwise, no amount of stirring would help. According to the Americanizers, the New Immigrants lacked those qualities. The best way to deal with them was to pressure-cook them so that they would dissolve without affecting its color, flavor, or odor. Greeks, Slavs, Jews, and Poles were considered so different from the English, Scot, Scotch-Irish, and Germans of the Old Immigration that they were required to renounce completely their ancient cultures—so completely that nothing would be left of them—and take on the way of life of Americans of the Old Immigration as quickly as possible. This I call *prompt* assimilation. The cultures of southern and eastern Europe were treated with disdain—sometimes the people were too, by over-enthusiastic Americanizers—and the prescribed pattern of assimilation demanded their complete dissolution. The indigenous American culture that had developed as a result of the melting of various northern and western European cultural traditions was the set standard not to be violated under any circumstances. The duty of later immigrants was to abide by that standard. For *Amero conformity*, then, the

Melting Pot had ceased to be functional once the Old Immigration had come to an end. The pot had melted the peoples and cultures of northern and western European settlers in America into one American race and cultural type; no further addition was welcome.

Need of the Hour II: A New Americanization Movement

The fact that immigration from southern and eastern Europe could not be prevented necessitated Americanization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A fresh wave of immigration from Asia and Latin America in the late 60s and 80s necessitated another Americanization effort. But then, what was the immediate reason behind the latest Americanization movement, better known as the Official English Movement?

For one, the emergence of bilingual education was an important factor. The Bilingual Education Act (1968), which had the simple goal of teaching English to Limited English Speaking Ability (LESA)—later renamed Limited English Proficient (LEP)—children of non-English speaking immigrant parents, somehow lost its purpose and direction and instead of remaining *transitional* bilingual education [using ‘immersion’ and/or English as a Second Language (ESL) methods] became *maintenance* bilingual education (using native language instruction). The various amendments to the Act of 1968, the *Lau V. Nichols* (1974) ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court, the *Lau Remedies* (1975) of the Office for Civil Rights of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare were principally responsible for this loss of direction and purpose of bilingual education. Worse still, the 1975 amendments to the Voting Rights Act (1965) mandated multi-lingual ballots and voter assistance in electoral districts with substantial language-minority populations.

Bilingual education through native language instruction and multilingual ballots convinced non-English-speaking immigrants that there was no need to learn English—let alone achieve fluency in that language—for living and working in America. Among these non-English speaking immigrants were many

Asians and Hispanics. With time, Hispanics became the largest ethnic-minority group in the United States. This numerical strength, along with instigation from ethnic leaders and Cultural Pluralism-inspired politicians gave birth to a new reluctance—unheard of in earlier generations of immigrants—to learn English. This resistance to learning English—fanned by Cultural Pluralism—alarmed English-speaking Americans (many of them immigrants or children of recent non-English-speaking immigrants) of the growth of an un-American tendency opposed to assimilation. Let alone getting assimilated as quickly as they could, these Americans of the Newest Immigration—Asians and Hispanics, though not all of them—were refusing to assimilate at all. The need for a new Americanization movement was felt. And this time it was an urgent need.

This new Americanization movement—deridingly called the English *Only* movement by opponents—started with the formation in 1983 of the organization U.S. English by the late semanticist, Senator Samuel I. Hayakawa (R-CA), himself born to Canadian immigrant parents of Japanese descent and Dr John Tanton, a Michigan ophthalmologist. The most important objective of U.S. English was to get amended the federal Constitution to declare English as the official language of the United States. Why? Because the English language is common to all Americans: it is the language of the Constitution and the laws, of the Declaration of Independence, of the Founding Fathers, of all Americans. Moreover, it is the language of the marketplace and of opportunity in the United States. It is not only the tie that binds Americans together but also the means to realize for every American his/her share of the American Dream.

U.S. English would also like multilingual ballots and voter assistance to be scrapped and funding only for *transitional* bilingual education (and not for *maintenance* bilingual education) to be retained by the federal government. It would also want government to control unbridled immigration which, along with bilingual education and multilingual ballots, has contributed to language segregation in the United States.

But nowhere does U.S. English propose the elimination of languages other than English. In none of the proposed amendments to the federal Constitution—the English Language Amendments (ELAs)—that it had helped prepare and in none of the Official English laws in the thirty states that it had backed did it suggest that the use of languages other than English be stopped altogether. In fact, it does not object to the private use of other languages at all. Accordingly, English *Only* Movement—spearheaded by U.S. English—is a misnomer. Official English Movement is the appropriate name for this new Americanization endeavor.

The chief concern of this movement is the total assimilation of non-English-speaking immigrants with the rest of the American population. Language is chosen as the instrument through which to assimilate because it has remained common to all Americans right from the initial days of the republic. No doubt that American society is plural, but any attempt to foster differences among people—and that is what Cultural Pluralism does—would divide the nation along ethnic lines. In fact, the principal objective of the Official English Movement is to put an end to hyphenism among Americans. Hyphenism denotes ethnic identities and any attempt to perpetuate them would keep an American identity from developing among these immigrants, both Asian and Hispanic. In the tradition of Theodore Roosevelt, the Official English movement would want complete elimination of ethnic identities, if fostering them would mean undermining the American national identity.

But the Official English movement is a diluted version of the original Americanization movement: it allows the private use of languages other than English, something neither ‘100% Americanizers’ nor Theodore Roosevelt would have approved of. It is stringently opposed, though, to bilingual education through native language instruction. Public education is meant to prepare children for a successful public life; native language instruction ill-prepares language-minority children for life and work in the United States.

If the American Dream eluded them, immigration for these children and their parents would be a bitter experience. And that may create a sense of alienation among them, a price they would have to pay for the lack of English proficiency.

There is no concrete evidence to prove that a child understood academic concepts better if taught in the native language. There are millions of non-English-speaking children in India who go to English-medium schools to be taught subject-matter courses in English. The native language is taught as a second language in Indian K-12 English medium schools. But college and university education is mostly in English, and that is what vernacular-medium schoolchildren find difficult. They have to labor hard to not only study their specialized academic disciplines but also master the English language. In the United States, where college and university education is wholly in English, it is not unusual for children taught through native language instruction to fare poorly and ultimately drop out. It is very difficult to attain an academic level of competence in two languages. In that case, English should be the language to be used for academic, professional, and public purposes; the native language can easily and, naturally, be the language used at home. The Official English movement’s respect for the right of individuals to privately use languages other than English is an admission of this practical reality.

But why did this new Americanization movement have an Official English focus? During the old Americanization movement, many restrictions were placed on the use of languages other than English (especially German) in the early years of the 20th century. Only one state, Illinois, passed a law declaring ‘American’ to be its official language. At that time in American history, no reluctance on the part of immigrants—those of the New Immigration, that is—to learn English was observed even by ‘100% Americanizers’. There were no federal laws mandating bilingual education and multilingual ballots. The need to declare English as the official language of the United States was not felt.

But the situation had changed in the 70s and the 80s. Not only were there federal laws that made bilingual education (through native language instruction) and multilingual ballots compulsory, latest immigrants—among them many Asians and Hispanics—were refusing to learn English, seriously disrupting the process of assimilation and jeopardizing the future of American society. Thus the Official English movement gave the battle-cry “One Nation, One Common Language” to enthuse not only its adherents but also common Americans.

But who was the battle against? Surely it is not against Asians and Hispanics, but against those who wanted to perpetuate bilingual education and multilingual ballots and were preventing non-English-speaking immigrants from assimilating into American society. Not only were these vested interests to be stopped in their tracks, their philosophy—Cultural Pluralism, that is—was to be eliminated as well. That would put an end to language and ethnic segregation forever, just as racial segregation had been abolished earlier. This I call *delayed* assimilation, because such assimilation can take place once language minorities are weaned away from the influence of Cultural Pluralism and made to realize the futility of bilingual education and multilingual ballots.

The Official English movement recognizes that in an ethnically plural society, Cultural Pluralism can never be allowed to become the reigning social philosophy because it would encourage ethnicity-based cultural diversity; more so, when ethnicities in the United States were themselves based on national origin. To build a culturally united nation out of an ethnically diverse society is the goal of all Americanization efforts, including that of the Official English movement. [In this context, it needs to be clarified that I use the term *ethnics* to mean national origin-based *language minorities* characterized by the *maintenance* of their native languages and cultures. Such *ethnics* are the result of the failure or refusal to assimilate. On the contrary, when I talk of *ethnic plurality*, I mean the whole gamut of ethnic communities—different from each other

because of differences in national origin—that make up American society. Such *ethnic plurality* had seldom come in the way of evolving a common American culture (as with earlier immigrants from northern and western Europe) or of conforming to that culture (as with later immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and, to a much lesser degree, with latest entrants from Asia and Latin America).]

No doubt the United States has an ethnically plural society. But problem arises when that plurality is made synonymous with cultural diversity and sought to be perpetuated at the cost of national unity. Ethnic enclaves turn into voting blocs. Ethnic leaders are assured of bases of political and electoral support. And public policies are formulated with the purpose of acquiring and retaining such support. Divisive electoral campaigns tend to drive a permanent wedge between communities the effects of which are felt much after Election Day. Ethnic politics becomes an everyday affair. The great American Motto—*E pluribus Unum* (From many, one)—is stands thoroughly undermined.

The latest Americanization movement is a little over 20 years old. Thirty states—through statutes and constitutional amendments—have already declared English as their official language. There were many voter initiatives behind these statutes and amendments, and most of them passed with huge majorities. Many Hispanics and other language-minority groups have supported these initiatives. The movement has made its presence felt in the other twenty states. An English Language Amendment (ELA) was proposed in every Congress since 1981. The Bill Emerson English Language Empowerment Act (H.R. 123) of 1996, passed by the 104th Congress, was a big victory for the Official English movement. That was the first time that the U.S. House of Representatives had approved of an ELA. The Inhofe Amendment Act of 2006, passed by the U.S. Senate in the 109th Congress, was a big victory too. It would not be imprudent to note that President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden, then Senators from Illinois and Delaware respectively, had voted against

the Inhofe Amendment. So did late Sen. Edward Moore “Ted” Kennedy (D-MA) and a certain Sen. Hillary R. Clinton (D-NY). If opponents of Official English—and of Americanization—have partisan interests to serve and have partisan support to fall back on, the Official English movement is not without partisan following either. In this, it is no different from the first Americanization movement.

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'Realpolitik' of India and Myanmar: The Road Ahead

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ABSTRACT

India's Myanmar relations has an interesting trajectory. While Nehru said that the two countries would move shoulder to shoulder, post-Nehruvian period has just proved the opposite till 1992 when India overcoming the lull of idealism became conscious of pragmatic foreign policy with Myanmar. Issues of national interest like opening up to southeast Asian countries, China's persistent presence in the region, control insurgency in northeast states in order to link northeast with Myanmar, the 'gateway to southeast Asia,' triggered India to give priority to pragmatism. However, in doing so, India is facing too many tests. Strong and stable Myanmar that observes strict neutrality between India and China and also cooperate with India in the common fight against insurgencies is a top priority for India. Emulating China or reduce its influence in Myanmar is not an easy task as China is a more trustworthy friend of the junta. In the domestic quarters India still faces the dilemma whether to support the pro-democracy movement or engage with the military junta. Many continue to ask for a moderation in India's policy since for them it has benefited the junta more than it has helped India's cause. Nevertheless, for India the imminent decisions are to keep promises by delivering qualitative investment projects on time and engaging with both Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi. The biggest challenge, however, lies in ensuring that subsequent visits are more than a homily, and actually help to strengthen political bilateral ties.

Key words: Real Politik, India, Myanmar.

Introduction

Myanmar's criticality for India has been variously defined. Referring to different perceptions of experts in regard to 'shared historical, ethnic, cultural and religious ties,' in real terms, both countries share a 1643 km long land border. According to the Singhvi Committee Report, the total Indian population in Myanmar is estimated to be 2.9 million, of which 2,500,00 are People of Indian Origin (PIO), 2,000 are Indian citizens, and 400,000 are stateless. Four of India's north-eastern states, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur

and Mizoram, are geographically contiguous to Myanmar. India also shares the strategic waters of Bay of Bengal, including the area of strategically important Andaman and Nicobar islands where the two closest Indian and Myanmar's Coco islands are barely 30 km apart. Myanmar's ports provide India the shortest approach route to several of India's north-eastern states. Since 1997, when Myanmar became a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), it also provided India with a geographical contiguity with the Asia-Pacific region. Myanmar, being

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China's neighbour, also provides India a transit route to southern China. Both India and Myanmar were close allies in the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) in the 1950s and several years preceding that. On the day of its independence on 4 January 1948, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had referred to the shared future awaiting both countries. 'As in the past, so in the future, the people of India will stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Burma, and whether we have to share good fortune or ill fortune, we shall share it together. This is a great and solemn day not only for Burma, but for India, and for the whole of Asia,' he said. Thus, it appears quite surprising that in spite of such geopolitical criticality and Nehru's adorable attitude towards Myanmar, Myanmar assumed extremely low priority in Indian foreign policy. Nehru's pragmatism caused him to pay little attention to generally perceived trivials including the Burmese government's refutation of the rights of Indian nationals who lived in the immediate aftermath of Burmese independence. But subsequent Indian leaders following a narrow view of Nehru's outlook emphasised the ideal and ignored the pragmatic. As a result, China's influence grew in Myanmar as India's waned.

It was between August 11 and 13 in 1992 with the visit of U Baswa, the Vice-foreign minister of Myanmar, to India, the relationship took a turn with acknowledgements on the ground diplomacy of 'give and take'.

First, Myanmar respected India's commitment to democracy and hoped India would be patient about the revival of democracy in Myanmar. Second, concerned about security and political menaces that were shared by both countries, Myanmar was willing to cooperate with India in taking joint action to combat the security and strategic challenges of both countries. And third, Myanmar was willing to increase economic and technological cooperation with India.

New Delhi was also keen to overhaul its policy towards Myanmar. First, India took a decision not to interfere anymore in the internal affairs of Myanmar. The period between 1994 and 1996, as a result, witnessed an enhancement

of economic cooperation between the two countries. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on 21 January 1994 during Deputy Foreign Minister, U Nyunt Swe's visit to India to increase cooperation between civilian border authorities of the two countries and to prevent "illegal and insurgent activities". A bilateral border trade agreement was signed which was to be conducted through Moreh in Manipur (India) and Tamu (Myanmar) and Champhai in Mizoram (India) and Hri on the Myanmar side. Trade started officially on 12 April 1995 and, since then, Indo-Myanmar relations continued to improve through bilateral visits, as well, between the two countries.

Yet, as the former Indian ambassador to Myanmar, Shyam Saran, took charge in Yangon in 1997, he commented that "the ties were still frigid." Finally, it was in 1998 with the advent of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, and especially the 'Eastern Strategy' pursued by the then Foreign Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh that a real shift in India-Myanmar relations took place. There had been military to military dialogues, political rapprochement, and management of security situation in the North-east. Initiatives like BIMSTEC also took off during this period.

Fast forward, to the present, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit, between 27 and 29 May 2012, happened when Myanmar was on the brink of a massive transformation. The change was for good with significant economic and political reforms – providing Myanmar with a US\$500 million line of credit, establishing a Border Area Development Programme, and setting up a rice bio park. The two nations also agreed to develop a border '*haat*', a joint trade and investment forum, and cooperation between the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, and the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies. India had also stated its willingness to help Myanmar improve democratic practices through training in parliamentary and electoral processes and strengthening of human rights institutions. Thus, through Singh's visit, India made its balanced stance clear: keen to do business with

Myanmar and protect its internal security while supporting ongoing democratic reforms.

Flashback of India-Myanmar Relations

Unpleasant Relations

The 1962 coup in Myanmar which heralded military rule brought watershed in India-Myanmar relations. The military junta fell out of India's favour immediately after the coup. General Ne Win came to power. Ne Win's isolationist 'Burmese Road to Socialism' policy remained in vogue for the next 26 years, that included nationalisation of industries, repression of minorities, expulsion of foreigners, discouragement of tourists and closing off the economy, instituting a police state.

Throughout the 1960s and '70s, a large number of ethnic Indians were expelled from Myanmar. As a result, those Indians who formed the backbone of Burmese government and economy during the British rule, serving as soldiers, civil servants, merchants and moneylenders, were reduced to a negligible minority. By 1964, an estimated 100,000 such ethnic Indians reached India as refugees.

Myanmar's neutral stand during the 1962 Chinese aggression on India was seen as a pro-Chinese tilt by New Delhi. As a result, stagnancy bordering on the margins of cordiality marked the Indo-Myanmar relations for next two decades, though routine visits by heads of both the governments continued. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi paid a visit to Rangoon in 1969. During her visit, General Ne Win made assurances that Myanmar would not allow any anti-Indian activities on its territory by any state or organisation. General Ne Win too paid three visits to India during this period. P.M.S. Malik, the then High Commissioner for India, commented: "Ne Win recognized that as long as he fed her (Indira Gandhi) ego by visiting her almost as regularly as the contacts he maintained with the top-ranking Chinese leadership he would have nothing to fear from India".

Post-Nehruvian period especially during Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's tenure India was largely neutral and disinterested in Myanmar.

Indian Foreign policy prioritised "commitment to democratic values" ahead of "security concerns" in their agenda. Rajiv Gandhi continued the same policy of idealism, although he did visit Myanmar in 1987, marking the first visit of the country by an Indian Prime Minister after almost nineteen years. However, when the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) assumed power in Myanmar in 1988, India extended its moral support to the pro-democracy movement. SLORC suspended the 1974 Constitution, and used all means to put down the protests, killing over a thousand unarmed demonstrators in the process. The Indian Embassy in Rangoon was active in helping pro-democracy activists on the Myanmar soil. The then External Affairs Minister, Narasimha Rao informed the Indian parliament in 1989 that no genuine Burmese refugee seeking shelter in India would be turned back. Several reports indicated that India provided financial and material support to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA)¹ and the Karen National Union (KNU)² that had opposed the military regime.

The Indian government, owing to domestic pressure, even risked sacrificing the thin linkages it had with the Burmese military rulers. The politicians were enmeshed in domestic political uncertainties and compulsions of electoral politics. This was the time that coincided with Indian politics plunging into coalitional politics breaking the trend of single largest party coming to power. Consequently, cohesive foreign policy towards Myanmar was hardly a priority for New Delhi. Hence, whether it was release on bail of two Burmese student hijackers in 1990 who hijacked a Thai plane from Bangkok to Calcutta under Prime Minister Chandra-sekhar's govt. or anti-military broadcasts in Burmese language from All India Radio, India's former Foreign Secretary, J. N. Dixit wrote, "Indo-Myanmar relations went into a negative spin in 1990, when the military authorities of Myanmar refused to accept the 1990 electoral verdict of the Burmese people in which Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD), emerged victorious". Since 1992, India

partnered with the US and other Western countries to sponsor a United Nations resolution condemning the Burmese military junta for its violations of human rights.

India's Myanmar policy continued to remain rooted in idealism, implying India's no business with the ruling military junta. Nurturing a sense of satisfaction of supporting the 'idealism' fulfilled none of India's strategic objectives in Myanmar. It was a time when the insurgents operating in India's north-eastern region took full advantage of the porous Indo-Myanmar border to set up safe havens inside that country. The backdrop of a curious mix of conscious decision and ignorance, resulted to the detriment and erosion of its stakes in that country.

Stimulated Relations

India's Myanmar policy turned pragmatic since 1992, when New Delhi decided to break the deadlock and start with a foreign policy of 'constructive engagement' from 'isolation' with the military regime. Security and economic objectives were placed ahead of political and human-rights considerations. The Indian stand was made fairly clear by the then External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee in 2006. He said that India cannot "export democracy" to neighbouring countries and that India had to deal with governments "as they exist". "This shift from value based foreign policy to 'realpolitik' on Myanmar came after India burnt its hands and feet and didn't have much to show of it". New Delhi's de-emphasis on the support for Myanmar's democracy and even voicing down against the arrest of Suu Kyi was essentially for five considerations that were vital to India's national interest during the time.

First, policy makers of New Delhi realized that power centres might not change in Myanmar as military would remain as de facto rulers in the country. Hence it was prudent to do business with the actual rulers, rather than courting the pro-democracy lobby who were in no position to adequately address India's concerns. At the same time it became evident that the regime of embargo imposed by the West on Myanmar could not manage

to weaken the military's hold on power. It became very obvious for the military to view any move to support Suu Kyi as an attempt of dethroning the establishment. As former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, pointed out, "The enduring hostility that the regime has faced from the US and its Western allies has also engendered a sense of siege and sometimes even paranoia among the generals. Suu Kyi unfortunately became, in their eyes, an instrument in the hands of West to force a regime change". Moreover, India's assessment that nothing would change dramatically in Myanmar in the November 2010 elections proved correct as the military continued to rule the country through the proxy civilian government.

It was also believed that "religious politicking is poisoning some of the good will that President Thein Sein had when he began the liberalisation effort in 2011". The rampage by radical Buddhists in the city of Mandalay spurred the authorities to declare curfew, post hundreds of riot police officers and erect razor wire around the Muslim neighborhoods that were attacked. The euphoria that greeted the end of five dark decades of military rule is now intercepted not only by regular religious violence but an apparent rolling back of some media freedom, as well.

Second, realists argued that Indian idealism and pro-democracy stance had augmented the presence of China in Myanmar since the late 1980s which had an immense negative impact for India. Reflecting their close and cordial relations, Myanmar and China call each other as 'Paukphaw', a Myanmar word for siblings. American and Indian agencies believe that the Chinese are building monitoring facilities at Myanmar ports near the strategic Straits of Malacca, enforcing, thereby, the so-called "string of pearls" strategy to encircle India.

Though the military regime under General Ne Win had maintained a policy of equidistance between both India and China, the Myanmar's elite have always been suspicious of the motives of the two big neighbours. Following a crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in 1988, when the West imposed broad sanctions on Myanmar, China stepped into the void,

providing aid and weapons and ramping up trade. China occupied an important position in Myanmar's external trade and thereby achieved a high ranking since 1988. Several issues like legitimizing Myanmar and China border trade activity, deemed to be illegal, exemplifies the nature of their courtship. This trade constituted 32% of total exports and ranked first and 23% of total imports ranking second in 1988.

Crucial to China's energy security strategy, it was willing to ensure the "smooth progress" of oil and gas pipelines being built across Myanmar into southwestern China. Myanmar gives China access to the Indian Ocean, not only for imports of oil and gas and exports from landlocked south-western Chinese provinces, but also potentially for military bases or listening posts. Thein Sein and Chinese President Hu Jintao signed nine agreements, including a cooperation framework agreement for a 540 million euro line of credit from China Development Bank to Myanmar's Ministry of Taxation and Finance. Other loan deals were agreed between various Chinese and Myanmar ministries, while another covered a hydroelectric project. Additionally, Myanmar has been a major recipient of Chinese economic assistance in the form of grants, interest-free loans, concessional loans or debt relief. At the end of the 1980s, China helped Myanmar to fulfill its plan of enlarging and modernising its armed forces. It modernized Myanmar's naval facilities. Chinese technical experts had improved and militarized Myanmar's port facilities in the Bay of Bengal at Akyab (Sittwe), Kyaukpyu and Mergui. It constructed a major naval base on Hainggyi Island near the Irrawaddy river delta, and upgraded the naval base on Great Coco Island.

China's investment in Myanmar reached \$12.3 billion in 2010, with a strong focus on natural resources and energy projects. Diplomatically, China provides Myanmar with 'crucial cover at the United Nations, fending off calls for tougher action demanded by the West on Myanmar's poor human rights record'. It has acted as a protective shield for Myanmar in the United Nations Security Council by vetoing

resolutions against the military junta like in September 2009, it blocked the inclusion of Myanmar on the agenda of UN Security Council.

Third, in energy sector, Myanmar's oil and gas reserves are of critical importance to India's future energy requirement. Myanmar has oil reserves of around 600 million barrels and total gas reserves of 88 trillion cubic feet (tcf). Despite protests from the West, Indian companies like the overseas arm of India's Oil and Natural Gas Commission - ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL), Essar et. al - have made investments in the oil and energy sector of Myanmar. The February 2003 visit of Myanmar's General U Win Aung to India further boosted this cooperation in hydrocarbon, power and energy sectors, particularly in the exploration of Myanmar's onshore oil and gas reserves.

However, in spite of the involvement of OVL and GAIL in exploration activities in the offshore natural gas fields along the Rakhine coast, India has suffered a number of setbacks in different occasions of getting gas from Myanmar compared to China.

In 2008, Myanmar withdrew India's status as preferential buyer and instead declared its intent to sell them to China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) for 30 years beginning 2013. Since October 2009, CNPC started building a crude oil port in Myanmar, part of a pipeline project aimed at cutting out the long detour oil cargoes take through the congested and strategically vulnerable Malacca Strait. Critics believe that compared to China, perhaps India's democratic and slow political system puts it at a disadvantageous position abroad. Supporting the assumption, Stephen O'Sullivan, partner and head of research at United Financial Group (UFG), Moscow commented, 'Whenever we have seen the Indians and Chinese tussle, the Chinese have been faster and more aggressive in attaining their objective'.

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation of India has invested US \$3.5 billion overseas since 2000, while China National Petroleum Corporation

has made overseas investment of \$40 billion. In this context Girijesh Pant mentions that, 'oil deals are not known for their fairness and transparency. The recipient governments of Chinese investments are particularly attracted to the Chinese money. Because, unlike US and western government investments, generally Chinese money comes with none of the good governance requirements, human rights conditions and environmental quality regulations.' One report identifies 69 Chinese MNCs involved in 90 completed, current and planned projects in the hydropower and extractive sectors including oil, gas and mining in Myanmar. China is Myanmar's sixth largest foreign investor. Myanmar has increased its foreign currency holdings from \$2.5 billion in 2005 to \$3.6 billion in 2009, mainly on oil and gas sales to China and Thailand.

When exploration began off the Rakhine coast in Myanmar in 2000, India was planning to lay pipelines bypassing Bangladesh from Shwe natural gas field in Andaman Sea to Kolkata. The total proven reserves of the Shwe gas field are around 9.1 tcf (260 km³), and production is slated to be around 700 million cubic feet/day. The proposal to bring gas through a 1575 km pipeline from Sittwe port in Myanmar to Gaya (Bihar) in India costing \$3 to \$5 billion received a jolt due to imposition of conditions by Bangladesh. Such conditions were: establishing trade routes for commodities from Bangladesh to Nepal and Bhutan through Indian territory; allowing transmission of hydroelectricity from Nepal and Bhutan to Bangladesh through Indian territory; and pursuing measures to reduce Bangladesh's trade imbalance with India. Underestimating Bangladesh domestic politics, India's pipeline plans, awaited to be negotiated, were finally rejected by the regime in Myanmar after China's state owned company came forward. An ONGC official commented that, 'China matched India's offer very aggressively and they made every effort to ensure that this gas project is wrapped up. We lacked that kind of aggressive strategy and also suffered from delays in decision-making. . . ' Indian President and other Indian officials conducted state visits to lobby the deal, but their efforts went into

vein. Even the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh confessed: 'China is ahead of us in planning for its energy security. India can no longer be complacent.'

The deal gave advantage to China to get the entire stock from A-1 and A-3 blocks in the Rakhine offshore area despite ONGC Videsh and GAIL held 30% stakes in the exploration and production of gas in those blocks. GAIL had been appointed by Myanmar as the agency responsible for marketing gas from A-1 block.³ In March 2004, Myanmar leaders and visiting Chinese Vice-Premier Wu Yi signed another MoU, including agreements on mineral exploration along the Myanmar-China border region and the Lashio-Muse railroad project. China is currently building a deep-sea port in Kyaukpyu, in Rakhine state.⁴ After a five-day visit to Beijing and Yunnan made by Thein Sein, the then Acting Prime Minister of Myanmar, China's Natural Development Reform Commission approved plans in April 2006 with Myanmar government for the construction of 1100 km oil and gas pipeline. Commencing from June 2009 it was decided to build the pipeline from deepwater port of Kyaukryu on the west coast of Myanmar to Ruili in Yunnan province.⁵

This project, once completed, would impact the energy politics in Southeast Asia in favour of China for the following reasons: First, it would eliminate Chinese reliance on the currently risky Malacca Strait via Singapore oil route and second, it would create a transport reduction of 1200 km to China's southern coast. However, in the mean time, India's ONGC acquired three offshore deepwater exploration blocks i.e. AD-2, AD-3 and AD-9 on 23rd September, 2007 on the ground of mutual understanding and cooperation. In the triangular relationship between India, Myanmar and China, though India's relations with Myanmar has improved considerably, nevertheless, China's economic, political and military leverage on the foreign policy of Myanmar forces the latter to remain within the Chinese sphere of influence. China's non-complacent attitude towards human rights and democratic concerns as well as aggressive stance puts India on disadvantageous position.

Fourth, one of the important drivers for India to engage Myanmar is the issue of insurgency in North East. Since the beginning of armed insurrections in the northeast, Myanmar's contiguity with Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur and the ethnic ties and tribal linkages between the people on either side of border has facilitated their movements and safe shelter in Myanmar. The majority of these armed groups established their camps in Myanmar in the mid-1970s. It developed crucial link zone through which rebels could go to China for training and weapons procurement. It became a safe training and regrouping zone.

There had been occasions when Myanmar used the rebels as a bargaining chip against India. The signing of MOU for the maintenance of peace and tranquility in border areas in 1994, enabled India to launch Operation Golden Bird in 1995. It was a joint operation to intercept a huge consignment of arms being transported by insurgent groups from Cox Bazar in Bangladesh to Manipur. The Operation had netted more than 200 rebels belonging to several separatist groups from Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. But the Nehru Award for International Peace to Aung San Suu Kyi by India in 1993 brought the operation under diplomatic cloud. As a reverse action, Myanmar pulled out of the joint operation, allowing the trapped rebels to escape. Again in November 2001, though the Myanmar Army raided four Manipuri rebel bases, rounded up 192 rebels and seized more than 1600 weapons, surprisingly, all these rebels including the chief of UNLF Rajkumar Meghen were released. Myanmar Army was also using the services of insurgents to keep track and carry out occasional attacks on Myanmarese rebels, some of whom had taken refuge on the Indian side.

According to the Govt. of India, Manipur based Meiti insurgent groups like People's Liberation Army, United National Liberation Front, People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak; Naga insurgent group like NSCN-K and ULFA and NDFB had their camps and hideouts in Myanmar Naga Hills. The presence of insurgent groups in Myanmar, had been the most important security issue in the India and Myanmar bilateral relations. 'These groups

continue to use Myanmar territory notwithstanding Myanmar's repeated assurances not to allow its territory for activities inimical to India,' said Mullappally Ramachandran, the Minister of State for Home at the Lok Sabha.

The ongoing insurgency in the region has been in existence since the early years of Indian independence. Interestingly, as early as 1950, India had supplied six Dakota aircraft to Myanmar to fight rebels. It is believed that these groups of outfits have received financial, logistic and military support allegedly from external sources in South Asia and also from Southeast Asia. They have established sanctuaries with the connivance of sympathetic groups and communities in the neighborhood. The Indian security forces had conducted counter insurgency operations but the insurgents have managed to escape to neighboring areas where the law enforcement agencies were either weak or disinterested. India and Myanmar have been holding regular border liaison meetings and during the 46th meeting held in August 2012, Myanmar and India discussed several measures along the border aimed at pushing the insurgents out of the Myanmar's territory. It was also informed that the Indian security forces had stepped up the vigil in districts in the tribal-dominated areas.

Insurgency issue is tagged with the problem of arms smuggling. Arms into the northeast either come through Myanmar or through Bangladesh, though it is alleged that Myanmar is the sole route for weapons into the northeast. Camps in Myanmar allowed these rebels to stockpile these weapons and transfer them at appropriate time into India. The Naga rebels have traded with the surplus weapons by selling them to smaller outfits in the northeast.

Along with insurgency problem, drug smuggling too comes as an intimidating affair in India-Myanmar relations. Spread around 43,600 hectares, Myanmar has been identified as a major source of poppy cultivation in Asia aiding several processing units to be spread in the jungles of the northern part of the country. Although the Myanmar government has taken initiatives to curb poppy cultivation

and production, the illicit trade continues. For India the constant factor of geography and location of two primary sources of illicit opium in Asia turns it ironically as a transit route for processed narcotics. The Golden Crescent comprising of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Golden Triangle formed by Myanmar, Thailand and Laos are the two sources of illicit opium in Asia that has dragged India in the sphere of drug smuggling coupled with becoming source of chemicals like acetic anhydride (AA), ephedrine, and pseudoephedrine used for processing opium. The north-eastern insurgents have indulged in smuggling of drugs from Myanmar. The easy availability of such drugs have made youth in states like Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland vulnerable to a host of problems including AIDS. It is estimated that Manipur's share in the estimated 3.5 million AIDS/ HIV cases in India is over 11 per cent.

Fifth, the shift in India's Myanmar policy was part of its look east policy, which in line with its economic reforms hoped for a rapprochement with the economically successful South East Asian states. This became urgent especially when the pagoda nation is strategically located between India and south-east Asia through the north-east. The look east

policy necessitated that India mends its fences with Myanmar to institutionalise linkages with ASEAN and its affiliates; to strengthen bilateral relationships with member states of ASEAN; and to carve a suitable place for itself to prevent Southeast Asia falling under the influence of any other major power. Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh made two visits to Myanmar in 2001 and 2002: the first visit was to inaugurate the India-Myanmar Friendship Road, and the second to start talks on building the ambitious Trans-Asia highway project. Myanmar was crucial to the Indian government in view of BIMSTEC.

Economics of India-Myanmar Relations

India's exports stand at \$334.4 million, while it imports goods worth over \$1 billion from Myanmar. The main exports to Myanmar are pharmaceutical products, iron and steel, electrical machinery and equipment. India imports large amounts of vegetables, pulses and wood products from Myanmar. (Bhaumik Subir, 2013:1). In addition, bilateral trade between the two countries has expanded considerably from US\$ 12.4 million in 1980-81 to US\$ 1207.56 million in 2009-10. The trend of trade between the two countries since 2008 in US \$ million is as follows: (FICCI Country Profile, Myanmar:1)

Year	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Export	221.64	207.97	320.62	545.38	544.66
Import	928.97	1,289.80	1,017.67	1,381.15	1,412.69
Total Trade	1,150.60	1,497.77	1,338.29	1,926.52	1,957.35

Source: Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, GOI

There is also trade at the border trading posts through Moreh in Manipur and Tamu in Myanmar and Champhai in Mizoram and Rhion on the Myanmar side.

India's investment in Myanmar is now around \$273.5 million. It is expected to soar to \$2.6 billion over the next few years. Myanmar enjoys a favourable trade balance with India. Of its total trade of over \$18 billion, India accounted for only about 7.5% in 2011-12. Total foreign investment in Myanmar crossed \$43

billion in August 2013, according to the Myanmar Investment Commission.

However, the question that emerges repeatedly is whether India has adequate economic footprint in Myanmar to play the great game involving China and the western powers? The Indian IT industry and the entertainment industry have not yet looked at Myanmar as a market. From an investment point of view, healthcare and education beckon Indian players for large-scale investment with

possibilities of great returns ensuring an Indian presence. Even Indian media has possibilities of investments in an untapped market, where a new democracy has increased an appetite for news. 'The trouble is that India has generally looked at Myanmar for its hydrocarbons', comments Subir Bhaumik. Thus, such strategic considerations guided India to refrain from promoting democracy in its neighbourhood, especially when public pressure on the military junta was unlikely to yield results and sanctions by the western powers could hardly goad the junta to accommodate the pro-democracy camp. Rather, it made the de facto rulers of that country more rigid and un-amenable to change.

Conclusion

While India tries to forge a stable bilateral relationship with Myanmar, it has to face few challenges simultaneously, because, the ultimate determining point would be the internal political dynamics within the political regimes and its long term repercussions on India-Myanmar relations.

Firstly, New Delhi realized that India's national interest is best served by a strong and stable Myanmar that observes strict neutrality between India and China. It should also cooperate with India in the common fight against insurgencies. But will it be ever possible? Myanmar however is walking on a tight rope in balancing China and India against each other. If it gives importance to democratic administrative practices of state building and nation-building against the predecessors, it brings it closer to India. At the same time, it poses a considerable threat to the prolonged Chinese influence and dominance in the region. In current reality, China continues to remain as its largest trading partner and biggest source of foreign investment. President Thein Sein has reaffirmed that Myanmar's transition to democracy will not change the country's traditional friendship with China. Their goals of bilateral exchanges in politics, economy, trade, culture, security and other areas will steadily push forward comprehensive cooperation. Hence, no

wonder, in the same week when Narendra Modi promised that his government was 'acting east' and Barak Obama hugged Aung San Suu Kyi to promise her American support for democratic reforms, China and Myanmar quietly signed more than 20 deals worth over US\$8 billion.

Secondly, easing of western sanctions following political reforms in Myanmar entrusts India with a more pro-active role since it has to secure its own economic interest vis-à-vis competition against the new powers in the region. As for example, European Union and Australia have already lifted their travel and financial sanctions against Myanmar, and the United States has taken a "calibrated" approach. But the imminent challenge for India lies in the fact of avoiding competition and confrontation with China in the context of Myanmar, especially when Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor might be useful for much-needed investment for the northeastern states.

Thirdly, India's economic involvement in Myanmar, largely through the public sector, has not been satisfactory. There are complaints about implementation delays and quality controls. This gap, can be filled by the Indian private sector as opportunities expand in Myanmar. But lack of connectivity and poor rail-road link in the border areas of Myanmar and India's north-east has posed a formidable challenge for integrating the region and meeting up the development dividends.

Fourthly, the ongoing tussle between the hardliners and reformists is disturbing the reform process that will pose a question over the durability and sustainability of the regime. At the same time when events in Myanmar are on the verge of taking swift turns, the possibility of divisions within Thein Sein's government cannot be ruled out. India cannot connect with Myanmar without addressing pressing problems in its own northeast. Hence, a calibrated policy needs to be developed by India to address the issues of the 'ethnic melting pot'. While it is prudent to see the 'managed democracy' not getting derailed, India should devise a comprehensive contingency plan that can handle the possible

ethnic and refugee issues in northeast and Myanmar.

Fifthly, perhaps the most important dilemma India faces is whether to support the Aung San Suu Kyi-led democratic movement or manage a close tie with the junta. India does share sympathy with the NLD and Suu Kyi and has to keep up to the rising expectations of the pro-democratic forces in Myanmar. Aung San Suu Kyi, once emotionally advocated a greater role of India for Myanmar. She said, 'Myanmar had not yet achieved the goal of democracy.....We hope that through this difficult last stage, the people of India will stand by us and walk with us as we proceed along the path which they had taken many years before.' While India still urges that Aung San Suu Kyi should play a constructive political role in the country, at the same time it cannot indulge in the ideal of democracy. As Shyam Saran noted, 'As a democracy, India would welcome the establishment of inclusive and broad-based multiparty democracy in Myanmar, however, this desire cannot hold India's long term and strategic interests in the country to ransom'. The Mutual Legal Assistance Agreement signed between India and junta in July 2010 will indeed help India to combat many strategic issues.⁶

On the other hand, India's pragmatic approach to engage the junta with some success has been condemned by the idealist groups. They said, "Under Suu Kyi, the Myanmar people have been emulating the non-violent methods of Gandhiji. We will be betraying the memories of Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and other freedom-fighters if we fail to support a Gandhi-inspired movement in Myanmar and instead support a military Junta, which rules the country in its interests and not in the interests of the people. The strategic path need not exclude the ethical and vice versa. A mix of ethical and strategic parameters should govern our policy-making. Presently, the ethical parameters hardly have any influence in the policy-making on Myanmar. This position has to change and ethical parameters should play an important role. Suu Kyi and her supporters are trying to prove that

Gandhism has still got relevance and can work in restoring their people their dignity and freedoms. We should not prove them wrong by continuing with our present policies."

Sixthly, while India aspires to emulate China's levels of engagement in Myanmar, nevertheless, restoring ties with the military junta did not bring about the desired economic results for India. The slow pace of implementation of projects has been a major factor. For instance, in 1999, at a joint conference in Kunming involving China, Myanmar and Thailand, while India declared its participation in setting up National Highway 153, a decade later, India landed up as the last country to start working on the project. There is much talk of connecting Myanmar, Thailand and even Vietnam through rail and road links, yet so far India has been slow in connecting its northeastern region with Myanmar and beyond. The start of Imphal-Mandalay bus service would be a decisive step to ensure that bilateral relations are not precluded by sluggish bureaucracy.

Factions of Indians continue to ask for a moderation and alteration in India's policy of engaging with Myanmar's military rulers. They believe that India's new policy has benefited Myanmar's military junta more than it has helped India's cause. India has not been able to contain China, nor has the military junta been able to eradicate the problem of north-eastern insurgency. As for instance, Myanmar's reported yearning for nuclear weapons is coercing Indian policy makers to rethink on their strategy. External Affairs Minister S. M. Krishna ambiguously stated in the Parliament on 26 August 2010 that "The government is trying to gather information about such peripheral activities. We monitor such activities closely as we are concerned about security of the country (India)." Similarly, continuous failure in fulfilling its energy requirements from Myanmar vis-à-vis China too might push New Delhi to reorient its strategy. In addition, Myanmar's cooperation in tackling the northeast insurgency too would be a test case. A lot would, thus, depend on Myanmar's response to India's gestures: whether Myanmar chooses

to nurture a tactical ally in India is something India needs to watch out for. Fast-paced implementation of promises, backed by regular bilateral meetings, will ensure India's proposed 'gateway to southeast Asia' become a reality. Thus the biggest challenge, lies in ensuring that subsequent visits are more than ornamental talks actually helping to strengthen bilateral political ties.

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1. The Kachin Independence Army is the military arm of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), a political group composed of ethnic Kachins in northern Myanmar. The Kachins are a coalition of six tribes whose homeland encompasses territory in Yunnan, China and Northeast India, in addition to Kachin State in Burma. In May 2012, the Associated Press reported that the rebel group had approximately 8,000 troops. The KIA formed in 1961 February 5 in response to a military coup in Burma led by General Ne Win, who attempted to consolidate Burmese control over regions on the periphery of the state which were home to various ethnic groups. From 1961 through to 1994, the KIA fought a grueling and inconclusive war against the Burmese junta. Originally the KIA fought for independence, but now the official KIA policy goal is for autonomy within a federal union of Burma.
2. The Karen National Union is a political organisation with an armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) that represents the Karen people of Burma. It operates in mountainous eastern Burma, and has underground network in other areas of Burma where Karen people live as a minority group. In the Karen language, this area is called Kawthoolei. Some of the Karen, led primarily by the Karen National Union (KNU), have waged a war against the central government since early 1949. The aim of the KNU at first was independence.

Since 1976 the armed group has called for a federal system rather than an independent Karen State.

3. The Myanmar Ministry of Energy decided against imposing any duty on export of oil and natural gas and gave concession to GAIL to export 90 per cent of any gas produced from fields in the A-1 block. Block A-1 off the Rakhine occupies a world-class commercial-scale gas deposit and contains 4.2-5.8 trillion cubic feet of gas, with a potential of 14 trillion cubic feet.
4. The port has a projected water depth of 20 meters and a capability of accommodating 4,000 TEU (20-foot equivalent units) container vessels.
5. The natural gas pipeline was extended further from Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, to Guizhou province and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, running a total of 2,806 kilometers. It is projected to transport 12 billion cubic meters of gas to China every year. It is also estimated to pour 20 million tons of crude oil to China from the Middle East and Africa annually. In return it will pay an annual transit fee of \$150 million for 30 years for the pipeline's 990 km stretch in Myanmar.
6. Combat transnational organized crimes, trans-border terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, counterfeit currency, smuggling of arms and explosives. Under the provisions of the treaty, Indian insurgents caught in Myanmar can be handed over to India. The treaty has enabling provisions that will help both countries expediting criminal investigations, judicial proceedings, gathering evidences and assisting each other during investigations.

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Significance of the Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram in India's Look East Policy

Jangkongam Doungel*

ABSTRACT

Look East Policy can be described as an offshoot of globalization, privatization and post cold war phenomena. In fact, it is a strategic shift on India's foreign policy in the post cold war era. It was developed and enacted during the government of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and vigorously pursued by the successive governments of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Dr. Manmohan Singh. The essential philosophy of the Look East Policy is that India must find its destiny by linking itself more and more with its Asian partners and the rest of the world, and that India's future and economic interests are best served by greater integration with East and South East Asia. Further, as India's dependable and reliable partner in all fronts, the erstwhile USSR, had already exited from the international political scenario; India has to look towards her neighbouring South East Asian countries for survival in economy as well as to counter act the growing influence of China in the region. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has said that the Look East Policy is not merely an external economic policy but it is also a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and India's place in the evolving global economy.¹ India's main agenda in framing and pursuing of the Look East Policy is to establish good diplomatic link and cordial trade relationship with the South East Asian countries. Association of the South East Asian Nations was established in August 1967 at Bangkok by representatives of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.² At present, the member countries of ASEAN comprise of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.³

Key words: Sixth Schedule, Mizoram, Look East Policy.

Introduction

The Look East Policy was classified into two phases, namely, the first phase and the second phase. The first phase of the Look East policy was from 1991 - 2002 and it wholly concentrated on Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries which

mainly focused primarily on trade and investment linkages. Where as, the second phase which began since 2003 is more comprehensive in its coverage, extending from Australia to East Asia, with ASEAN as its core agenda. As part of the endeavour to strengthen India's linkages with the East and South East Asian region as well as to reinforce the Look

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East Policy, a sub-regional grouping, called BIST-EC, comprising Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand was established in 1997. With the addition of Myanmar, Bhutan and Nepal, the grouping came to be known as Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technique and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). In fact, India promotes BIMSTEC to establish economic links with peninsula member countries of ASEAN to boost the economic development of its seven North Eastern states.⁴

The Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram is unique in various aspects because the provision of the Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India has been enforced in the area since the enforcement of the original constitution of India. The Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram is the area dominated by the Lais, Maras and Chakmas in the extreme south of Mizoram, namely, Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC), the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) and Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC); and the present Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram, comprising the above mentioned three Autonomous District Councils jointly traced their root to the Pawi Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) which had been in existence from 1953 to 1972. Other than the Chakma, Lai and Mara, there are also sub-minority tribes, namely, Bawm, Pang, Tlanglau, Bru (Riang or Tuikuk) and some emigrant tribes from Myanmar in the area.⁵ Look East Policy also happened to be the popular political slogan, spearheaded by certain political parties for their own political advantages in the Sixth Schedule area of the state. The methodology for the present research paper is based on historical and analytical approaches; and both the primary and secondary sources are employed for collection of materials which are required in the paper. Thus, the paper attempts to assess the two ongoing projects in the Sixth Schedule area of the state and it also attempts to assess the significance of the area in India's Look East Policy.

Actors for pursuance of the Look East Policy Projects

Myanmar and North East India: Myanmar and

the North Eastern States of India are important actors for successful implementation of the Look East Policy projects because of their strategic location. The NER Vision 2020 highlighted that the Look East Policy has not brought any significant gain for the North Eastern states as all trade exercises were done through sea. It should be noted that the North Eastern States share borders with Nepal, China, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar and has less than 1 percent land contiguity with the rest of India through a 22 kilometre Silliguri corridor which is often referred as the 'chicken neck.' The North Eastern states comprise 8 percent of the land area and 3 percent of the population of the country. It is one of the most complex spots in Asia with over 200 ethnic groups, languages and dialects and their own faiths and practices constantly create conflicts of interests. Despite being linked with the mainland by just 22 km, North Eastern states share 1600 long common border with Myanmar. Over and above that, the basic necessities and requirements of North Eastern states are obtained from Myanmar even before the legalization of trade. As a matter of fact, Myanmar and North Eastern states are two important actors in the Look East Policy project.⁶

China: China was a hostile neighbour for India since the China-India war of 1962 and China also provided military assistance to Pakistan from time to time. Besides these, China also became the closest partner and supporter of military junta of Myanmar. The increasing Chinese influence and trade exercise in ASEAN countries and Myanmar alarmed India, as such; India has also intensified its trade competition with China in harnessing of Burma's significant oil and natural gas reserves, seeking to establish a major and stable source of energy for its growing domestic needs and reducing dependence on oil-rich Middle East countries. Over and above that, China also got contracts for harnessing more than 2.88-3.56 trillion cubits of natural gas in the A-1 Shwe field in the Rakhine (Arakan) State and development of naval and surveillance installations along Myanmar's coast and the Coco Island. It is evident that if India continues to remain a silent spectator

after the entry of Chinese trade activities in Rakhine State of Myanmar which is geographically contiguous to Mizoram State of India, it would be a suicidal step for India.⁷ As a matter of fact, India vigorously pursued the two projects which are initiated in the Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram mainly due to the Chinese factor. Thus, China is also one of the important actors who is responsible for effective pursuance of the two projects in the Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram. It should also be noted that security comes first than economic development for implementation of the Look East Policy projects in the area.

Projects of the Look East Policy in the Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram

The Government of India has initiated 6 projects in Myanmar, namely, Tamu-Kaletwa-Kalemyo road (160 km), Kaladan Multi-Model Transit Transport Project, ASDL Project, ISRO Data Processing Centre, Yangon , Truck Supply (TATA Company) and ONGC, Videsh Limited, GAIL and ESSAR project in energy sector. The 7 projects in the North East India are Kolodyne HEP II, Kolodyne Multi Model Transport Project, Asian Highway, Asian Railway Link, Natural Gas pipe line, Guwahati-Hochin Minh City Flight and Imphal-Hanoi Flight.⁸

The two projects in the Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram shall be analysed as given below

Kolodyne Hydro-Electric Project II or Kolodyne HEP II: The Kolodyne HEP II is a project for production of 460 megawatts of power, to connect the Kolodyne River with Port Sittwi in Myanmar by making it navigable from favourable spot as well as supply of good drinkable water to people of the area. The Kolodyne HEP II Project is about to harness the potentiality of the Kolodyne River with multi-purpose utilization which should be concretely beneficial for people of the area. The Government of India intensified its move for cooperation with Myanmar in pursuance of its Look East Policy programmes; and some of the main agenda for appeasing Myanmar in this regard are – joint exploitation of Myanmar's gas deposits in Rakhine (Arakan) State, multi-model project for development of

highway, inland water way linking Kolodyne and Sittwe Port and hydro power generation from a dam on Kolodyne.⁹ The project estimated cost is about Rs. 5000 Crores and the work is undertaken by the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC). Detailed Project Report (DPR) in this regard was submitted by the Central Water Commission (CWC) in 2008 but it was not found to be authentic, as such, the Central Water Commission is preparing another DPR which automatically delays the works to be undertaken by the NTPC. The NTPC has started functioning in the area by opening office at Lawngtlai in October, 2009 but the actual work can not begin due to delay in submission of the DPR by the Central Water Commission. The HEP II project is about to require more than 200 engineers which comprise of Chief Engineer (C.E.), Superintendent Engineer(S.E.), Executive Engineer(E.E.), Assistant Engineer (A.E.) or Sub-Divisional Officer (S.D.O.) and Junior Engineers (J.E.). Besides the qualified engineers, the projects may also require skilled labours, namely, carpenters, welders, fitters, mechanics, electricians, gas cutters and grinders etc. However, it should be noted that only certificate holders would be given preference even for appointment to various skilled labour posts. Even if a person is a good skilled labour worker, he may not have chance for appointment if he does not have the required certificate. So, it is high time for people of the area to gear up for taking advantage of the benefits of the project.⁹

Kolodyne Multi-Model Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP): The Kolodyne Multi Model Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP) is a road project for construction of international standard highway which pass through the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) area via AOC Veng, Lawngtlai and it should pass through Myanmar as far as Akyab. The Kolodyne Multi Model Transit Transport Project road is aimed at establishing connectivity between Indian ports and Sittwe port in Myanmar through riverine transport and road links in Mizoram. The distance of the road is estimated to be 117 kilometers within Mizoram from Lawngtlai to Myanmar

border and it is about 222 kilometers from the border to Akyab. The Detailed Project Report (DPR) for this project was prepared by the Rail India Technical Economic Service (RITES) and the work is being undertaken by two road construction companies, namely, RDS (Rameshwar Dayal & Sons) and ARSS (Anil Rajesh Subhash Sunil) Exhibition Project Limited. The estimated cost of the project is about Rs. 746 Crores and this highway is expected to be the gate way between India and South East Asian nations for commercial and business activities.¹⁰ The construction of the highway is supposed to be completed within four years and the work is now undertaken in full swing.

Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram in a Strategic Location

The Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram comprises the three Autonomous District Councils, namely, the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC), the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) and the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC). The said area comprised of one administrative district, known as Chhimituipui District from 1972 to 1998 and it was bifurcated into two administrative districts, namely, Saiha District and Lawngtlai District. The administrative jurisdiction of the Saiha District covers the geographical area of the M.A.D.C., where as, the Lawngtlai District covers both the C.A.D.C. and the L.A.D.C. geographical areas.¹¹ The three Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram are collectively known as undivided Chhimituipui District or the Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram and the Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram happened to be a more popularly used terminology than the other one. The Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram shares common international boundary with Myanmar and Bangladesh, as such, border trade was witnessed between the localities of the border area either with Myanmar or Bangladesh, and it still going on undisturbed whether it is restricted or permitted by the government. The reason being, people inhabiting the border area in both side of the countries are from same ethnic stock. It is evident that ethnic stocks of the Lai and Mara from the Zo ethnic group

are inhabiting the border area of India and Myanmar, particularly the Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram and Chin state of Myanmar. Likewise, kindred tribes of Lai, namely, Bawm, Pang and Miria are inhabiting the Chittagong Hill tracts of Bangladesh and there are huge Chakma population also in the Chittagong. As blood relationship is thicker than international political boundary, kindred tribes of the border area have continuous social, commercial, economic and marital ties with their brethren on the other side of the international border. And, the ongoing Look East Policy development provides enough space for them to interact further beyond their own ethnic stock.¹²

Kolodyne River flows into Mizoram from Myanmar and turns west first and then southward within Mizoram and reenters Myanmar. The Kolodyne HEP II Project is about to harness the potentiality of the Kolodyne River with multi-purpose utilization which should be concretely beneficial for people of the area. The Government of India intensified its move for cooperation with Myanmar in pursuance of its Look East Policy programmes; and some of the main agenda for appeasing Myanmar in this regard are – joint exploitation of Myanmar’s gas deposits in Rakhine (Arakan) State, multi-model project for development of highway, inland water way on Kolodyne, Sittwe Port and hydro power generation from a dam on Kolodyne. The two projects in the Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram, namely, Kolodyne HEP II and KMMTP can only be satisfactorily utilized by people of the Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram only if they have adequate and resourceful human resource. Human resource is the solid background for any development, namely, social, economic, educational and all other developments; and any type of resources may never be utilized to the maximum in the absence of potential human resource. Therefore, steps are required to be taken up in this regard as precautionary measures for positive preparation of the Look East Policy projects.¹³

It should be noted that the Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram may automatically be

facilitated with certain prospects and it may not be able to avoid certain problems due to strategic location of the area in the international border. Whether it be for good or bad, the Look East Policy projects may never be concretized with out utilizing the soil of the Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram. Further, the effective pursuance of the Look East Policy heavily depends upon the successful completion of the said two projects. The three Autonomous District Councils in the Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram should also emphasis upon the following points for effective utilisation of the Look East Policy projects, namely, building up of potential human resources, imparting quality education in District Council controlled schools, development of tourism and emphasisation of decentralized administration program. Some natural problems may also emerge along with the Look East Policy projects, such as, abolition of Restricted Area Permit and Inner Line Permit (ILP), issuing work permit to foreigners, emergence of red light area and sex workers in the area, emergence of mixed cultural society, spread of various epidemics, intensive smuggling trade, lawless government, free social and religious curiosity, spread of HIV/ Aids, entry of beggar and beggary, emergence of cross border crime, alarming raise of illegal arms trade, ineffective grassroots political situation to cope up with the changes and ineffective Autonomous District Council to handle administration etc. Over and above the precautions and steps which can be taken by the Autonomous District Councils, if appropriate steps are not timely taken up both the State Government and the Central Government, it would be hazardous for marginalized communities who are inhabiting the strategically located international border area to face the various challenges which lay ahead of them. Therefore, doubts and apprehensions of the localites should also be clarified in order that they may not be suspicious of the Programmes of the government.¹⁴

There was dismal success rate in the early phase of the Look East Policy because trade was carried directly through sea route only. As such, people of the North Eastern states

were not aware of what has been done or what development was taking place as trade activities with the South East Asian countries was totally unknown in the region. Over and above that, tangible development is unlikely to take place if trade activities are restricted only to sea route. As a matter of fact, the Government of India has initiated many projects in Myanmar and North Eastern states to give wider scope for involvement of the region in the ongoing Look East Policy projects and Look East Policy diplomacy. In fact, surface transport link or navigational communication with the South East Asian countries may never be concretized with out utilizing the soil of Myanmar and North East India. Besides these, the growing involvement of Chinese companies and proactive involvement of China in Myanmar foreign policy also alarms the Government of India, however, requisite steps for countering China as well as for maintaining cordial relationship with South East Asian countries will never be pursued with out utilizing the soil of the Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram. Thus, the geographical location of the area in a internationally strategic location with multi-dimensional impacts has automatically increases the significance of the area in the India's Look East Policy.

Conclusion

Look East Policy is the offshoot of globalization, privatization and liberalization, so; its emergence is unavoidable in India's foreign policy. Therefore, it should be welcome with adequate preparation than viewing it negatively with adversarial comments. It was the policy which was initiated in 1991 during the Prime Ministership of P.V. Narasimha Rao; and it has now 6 projects in Myanmar and 7 projects in North East India. Out of the seven projects in North East India, two projects, namely, Kolodyne HEP II and KMMTTP are located in the Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram particularly in the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) area. The ongoing Look East policy projects in the Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram can be cited as the direct out come of appeasing the Myanmarese against the Chinese influence; yet, satisfactory result in

this regard is not yet achieved. The main factor for immediate pursuance for the two projects in the Sixth Schedule area of Mizoram is Chinese factor and security reason. Thus, the government of India has taken its own time in framing, implementing and enforcing the Look East Policy projects only after careful analysis of it from different angles. The policy is pursued not due to the pressure and demand of political parties and politicians of the area; and this policy also has been taken up not primarily for economic development of people of the Sixth Schedule area but it is due to diplomatic and security reason. The successful implementation of the project may enable certain economic development for people of the area but that is only the secondary option of the Government of India. As any tangible diplomatic and commercial ties may not be achieved without utilizing the soil of North East India and Myanmar, the Government of India has taken up many projects in north East India and Myanmar. Thus, the strategic location of the area in internationally strategic location and the two ongoing projects are the evidentiary factors for the significance the Sixth Schedule Area of Mizoram in India's Look East Policy.

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Contrasting the ASEAN and Chinese Response to India's Look East Policy: Inventing South-East Asia as a Strategic Arena

Obja Borah Hazarika* & Padam Nepal**

ABSTRACT

India's Look East Policy does not command the same strategic resonance as the non-alignment policy did during the height of the Cold War. Instead, the Look East Policy has been academically treated as largely an economic endeavour, having minimal or even superficial cultural and political depth. India initiated the Look East Policy as an attempt to pay greater attention to the countries in South East Asia. Having been freed from Cold War compulsions, India was at liberty to alter her policies accordingly. Faced with new circumstances and cajoled by various external and internal factors, several policy changes, were initiated in India, the Look East Policy being one of them. Throughout the two decades for which the Look East Policy has now been in existence it has distended into an enormous initiative with its tentacles spreading as far as Japan in the North to Australia in the South and engulfing all the regions, including the water bodies, which lie in between these two extremes. In the race among nations to establish influence over the Asia-Pacific, which has gained fresh momentum in the 21st century, the Look East Policy was India's preferred vehicle of choice.

South-East Asia, by which one refers to the ASEAN nations, has come to occupy paramount position in world politics in general and in Asia in particular. It is a region straddling some of the busiest shipping routes in the world and it lies adjacent to China and India, two powers, which are seen to be the cynosure for most other nations in the world. These attributes of the ASEAN nations provides them with a veritable invaluable quality in world politics. The Indian Look East Policy, with its focus initially, primarily and continuingly, having been bestowed on the ASEAN nation compounds their strategic importance even further. In this light, the paper will examine the response of the ASEAN and China to the overtures of India via its Look East Policy on South East Asia, with an intention of comprehending the following–

- 1. How external responses from China and the ASEAN impacted the Look East Policy.*
- 2. Whether the strategic importance of South East Asia was compounded by the Look East Policy and the response of China to it.*

Key words: ASEAN, China, South-East Asia.

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Introduction

The ASEAN region is significant for political, security and economic reasons for both China and India, which makes it a strategically important space. The strategic significance is also compounded by the fact that the US has been realigning its policies which seek to focus on the ASEAN region. India and China both have had less than cordial relations with the ASEAN region in the Cold War era. In the case of India, ASEAN nations were viewed as being firmly in the capitalist camp which prevented greater cooperation between the two, despite some common ground like the non-alignment movement. ASEAN apprehensions about India can be gauged from its criticism of the Indian Navy which viewed it the "expansion of naval facilities at the Andamans in Bay of Bengal, was seen to be an attempt to acquire power projection capabilities and an ability to control crucial Malacca and other straits in the region."¹

In the post-Cold War era, India began to engage the ASEAN which had emerged as an economic powerhouse. The ASEAN responded positively to the "Indian initiatives as the regional organization itself faced the trauma of an uncertain future in the midst of an unprecedented post-Cold War atmosphere of political flux."² ASEAN feared the US's withdrawal from South East Asia as it would result in a "power vacuum".³ Southeast Asia had particular fears of China stemming from "geography and historical experience. China's sheer size and proximity, the longevity of Chinese civilization, the tributary relationship of antiquity, and the presence of disproportionately wealthy ethnic Chinese communities have all contributed to fears of China dominating the region."⁴ The Southeast Asian countries became worried about China's military power, mainly because of China's nuclear tests, its exclusive claim to sovereignty in the South China Sea and its aggressive attitude towards the Taiwanese elections in 1996. Southeast Asian countries were also eager to ensure the safety of vital sea lanes of communication, such as the Taiwan, Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok Straits⁵. The

ASEAN began to look upon India as a power that could play a kind of balancing role.⁶

Many ASEAN countries were also attracted by the economic opportunities that a huge market like India offered after its opening in 1991. The ASEAN's positive response to India's Look East Policy can be gauged from the acceptance of India as 'a sectoral dialogue partner in 1992' to 'a full dialogue partner (1995), member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (1996) and finally a summit-level partner (2002)'... to 'India's entry in the East Asia Summit (EAS).'⁷ India has also signed an FTA with ASEAN which has "come into force from 1 January 2010".⁸

China and India's Look East Policy

The Look East Policy, in its entirety, covering its economic, security and strategic aspects, has been viewed in some sections in China as a policy aimed at countering China's influence in its own backyard. It can be understood as India's response to the increase in China's presence in the South Asian nations like Sri Lanka, Pakistan which is of concern to India and has been dubbed as the 'string of pearls'. The ASEAN nations are in a favourable position as it has giant markets and diplomatic powerhouses like China and India both vying for its attention which helps it diversify its options of engagement.

China's state-controlled media regularly lambasts the Look East Policy as a policy designed to counter and contain China. This is especially evident where India's naval diplomacy is concerned. The Chinese media for instance reported 'port calls by Indian naval vessels in countries like Vietnam and the Philippines have come under their criticism.'⁹ The annual congregation of Bay of Bengal navies – of India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, near the Andamans, called the Milan, has also come under scrutiny by China.¹⁰ It is perceived that in response to China's growing military influence in Southeast Asia, India and selected ASEAN countries like Singapore and Vietnam have begun holding joint military exercises. In this context, India's

Look East policy, launched in 1991 has evolved to include security aspects along with its prime economic objectives. Mutual desire by India and ASEAN to engage each other has been reinforced as both actors are uneasy about China's rapid rise in the region.¹¹

The strategic value of the ASEAN has also risen owing to the involvement of India under the rubric of Look East Policy in its decision to precede with oil exploration cooperation with Vietnam in the South China Sea, an area of China's interest and claims. China is concerned with India's involvement in exploring oil in the South China Sea as it would mean greater Indian presence in what China considers its own sphere of influence and is also concerned about the sovereignty issue being dragged into the exploration clauses. The South China Sea disputes are about two major areas: the Nansha Islands (the Spradly Islands) and the Xisha Islands (the Paracel Islands). Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and China stake claims to these islands but given the latter's sheer dominance in terms of military prowess the other claimants fear China's highhandedness in forcefully taking over the region without adherence to proper and lawful settlement of the issue. The competing claims over the South China Sea issue has 'acquired enormous significance because of its geostrategic location connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans, through which some 40 % of global trade passes. It is estimated to be rich in both living and non-living resources, and importantly, control over this sea offers huge strategic advantage vis-à-vis the rest of the East Asian region'.¹²

The entry of India in an already contentious area multiplied the strategic value of the ASEAN region and its littoral space. Although Indian companies are involved in a seemingly economic endeavour of exploring natural resources, however, its presence in the region amplifies the strategic resonance of the already existing contention over the South China Sea.

The strategic value of the South China Sea increases with India's presence via the contracts with Vietnam as the South China Sea which extends from the Straits of Taiwan

to the Straits of Malacca is close to India's maritime borders which translates into India having an obvious security interest in the security and stability of the region as any turbulence in this region could adversely impact India's national security interests. The maritime expanse which falls under the South China Sea is vital for India's trade and commerce and its energy security.¹³

China has demonstrated 'by its Nine Dash Declarations and the South China Sea as China's 'Core National Interest' and claims sovereignty over it. This stand of China is challenged by all the other claimants of the South China Sea and its islands, who claim that the South China Sea is part of the Global Commons and these are international waters through which "international maritime traffic including naval movements have the right of unimpeded access and navigation."¹⁴ China is aware that India also does not support its stand on the South China Sea which lends greater strategic conflict over the region. The Look East Policy has come to include the South China Sea and other water bodies in its rubric. To the great consternation of China, the South China Sea figured as an area of interest in the Indian Maritime Strategy released in 2007 which "identified the northern Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, the sea lanes crisscrossing the ocean, and the 'narrow seas' providing access to it as 'primary areas' of interest. India considers the South China Sea (alongside other bodies of water) an outer, or 'secondary', theatre for the exercise of sea power'".¹⁵

With both India and China staking claims over the same region, its strategic significance becomes evident and ever more palpable. With the exploration contracts with Vietnam, and the joint naval exercises with the ASEAN, the US, Japan, South Korea; India has built substantive familiarisation of South China Sea waters and inter-operability with other Navies with a stake in the South China Sea which are viewed by China as attempts by India to magnify its strategic presence in the waters claimed by China. Other Indian involvement in the maritime sphere includes sending of warships, tankers and submarines to Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Vietnam for

bilateral exercises and as gestures of good will in 2004.¹⁶ The intensity of India's naval activism, has led to protests by China to this aspect of the Look East Policy which concentrates on magnifying India's presence in the South China Sea.¹⁷ Adding to the complexity of the situation is the ASEAN which "seem more willing to cooperate with India than China, especially in the Strait of Malacca."¹⁸ The ASEAN has been steadily increasing its engagement with India in the South China Sea, which is unsettling for China, rendering the issue a disconcerting visage.

Apart from joint naval exercises with the ASEAN nations, China is also wary of the rise in naval cooperation of India with the US and Japan in the East China Sea in April 2007.¹⁹ The purpose of the exercises of India with the East Asian nations and the US was to "improve mutual cooperation between the different navies, share data and communication linkages, conduct manoeuvres which track ships, test air defences, hit onshore and sea-based targets, hold cross-deck helicopter landings, to learn from each other and move towards interoperability of each other's armed services and practices."²⁰ China's consternations with these naval games was evident when the China's newspaper the People's Daily declared, 'It is absolutely not new for Japan and the U.S. to sit down and plot conspiracies together but it is rather intriguing to get India involved', amid reiteration that such moves could reflect how 'the joint military exercise was focused on China with a purpose of encircling it militarily, and this constitutes a concrete move to enhance the Japan-India-Australia-US military alliance'.²¹ Such naval activism is part of the Look East Policy of India and it underscores the strategic dimension of the policy, which China sees as directly aimed at equalling, offsetting and countering China's presence in the region.

India under the Look East Policy has been vigorously pursuing regional groupings and organizations. India has also successfully become party to the East Asia Summit despite resistance from China which was offset by 'nearly all Southeast Asian countries' which

'supported India's participation in the EAS, possibly seeing it as a useful balancer to China's growing power.'²² China wanted to prevent India from influencing decisions made in important forums like the EAS, which it sees as falling beyond India's sphere of interest, but failed to do so, after which it attempted to ensure that India gets a secondary status in the EAS by stating that the ASEAN plus three (China, Japan and South Korea) were the core states while the rest were outsiders.²³ Keeping India out of groupings like the EAS is important for China as India's inclusion would embolden it with influence over strategic decisions made in the EAS and may lead to the ASEAN using India as a counterweight to China when it came to making decisions in the EAS.

The strategic underpinning of the ASEAN region is most visible if the involvement of China and India in Myanmar, the last entrant into the ASEAN grouping, is examined. China had had better relations with Myanmar while the junta was in power, but India also reneged on its previous policy of neglect and around 1990s when it gave up its policy of holding onto high moral ground and instead began to cultivate close ties with the junta. India's volte face in its policy towards Myanmar was done as Myanmar was crucial for India to fight the insurgencies in its north-eastern region, as was its natural resources and it also did not want Myanmar to fall unduly into China's sphere of influence.²⁴

The balance-of-power politics is obvious in the 'Sino-Indian rivalry in Myanmar', with India viewing with suspicions China's military sales to Myanmar and 'construction of military facilities' especially 'intelligence facilities on Coco Island' near the Andamans.²⁵ Similarly, to counter China's growing links with Myanmar, New Delhi has sought constructive engagement with the military regime, and has taken 'steps to ensure peace and tranquility along the India-Myanmar border' among other steps.²⁶ China has been pursuing infrastructure developments in Myanmar which will link it to the Indian Ocean via Myanmar, has India reconsidering its policies in the region. In order to offset China's growing presence in the

Indian Ocean, India has chalked out a strategy which includes- 'increasing its naval spending', 'strengthening its infrastructure presence', 'increasing its naval capabilities', 'active maritime diplomacy', 'increased deployments of these naval assets around the Indian Ocean', 'conducting naval exercises in the Indian Ocean' and "keeping open the choke points in and out of the Indian Ocean".²⁷ These policies of India are in direct response to the growing investment by China in Myanmar to improve its access to the Indian Ocean, an area which is of great strategic significance for India. The competition between India and China in Myanmar over investments, exploration of natural resources among others are evidence of the growth of strategic significance of Myanmar, once a pariah nation, without investment and reeling under sanctions.

Infrastructural projects pursued by India like the Tamu-Kalemyo-Kalewa highway linking India with Myanmar which "is expected to promote economic development, cross-border trade and tourism in the region" are viewed by China as attempts by India to elbow out Chinese presence in Myanmar.²⁸ At the sub-regional level, there are few groupings like the 'Mekong-Ganges River Cooperation Project' between India and ASEAN-5²⁹ (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand) and the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral, Technical and Economic cooperation) which are perceived by some sections in China as attempts by India to influence decisions in South East Asia without giving China a voice in the matters as China is not member to these organizations.³⁰

In this manner, seemingly innocuous regional groupings also take on a strategic countenance when China and India vie with each other to be party to such groupings while at the same time keep the other out of them.

There are factors of India's Look East Policy beyond the ASEAN region which also are of botheration for China. For instance, the US's 'pivot' to the Asia -Pacific and India's Look East Policy implies a synchronization of their foreign which bring them close to China's shores, making China feel hemmed in and

which is threatening for China's trade routes and security concerns. Moreover, China is wary of growing cooperation between India and Japan, under the LEP. Improved ties between Tokyo and New Delhi are reflected in the '...United States-Japan- India trilateral dialogue in October 2011, the India-Japan Global Partnership Summit in September, the implementation of the India-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in August and the Malabar 2011 naval exercises between Japan, India and the US in April.'³¹ The Chinese media commented on the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Japan in October 2010, by criticising India for 'encircling' China through its Look East Policy and exploiting Beijing-Tokyo rift.³²

Conclusion

South East Asia is undoubtedly an economic and strategic space in the contemporary world. The activism of India and China in South East Asia has increased the strategic value of the ASEAN lending the latter with options of hedging, balancing and bandwagoning. The bargaining power of the ASEAN has increased manifold due to the attention bestowed on them by China and India which see each other in zero-sum terms as far as their influence in the ASEAN region is concerned. The Look East Policy, the US's pivot to the Asia-Pacific and China's reaction to these policies are all responsible for increasing the strategic worth of the ASEAN region. China and India's engagement of the ASEAN in economic, naval, security, diplomatic, political terms has led to the increase in the significance of the ASEAN nations giving it ample opportunity to leverage its potential and harness the benefits which comes from engaging China or India or both or none, depending on what suits the ASEAN's interests, thereby putting them in a highly favourable position. Being wooed by the strategic and economic powerhouses like India and China at the same time gives the ASEAN considerable advantage to make the best of the opportunities which India and China wish to offer and the ASEAN can extract maximum benefits from such near-perfect competition between its suitors.

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Does Democracy Matter? Political Regimes and Indo-Bangladesh Relations

Srimanti Sarkar*

ABSTRACT

The concept and practice of democracy has developed in close connection with wider political, economic and social forces but there are varying understandings of the conception. Drawing from the habitual instances of societal unrest that prevails in Bangladesh; exploring the functioning of her democratic system over the years can be tempting. This can pose a challenge to the very notion of democracy that is being operationalized in the country over the years; having plausible consequences at both national and international levels. In light of this argument, the impact that functional (or non-functional) democracy poses over a country's neighbourhood policies can be a much venerated factor to ponder upon. Accordingly, the paper will try to appraise how democracy and democratization act as a determining factor in Indo-Bangladesh neighbourhood relations. In doing so, India's relationship with Bangladesh will be re-envisioned under the subsequent regimes with the aim to emphasize upon an inward looking approach to study foreign relations.

Keywords: *Democracy, Neighbourhood Policy, Indo-Bangladesh Relations, India, Bangladesh.*

Introduction

The twentieth century has witnessed a tremendous reinforcement of the concept of democracy. Over the years, democracy has aroused millions of people all over the world, empowering them for shaping their own destiny in a manner considered to be appropriate and useful. However, it is not easy to build a sturdy democracy, as even the long-established ones remain disposed to corrosion over the period of time if not nurtured and protected. On the other hand, nations with a weak democratic tradition are, by default, vulnerable to setbacks and many so called 'non-consolidated' democracies remain fragile and often backtrack due to socio-economic

stress. But notwithstanding the difficulty of building a stable one, democracy with its set of values retains its strong appeal worldwide. Subsequent to this growing acceptance of democratic virtues, the present world order is also shaped by another crucial phenomenon, namely globalization. The influence of globalization has been so widespread that one readily considers interdependence and multilateralism as the order of the day. An important segment of national politics thus revolves around strategizing and formulating appropriate foreign policies. It is here again that, relations between the neighbouring countries become significant. Our neighbours being our closest acquaintances share multiple features in common. Due to their physical

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proximity, it is palpable that a country's internal political situations will have a powerful spill over effect on its neighbourhood. Thus while analysing the trend of neighbourhood relations between two countries one might find its viable connection with the country's internal functioning. Accordingly, the article will take into consideration the two concepts of 'democracy' and 'neighbourhood policy' and try to establish how democratic functioning of a country influence foreign relations. In doing so a critical appraisal of India-Bangladesh relations will be attempted considering it an apt case to establish the same.

Indo-Bangladesh Relations: Historical Overview

India's relationship with Bangladesh is civilizational dating back to centuries when both were a part of the same state structure nurturing common spirit of fraternity. A shared historical legacy, geographical proximity, akin linguistic-cultural ties amalgamate much of the sentiments of these two neighbours.² However, 'relationship between India and Bangladesh has oscillated between spirit of cooperation and dialogue to one of distrust and diplomatic silence'.³ Dhaka's perception of India and her approach towards it had varied over the period of time under different governments and regimes. Although sceptics observe India's affordability to remain indifferent to relationships with Bangladesh with the contrary not feasible for the latter, 'the realities do not admit of such sceptic oversimplification'.⁴ With India's north-eastern region remaining chronically unstable, with Bangladesh holding the card of acting as a significant commercial gateway to India's landlocked north-eastern states, and lastly but not the least with the increasing acknowledgement of Bangladesh's own geo-strategic location and prospects for emerging as a viable logistic hub connecting China, Myanmar as well as the South East Asian countries—India has the correct reasons to envision her relationship with Bangladesh in a more meaningful manner.⁵ Moreover, with growing concerns of Islamic terrorism all over the world and that too in South Asia—India

cannot afford to have another hostile neighbour on her side shutting the prospects of a peaceful co-existence in the subcontinent. In this light, it is very significant to study the Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations that have evolved over the period of time with its discrete developments under the subsequent civilian (1971-1975), military and the quasi-military (1975-1990) and the democratic (1990s onwards) regimes. This will further help us understand the extent to which political regimes, acting as a bearer of democratic principles, determine Indo-Bangladesh neighbourhood relations.

The retreat of the colonialist rule from Asia and Africa in around the mid-twentieth century was the most fitting time to showcase self-determination in the name of attaining independence. The Bangladeshi event was slightly different as it was a successful assertion of 'self-determination' in a non-colonial setting. Its gradual yearning for a separate identity through assertion of self-determination stemmed from its non compliance with the 'idea of India' and subsequently the 'idea of Pakistani/Bengali separatism' that predates to 1947.⁶ Bangladesh's defining of her separate identity, was therefore, not only as ethnic Bengalis (transcending the secondary treatment as Bengali Muslims under united Pakistan) but also in anti-Indian terms (to mark themselves exclusively apart in spite of acute cultural affinity with Bengal in particular).⁷ Ever since then, foreign relationship between India and Bangladesh had been a spasmodic one defying all expectations of persistent cooperation and friendliness even after India's major role in Bangladesh's Liberation War of Independence in 1971.

The Post-Independence Period: Mujib Era (1971-1975)

Bangladesh was born one of the poorest countries on earth, with very little infrastructure, low level of urbanization and a largely illiterate peasantry class. It is almost entirely surrounded by India on all its sides except a small south-eastern stretch joining with Myanmar. Its foreign policy from the very beginning has been shaped by the dire

need for survival and it had been a major client of foreign aids to meet the needs of the nascent democracy. It was also confronted with the formidable task of nation-building amidst her highly unstable socio-political state of affairs. This was the time when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972-1975) and his Awami League (AL) government was at the helm of Bangladesh's national affairs. The need for establishing a firm governmental foundation for leading the country was invariably bestowed upon and was readily recognised by the incumbent leader. Under the new constitution adopted in November 1972, a parliamentary form of government was established where Mujibur Rahman became the Prime Minister relinquishing the office of the President. Although the form of government was primarily structured along the British/Indian model, the AL inserted its own political principles under which Bangladesh would be governed. Through the four principles of nationalism, socialism, secularism and democracy the AL government intended to steer the fledgling state; but neither a national consensual leadership nor an effective political institutionalization emerged after 1971 in accordance to the proposed principles. A conventional bureaucracy, disorganized and faction ridden party and army compounded by widespread terrorist insurgencies led to the degeneration of the political situation of the country to a considerable degree. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's personal militia—the Rakkhi Bahini⁸ which was aimed to contain and liquidate all the anti-state elements instead earned the reputation for terrorizing the countryside in an autocratic vein. As the Mujib government came under increasing political and economic pressure, his adherence to liberal constitutionalism in accordance to the proposed principles literally broke down. He suspended the constitutional system in December 1974 and declared the state of emergency in Bangladesh. In a dictatorial manner press censorship was imposed, political parties were banned, independence of the judiciary was reduced, fundamental rights of the people were banned with civil liberties curbed to a great extent. On January

1975, the constitution of Bangladesh was abrogated and presidential system was introduced over the parliamentary system. It gave him full executive power and authorized the formation of a single party, the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL), by banning all other parties. Bangladesh thus eventually transformed into a personal dictatorship under Mujibur Rahman—the man who led its independence movement.⁹ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman adopted largely the role of a traditional patriarch whose arbitrary style of personality politics failed to develop a strong political base for the country. Thus of more importance to Bangladesh's democracy, during the post-independence period was the gradual radicalisation of society after decades of misrule by Pakistan, followed by the civil war and a lost unity initially achieved under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was also called the 'Father of the Nation', giving way to a military rule.

But on the international front India's dominant role in the creation of Bangladesh emblazoned her relationship as an indispensable one. During this period, Bangladesh established a steady bond with India. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's AL government had an overwhelming dependence on his Indian counterpart. India under the Prime Ministership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi played an instrumental role in aiding Bangladesh to evolve out of her highly unstable socio-political state of affairs which was ripped off by civil war. New Delhi and Dhaka developed a close and cooperative relationship as the AL government adopted a clear 'pro-India' policy during Sheikh Mujib's tenure. The two governments signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship on March 19, 1972 which initiated an all-round cooperation in social, economic and political fields. Both the nations vouched for a policy of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence; maintaining international peace and security; strengthening national sovereignty and independence by condemning colonialism, racial discrimination in all forms; along with the promise of active collaboration in trade, transport, communication, science and technical fields. Developing mutual cooperation on the basis of the principles of

equality, mutual benefit and the most-favoured nation (MFN) principle was also decided upon; along with cooperation in the fields of art, literature, education, culture, sports and health.¹⁰ The treaty further stipulated the establishment of the Joint River Commission (JRC) to coordinate water sharing interests and resources of both the countries (Article 6) whereby it would study and undertake flood control measures, irrigational projects, and river basin development programs to ensure efficient water resource management based on mutual interests. However, the setting up of the JRC lacked the ability to stop projects like the construction of the Farakka Barrage along the river Ganga which New Delhi had decided to construct in 1951. As a result of which, the dispute over the building of Farakka barrage remained as a bone of contention between India and Bangladesh. The barrage was built with the objective of increasing the flow of the Bhagirathi-Hoogly River and the water depth of the Haldia Port in Kolkata. Located only 10 miles up-river from the Bangladesh border, the leaders in Dhaka asserted that it will induce droughts during the drier seasons and increase flooding during the monsoons adding to the distress of the people of Bangladesh. Sheikh Mujib also lodged early protests in 1972 but by 1973 it was apparent that the construction of the barrage was inevitable and all that was left was only to discuss about its mode of operation. On May 1974 Sheikh Mujib visited India to discuss the barrage again but in a Joint Declaration at the end of his visit formal endorsement by the Bangladesh government was sought regarding the finished construction and starting of the operations of Farakka barrage in 1975 rendering the issue unsettled for another two decades.¹¹

The various other issues over which Indo-Bangladesh relations was hinged upon were the border disputes, problem of migration, insurgency in the north eastern states of India, anti-Hindu attacks and enclave issues. One has to understand that the newly formed government of Bangladesh was in a difficult position due to its primary dependence on India during the post-liberation period. Reconstruction of Bangladesh was the primary

concern of the period and India was called upon as the main lender of material assistance apart from Western Europe, the Soviet Union and the United States (US) who had to bear part of this responsibility as well. India also wielded a heavy hand in Bangladesh and in spite of the overwhelming presence of India, disturbing many quarters of the Bangladeshi populace, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's AL government maintained a cordial and encouraging relationship with India.¹² Adding to the difficulties further, certain provisions in the 1972 Treaty of Peace and Friendship invited criticisms for the Mujib government from within the country. It contained provisions that forbade either of the states from participating in any military alliance directed against the other party (Article 8) and sought to maintain regular contacts with each other on major international problems affecting the interests of both through meetings and exchanges of views at all levels (Article 4). Many among the opposition party saw this treaty as a violation of the sovereignty of Bangladesh and it emerged as political liability for the AL government which started facing sustained national criticisms for both the Farakka issue and other conciliatory actions of the AL government. The AL government was decried as a client government of India that sold out the country's interests and sovereignty to her dominating neighbour, India. The so-called 'honeymoon period' between India and Bangladesh waned gradually and the Bangladeshi polity came under military rule, which emphasized the country's Islamic heritage and in turn moulded the relations in a significant way.

Military and Quasi-Military Regimes: Zia and Ershad Era (1975-1990)

Political scenario changed concomitantly with the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by elements of the Bangladesh army on August 15, 1975. Bangladesh witnessed a successive chain of *Coups D'etats* thereafter. Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed was brought to power under army supervision, who was toppled by the coup of Khaled Musharraf on November 3, 1975 and subsequently again in a bloody army mutiny or 'Sepoy Revolution' on

November 7, 1975 Musharraf was killed to get replaced by General Ziaur Rahman who emerged as the *de facto* leader of the military regime (1975–1981) that followed in Bangladesh. In 1981 General Zia was again succeeded by the Lieutenant General H.M. Ershad who ruled Bangladesh till the 1990s. The primary reasons for rapid militarization of Bangladesh within five years of independence, as identified by Kukreja,¹³ have been poor institutionalization, lack of political consensus and excessive reliance upon the charismatic leaderships for the development of political structures that in turn abrogated civil and political culture to develop in Bangladesh. The coups essentially reflected the failure of the civilian countervailing forces to reign over the politics of the country and the absence of orderly political processes to counter the stronger military organizations from intervening into the state affairs. However, one has to acknowledge that the cause for the failure of civilian counter forces lay within the political and socio-economic structures of the nation; and here comes the importance of democracy that holds the prospects to initiate such structural developments.

It is interesting to note that the direct military rule lasted only until February 1979 as the military officer General Ziaur Rahman steadily moved towards a more democratic political structure instead of perpetuating his military rule. He tried to form a civilian rule where the role of the politicians would dominate over the military. In order to legitimise his government, Zia espoused a political and economic program of Nineteen Points to draw national consensus. Through a resounding referendum Zia legitimised both his entry and the subsequent political objectives of his military government. He further strategized the need for a political party to persist in politics. With an aim to balance and offer a viable alternative to the AL's pro-India, socialist, secularist and Bengali nationalist political philosophies, Zia tried adopting a pro-western, free enterprising, non-secular approach consistent with developing a 'Bangladeshi nationalism' instead of developing a 'pan-Bengali nationalism'. He

also tried to reach out to conservative Islamic elements of the society to secure further legitimacy. But at the brink of the elections of 1977, what Zia government felt were the dangers of a highly politicised military; as on early October 1977 a violent mutiny broke out in Dhaka military air base. This further strengthened his determination to isolate military from politics and forced him to 'civilianize' the government more substantially. On February 1978 the formation of the national front, called JAGODAL (later renamed as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party) was announced which would support Zia's candidacy for President, and on April 1978 the election rules were promulgated. The presidential elections were subsequently held on June 3, 1978 in which Zia fought the elections from the national platform as the JAGODAL candidate, with his Nineteen Point program as his central plank. Zia's victory in the elections ushered in the hope for a parliamentary form of government over a presidential government for the next fourteen years. With another election held in February 1979 for determining the formation of the new kind of parliament, Zia abolished the martial law in April 1979, three and a half years after it was introduced. Thus under Ziaur Rahman's brief reign since 1975-1979 Bangladesh experienced a limited but yet a 'social revolution' under democratically elected civilian president, and a slightly changing societal pattern from authoritarian to a slightly civilian. The various economic and social programs promulgated under Zia's brief reign set the stage for a far-reaching social revolution for the upcoming years. Considerable political stability marked the period after the parliamentary elections of 1978 up till Zia's death; and Bangladesh for the first time could experience the essence of 'democracy'—a fledgling one though.¹⁴

The Ershad Regime (1981-1990) that followed Zia's rule could not justify its legitimacy in the same way as the situation was far different from the former. Nevertheless, following the footsteps of Ziaur Rahman, he announced an Eighteen Point program to rectify societal instability. In order to gain legitimacy Ershad proposed changes to Zia's policies and programs to attract support from the business

community and the conservative sections of the society. Economic liberalization and privatization was an important component of Ershad's policy. He took particular interest in the system of local government in order to create a local base for his political support. Although this change seem to bring about development planning for its people, it accounted more of his intension to form his own political party and political base—The People's Party. Under him the martial law was restored and judicial independence was almost completely eliminated. Ethos of secularism also faced a major halt as Ershad announced the constitution to be based on *Sharia* or the Islamic law, and Arabic to be a part of the curriculum in primary education. It was under Ershad that this stricter leap to '*Sharia* as the only law' was made, from 'Islam as the official religion' under Ziaur Rahman and 'secularism' under Mujibur Rahman. Ershad's military government thus reflected less of its civilian character and more of its dictatorial fervour that triggered societal unrest and hostility. Under him, the constitution was suspended once again and parliamentary elections were not held for four years until May 1986. But the parliamentary elections of 1987 had a dubious impact as nothing really changed inherently. The Army remained in charge, and the President continued to rule in an arbitrary fashion through a compliant senior bureaucracy. The introduction of a puppet parliament literally redeemed the polity into 'a state of garrison'. Demonstrations and strikes became a habitual instance amidst which the state of affairs got embroiled. Protests reached its maxim in November 1987, when a situation of civil disobedience was experienced leading to the declaration of a state of emergency. Soon after the emergency in December the parliament was dissolved. But although the crises subsided for the time being, violence continued to persist which inflicted terminal harm on Ershad politically. Here, one needs to decide whether the tide of democracy—that was running throughout the world by the end of the century—had set the opposition parties to draw considerable unity to topple the Ershad regime in the 1990s or actually the seeds of democracy and

democratization had developed from within the polity of Bangladesh in the eventual course of time.¹⁵

At the international level, this period incidentally saw a relative downturn in Indo-Bangladesh relationship as India's so called overbearing dominance was looked upon with suspicion. This 'suspicion' may be seen as a result of Bangladesh's weak democratic development supplemented by her complex pre-dispositions and fears at work—of that of a small country almost entirely surrounded by India. Likewise, anti-India feelings were heightened and India was seen as the culprit and ultimate beneficiary amidst the former's political toils. To mark an alternative to AL's pro-India, socialist, secularist and Bengali nationalist political philosophies, Zia tried adopting a pro-western, free enterprising, non-secular approach, consistent with the Bangladeshi nationalism instead of the pan-Bengali nationalism propounded by his predecessor.¹⁶ He also tried to reach out to the conservative Islamic forces in the polity to secure further support and legitimacy. As a weak and developing country, Bangladesh readily attracted foreign investors to intrude as clients with latent interests. Islam was also endorsed as a common uniting force for drawing closer relationship with Pakistan and the Arab world; and a subsequent speculation about establishing a confederal economic system emerged.¹⁷ Growing relationship with China was another silent area of strife, which was reinvigorated by General Ziaur Rahman's official visit to Peking in January 1977 brandishing Bangladesh's first direct contact with Peoples Republic of China (PRC) since 1971—well in advance of the restoration of Sino-Indian diplomatic relations after 1965.

Old debates over contentious issues were subsequently revived affecting neighbourhood relationship. Frontier issues pertaining to border management, illegal migration, cross border terrorism emerged and row over sharing of the Ganges river water and the Farakka dam re-surfaced. Bangladesh raised the Farakka Barrage dispute not only at the Istanbul Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference in 1976, but also at the Summit Conference

of the non-aligned countries held in the same year at Colombo. Later she also brought up the issue in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) where it was decided to be resolved bilaterally.¹⁸ Attempts to internationalize the bilateral issues at the world forum embittered the relationship further. Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations thus continued to deteriorate up to India's electoral debacle in March 1977 during which Indira Gandhi's government gave way to the Janata government led by Prime Minister Morarji Desai to enter the political scene. The Janata government attaining political power in India seemed to mollify General Zia's fears about India's overwhelming dominance under the congress leadership to a certain extent. The new arrangement led to the ever successful signing of the Farakka Agreement on November 5, 1977 between the two countries impending since its inception. General Ziaur Rahman visited India on December 19, 1977 followed by the visit of the Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai on April of 1979 that paved the way for developing mutual cooperation between India and Bangladesh to a considerable extent.

Foreign relations with India under General H.M. Ershad did not deviate much from that under General Ziaur Rahman in its anti-Indian and anti-Soviet dispensation. However, there was a subtle upswing in India's relations with Bangladesh in 1982 due to a comparatively smoother transition of power from Ziaur Rahman to Ershad.¹⁹ Two Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) on Ganga water sharing was signed in 1982 and 1985 and agreement on the perpetual lease of Tin Bigha Land to Bangladesh was achieved. Although initiatives for re-evaluating the diplomatic and technical possibilities concerning river water sharing of the Brahmaputra and the Ganga were undertaken—much remained for settlement. Security issues remained one of the primary concerns of the time. The Indian government decided to construct a fence around the highly volatile Bangladeshi border to prevent illegal immigration tormenting India, and especially in her disturbed north-eastern states. But Bangladesh responded with outrage over this issue by associating it with

sentimental representations.

The ascension of Rajiv Gandhi as the Indian Prime Minister in 1984 following Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assassination added a different flavour to the Indo-Bangladeshi relations. Rajiv Gandhi's so called conciliatory approach with emphasis on harbouring regional cooperation reinvigorated neighbourhood relations between India and Bangladesh. In such a context, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was inaugurated in December 1985 which appeared to be a promising endeavour. The Nassau Accord led to signing of new MoUs between India and Bangladesh which aimed to explore alternative plans for addressing the crucial issue of water-sharing. Nevertheless, factors like domestic factionalism, pre-existing national positions acted as combined fetters to sustain the cooperative initiatives. Amidst certain domestic and international compulsions like the issue of terrorism in Punjab and Assam, Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka and internal problems in various states—the central leadership in India remained greatly involved. Thus, according to Thakar, while Indo-Bangladesh relations during this phase tried to foster with the hope of reviving its status quo after a period of substantial deterioration and discontentment, the chance for developing such a relationship under the aegis of SAARC remained a missed opportunity.²⁰ This has been one major reason why mutual interdependence could not lead to a greater regional integration.

Period of Democratic Restoration: 1990-2010

The 1990s saw a drive for 'restoration of democracy' by overthrowing the military regimes through a mass movement. The post-cold war period saw a marked systemic change in the international realm with quickening pace of globalization. A wave of liberalization, globalization and privatization was followed by a trend towards enhancing trade and investments for economic development in both India and Bangladesh. This laid the platform for enhanced bilateral relations based on economic calculations with special consideration of the geo-strategic needs. Electoral politics got renewed emphasis since

1991 and Bangladesh witnessed regular elections in 1996 and 2001 that was considered as free and fair by neutral international observers.²¹ Nevertheless, the period since 1990 till present was characteristically marked by constant power struggles between the two rivaling governments – diametrically opposite and hostile to one another ideologically – namely, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Begum Khaleda Zia and Awami League (AL) led by Sheikh Hasina and the presence of the Caretaker Government (CG).

Begum Khaleda Zia's BNP Government (1991-1996) strengthened its power base in collusion with the religious elements in the polity. This further narrowed down the chance of bracing the ideals of secularism and democracy that both India and Bangladesh cherished in common. However, some of the positive measures undertaken during this period were that – Bangladesh recognized the sovereignty of India over the Tin Bigha land. At the same time India handed over the Tin Bigha land on a lease and opened it for use by Bangladeshi passengers and vehicular traffic on June 26, 1992. The year 1996 saw a change in the state power in the hands of Sheikh Hasina Wajed and again Begum Khaleda Zia came into power in 2001 with the help of two Islamic parties in coalescence with it. Under Sheikh Hasina's government a treaty on sharing of the Ganges water was signed with the then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. India also facilitated repatriation of the Chakma refugees from Tripura to Bangladesh and about 12,000 refugees voluntarily returned to Bangladesh. The symbolic inaugural run of the bus service from Kolkata to Dhaka heralded a new era in the bilateral relations. However, some of the key issues that remained unresolved were that of economic imbalances, water sharing and border demarcation.

The Bangladeshi government nearly crippled with political violence and general lawlessness amidst stiff political strife between the AL and the BNP-led coalition of two Islamist parties in 2006. The lack of public trust in the elected governments escorted the formation of a CG. The CG was installed to temporarily oversee

parliamentary voting but during the 2007 elections the conduct and impartiality of the CG system was itself questioned by the AL and a reform of Bangladesh's CG system was demanded. In January 2007 the army pressured the president to declare a state of emergency, and thus a new military-backed CG, headed by a technocrat, Fakhruddin Ahmed, took over to tackle the endemic political scenario and prepare for eventual elections. Under the emergency regulations the civil and political liberties were greatly curbed and all political activities were banned. It was a sort of 'Soft Coup' that was setup within the constitutional framework, stopping short of a martial law and leaving the civilian government in nominal control.²² The elections of 2009 that ushered in the AL to take control of the government headed by Sheikh Hasina opened up new horizons in Indo-Bangladesh relationship that was long stalled after Sheikh Mujib's rule.

It will be no exaggeration to state that the AL government in Dhaka felt comfortable with the Congress led UPA government in India and vice-versa; sharing complementary visions of secularism and a much friendly stance. The friendly government of Sheikh Hasina had taken certain bold steps to mitigate the activities of insurgents in Northeast India (NEI) and facilitated peace process with the militants in the region. The arrest of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) founder General Secretary Anup Chetia alias Golap Baruah may be considered a significant step taken by the Sheikh Hasina to crack down militancy in NEI.²³ The Indian counterpart headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had reciprocated equally and expressed keen interest to realize the common vision of bringing about an overall social change and economic prosperity in the region, by working in close association with Bangladesh. On January 10-13, 2010, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina embarked upon a much anticipated 123-member delegation visit to India and met her counterpart. Bilateral relations were furthered by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's dignitorial visit to Dhaka at the invitation of Sheikh Hasina on September 6-7, 2011. Delegation level talks between the

two countries ended with discussions covering a wide range of bilateral issues like terrorism, security, energy, connectivity, trade, investment and sharing of water resources. A subsequent signing of 10 Agreements, Protocols and MoUs including a Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development and Protocol to the Agreement concerning demarcation of the Land Boundary between India and Bangladesh took place.²⁴ These agreements were resultant implementations of the various SAARC protocols. On the economic front, India announced a US \$1-billion line of credit for large scale infrastructural development in Bangladesh along with technical supports lent.²⁵ India also agreed to remove 47 items from its negative list to give Bangladeshi products duty free access to the market. This measure was to ensure removal of trade imbalances that is hugely against Dhaka. Establishment of a transit route to Nepal and Bhutan through India was an initiative embarked upon to enhance connectivity so that Bangladesh could transform itself as an economic bridge between South Asia and Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The two countries decided to enhance connectivity and for that matter India vouched to set up a 14-km meter-gauge rail line between Akhura and Agartala. Cooperation over power and renewable energy resources were discussed along with issues relating to the demarcation of the 6.0 km of un-demarcated stretch of land out of the 4,096-km border which encompass 'enclaves' and 'adversely possessed lands'. Two MoUs were signed regarding power sharing and India agreed to export 250 megawatts (MW) of electricity from its central grid to Bangladesh. On the cultural front, both the nations agreed upon to jointly celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore and the 90th anniversary of the publication of the poem 'Bidrohi' by Kazi Nazrul Islam to show familial gestures. Special emphases were also laid on the fields of music, theatre, art, painting and books. The inauguration of the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) at Dhaka on March 11, 2010 was another significant effort in this direction. Furthermore, the introduction of the

'Maitree Train' between Dhaka and Kolkata had been a significant leap forward symbolizing cooperative interests of the two neighbours.²⁶

Crossing the Rubicon: Post 2010 Scenario

While the year 2010-2011 marked a watershed in Indo-Bangladesh relations – two of the most sensitive and issues remained unresolved. The signing of the Teesta Accord and the ratification of the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) suffered a damper due to last minute incongruencies in the center-state relations in Indian. The Teesta Treaty regarding the use and access of the Teesta water received a staunch opposition from the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee. Disagreements regarding the sharing ratio of the Teesta water keeping in mind the seasonal and agricultural requirements of both Bangladesh and North Bengal loomed large upon their relations. Although, the volume of water involved account for even less than 1% of the total trans-boundary water to be shared by the two countries – yet; 'rhetoric' makes it seem like a huge dispute.²⁷ In May 2012, during a visit to India, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Ms. Dipu Moni, warned that bilateral relations would be complicated if India fails to deliver on the Teesta water-sharing agreement.²⁸ Despite this pressure tactic, the treaty remains a slow burner as India continues with its efforts of building political consensus at home. Similarly, relations strained over the failure of the ratification of the LBA in the monsoon session of the Indian Lok Sabha in early September 2013. India had signed the additional protocol to the LBA in September 2011, but it was not ratified because the UPA government failed to get parliament's backing. The main opposition came from the Bhartya Janata Party (BJP) and especially the party's Assam unit, namely the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) as well as the Trinamool Congress (TMC) of West Bengal. The regional political parties voiced against the LBA as they showed their apprehensions for losing vast tracts of territory²⁹ together with the possibility of acquiring large scale Bangladeshi immigrants from the enclaves.³⁰

While concerted efforts to assure Bangladesh regarding India's continued commitment towards an early solution on the issue of sharing Teesta waters found reflection in the words of ex-Indian Minister for External Affairs, Salman Kurshid in the second Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) meeting in February 2013,³¹ the issue got a fresh push after the first stand alone visit of the new External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to Dhaka in June 25-27, 2014. Her visit marked an 'excellent beginning' with renewed commitment to address Bangladesh's concerns over sharing of Teesta waters as well as the implementation of the LBA.³² With significant political realignment that had taken place in both India and Bangladesh in 2014 – whereby the BJP assumed governmental power in India under Prime Ministership of Narendra Modi through a sweeping majority replacing the Congress-led UPA-II government; and the AL returned into power under Prime Ministership of Sheikh Hasina for the first ever consecutive term after the most controversial 10th Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament) elections in Bangladesh – it was a matter of great speculation about how the two governments will fare with each other in the near future. While the previous government (UPA-II) headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh laid the foundation for an improved Indo-Bangladesh relations, hopes were pinned upon the incumbent leadership as it discretely asserted a foreign policy based on deliverables. Accordingly, Prime Minister Modi's political outreach to the neighbourhood – emblazoned by his invitation to leaders of all SAARC countries to attend his swearing-in ceremony; followed by high dignitorial visits by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in June 2014; and a three-day visit of the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to Bangladesh on February 19-21, 2015³³; which was again succeeded by the historic ratification of the LBA on May 7, 2015³⁴ – may be considered as a rigorous effort in tuned with his much acclaimed 'Neighbourhood First' policy.³⁵ While the new government's policy measures can be seen as an innuendo to re-assess whether India and Bangladesh has successfully 'Crossed the Rubicon' and moved beyond their

regime compatibilities – one still has to acknowledge that political regimes with their characteristic features continue to factor in determining bilateral relations (in a varied degree though). This is also true for both India and Bangladesh where subtle modifications and realignments have taken place.

For India, AL's retention of governmental power is considered as advantageous for several reasons – social, economic, political as well as security. As the leader of one of the largest Islamic nations, Sheikh Hasina stood for the separation of religion from state affairs, and attempted political moderations to facilitate greater regional integration. Although, the latest row over the trial of the war criminals of 1971 that culminated into the Shahbag Movement and followed by the most violent and controversial 10th Jatiya Sangsad elections, reflected Bangladesh's enduring struggle with democracy and secularism – India has reasons to think that the AL government will help check religious fundamentalism to grow. In such a context, if India fails to reach out substantially to her foremost neighbor, out of sheer domestic compulsions and federal complexities, it would have to take part of the blame for abetting resurgence of extremism in Bangladesh, which is again one of her biggest concerns in the recent times. At a time when jihadi politics is gaining ground in her western frontier, it will be suicidal for India to facilitate the rise of the same in her eastern frontier as well.³⁶ Furthermore, with Bangladesh gradually transforming itself into a logistic hub – with Southeast Asian powers along with China showing keen interest in the country, India needs to re-strategize her prowess in the region in a pro-active manner.

Conclusion

Therefore, what we find is an evolving trend in Indo-Bangladesh relationship across the different political regimes. Under the civilian regime of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Sheikh Hasina, Indo-Bangladesh relations experienced a relative upturn. The contrary was true in case of the military regimes under General Ziaur Rahman, General H M Ershad and the BNP government led by Begum Khaleda Zia.

The civilian regimes being more tolerant towards democratic principles and secular values than the military dictatorships, confirm 'democracy' as a factor affecting neighbourhood relations between India and Bangladesh. However, one has to differentiate between the varying understanding of the concept of democracy in India and Bangladesh. Although both the nations affirm to be constitutional republics and representative democracies—both are characteristically different. The core problem lay in the fact that the two countries are democratic in very different ways. Unlike in Bangladesh, change of political regime in India is not inevitably marked by violence with random suspension of civil and political liberties. Furthermore, in India 'democracy' play a greater role in shaping her foreign policy towards her neighbours. But in case of Bangladesh—India figures as a significant rhetoric, during her foreign policy formulations. Therefore a deep delving approach to appraise neighbourhood policies between India and Bangladesh becomes crucial. However, in this context, one has to consider other factors that induce regimes to be compatible with one another. Impact of globalization and mutual recognition of the merits of regional integration are factors that figure as important determinants. This justifies the change in the policy orientations which tend to give more importance to geo-strategic and economic factors over sheer political ones. Likewise, Indo-Bangladesh relations have been changing gradually from a histrionic one to a more pragmatic one. Both the countries avow to be more resilient in resolving political imbroglios. The explicit espousal of AL's pro-Indian stand and the BNP's anti-Indian stand needs to be mollified. As noted by G. Parthasarathy, India's former high commissioner to Pakistan, India-Bangladesh relationship 'has to be strong enough to withstand changes in government on both sides.'³⁷ While the Modi-government's pro-active stance to cooperate with the AL government in Bangladesh buttress the efforts for taking neighbourhood relations beyond the level of regime compatibility, one needs to behold to such standpoint. Compassionate

acknowledgement of domestic compulsions and earnest initiative to resolve mutual deadlocks is a matter highly desirable. The fact that, bilateralism is rooted in domestic echelons, which essentially transcends to the international level, needs to be comprehend. Thus a bottom-up approach to handle neighbourhood relations between India and Bangladesh with due consideration of the fundamental factors is a prime necessity.

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India and Bhutan: An Updating of Bilateral Relations

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ABSTRACT

A decade and half into the twenty first century, the electronic world has taught us the benefits of updating. However, it has escaped the knowledge of the political people at the helm of affairs as well as the think tanks formulating foreign policy in India that formatting is imperative in an ever changing political scenario. Relations with the next door neighbours are intrinsically ingrained in the spectrum of India's foreign policy – due largely to the geo-strategic layout of the sub continent. It is undeniable that certain determinants, like geography, are constant variables in the formulation of foreign relations and also that there will always be an underlying theme of national interest at the bottom of each of the actors. Nonetheless, time changes people and their mindset as well as their preferences in which they are influenced by outside forces of push and pull. In the context of India- Bhutan relations, it is futile to carry on with a system, a legacy of the British Raj that worked sixty years ago, in today's drastically different circumstances. It is not that the geographical lay out has suddenly turned turtle but the Druk Yul has come out of the cocoon of Shangri la to spread its wings as an awakened butterfly. Moreover, it must be understood that the bilateral relations are no longer confined to them alone as China looms large in South Asia and has to be reckoned with. India took a long time in waking up to the reality and pay its due attention not only to Bhutan but to the whole gamut of its policy vis a vis the smaller neighbours all around her

Bilateral relation is a tricky game especially when it is between two asymmetric next door neighbours dissimilar in almost every aspect. The 'big-small syndrome' tends to influence the actors to a great extent in this situation along with inputs from external players. In spite of that, there is always a definite perimeter which restricts their actions. India- Bhutan relations can be depicted as a case in this light.

Key words: India, Bhutan Bilateral Relations.

Introduction

Bhutan, one of the three erstwhile landlocked northern kingdoms (with Nepal and Sikkim), that have for long served as buffers. As the

Himalayas lie to the north of Bhutan, the security of India does not stop at the Indo-Bhutan border, but is extended beyond that to the Bhutan-Tibet (China) border. During

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the British rule, the Tibetan plateau was considered as the 'outer line of defence' while the three mountain states together served as the 'inner line of defence'. The British established contacts with Bhutan and the latter invited them to resolve disputes with neighbouring kingdoms. By the Sinchula Treaty of 1865, the British in India became the 'sole arbiter' between them and a revised edition was the Punakha Treaty of 1910 whereby their power was enhanced to that of an 'advisor'. The taking over of Tibet, China came closer and the importance of territorial security for independent India enhanced. Nehru took it upon himself to 'contain' China by entering into three separate treaties with the Himalayan states which gave India the *locus standi* to defend her territory by strengthening the defence mechanism of the northern neighbours.

Airing his views in Parliament, Nehru categorically stated that the Govt. of India was "responsible for the protection of the borders of Sikkim and Bhutan and of the territorial integrity of these two states" and further declared in the tune of a defence pact that "any aggression against Bhutan and Sikkim will be considered as aggression against India."¹ The 1949 India- Bhutan Treaty signed in Darjeeling was a sequel to the earlier ones. Art. 2 of the 10 Article Treaty was not only a continuation of the British policy and aimed at consolidating Indian presence in Bhutan. It stated that India would not interfere in the internal administration of Bhutan in almost identical wordings while the latter "agreed to be guided by the advice of the Govt. of India in regard to its external relations."² There were also specific mention of importation of arms and ammunition by Bhutan only with the approval of India provided those are not detrimental for the latter.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to touch upon the other giant actor across the mountains that had, from time immemorial, nurtured certain ideas that have remained rigidly constant in spite of change of regimes – dynastic, national, Communist and its latest *avatar* at present. So, Bhutan was also wary of China which

enhanced with the atrocities perpetrated on the Buddhist population in Tibet and the flight of the Dalai Lama to India. Thus, it was in the best reciprocal interest that their bilateral relations were deeply attached which emanated from the common bogey of Communist China. Moreover, Bhutan did not possess the means to repel any large scale attack. Although, it was viewed by some in Bhutan as an impingement on political sovereignty of that country and voices were raised against it, the Govt. was steadfast. "The stronger we are the more happy India should be. We will give unstinted support in times of crises", said the then King.³ Nevertheless, that his country was neither an Indian protectorate nor was there any clause related to defence in the treaty was highlighted by the then Prime Minister Jigme Dorji at about the same time.

It is discernible that by virtue of the 1949 Treaty, India strove hard to modernize Bhutan both strategically and economically. In Bhutan's development – starting from building infrastructure to democratization – India's indelible stamp is evident. Not only India took out Bhutan to the world fora but has all along been the largest donor. High priority hydal projects have yielded benefits for both as Hydroelectric power is the most important export item of Bhutan while India is the importer. Bhutan has remained perhaps the only loyal follower of India in this region till date.⁴

However, this is not to assume that there had not been any urge to exhibit its separateness from Indian policies and there are several instances when Bhutan acted on its own – sometimes even in defiance – over international issues. Eg. Positions adopted in NAM, UNCTAD or abstaining against Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Bhutan's relations with Bangladesh started without consulting India. Even as far back as in 1979, a section of Bhutan talked of revision of the 1949 Treaty which was too 'Indocentric'.⁵ It is also interesting to note that Bangladesh advised Bhutan to come out of the apron strings of India to conduct its own foreign policy.

It should be pointed out here that from the very beginning, China was vociferous against the treaty and declined any Indian interference in its boundaries (Tibet) with Sikkim and Bhutan. Although the Treaty was appropriate for the time being and served the purpose, but the strategy diluted with Nehru's utopia of a 'pan Asian' view with China as a partner and a pre-conceived idea of 'Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai' that backfired in the 1962 Sino-Indian border skirmish.

The 'Big Brother' attitude, which was an aftermath of stepping into the shoes of the British when they left the subcontinent, has often rubbed the neighbours the wrong way. With the passage of more than half a century, they expected to be treated as peers with sovereign entity. Even being members of SAARC did not help much due to the inherent 'fear psychosis' and 'threat perception' of the smaller neighbours vis a vis their giant counterpart which enhanced after the creation of Bangladesh, incorporation of Sikkim and Pokhran I. As the basic contrast between India and them remained constant in the form of territory, resources, economic and infrastructural set up, armed forces and advancement in science and technology, the hiatus is unbridgeable. Under the circumstances, it is quite natural that the Himalayan states would contemplate looking in some other direction, if not for survival, but at least for self assurance. The entry of the Dragon set the stage.

Relations with China started in 1984 over the issue of demarcation of Bhutanese territory. It was imperative that meetings were held to resolve the border problem (detail) It was indeed a setback for India when she was not allowed to be present in the deliberations as China put its foot down to deter India from issues that did not fall within India - Bhutan affairs. Although Bhutan assured India of her friendship irrespective of the growing Sino - Bhutan dialogue, it is undeniable that a third country, and a very important one for the matter, has entered the Garden of Eden signalling a shift in the power equation in part of South Asia. The signing of the Agreement in 1998 on Maintenance of Peace

and Tranquillity along the Sino -Bhutan Border Areas was a landmark in their newly emerging bilateral relations. Subsequently, China expanded its hand in making investment in education, health and services in Bhutan. Construction of roads has also been undertaken along the 470 km border. High level visits have been taking place from both sides.⁶

It must, however, be pointed out here that although Bhutan- China deliberations may not be within the scope of India- Bhutan relations, but some areas like Chumbi valley, of the 'chicken neck' of Siliguri, are included in the Chinese quest for its 'lost territories' and fall definitely within the purview of Sino- Indian relations. Again, some joint Sino-Bhutanese ventures in hydro electrical projects could hamper Indian interests - both economic and strategic.⁷ It is a known fact that nurturing a strategy of extending its sphere of influence in South Asia, China has successfully created a 'string of pearls' in the southern waters along India's coastline and has attempted to have a 'ring' around India in the north and the flanks to encircle her.

When winds of change began to blow in Bhutan, at the home turf, it could no longer continue with the ancient administrative system that the ruling dynasty had brought from Tibet and had to start on a democratic path. Although the successive rulers acted as 'benevolent' patriarchs to dole out liberal/modern ideas in doses to the people (unlike Nepal where the demand for democracy and modernization percolated up from the people themselves), the first onslaught came from the ethnic Nepalese who lived in Bhutan for ages. Their democratic aspirations met with retaliation from the govt. which apprehended to be submerged by a formidable minority and feared a fate like Sikkim. Clashes and insurrection finally led to an ethnic cleansing that made 1/6 of the population to flee Bhutan and take shelter in Nepal and parts of India - Assam and West Bengal. In Nepal they were granted refugee status and UNHCR took the charge in their upkeep. In India they just started living with their kith and kin by virtue of the 1949 treaty which gave equal rights to

them with the citizens of India.⁸ Although a lukewarm screening process for ascertaining the *bona fide* citizens started, actually no repatriation ever took place. Third country repatriation by the world agency – Bhutan washed its hand off the problem totally.

The Indian stand in this context was of ‘neutrality’ between two of her neighbours but an inclination towards Bhutan became clear when New Delhi allowed the Bhutanese refugees to enter Nepal through Indian territory (as there is no common border between the two Himalayan states) but stopped them on their reverse journey to re enter Bhutan. Time and again India talked about not allowing its territory to be used for anti- Bhutan activities too.⁹

In the mean time, ups and downs in another of India’s northern neighbour, Nepal’s prolong movements for democracy culminated in the final abrogation of Monarchy and setting up of a govt. with the Maoists in power. Peeved by the happenings all around, the then Bhutanese king Jigme Singye Wangchuk abdicated in favour of his son and introduced democracy with a proper Constitution and other related institutions to retain Monarchy in his kingdom. In 2005, a Constitution was drawn up with Indian help.¹⁰ There was a tie up of the Indian and Bhutanese Elections Commissions and they acted in tandem to carry out the electoral process leading to the democratic set up now existing there.

In spite of that, a sea change in the shape of the abrogation of the 1949 Treaty took place that replaced Art. 2 of the 1949 treaty that had given India authority over Bhutan’s foreign policy. Art. 2 of the present 2007 Treaty states: “Both countries shall cooperate closely to their national interest. Neither government shall allow the use of its territory for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other”.¹¹ This goes a long way in removing Bhutan from the grip of India – although in a very subtle way. It reflects maturity of Bhutan and indicates that the days of taking Thimpu for granted are no more. By this, Bhutan achieved “a significantly greater freedom in foreign and defence policies – areas hitherto controlled by New Delhi for

nearly six decades” as an author points out.¹²

Though, India still remains the most important partner in multifarious areas – and the benefactor –relations seems to nosedive in the recent past. The continuous presence of illegal militants like Bodo, Alfa, KLO etc. within Bhutanese territory, in spite of once being dismantled by the then Bhutan Prince in 2003, poses a perennial problem for the inhabitants there. Trafficking is another evil that thrives along the border ensuring a free flow of man and materials. Further, resentment over Indian benefit the cost of Bhutan from the hydal projects are heard in many quarters of Bhutan.¹³ Moreover, Bhutan attaches much importance to environmental factors and tries to conserve and protect nature which has not been the case with India where nature is exploited without thinking of the consequences.¹⁴

Under the circumstances, a new turn with a new vision became imperative for India regarding Bhutan and the much needed breakthrough happened with the ascendancy of Narendra Modi to Primiership in May 2014 who unfolded a fresh road map. His priority for the region manifested in having the representatives of the SAARC nations at his very first public occasion of the oath taking ceremony as the Prime Minister. By making Bhutan, India’s friendliest neighbour, his first port of call, the emphasis was highlighted.¹⁵

That the security of the northern borders has a top priority can be discerned from the statement by Kiren Rijiju, Minister of State for Home, hailing from the North-east that highlighted the importance of the Himalayas. “Our weather conditions are determined by the lofty Himalayan ranges, 90% of the fresh water to India comes from the Himalayan region. If the Himalayan region is protected, then India’s future is bright. But if the Himalayan region is in danger, it will be a disaster for our country”, he said. Reiterating his view, he agains said: “We must strengthen our position on China border (Arunachal).”¹⁶

Although most of the items in the bilateral relations are not new but have been continuing from the past, it is the change of *attitude* that has started breathing a fresh life into it. It

must be realised that one of the basic drawbacks of India's neighbourhood policy has been that of 'magnanimity', the urge to be 'generous' - a streak of the superiority complex of the 'big brother' syndrome. As the modern world believes in reciprocity, if not in 'quid pro quo',¹⁷ the futility of the Gujral Doctrine that advocated benefits for them even at the cost of 'no reciprocity' was self evident.¹⁸

Now, 'B2B' (Bharat to Bhutan)¹⁹ as emphasized by Modi in Thimpu, highlights the parity factor between two neighbours irrespective of other asymmetrical consideration. This will go a long way in removing the resentments that emanated from the Druk Yule over the past years by the show of 'friendly 'but 'cavalier' attitude by India²⁰ that impinged upon their national sentiment.

There are indeed certain basic principles of statecraft that includes foreign policy that have to be kept intact - a continuum in spite of changes. So, economy remains the mainstay of cooperation along with other areas of development in bilateral relations between India and Bhutan. Being a landlocked country, Bhutan is expected to get its share of privileges from India and India is and will be the most important partner. It is obvious that strategic interest underlies their common concern which revolves round China with its demanding tentacles spread over this region to establish a sphere of influence.²¹ Although Bhutan's interests will be served by Chinese infrastructure in its country, still a danger of encroachment will always be lurking behind. That the Bhutanese government is well aware of the situation is evident from the statement of Tshering Tobgay, the Prime Minister, who pointed out that "the Bhutanese territory cannot be used against India's security interest... we are vigilant" and reiterated that India remained the "bedrock" of Bhutan's foreign policy²² as national interest and security bind them together.

Thus, although there is not much possibility of Bhutan totally deviating from its trodden path of friendship with India, a chance of Bhutan showing the 'China card' like Nepal may not be totally unfounded. Therefore, a

new trend set forth by Modi in creating a sentiment is bound to have a positive effect. It will also be instrumental in keeping with Modi's notion of reasserting India that holds the key in resurrecting SAARC from its present comatose state. Indian security is synonymous with the security of the whole region and is intrinsically intertwined with that of the neighbours. So, economic prospect through cooperation would ensure prosperity for all and would work towards diminishing the irritants that set them on a centrifugal path. India- Bhutan relation is an important aspect of the same.²³

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Prospects of Northeast India-Myanmar Tourism Cooperation in the Emerging Dynamics of India's Look East Policy: A New Dimension

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"Tourism, one of the world's top job creator and lead export sector, especially for developing countries, can play a significant role in achieving Millennium Development Goals(MDGs) 1 – eradication of poverty, MDGs 3 – gender equality, MDGs 7- environmental sustainability, MDGs 8 – global partnerships for development".

- UNWTO¹

ABSTRACT

One of the most visible dimensions of regionalisation today tourism promotes economic growth, increase more people to people contact and brings regions and countries closer. The two enjoy a reciprocally strengthening relationship with regionalism providing an avenue for the tourism industry to expand and, conversely, the tourism providing an opportunity for countries to regionalize its economy. In fact, this sector act as a medium for shared prosperity across regions and countries. Consequently the effort is for more cooperation in the tourism sector among countries and region without the exception of India's Northeast and Myanmar, the biggest country in mainland Southeast Asia. With India's LEP directed towards developing greater economic cooperation with its Southeast Asian neighbours on the one hand and the fact that South and Southeast Asia is set to be the fastest growing area of tourism activity in the world well into the present century, the significance of the two are very much there. Besides, a positive change in the political climate of Myanmar with increasing receptiveness to the global community and at the same time improving law and order in Northeast India provides a brighter prospect for more movement of people in the region. This could be a good sign for enhancement of tourism which in turn could bolster the overall economy of the entire area.

Thus the attempt of the paper is to study the prospect of tourism cooperation between Northeast India (NEI) and Myanmar within the broader perspective of India's increasing emphasis on Look East policy (LEP) and also taking into consideration the India-ASEAN connectivity dimension.

Key words: *Tourism, Northeast India, Myanmar, Look East Policy.*

Introduction

Indeed in the new socio-economic trend of working towards the achievement of

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) all over the world tourism has emerged as one of the most significant export sectors contributing to the overall economic growth

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of almost all the countries in the global landscape, more apparent in developing and less developed countries. A general consensus has emerged that this global industry not only increases foreign exchange income, but also creates employment opportunities and more people to people contact. Due to this income and employment generating capacity it creates, tourism has got special significance for emerging economies and regions. This sector could play an important role in regional cooperation and integration of any region, without exception of India's Northeast (NEI) and Myanmar, the biggest country in mainland Southeast Asia - reciprocities very much inherent therein.

In his recent tour of Northeast India Prime Minister Narendra Modi recognised the untapped tourism potential of the region which could be transformed into productive component of the region's economy. Henceforth he announced that the Central government will provide Rs 28000 crore for laying down new railway lines and Rs 5000 crore for providing 2G mobile coverage in the Northeast strictly for improving connectivity while the primary objective remains in developing the untapped tourism potential of the region². This act brings to the fore the significance of Northeast India as a significant tourism hub which if properly synchronised with the recent moves of its immediate neighbor, Myanmar, could be a tool for economic development of the whole region and at the same time an important contribution to India's Look East policy. In his quest to transform LEP into a more vibrant policy Prime Minister Modi take into consideration the tourism prospect of NEI as a growth engine. Thus in his newly coined connotation of *Act East* tourism sector has got a significant place of its own.

Taking a cue from the above the fact remains that development and promotion of tourism happens to be one of the most important means of regional cooperation which undeniably is receiving lots of political and economic attention. It is in this context the author is going to study the prospect of tourism promotion between Northeast India

and Myanmar within the broader perspective of India's increasing emphasis on LEP.

One of the most important objectives of LEP in this era of globalisation and regional shifts is to develop greater economic cooperation with its Southeast Asian neighbours through more people to people contact. In this context tourism is taken as an instrument for reciprocal growth, with the relevance of Northeast India and Myanmar becoming pre-eminent. More emphasis on the connectivity agenda in the ever improving India-ASEAN cooperation could be a strong impetus in this direction. Besides, a positive change in the political climate of Myanmar with increasing receptiveness to the international community and at the same time improving law and order in NEI provides a brighter prospect for more movement of people in these adjoining regions. This could be a good sign for enhancement of cooperation between the two through tourism which in turn could bolster the overall economy of the entire area. Thus the argument that regionalism - tourism development linkage has mutual and causal relationships, which reinforce each other and move along the same trajectory, proved to be apt in this context.

What is to be deduced further is that the incentives and benefits generated from the tourism industry encourage other sectors to develop, which generates a chain of spillover effects. It also connects regions through three dimensions: people, institutions and infrastructure.

Rationale

In the aforesaid background mentioned a new aspect that one could see is the increasing importance of NEI where Myanmar remains a top priority. The two shared a boundary of 1643 kilometres. Any initiative taken under India's LEP could not undermine the importance of Myanmar's geo-strategic position as India's land corridor to Southeast Asia, with India's Northeast as linkage. Same applies for the prospect of developing tourism sector under this policy. And in the context of the growing trend of regionalisation and liberalisation in South and Southeast Asia the

importance of NEI and Myanmar is very much there and the rationale behind the prospects for tourism cooperation with all reciprocities. Tourism is flourishing in the entire Southeast Asia without the exception of Myanmar and NEI could be a part of the milieu and garner the benefits. At the same time NEI is home to a large scale unexplored and untapped historical, cultural as well as natural assets which could be of high interest for tourists from Myanmar and beyond. Besides, there is the ethnic, racial and cultural affinity between the two.

The unique but untapped natural endowment and colourful traditions of NEI when combined with the vast cultural heritage of Myanmar could provide for a potent ground for boosting up tourism sector either way, which in turn will be a boon for bilateral economic cooperation and subsequent growth of the same for both. The Northeast of India, besides being richly endowed with natural resources, is identified as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots; as it hosts species-rich tropical rain forests and supports diverse flora and fauna and several crop species. Coupled with is the diverse mixture of ethnic and tribal traditions and culture.

Increasing importance of NEI under India' LEP and the gradual return to political stability and transition towards openness since 2010 in Myanmar provides a positive ground for exploring and developing the tourism sector as a medium for further people to people contact and at the same time for bilateral economic cooperation. As the cultural connections between the Northeastern states of India and the countries that stand to its east pre-existed the formation of nations in South Asia and continues to remain an important informal medium of link, this natural connection could be of advantage in furthering any relations between the two. Many of the tribes and sub-tribes of NEI residing in the border areas or inside are culturally as well as ethnically link with those in Myanmar and one could see lots of similarities in their ways of life. To take an example one could see the visit of many from Nagaland state of India to attend Naga Festival

held in January every year in the Naga inhabited areas of Myanmar. Besides, NEI being a natural bridge between India and Southeast Asia, economic integration with its transnational neighbours (especially Myanmar) is expected to open up new opportunities for the region, without the exception of tourism sector. At the same time the initiative on the part of a politically stable Myanmar for adopting tourism as a priority area in its *Framework for Economic and Social Reforms* and *National Comprehensive Development Plan* could be a positive and reciprocal indication³. Thus, the very rationale of studying the future prospects for a collective tourism promotion of NEI and Myanmar together will not only be an interesting area but also obvious.

Tourism as a Growth Engine

The question is why tourism. The answer is not far for anyone to seek in the present context. Tourism is one of the foremost emerging economic sectors in developing economies and regions today. According to a report of the UN World Tourism Organisation it is found that tourism contributes 5 percent of world's GDP, accounts for 6 per cent world's exports in services (fourth largest export sector), and provide 235 million jobs, or one in every 12 jobs worldwide⁴. It further pointed out that this sector, in many developing and least developed countries, is the most viable and sustainable economic development option, and a strong driver for poverty alleviation as it is a relatively labour intensive sector and is traditionally made up of small and micro enterprises⁵. This is a sector where investment is less. Breaking free from the confines of its unrecognised existence, tourism has now gained universal acceptance as a potent engine for inclusive socio-economic development. Same applies for these two regions. Tourism possesses the potential to stimulate other economic factors through its forward and backward linkages with a host of sectors⁶. As such, tourism development has become an important target for most governments. Tourism could be the best means for these two late starting regions as both NEI and Myanmar are rich in natural resources and

cultural heritages but economically less developed regions.

Tourism is not only a growth engine but also an export growth engine and employment generator is a viewpoint accepted by the Governments of India and Myanmar respectively in their quest for sustainable economic growth and upliftment of those lagging behind in their society. According to the Economic Survey 2013-14, Government of India, presented in the Parliament, the sector has capacity to create large-scale employment both direct and indirect, for diverse sections in society, from the most specialised to unskilled workforce. The sector contributed around 6.6 percent of India's GDP in 2012 and supported 39.5 million jobs, which is 7.7 percent of its total employment⁷.

In short, tourism industry supports an economy in the following ways:

- It helps economic growth through foreign exchange earning.
- Provides employment to a large number of populations, which in turn alleviate the standard of living of the people through a sustainable means of livelihood. It provides 6-7 per cent of the world's total jobs directly and millions more indirectly through the multiplier effect⁸.
- It becomes an easy way for poverty reduction as it is in most case labour intensive, and one could sustain in the sector with or without minimal amount of investment.
- The infrastructure required by tourism – transport, communications, water supply and health services – also benefits local communities⁹. According to UNWTO different activities and inputs make up the tourism product, which has a large and diversified supply chain.
- It promote international earning for environmental protection and at the same time instil economic value to cultural heritages. A new concept has also emerged in the form of what is

known as *Environmentally Responsible Tourism* according World Tourism Organisation in 2012.

- Because tourism is a multidisciplinary activity that involves several industries and draws upon a variety of skills, its benefits are spread over a wider section of society comparatively to other sectors of the economy.
- The prospering tourism not only earns foreign exchange and brings people from different places closer to each other but also sustains the revival of traditional skills, local arts, craft work, activities of the performing folk artists, in a way the overall culture traditions and customs of a place.

Today many of the East and Southeast Asian economies are thriving on tourism industry. To take an example, Cambodia's economy to a great extent is sustained by tourism and related sectors as its contribution form 23.5 per cent of the country's total GDP in 2013¹⁰. Scholars working in the area of tourism-economic growth relationship revealed the finding that there is a bilateral causality and positive long-run inter-relationship between economic growth and tourism development¹¹. On the one hand tourism-led growth hypothesis is confirmed, at the same economic expansion leading to tourism growth through expansion of social and physical infrastructure is also proved. This could be a medium for understanding the present study. Indeed, understanding tourism potentiality of Northeast India and Myanmar, plus the actual progress and weak points for the two in this sector, could go a long way in enhancing the study further.

Northeast as a Unique Entity: What can it give?

The Northeast part of India, which stretches from the foothills of the Himalayas in the eastern range and is surrounded by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Nepal and Myanmar, comprises of eight states viz., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura and Sikkim. Racially inhabitants of the regions

are more closer to its Eastern neighbours rather than to those in other parts of Indian mainland. NEI having 3.1 percent of India's total population and 8 per cent of the country's land area is connected to the mainland by the Siliguri Corridor in West Bengal, with a width of only 21 to 40 kilometres. Interestingly however, the region has a long international boundary, about 96 per cent, with China and Bhutan in the North, Myanmar in the East, Nepal in the West and Bangladesh in the South and West. Thus with right policy NEI could provide room for tourist visits from across the international line.

This region can be considered as a melting pot of various ethnic cultures of different backgrounds, shaping the cultural heritage of the present inhabitants. The assimilation of cultures in the form of both material and non-material culture can be seen in every aspect of society and life in this region. Early movements of people through this region might have contributed tremendously for this assimilation. Scholars like Medhi refer to this region as the "Great Indian Corridor", for the prehistoric and proto-historic movements of people from and to its neighbouring regions¹².

Not only these, NEI is also characterised by cultural and ethnic diversity of its own which make it more colourful and contribute a uniqueness of its own. The practices and traditions that emerged of the ages of mixing institutionalised religions with the existing animism provide a distinct variety for outside people. Though proper balancing of tradition and modernity could be seen in various aspects of life in the region, yet there are still many untouched and virgin natural hotspots too, which could be new variety for whoever visits from outside. The eight sister states of NEI, each state more beautiful than the other, each with its own cultures and beliefs, each having its own charm, is a paradise for tourism.

The rich natural beauty, serenity and exotic flora and fauna of the area offer invaluable resources for the development of tourism. The region is gifted with diverse tourist¹³. It has white water rivers, snow-peaked mountains, fresh water lakes etc. The forests of Northeast

are a treasure trove of bio-diversity and are the most important ecological hotspot of the world. The flora and fauna count is astounding, with a list of hundreds of mammals, thousand of birds, thousands of plant species. And yet, there are many species that are waiting to be discovered from the much unexplored region. For instance, Tripura alone houses about 150 species of birds.

Being a latecomer in the Indian mainstream the region remained less accessible to the outside world which in itself turns a boon in disguise in the present millennium. For a long time, it has been lucky enough to maintain most of its natural diversity. In fact for the new and growing breed of tourists in the emerging globalised world, who are money rich and time poor and are for some unique experience, the Northeast with its variety and uniqueness holds immense attraction. The rich natural beauty and its diversity, exotic cultural and ethnic mosaic, flora and fauna and the serenity of the virgin, unexplored ecosystems provides possibilities of a totally different experience for the tourists. And, of recent, the significance of NEI as a unique and happening tourism hotspot has been recognised worldwide. For instance Northeast state of Sikkim has come to the top of the Lonely Planet's regions to visit in 2014 for its responsible and sustainable community-based tourism and eco-friendly policies¹⁴. At the same time, Manipur, one of the most disturbed states some years back, saw a rise of foreign tourist visits (FTV) with the recent (2011) removal of protected area permit from foreign visitors in Northeast and also some improvement in law and order situation. Almost all the states in NEI could see a growth of FTV in 2013 (against previous year) the highest being in the state of Manipur with 154 percent. For the entire NEI it was 27.9 percent against national growth of only 5.9 percent¹⁵.

Myanmar: Ancient Splendour and Modern Grandeur, the Emerging Scenario

"This is Burma, and it will be quite unlike any land you know about".

– Rudyard Kipling¹⁶

Figure 1: Domestic and foreign Tourist Visits to Northeast India States during 2011-2012

State	2011		2012		Growth Rate	
	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign
Arunachal Pradesh	233227	4753	317243	5135	36.02	8.04
Assam	4339485	16400	4511407	17543	3.96	6.97
Manipur	134505	578	134541	749	0.03	29.58
Meghalaya	667504	4803	680254	5313	1.91	10.62
Mizoram	62174	658	64249	744	3.34	13.07
Nagaland	25391	2080	35915	2489	41.45	19.66
Sikkim	552453	23602	558538	26489	1.10	12.23
Tripura	359515	6046	361786	7840	0.63	29.67

Source : India Tourism Statistics 2012.

Figure 2: Foreign Tourist Visits to Northeast India States during 2013

State	Foreign Tourist	Growth Rate 2013/2012
Arunachal Pradesh	10846	111.2
Assam	17638	0.5
Manipur	1908	154.7
Meghalaya	6773	27.5
Mizoram	800	7.5
Nagaland	3304	32.7
Sikkim	31698	19.7
Tripura	11853	51.2

This very line aptly brings out the unique and mysterious nature associated with the country that we called Myanmar today. Visiting the country means a vista to an enchanting land. Myanmar is indeed emerging after being out of the memories of the world for a long time, lying in the very abyss of oblivion. And, in the same context as what is gradually emerging in NEI, post 2010 suddenly open up the grandeur of Myanmar to the rest of the world, boosting up tourism potentialities of the country to a level that no one had ever expected or dreamed before. The country has got a mystifying and surreal but at the same time very lively facet of its own less known to the outside world which has gradually been opened up in the last three or so years. For the first time visitors to this country could see in front of them the unfolding of a multifaceted vista – the blending of beauties of the past with the creations of the present,

old historical sites and new cities, where natural beauties are intricately intertwined with that of manmade architectural designs and artistic skills. Now they could enjoy all these with less restriction as well as sans the dos and don'ts. Having said this, though Myanmar is in many ways racially, ethnically and culturally lots similar with those in NEI yet they are not the same. The country is unique in its own way. Hence, people going to Myanmar after visiting NEI will see many things very similar but still different.

Experts are of the view that Myanmar is a country of tremendous natural style, and that both the physical country and the people emanate grace and elegance¹⁷. The country, as such, is a treasure trove of rich cultural sites, monuments and beautiful historical structures coupled with an abundant yet distinct natural flora and fauna, not to mention of those colourful festivals, dresses, costumes,

cuisines etc. Geo-strategically Myanmar lies between two great civilisations of India and China, having an imprint of both but maintaining a unique identity of its own. Though the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia and one of the most diverse countries, Myanmar remained one of the most mysterious and undiscovered destinations in the world because of long years of military rule and military isolation. But now it is gradually opening itself up to the world outside. And indeed, in a report entitled “*Myanmar: Unlocking the Potential-A country Diagnostic Study*” Asian Development Bank acknowledged the huge tourism potential of Myanmar due to the fact that the country is blessed with many natural, historical and cultural tourist attractions as well as a rich handicraft heritage¹⁸. The country provides all the traditional delights of Asia in one fascinating country¹⁹.

Myanmar Tourism Master Plan (2013-2020) clearly elaborated the above facet in these lines: “Myanmar has an abundance of natural and cultural tourism assets, including 2,832 km of coastline, the pristine Myeik archipelago, 36 protected areas covering 5.6% of the country, outstanding examples of religious and vernacular architecture, and a youthful population of about 60 million that includes over 100 distinct ethnic groups. The historic legacy of former kingdoms, the colonial period, and World War II complement these assets, providing a unique setting for the development of a responsible tourism industry”²⁰. Thus the country boast of virgin jungles, snow-capped mountains and pristine beaches, combined with a rich and glorious heritage spanning more than two thousand years, and spectacular monuments and ancient cities attest to a vibrant culture. Its golden pagodas, beautiful palaces (Mandalay), old monument and ancient palaces with architectural splendours (Bagan), natural beauties (Inle lake, Shan State), colourful festivals (water festival) etc are all unique. The most popular available tourist destinations in Myanmar include big cities such as Yangon and Mandalay and the newly created Nay Pyi Taw; religious sites in Mon State, Pindaya, Bago and Hpa-An; nature trails in Inle Lake,

Kengtung, Putao, Pyin Oo Lwin; ancient cities such as Bagan and Mrauk-U; as well as beaches in Ngapali, Ngwe-Saung, Mergui. In fact, Yangon, Bagan, Inle Lake, Kyaikhto, Mandalay, and Ngapali beach are the six flagship destinations for tourists in Myanmar today²¹.

As mention made already, Myanmar has recently begun to open politically and economically thus tourism has just picked up its momentum. Recent studies, though, have shown that Myanmar still has one of the lowest numbers of tourists in the ASEAN region, yet it is picking up. While 2011 saw only 816,400 tourists coming to the country, it rise to 2.04 million in 2013, of whom 1.14 million entered through border gates and 885,476 through airports²². Various international events are attracting tourists. The country has also eased access for tourists by granting several visa exemptions. Understanding the importance of tourism sector for the overall growth of the economy Government of Myanmar came up with the above mentioned *Tourism Master Plan (2013-2020)* in June 2013 assisted by experts from Thailand and the Asian Development Bank. The Master Plan set a high target of 3.01 million international visitors in 2015 (but since it received 3.5 in 2014 itself so government officials are now positive of crossing 4 million mark) and 7.48 million in 2020²³. Based on this high growth scenario, tourism receipts are projected to increase from a baseline of \$534 million in 2012 to \$10.18 billion in 2020, with the corresponding number of tourism-related jobs rising from 293,700 to 1.49 million. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), which analyses the sector’s performance across 184 countries, expects Myanmar to feature on its list of the top ten fastest-expanding tourism industries globally²⁴. In fact in 2014, tourist visit was 3.5 million approximately. At the same time total earning for the said year was US \$ 1.1 billion, a leap from the US \$ 171 million earned some 10 years back in 2004²⁵. Myanmar was declared the *Best Tourist Destination of 2014* by the European Council on Tourism and Trade, a body of the European Union²⁶.

Regional Grouping as a Boosting Mechanism

Having discussed the tourism potentialities and its likely contribution to the growth of the economy one interconnected facet that need to be taken into consideration in the context of NEI and Myanmar is its strategic position in the emerging regional and sub-regional organisation as it lies in the midst of most of these groupings. Today inter relationship between regional cooperation and tourism development is something which is very obvious in the global scenario. The coming up of these economic groupings in South and Southeast Asia and their conscious efforts for achieving shared and mutual benefits also brought Northeast India and Myanmar under their framework touching different socio-economic aspects. Strong focus on ASEAN and sub-regional cooperation mechanisms such as Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Bangladesh China India Myanmar (BCIM), Greater Mekong Sub-region etc. enhanced the very prospects for connectivity in the region and consequently the materialisation of required infrastructures, which in turn could be a mechanism for boosting tourism growth in areas covered by Myanmar and India's Northeast. Looking at the framework and objectives of these groupings will help in understanding how they could be an important contributing factor in the overall development of tourism in the areas studied, directly or indirectly. And interestingly all these groupings give priority to tourism industry as a contributing variable of economic growth. Now the most significant one among these groupings is the ASEAN. Consisting of 10 Southeast Asian countries as members it has already emphasised on the development of tourism. With the aim of making Southeast Asia a common tourist destination and to promote sustainable tourism for overall economic growth of the region, it formed the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) in 1981. This Forum had its conference every year in one of the ASEAN countries with the last edition being held in January 2015 in Myanmar. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), another sub-regional grouping

established on November 10, 2000 at Vientiane, emphasises on tourism as an important area of cooperation in order to establish a solid foundation for future trade and investment cooperation in the region²⁷. Same goes with Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), an informal institution involving five countries as well as two provinces of the PRC, supported by ADB. It recognises tourism as an important component of economic growth. As such, in its process of achieving the main goal of integration through trade and infrastructure tourism was included as a significant target area with others like transport, energy, telecommunications and agriculture.

Over and above, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is another sub regional grouping which is taking up active initiative in promoting tourism sector for economic growth in the region. Created in 1997 to link some of the SAARC countries with Myanmar and Thailand, to take advantage of the historical link and turning them into economic opportunities BIMSTEC has got 13 priority sectors of which tourism is one, which is lead by India. It set up a Tourism Working Group and has conducted several rounds of meetings. Since 2005, the ADB has supported this initiative as well. The ninth Ministerial Meeting of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), held in August 2006 accepted Tourism as an important thrust area for cooperation among the members. It agreed to enhance tourism in the region for which a BIMSTEC Tourism Information Centre and BIMSTEC Tourism Fund was to be created. Besides it was agreed that tourism should be promoted both within and from outside the region and that a concept of combined BIMSTEC destinations should be developed²⁸.

The latest in the line is the Kunming Initiative or what we now call BCIM. Initially started as a Track-II non-governmental initiative in August 1999 with the ambition of making border irrelevant it has recently been transformed into a Track-I initiative. It is believed that at a time (some centuries back)

Bangladesh, Northeast India, Myanmar and Yunnan were much more integrated culturally, politically, and economically than they are today. The effort is to restore the status and relations by removing the importance of borders.

In continuance of India's Look East policy, consequent to its liberalisation and economic reforms of the early 90s, the process of interregional cooperation was institutionalised with India becoming active partner of these sectoral groupings. In this entire move of India NEI became an important component. Myanmar, on its part, is also equally active in the whole process of regional initiatives. So, what one could see is that collectively as a region NEI and Myanmar has become an integral part and partial of these regional and sub-regional economic groupings. When these groupings started working to and fro the two are pulled in the fold automatically. Tourism thus becomes a promising area for cooperation in the midst of certain political and diplomatic tangles that may arise among the governments. It has become an important meeting area for Myanmar and NEI with ample opportunities and potentialities for both.

Initiatives for Connectivity and Linkage

Having discussed the above views fact remains that for development of tourism as a medium of cooperation and shared prosperity between NEI and Myanmar an efficient connectivity, especially overland connectivity, is a much. Indeed it is going to be the main instrument that could bring people, infrastructure and economies closer to each other which in turn will be a boon for tourism sector. Thus, as an outcome of its connection with the various regional groupings when NEI and Myanmar comes under the purview of many infrastructure projects taken up under a wide range of their programmes, it could paved the way for a regionalism-tourism nexus. As such the initiatives that have been taken up by the Government of India as well as the Government of the states under LEP, which has mainly to do with concept of Northeast as the outlet, started first in the form of developing connectivity and linkage. Every stakeholder in these parts realise now the

indispensability of infrastructure for connectivity which in a way could play a crucial role in developing the tourism industry. Same applies for Myanmar also where initiatives are on for synchronising its grand designs associated with its tourism sector under its ambitious *Tourism Master Plan* with that of ASEAN's objective of transforming ASEAN region to an ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. In the process it also comes under the *Master Plan for ASEAN Connectivity*.

However, in the ongoing initiatives for a smooth ASEAN-India connectivity, maximum missing link is in NEI and Myanmar. On the part of India, the connectivity within the NEI is extremely poor. The quality of national highway is quite negligible in most of the NEI states though initiatives and subsequent improvements could be seen. The Centre has envisaged connecting the NEI state capitals to the East West Highway through the Seven Sister's Corridor project. This will link the capitals of the eight states and the border points of Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. To channelise it an ambitious programme of road building has been taken up under the *Special Accelerated Road Development Programme for the North East (SARDP-NE)* which was further supplemented by Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna (PMGSY). In the Third BIMSTEC Summit held in Nay Pyi Taw in March 2014, the then India's foreign minister Salman Khurshid highlighted the need for providing connectivity for seamless movement between India's Northeast and Myanmar. Initiatives in this direction were actually taken up a decade before and the demand now is of improving it further.

In 2001, India constructed the 160 km long Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo highway, named *Indo-Myanmar Friendship Road*. Plans for a 1400 km long Trans-Asian Highway (TAH) that will connect India, Myanmar and Thailand is now being finalised. Work is also going on for a railway link that will connect Jiribam to Moreh and beyond upto Hanoi, as a part of the Trans Asian Railways Project (TAR).

Bilateral cooperation between India and Myanmar has also been expanding at a

significant rate since 2001. Some major projects between the two, besides the one already mentioned, include the Rhi-Tiddim and Rhi-Falam Roads in Myanmar and the *Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project*. The Kaladan Multimodal Transit-cum-Transport project agreement which was signed in April 2008 will help increase connectivity between the two countries. This project will link landlocked Northeast India to the sea through Myanmar. It also envisages the development of a 225 km waterway on the Kaladan River and the construction of ports along the way. As a positive step now Government of India allow free movement of Myanmarese citizens up to Moreh town in Manipur. At the same time Government of Myanmar allow Indians to enter upto Tamu Town. Necessary amount has been sanctioned for expansion of the *Integrated Check Post* in Moreh. It is believed that the Imphal-Mandalay bus service will start this year though the proposal was accepted way back in 2006, and the exact date goes on postponing.

Indeed the trend of increasing cooperation between India and Myanmar directly across the border points along the boundary of Northeast India could be a means for easy accessibility in each other's areas. In addition, exploring and developing new points – Lungwa/Ledo, Pongru and Pokhungri in Nagaland and Nampong, Vijayanagar and Khimiyang in Arunachal Pradesh, are needed. The Manipur Commerce and Industries Minister had proposed an alternative border point in Behiang in Manipur's Churachandpur district along the Indo-Myanmar border which needs consideration. Many believe that the proposal to upgrade the Rih-Tidim and Rih-Falam road, which will operationalise the India-Myanmar border trading point at Rih-Zokhawthar in Mizoram along with the Moiwa-Chindwin-Thailand trilateral highway project, needs immediate attention²⁹.

But ultimately, all these call for a synchronisation and synergy among different aspects of development in both sides of the border. The projects such as Asian Highway and Trans Asian Railways need to properly connect to the transport networks of NEI for

which the Government of India needs to take up special attention. Effort needs also to link it with the *ASEAN Master Plan for Connectivity*. Development of airline industries and more air linkage with the various destinations would be an added advantage as there are already 14 airports in the entire NEI (though they need to be upgraded to cater to international flights). At the same reciprocal development from Myanmar side is a much.

All these could to certain extent provide the necessary connectivity and infrastructure for promoting more people to people contact across borders and at the same time an avenue for boosting the different dimensions of tourism. Thus, it will not be too much to say that once all these are materialised tourism cooperation between India's Northeast and Myanmar will be further enhanced.

Prospects for a Northeast India-Myanmar Tourism Synergy

The above environment, situations, initiatives and dynamics, gradually unfolding in the region, both governmental and non-governmental initiatives, bound no longer within the political boundaries, may bring out a prospective tourism scenario. Though India and Myanmar as such have no specific bilateral relations in tourism sector yet both the country are part and partial of the tourism initiatives taken under the various regional and sub regional groupings mentioned. As such there are lots of mutually beneficial areas for both Northeast part of India and Myanmar in the tourism sector which could be developed to the optimum if the sub-regional groups could provide the right framework and the much needed platform. This could be a positive driver to the existing question of a NEI-Myanmar tourism synergy.

In the case of Myanmar, although it possesses diverse and extensive cultural, natural, and historic assets, it has only recently begun to develop its enormous tourism potential. As a result of sweeping political and economic reforms the country is enjoying unprecedented tourism growth. It was in 2012 that, for the first time in its history, Myanmar received over 1 million international visitors. Earnings

from international tourism more than quintupled from \$165 million in 2008 to \$1.1 billion in 2014 though it still has to go a long way³⁰. Comparatively among the ASEAN countries tourism's total contribution to the GDP is still lowest in the context of Myanmar coming to only 3.7 per cent in 2013³¹. Need is felt for more key drivers of tourism growth which include the rapid expansion of scheduled inbound flights, eased tourist visa-on-arrival privileges at gateway airports, improving business and investment conditions, and the growing demand for international travel among regional and long-haul markets³². Further Government of Myanmar is pondering to the idea of declaring 2016 as *Visit Myanmar Year*, reviving what it did in 1996. In fact, today Myanmar is eager to pursue for an enhanced regional cooperation in tourism and related sectors in order to exchange knowledge and lessons on good practice, ensure consistency in tourism standards and visa policies, and harmonise the collection and reporting of tourism statistics.

Same is the case with India in general and Northeast India in particular. India started its National Tourism Policy in 2002 which is subsequently followed by the formation of National Tourism Advisory Council (NTAC), which serves as a think-tank of the Ministry of Tourism for the development of tourism in the country. Not only this, the Government of India's executing agency for the Northeast, the Northeastern Council (NEC), has also taken up policies for enhancement of tourism for overall economic growth of the region under its *Vision 2020*. Ministry of Development for Northeast (DONER) strongly emphasised on the *Comprehensive Tourism Master Plan 2011* initiated by NEC, to be implemented in three phases over a period of ten years. Besides, the present Modi government is in favour of promoting '*Make in Northeast*' initiative within the scope of his re-oriented *Act East*, which could be a new dimension for promotion of tourism in NEI.

In the evolving dynamics, when it comes to the context of these two regions, besides the traditional tourism, adventure tourism,

ecotourism, religious tourism, medical tourism, wellness tourism are areas where the two can cooperate with each other. Importance could be deduced from the signing of an MOU during PM Manmohan Singh's visit to Myanmar in 2012 which include air connectivity, cultural exchange programmes; and establishment of border *haats* (markets), which in turn could be itself a contribution in the promotion of tourism. In fact borders, if developed, could help in bringing more people to people contact across political boundaries which is one very important component of speedy economic growth.

At the present juncture clear initiatives on the part of both the Governments of India and Myanmar could be seen for transforming tourism as a long term growth engine in their respective countries. In the *Annual Report 2013-14* (Ministry of Tourism), it has been mentioned clearly that the effort of Tourism Policy of India is that of "*positioning tourism as a major engine of economic growth and harnessing its direct and multiplier effects on employment and poverty eradication in a sustainable manner by active participation of all segments of the society.....*"³³. At the same time Myanmar Government, in its *Tourism Master Plan 2013-2020* clearly envisioned of transforming tourism as a growth engine and to use it to pull up the country's economy with available potentials. And to make its objectives more effective the Master Plan has been linked to the *ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan* and, in particular, to the *ASEAN Tourism Marketing Strategy*. Experts do believe that this will promote Myanmar's tourism within a regional initiative which in turn could help in promoting the country's tourism development in the long run. Ultimately, in this emerging dynamics, because of where they are geo-strategically tagged together, NEI and Myanmar are inseparable from each other in any development in the region. The fact remains that there is indeed ample scope for both in using tourism sector as a medium of growth through mutual cooperation. Thus, keeping all these in mind every effort is needed from the side of the stakeholders for creating the right synergy between these two.

Sorting out the shortcomings while identifying the positive points and boosting them up will go a long way. Though NEI and Myanmar have many things in common yet they are unique in their own way and in this sense each has their specific areas to contribute.

Challenges

To take the prospects and potentialities provided by tourism to NEI and Myanmar to an even more higher plane of mutual and shared benefit call for grappling with various challenges as both have got area specific problems of their own and politics influencing the issues. Security issue and lack of requisite infrastructure for development posed another serious concern. Coming up with mechanism to tackle the situations facing the regions proved to be a challenge within challenge for both Myanmar and the Northeast of India, in individual as well as bilateral manner.

In the context of NEI the argument is for the need of an all inclusive policy with special focus on three aspects – political, economic and transnational. Politically the need is for looking towards the region beyond security perspective and emphasis on administrative accountability and efficiency. Economic dimension include sustainable use of local resources for all round development of the region with a strong effort towards development of physical and social infrastructure. Transnational dimension include more people to people contact as well an increased move towards bilateral and multilateral trade and security cooperation in the governmental level with the neighbouring countries ultimately focusing on connectivity as the priority issue. Thus, transforming the political and economic system of Northeast is a much to enhance inclusive economic growth, accelerate poverty reduction, and increase the living standards of its multiethnic population which will go a long way in enhancing tourism prospect and consequent development of the same.

However, in the absence of proper infrastructure in cross-border transit points along the Northeast border and integrated transport networks has posed major

challenges towards a sustainable tourism growth directed towards avoiding the negativities of uncontrolled and unorganised growth which could lead to an irreversible impact on the ecology and environment of the region. This will be a big challenge.

Despite the development tourism sector in Myanmar is still in an early stage but with lots of prospects and potentials and at the same time challenges. Challenges will be in the context of providing right facilities, particularly rooms in hotels; arranging infrastructures; and the sustainability dimension of tourism. Nonetheless, in order to truly comprehend its current development, one has to comprehend recent dynamics in the tourism sector of Myanmar. No doubt the country's tourism sector has already grown significantly, but this also comes with certain cautions. There are now increasing concerns about the sustainability of the tourism sector and about the questions of reservations of old pagodas and other traditional sights. Furthermore, country has to grapple with some very complex issues associated with decades of neglect. Apart from issues related with economic growth, infrastructure, connectivity, political reforms etc., a serious challenge for the Government of Myanmar is coming to a peaceful settlement as regards to the issues of ongoing ethnic conflict in the country. Development of tourism sector will significantly depend on successfully tackling with these issues. Some specific institutional and structural challenges for both which need to be overcome are:

Specific Challenges for Northeast India

- Law and order associated with the armed uprising and the ongoing low intensity warfare.
- Lack of proper social and physical infrastructure specifically road, power and health.
- Inability to transform places and products into marketable item-L a c k of a mechanism for easy entry of tourist either way.
- Need for trained human resources.

Creating awareness among the local in sustainable development and protection of the biodiversity and rich ecology. Control the dumping of waste materials in tourist sites.

- Lack of a pragmatic approach of political and bureaucratic leadership toward identifying and exploiting sociopolitical and economic opportunities,

Specific Challenges for Myanmar

- Need for political stability, particularly the ongoing peace process between the government and the ethnic armed groups need to be resolved at the earliest.
- Gradual easing of strict rules regarding tourist areas.
- Relaxation of rules of stakeholders,
- Extension and improvement of infrastructure as well as institutions. There is not enough rooms to accommodate the sudden surge in tourist visits.
- Implementation of measures to counter the rising threat of corruption and monopoly of the economy by a few

Having said all these the fact still remains that the significant impact of tourism on developing countries' economy justifies the necessity of governments intervention aimed, at promoting and increasing tourism demand by providing the tourism facilities. As well, the economic expansion in developing countries effects the tourism growth which is reflected by the development in infrastructure and tourism resorts and also an increase in country to country tourism cooperation. But for NEI and Myanmar this could be speed up only when there is no longer any atmosphere of suspicion and security concern on either side of the border, particularly on the part of the respective governments.

Furthermore, negativities or negative spillover of tourism from time to time could still put a serious question mark to the growth of tourism cooperation between Northeast India and

Myanmar. Issues like that of sex tourism, HIV/AIDS, SARS/swine flu, destruction of local culture, drug trafficking, degradation and exploitation of environment and natural resources still posed immediate threat to the region's economy, culture, tradition and social setup. All these needs to be properly tackled and sanitised before one hope for a positive and productive tourism cooperation in this part of the globe.

Ultimately, what is required of all in the present situation is to create enough room and the right atmosphere, without much bureaucratic hurdles, so that people from Northeast region of India can visit Myanmar and vice versa, tracing the historical and ethnic roots. Besides, once the proper mechanism is established people visiting NEI could easily crossover to Myanmar by overland routes making it easier as well as cheaper. This could mean that at one go tourists visiting either of the regions could enjoy two unique regions. This could in a way attract more tourists. The only technical shortcoming could be restriction of entry in certain areas, both in Myanmar as well as NEI. The effort should be for relaxation but at the same a system is needed for protection of natural and cultural uniqueness and at the same time going for a sustainable and responsible tourism mode. Having said this, the task ahead will not be that easy. To summed up, smooth cooperation in this sector, apart from overcoming the structural and institutional shortcomings and grappling rationally with the area specific issues, will depend largely on how the negativities of globalisation is being filtered through a well planned mechanism. This could be the most immediate challenge of all in hand.

Assessment

Today, the ever increasing involvement of tourism in socioeconomic development and political willingness to promote such an industry encourage other sectors to develop. It is moving from national to regional level in terms of planning, management and development. That is where Myanmar and NEI has to fit. Tourism related activities form significant part of regional cooperation and integration process. Such regional tourism

development becomes part of overall regional development in which the public and private sectors work together to facilitate the movement of tourists, goods and services³⁴.

Taking into consideration of the existing wave of regionalism there could be a combination of the tourism prospects, already existing ones as well as those that can emerge, of the two regions for common interest and present it in the form of a common destination. Continuing with this line of thinking one could come to the hypothesis that tourism could be a powerful growth engine for both NEI and Myanmar specifically, and the benefit will be immense and more if the two meaningfully cooperate with each other and present a regional framework in the context of tourism promotion. As for Myanmar, tourism development has been put within a broad national framework which prioritises, both in micro as well as macro level, purposeful development of quality tourism through strategic and responsible actions to deliver equitable economic benefits, social well-being, and environmental sustainability³⁵. It is for India within its LEP to streamlined tourism in Northeast to these new moves of Myanmar. What is needed for both the country is an effective tourism controlling body run in the line of public-private-partnership (PPP) model with strict emphasis on accountability, sustainability, income generation and ultimately economic growth.

Government of India and the state governments in Northeast should initiate the right mechanism and atmosphere so that the private players could become active in exploring and expanding business opportunities in this sector with more emphasis to PPP models of development. For all these connectivity need to be improved which again depends on the proper execution of projects within a time frame. Over and above rules and regulations should be such that more people are allowed to visit the regions but without compromising the area specific unique culture and heritage of the locals.

Apart from all these, despite the fact that for many years NEI and Myanmar had been

plagued by problems connected to law and order and lack of development both the region are home to a large youthful population forming a major chunk of the region's human resources³⁶. With the right type of skill development initiatives and capacity development mechanism the available human resources could be transformed into productive forces without the exception of the tourism sector, thus contributing to the growth of their respective economies.

Ultimately, tourism need to be promoted in such a way that it contribute to overall growth of the region. And this could aptly support the viewpoint in *Vision 2020* that is to return NEI to the position of national economic eminence it held till a few decades ago; to fashion the development process so that growth springs from and spreads out to the grassroots; and to ensure that the region plays the arrow-head role it must play in the vanguard of the country's Look East policy.

Since the key elements of tourism development are the state, market, tourists, infrastructure and local peoples, there need to be a proper synchronisation of all these. Both Track-I and Track -II initiatives are a much. In this juncture what is required is that stakeholders in both side works for a coherence of policies and initiatives associated with tourism cooperation and development of the two regions collectively and at the same time negativities are sensitised to the maximum. Racial, ethnic, cultural and historical affinity between those in NEI and Myanmar could be used as positive drivers through the medium of tourism for reducing poverty and bringing shared prosperity in the entire region. Although different countries have different approaches and policies towards tourism development yet common fact is that tourism needs to be managed in an effective, responsible, people-centric and sustainable way. Only then the whole exercise leading towards pragmatic and effective tourism cooperation between India's Northeast and Myanmar creating more prospects for future within the fold of India's LEP in general and Myanmar policy in particular, could be effective. And all these require a strong

political will and more people to people contact.

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Nepal and India's Security

*Anonya Bhattacharjee**

Close neighbours India and Nepal have been sharing a strange love hate relationship since a long long time. The relationship was initiated with the famous Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950. According to the treaty, neither of the countries will tolerate any kind of external threat on one another and both countries will inform one another of any kind of problem with other countries that might cause friction between them. Moreover, Nepalese citizens are provided the same economic and educational opportunities as Indian citizens in India while Indian citizens are given preferential treatment compared to citizens of other countries in Nepal. Apart from these, the Indo-Nepal border is open and thus citizens of both the countries can move freely. Both India and Nepal are members of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and work together to promote regional co-operation.

India and Nepal shares an 1850km long border covering 5 Indian states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Sikkim. Moreover, about 250 rivers flow from Nepal to India. Being a completely land locked country; Nepal is dependent on India for trade, transit, foreign aids etc. Nepalese can come and work in India and compete for some of the prestigious civil service posts like IFS, IAS, and IPS etc. Both these countries share similar cultural ties and have deep rooted people to people contacts of kinship.

If we look at the Indo Nepal relations chronologically, then we find that post independence, relations were very cordial. But with the 1962 Sino-India war, relationship deteriorated with Nepal. Tensions continued in 1970's with Nepal's proposed Zone of Peace. The whole of 80's saw a series of economic sanctions on Nepal and other trade related issues cropped up. It was again in 1990's that relationship was re-established between India and Nepal with the end of the economic blockade on Nepal. Moreover, a joint communiqué came up that restored trade relations between both the countries and transit routes were opened. The agreement on the pending water talks were resumed in 2008 and a 22 point document was issued that highlighted the need for the restoration and upgradation of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship. But again the Indo-Nepal relations soared with the political imbalance and growing influence of Maoism in Nepal. Moreover, Nepal's inclination towards China has also strained its relationship with India. But recently, with the visit of Narendra Modi to Nepal, signing of a hydro power plant deal and 1 billion dollars line of credit to Nepal, the relationship is again going towards friendliness. Moreover, with the very recent Nepal earthquake, Nepal is getting immense help from India in form of rescue teams, supplies, medical support, funds etc. Thus, over these years, the graph of Indo-Nepal relation has seen many up's and down.

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The region of South Asia comprises of India, the largest country both in terms of area and population as well as economy and development, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Maldives. The South Asian region can be called Indo centric as all the neighbours share land or maritime borders with India and their relations are fraught with problems.¹ India, being the most powerful country in South Asia has acted as the big brother for quite a long time and that is why most of its neighbours are extremely sceptical of India. There are innumerable instances when India has interfered in its neighbours businesses, be it Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal etc. Due to India's large size and population coupled with a comparatively much better economy, infrastructure, defence system, India's neighbours consider her as a big threat. So much so that they are even ready to take the help of countries outside the South Asian region in order to counter India.

Although this is one side of the story, there is another side where India is at risk due to threats from its neighbours. It seems like most of its neighbours are ganging up to counter India. India already has a very strained relationship with Pakistan with four wars in their kitty. Apart from that, India's relation with Sri Lanka is stressed with ethnic problems and human rights issues. Same with Bangladesh; there is a water dispute issue, terrorism threats, illegal immigration and smuggling problems. Among the two Himalayan countries, India is traditionally close to Bhutan. But as already discussed, India's relation with Nepal is stressed.

Coming to threats, India faces threats to its security from almost all its neighbours, – be it the spill over of domestic ethnic conflicts, large-scale illegal migration or the base they provide for terrorism directed against India – says the former Foreign Secretary, Muchkund Dubey.² So it's not just that a big brother country is a threat to other smaller nations. Rather, it can be the other way round as well.

In this article, I will focus on one of the South Asian neighbours of India: Nepal. We will

discuss some of the threats from this small Himalayan country that has put India's security at risk. Apart from threats like terrorism, smuggling, trafficking, illegal migration; the two most important threats are political instability and Maoism and the China factor.

Nepal's Threats to India

Although Nepal is a small Himalayan nation, it has been posing quite a number of threats to India. Being so close to India, any internal strife in Nepal affects India to a great extent. Political tensions in Nepal have an impact on India's political scenario. Moreover, due to the fact that Nepalese are considered at par with Indian citizens, there is quite a bit of tension in Nepali dominated areas of India when their native country is in turmoil. Apart from that, due to open borders, India is at risk because a lot of illegal, unwanted issues crop up due to the porous border conditions. Finally, another threat that has been creating a big buzz in Indian security dimension is the Nepal-China friendship and China's increasing influence in Nepal. Let's move on to discuss each of the threats in details.

Political Instability and Maoism in Nepal

Maoism emerged in Nepal in the year of 1994 when the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) was founded. They launched a People's War on February 13th 1996 with the aim of overthrowing the Nepalese monarchy and establishing a People's Democracy in Nepal. The most famous slogan of the People's War was "Let us march ahead on the path of struggle towards establishing the people's rule by wrecking the reactionary ruling system of state." The seeds of disenchantment that led to the Maoist insurgency were planted in 1990, as the pro-democracy movement swept Nepal. For 56 days, an agitated public demanded a return to multiparty democracy. The transition from the Panchayat system was relatively smooth, notwithstanding violent clashes between protestors and authorities. The decade of democracy brought poor governance. There had been eleven Prime Ministers in as many years of democracy due to inter and intra party squabbles. Government

corruption was endemic. Political uncertainty negatively affected the economy. Nepal's economic outlook remained anaemic with annual GDP growth around 2%-3% and low foreign investment. Compounding matters, about 42% of the population lived below the poverty line and the wealth gap continued to widen. In short, the government failed those who had supported it the most. The changes of the last decade were not just limited to politics. Nepal's urban areas became increasingly westernized. Middle class urbanites remarked that Nepal had gone from the Middle Ages to the 21st century in the span of one generation. This culture shock was most acute in rural Nepal where about 85% of the population lives. Rural Nepalese felt increasingly disconnected from their urban countrymen and betrayed by the government. Rural peasants distrusted the Nepali Congress Party as it reneged on promises of land reform and infrastructure. Similarly, the Communist party of Nepal United Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML), chief rival of the Congress, also supported the landlords. Rural frustrations regarding ineffective government, corruption, and widening wealth and social gaps manifested themselves in the Maoist movement.³

Also called the Nepalese Civil War, a deadly armed conflict took place between the militants and the government forces that lasted till 2006. This decade long Civil War resulted in the loss of more than 15000 people and displaced more than one lakh citizens. Due to the Civil War, Nepal's economy suffered a lot. Nepal being dependent on its tourism industry suffered a big economic blow in those years. The conflict ended with the peace deal between the Maoists and an alliance of seven political parties. According to the peace pact, the Maoists had to disarm under the watch of UN and they could contest the election. After the elections, the Maoist took power and Pushpa Kamal Dahal became the Prime Minister.

With the success Nepalese Maoist, India was plagued with a new security problem. Already since 1967, Naxal movement crippled different parts of India particularly West Bengal,

Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh etc. According to RAW reports, there are more than 30,000 armed naxalites in different parts of India. And with their Nepalese brothers' success, Naxalism in India got new rays of hope.

Scholars Like Sinha and Pandey in their article on Naxalism: A threat to India's internal security said, "a new challenge to India's security is fast emerging in the shape of Naxalite problem, its phenomenal growth and spread into 15 of our states. It defies justification. They seem to be drawing their inspiration from the Maoist uprising in Nepal, which has provided them new zeal and motivation to replicate the same in India. They are becoming more and more belligerent in central and south India. The Maoist of Nepal and their ideological brothers PWG and MCC seem determined to carve out what they call "compact revolutionary zone" extending from Nepal through Bihar and then to Dandakarnaya regions extending up to Tamil Nadu to give them access to the bay of Bengal as well as the Indian ocean. This corridor has dangerous potentials and must never be allowed to be established".⁴ Just like a domino effect of Nepal, Bihar was grappling with Naxal attacks in 2006-2007. "As India grapples with a difficult internal security situation in the wake of continuing Maoist attacks, the 'United Front' effort by the Asian Maoist outfits in general and linkages between the Nepalese Maoists and its Indian counterparts in particular have remained a cause of concern for India. The concern is obvious due to 1,690 kilometers of porous border with Nepal. In addition, internal security is in constant threat due to ideological, strategic and organisational linkages between the CPI-Maoist and the CPN-Maoist and misuse by the terrorist outfits",⁵ says Nihar Nayak, Associate Fellow, IDSA.

Although for many days the Nepalese Maoists denied their association with their Indian counterparts, in November 2009, they came out in full support for their Indian brothers and sisters. Many reports also suggest that Indian Naxalites are being provided training by Nepalese Maoist groups in Nepal. Indian officials have claimed that there is evidence

– although none has been made public yet – that the Nepali Maoists have been providing robust military and ideological training to the Naxalites. The letter, which has since been leaked to the Nepali media, says that two commanders of the Nepali rebel group signed a clandestine agreement with three senior Indian Maoist leaders to provide military training to the Indian rebels.⁶

The Naxalite problem mellowed down to a great extent when the situation deteriorated and once again and Nepal saw violent protests. On 2013, Nepalese Constituent Assembly Election was held and the Nepali Congress Party emerged as the winner with 196 seats out of 575. Moreover, with the 2014 Indian Elections, the BJP led Narendra Modi came to power and India saw a new political wave. Narendra Modi visited Nepal and Maoist leader Prachanda met Modi and expressed confidence that a “new chapter” has begun in Indo-Nepal ties. Prachanda, who led a decade-long armed movement before joining mainstream politics about seven years back, said he found Modi “very clear” in his mind about supporting the ongoing peace process and economic progress of Nepal. “We had a very fruitful meeting. A new initiative has begun in relations of India and Nepal. It is really historic,” the former Prime Minister of Nepal, who has been a critic of India, said after the meeting with Modi during which the two discussed the current state of bilateral ties and the future.⁷

Although the situation isn't that bad as it was some years back yet the Maoist problem persist in India. Till now Nepal's political scenario isn't stable as there is much discontent among Nepalese citizens. Moreover, there is still a large Maoist influence in Nepal. Youth are trained each day and the armed forces are increasing day by day. The Indian and Nepalese Maoists work together, conduct training and supply arms. The porous borders make it even easier for these Maoists to carry on their operations. Thus, even today, India has a serious “red threat” from Nepal's Maoist.

The China Factor: China's Increasing Influence on Nepal and China-Nepal Co-operation

India and China's strained relationship is nothing new in International Relations. Nepal being strategically located among these two powers has been trying to forge good relations with both the countries. Moreover, both India and China also have their own vested interest in keeping Nepal on their side. With India's relation with Nepal getting strained, China has perfectly grabbed the golden opportunity to attract Nepal towards its side. Nepal too has responded positively to China not only for economic benefits but also to counter India's rising in the South Asian region.

China's security and foreign policy objectives in Nepal are several. In fact, they could be divided into three parts. Nepal constituted one of the five fingers policies in Mao Zedong's five finger policy. Nepal and China share a long border, spanning about 1,414 kilometres. China has been playing significant role in determining the future shape of Nepali politics.⁸ The first phase is the Tibet factor. The second phase is focused on ending overdependence on India. The third phase is to weaken India's hold on Nepal.

In general, Nepal-China relation has always been very warm and cordial. But before 1950's, China wasn't bothered about Nepal. After Tibet was annexed, China started paying attention to Nepal. Till the Maoists first came to power in 2008, after the end of decade long insurgency which cost 14,000 lives, China's strategic interface with Nepal was overwhelmingly concerned with the issue of the political activities, or in the lexicon of Chinese authorities 'anti-China activities' of Tibetan refugees in Nepal. However, ever since the Constituent Assembly of Nepal came into being in 2008, the Chinese have been an active proxy player in the politics of the country. Moreover, majority of the Nepalese Prime Ministers are considered to be very close to the Chinese establishment.⁹

Apart from politics, China has been one of the major donors of aid to Nepal for decades. Since the 1960s it has been, along with India, one of Nepal's main sources for infrastructure development. But Nepalis have a much more positive perception of China than India. Particularly among the elite, China has a positive image not because of aid but because it has replaced India as the source of sought-after goods. Among Nepali social media users, China's mobile messaging app WeChat appears to be the most popular means of communication. While a few decades ago the view from the Nepali side of its border with Tibet was that the Tibetan side was poor and underdeveloped, today it is just the opposite.

China is building roads linking the Koshi-Kimathanka corridor and Western Nepal via the Jomson-Lumanthang. Moreover, bus services from Lhasa to Kathmandu have also been initiated. Beijing also plans to enhance connectivity between Nepal and Tibet through fibre optic links and energy pipelines and bring the strategic China-Tibet railway closer to the Himalayan Kingdom¹⁰. Nepalis see Chinese aid as positive because it's focused on infrastructure development, an area in which Chinese seem to have done a good job.¹¹

Recently China stressed on increased co-operation with Nepal's political forces. China wants to enhance military co-operation with Nepal's army. This is a very bad news for India because military co-operation between China and Nepal can be grave for India's security.

Moreover, Chinese influence in Nepal is growing each day as Chinese Learning Centres have been set up across Nepal borders. The SSB (Shashastra Seema Bal) feels that the mushrooming CLCs – which are linked to providing employment in major projects in highways, railways and airports undertaken by China in Nepal – could be part of a larger Chinese plan to unleash a perception war against India. SSB sources say from a handful of CLCs, the number has risen many times in the last three-four years. They say they have learnt about a trend of holding anti-India discussions on private FM channels on the UP side of Indo-Nepal Border. The sources

say these CLCs are concentrated mainly in border districts like Kanchepuru, Kailalo, Bardiya, Bankey, Daang and Kapilavastu, rather than mainland Nepal.¹²

China can't just be blamed for this threat; Nepal's pro China policy is equally responsible. Although Nepal's pro China policy was started by King Mahendra, it was when the Maoist came to power that they openly invited China as a partner to balance India. It is very important to note that 38 official Chinese delegations visited Nepal during Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahel "Prachanda's term, while the numbers of delegations from India were about one-fourth the above numbers.¹³ Moreover, Nepal sought arms and ammunitions from China in 2005. In 2008, China announced a 1.3 million dollars military aid to Nepal.

Thus, we see, China's intentions in Nepal can't be called noble because China is trying to take advantage of Nepal's situations and drive India's hold from Nepal. On the other hand, Nepal is also taking China's advantage by forging cordial ties and countering India. So far, China and Nepal has been more or less successful in igniting a fear among Indian defence analysts.

Terrorism

For decades now terrorism has been spreading fear among nation states. But it was through the 2001 terror attacks that terrorism reinstates its capabilities. No corner of the world is safe from terror attacks. Similarly, the South Asian region too has had its share of terrorist attacks. Although all the South Asian countries are trying to combat terrorism, yet terror activities are taking place. None of the countries have been spared and thus all of them are on the same boat. If we specifically look at India and Nepal, the main culprit is the long porous borders.

Trans-border terrorism is the most common form of terrorism in this area. Most of the terrorism and insurgency related problems in India have cross-border linkages. Consequently, border management has become an integral component of India's internal security management. The India-Nepal border

has assumed significance only in the recent years due to continuing instability in Nepal and increasing Chinese proximity to Nepal. The 1,751 km India-Nepal border runs through 20 districts of five Indian states. The India-Nepal border is open and there is no visa regime for persons of both the countries. There are 22 agreed routes for mutual trade and 15 for land traffic.¹⁴ The open borders have facilitated easy transport of people, goods and services but at a very high cost. These same borders that are benefiting the citizens of India and Nepal are used for terror activities.

The Maoists have used and are using the open borders to transfer ammunitions and training to fellow Maoists in India. What has caused considerable concern, of late, within the Indian security establishment is the fact that the Nepalese have been taking advantage of the open borders and forging alliances with extremist groups within India. According to government of India, they have been working towards their larger objective, together with the Communist Party of India (Maoist), to carve out a Compact Revolutionary Zone (CRZ), a revolutionary corridor extending from Nepal through Bihar and Dandkaranya region of Andhra Pradesh. As much as an 821-km stretch of the 1,664-km Indo-Nepalese border adjoins Uttar Pradesh.¹⁵

Apart from the open porous border issue, it has been reported that illegal mobile towers have been installed along the Indo-Nepal border. Since phone calls are expensive in Nepal, Nepalese prefer to use Indian SIM cards and thus a number of illegal towers have been erected. Indian security experts are apprehensive of these mobile towers as they can be misused by terrorists.

Moreover, according to reports, terrorists are entering Jammu and Kashmir via Nepal as it is very easy to cross the borders.

Thus, the two main primary issues responsible for terrorism are open border and the citizenship regime. India is in serious terror threat from Nepal as terrorists are easily sneaking into India and then hiding in Nepal.

Trafficking

The South Asian region is the hub of not only women and child trafficking but also drug trafficking. Once again due to the open porous border between India and Nepal, a crime as serious and grave as trafficking is conducted on a daily basis. UNICEF reported that as many as 7000 women and children are being trafficked to India each year. Moreover, drug trafficking takes place every day. There have been innumerable cases when Nepalese have been caught with heroin, cocaine etc. These dangerous drugs are transported to India from Nepal and vice versa. Addiction to drugs is a grave issue among Indian youth and the easy access to drugs is making it even more difficult to eliminate drug problem.

Thus, drugs and mafia on the India-Nepal border pose a serious challenge to the Indian security apparatus, and most criminals find safe passage to Nepal and a safe refuge too.¹⁶

Smuggling

Just like trafficking, smuggling is another threat that has crippled India. The Nepalese border has been the passage to a haven for smugglers, who have been able to smuggle drugs and arms to India without hindrance.¹⁷ Illegal markets are common along the border areas. As it is trade between India and Nepal is low, illegal trade that takes place daily has made the trading scenario even more pathetic. Arms are transferred illegally from Nepal to India and militants and terrorists groups are benefitted. As already mentioned, illegal mobile towers are being erected along the border area and the Indian SIM cards are easily smuggled to Nepal. Moreover, fake Indian currency and gold are also being smuggled to Nepal which in turn is crippling India's economy.

Thus, again the Indo-Nepal open border is instrumental in helping smugglers to smuggle goods and flee.

"Illegal" Migration

Migration between India and Nepal is a bit different because the border is open and

porous. According to the 1950 treaty, Nepalese can reside and work in India. So, Nepalese migration to India isn't actually considered to be illegal. Now we know that migration and security issues go hand in hand because it has been seen in many cases that security threats have cropped up due to migration.

The issue in this context is the demand for Gorkhaland. Ever since, there has been turmoil in Darjeeling revolving around the demand for Gorkhaland. Although this is within the Indian Federation, nevertheless, this has security implications. Since Darjeeling is the gateway to the North Eastern part of India, any disturbance in that area can hamper India's security in general. Moreover, Darjeeling's proximity to the ethnically sensitive areas of eastern Nepal might provide fertile ground for Nepali ethnicity to grow, giving rise to separatist tendencies.¹⁸

Moreover, it is reported that the Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Ekta Samaj (ABNES), an outfit of migrant Nepali residents in India, is working for the realisation of Greater Nepal. The ABNES, which was registered in Varanasi way back in 1979, had the stated objective of securing unity among immigrant Nepalis living in India and working for their welfare. But gradually, the organisation became involved in terrorism and conducted subversive activities. Ultimately, it started functioning as a front for Nepal's Maoist insurgents. The ABNES was banned by the Government of India under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) in July 2002. Yet, with a large cadre base and expanding membership, the ABNES has established an extensive network in India over the years, particularly in northern Bengal, the North-East, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where Nepalis are concentrated in large numbers.¹⁹

Although, Nepalese migration isn't considered illegal in its true sense because of the traditional ties and the treaty of Peace and Friendship, yet certain section of the migrated Nepalese are putting India's security at risk.

Conclusion

The most powerful country in the South Asian region is considered a threat by the other South

Asian countries. Maybe for its big size, huge population, blooming economy, comparatively better infrastructure and a history of interference in other countries, India is considered more a threat than a friend by most of its neighbours. Similarly, this powerful South Asian country is also at risk from its neighbours.

In this article, I have discussed how Nepal is posing as a threat to India's security. Most of the threats are primarily due to the open border through which people, goods and services move to and fro freely. Moreover, according to the 1950's Treaty of Peace and Friendship, any Nepalese citizen can reside and work in India. These are the two benefits that both the countries, especially Nepal enjoy. But with time, it has been analysed that this very beneficial aspect of the relation has turned out to be a big problem for India's security. Due to the porous open border, terrorism, illegal trade, smuggling, trafficking of women, children, drugs etc have flourished.

In case of terrorism, terrorist groups can easily cross the border to hide in Nepal. Illegal trade has been successful because of the open border. Same goes with smuggling of fake currencies and gold. Trafficking has been a huge business in both these countries and it has been possible due to the border and the citizenship regime.

Apart from these threats, Maoist activities in Nepal have great influence in India and the Nepalese Maoists work closely with the Indian Maoists. Training is provided and arms are supplied from Nepal to India.

But the most crucial threat at the moment is the China factor in Nepal. Co-operation between Nepal and China is extremely dangerous for India. Both Nepal and China is co-operating with one another to secure their own personal interests. China is expanding its reach in Nepal and helping her in order to replace India's control in the region. Similarly, Nepal being sceptical of India is reaping the benefits that she is getting from China. Nepal is acting quite smart by trying to balance both the powers and enjoying the advantages. Moreover, with the growing Chinese influence, Nepal is trying to bring in

an external power in South Asia to balance India's so called hegemony.

Thus, India's security is indeed at risk from a small Himalayan nation. The solution to these threats can be four fold. Firstly, India needs to secure its border areas and the SSB needs to be increased. Although the border is open, more check points need to be installed and goods moving to and fro needs to be checked more efficiently. Secondly, India needs to forge good relations with other South Asian countries. But here is the catch. Relation with most of the countries is already strained. Thirdly, India needs to hold talks with Nepal regarding the security of the border areas and co-operate with one other. India isn't the only one suffering from the border. Even Nepal is in danger because of illegal trade, smuggling, trafficking and terrorism. Thus, both these countries need to address these border crimes together. Finally, regionalism in South Asia hasn't evolved fully and that is why there is no strong bonding among the South Asia countries. Regionalism, through SAARC needs to be uplifted in order to prevent external powers to interfere in the area. These countries need to come together, trust one another and fight the odds. Otherwise, one country's fall will result in the fall of its neighbours as well. If India's security is at risk, then all its neighbours are at risk as well. So, let's wait and watch what's in store for India and its neighbours: Rising up against the threats or falling down!

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Bhutan and India's Security

*Anuja Saha**

The princely Kingdom of Bhutan is a landlocked country, about 300 km long and 150 km wide encompassing an area of 46,500 square kilometers. Located between longitude 88045' and 92010' East and latitudes 26040' and 28015' North in the Eastern Himalayas, it is bounded by India in South and South-West and Tibetan autonomous region of China in the North and North-West respectively.

Virtually the entire country is mountaineous, and ranges in elevation from 100m along the Indian border to the 7,554m Kulha Gangri peak on the Tibetan border. These two extremes frame a landscape which stretches from sub-tropical to arctic like conditions. The maximum East-West stretch of the country is approximately 300 km and north-South about 150 km.

The 1949 Friendship Treaty since the days of Jawaharlal Nehru and King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck has guided the contemporary Indo-Bhutan relationship. The treaty insured non-interference by India in Bhutan's internal affairs and inter alia Article 2 of the treaty that entrusted India to guide Bhutan's foreign policy was most significant.¹

Although, it was a set of bureaucratically defined framework for their relationship, however, it did embed values of trust and equality. This spirit kept the relationship moving unhindered.

Irrespective of contemporary geopolitical pulls and pressures, the Kingdom remained

steadfastly and unshakeably the most reliable ally of India.

When India broke Pakistan into pieces, Bhutan and Mongolia were the first to endorse India for Bangladesh's independence. Not just that, Bhutan unwaveringly remained committed to India. For example, it safeguarded India's security interests, never played the China card, never ruffled India's feathers in the region, and above all readily cooperated with India to exploit hydro-power assets, unlike Nepal. Chanakya would have easily contextualised the essence of Bhutanese allegiance to the Indian nation, for he also would have known how a policy of nation founder in the absence of a coherent strategic conscious.

A peep into the past suggests that Bhutan remained fully embraced to India until the middle of 1960s understandably in the face of China's assertion and events in Tibet, to the effect that it stood by India in the face of its conflict with China. True to the sentiment, Nehru declared in the Indian parliament in November 1959 "any aggression against Bhutan . . . would be regarded as an aggression against India."²

A host of analyses also suggested that Bhutan in fact started to doubt India's ability to protect her against China especially after the Sino-India War of 1962 and Indo-Pakistan war of 1971. The incorporation of Sikkim by India may have also added to Bhutan's insecurity.

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Concomitantly, Thimphu firmed up its independent status by forging diplomatic ties with Dhaka and raising its representative's status in New Delhi to full Ambassadorial level in 1971. Since then Bhutan started taking independent position on the international front, for example, sided with China and others on Cambodia's Khmer Rouge issue at the NAM summit in Havana in 1979.

While India had fathomed the extent and severity of the potential crisis, it ultimately brought amendment in the 1949 treaty. The removal of Article 2 of the 1949 treaty in 2007 – freed Bhutan among other things from seeking India's guidance on foreign policy and obtaining permission over arms imports.³

The crisis in Indo-Bhutan relations finally exploded in mid-2013 apparently over alleged attempts by India at thwarting Bhutanese bid to diversify its foreign policy especially the overtures towards China in 2012.

India's Areas of Concern

1. Border predicament – Bhutan's boundary dispute with China remains the principal underlying source of concern for India. Besides India, Bhutan is the only country that has unresolved border with China. From India's perspective, any boundary deal between Bhutan and China will not only impact Indian security but also on its negotiating position vis-à-vis China on the boundary.

At the heart of the issue is the lingering suspicion in India about the possibility of Bhutan ceding Doklam Plateau located on the strategic tri-junction of Bhutan, Chumbi Valley and Sikkim. Of course, the area is extremely critical to India's security as it overlooks the Siliguri corridor. (Plethora of literature relating India's concerns are available in open domain.) China, on the other hand, has shown tough position on Doklam and it has been upgrading infrastructure network including roads nearby areas on the lines that it has built in Aksai Chin.

Bhutan however, until recently as per the treaty obligation followed the Indian direction, kept India's interest in mind and evaded a settlement with China. The general approach

was that the country could neither bargain nor impose will on the matter, therefore would go along with India-China understanding.

2. India's tactical concern – India's insecurity in Bhutan seems based on the prospect of revival of Sino-Bhutan relations and it would be relevant to understand whether it would be possible or not. Clearly, in the 21st century, Bhutan seems unable to escape the pull factor of China's growing power especially its economic influence in the region and global arena. China has been pursuing its policy engagement with Bhutan at several levels; moreover, the geography contiguity allows the possibility of China restoring its lost connectivity and trade ties with Bhutan. In addition, China has long pursued its policy of spurring internal economic development with regional linkages with its neighbours for it is aware that even though Bhutan itself may be economically less significant (bilateral trade is said to be meagre) but its pivotal status as a trade corridor and a gateway assumes immense importance to expand into South Asian market.

India's heightened concerns also relates to China's steps to build infrastructure (roads and railways) in the Tibetan plateau along the entire Himalayan border. With their eyes on 1.4 billion people market, the Chinese have long planned to reactivate the old "Southern Silk Route" to connect its Sichuan and Yunnan provinces with South Asian countries.

The plans are afoot to extend the railway to Shigatse and then to Yadong adjacent to Chumbi Valley and another track connecting to Nyingchi near Arunachal Pradesh. Additional highways to Lhasa from Golmud and Kunming are under construction. All these will inevitably give way to Chinese economic inroads into the markets in the Himalayas. It is here that Bhutan provides a useful window for China to widen linkages with South Asian countries.

Many commentators have viewed China's motivation in Bhutan also in regard to geopolitical context, as this country is the only missing link in Beijing's South Asia strategy.⁴ Any restoration of Bhutan's pivotal role as a

trading nation could therefore enhance China's manoeuvrability and a means of better aligning with the SAARC members.

3. Political disputes – The Bhutanese desire for change is inevitable. However, as the country redefines itself to meet the 21st century challenges, it could confront with multiple dilemma within and with the world outside. For India, dealing with democratic Bhutan could become more challenging compared to the experience of simply keeping the Druk King in good humour. Unfortunately, resentment against India has started at the very onset of Bhutan's experiment with democracy as also evident through two multi-party democratic elections that have strained this relationship. Clearly, India will become the focal point in Bhutan's future electoral politics as well. There will be temptation among the Indian political leaders for making noisy interference in Bhutanese politics. With the democratic changes unfolding, any events in Bhutan could spin out at a higher scale than before. Although, there is no powerful anti-India lobby in the country, but the new generation in Bhutan could be more assertive as well as sensitive towards India's dealings. Such a situation will demand a competitive relationship and transparent conduct of diplomacy in the longer-term.

India should try to allow the political developments in Bhutan to progress through a normal process so as not to allow any strands of tensions and conflicts to take roots in Bhutan, at the same time draw a clear red line on security.

4. Economic issues – India has been providing development assistance loans, grants and other forms of project-funds to Bhutan for years. In fact, the grants seem to have increased considerably in the 11th five-year plan.⁵ However, Bhutanese have perceived the Indian model of economic assistance as exploitative, which tends only to serve Indian interests.

The cooperation in the hydropower sector has been one of the keystones of India-Bhutan economic partnership. In July 2014, Prime Minister Modi has laid the foundation stone

of the 600 MW Kholongchu Hydroelectric project to widen the scope of cooperation further. However, certain factors such as the operational aspects, control of assets, the differences over power tariffs, etc are already creating rift that could spill over into political domain, for they also involve the psychological factor of 'being exploited'.

Clearly, the economic subsidy policy of enlisting political loyalty seemed over-lived its utility and may prove to be counterproductive in the long term. Such ad hoc measures also cannot remain sustainable especially in the age of globalisation. It thus becomes imperative that India needs to offer a more beneficial economic engagement plan to Bhutan, which is sustainable and may even consider channelizing its own experiences to strengthen the fundamentals of Bhutanese economy.

The solution should lie in helping Bhutan in its capacity building, generating domestic revenues, making it a hub of agricultural products tea, fruits, vegetable products, etc, to meet the Indian demands and conversely allowing Bhutanese to create business stakes in India.

5. Strategic challenges – Bhutan's geo-strategic importance to India as a security buffer is indisputable and extends beyond the military security. Moreover, the geographical proximity of Bhutan to sensitive Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh (states), Nepal and China renders it of great strategic importance with regard to India which is why Bhutan has always assumed vital importance in India's military calculus. The China factor is important for India because Bhutan shares considerably long borders with its northern neighbour. The focal point of India's concerns relates to the Bhutanese desire to solve border disputes with China. It also continues to remain a sensitive issue for India, which is also likely to bear the consequences of any compromise on the part of Bhutan. For India, the issue is also about the larger strategic and military question of the PLA gaining access to several important Himalayan passes. In this sense, Bhutan's role in dealing with India's internal security is critical. There are fresh concerns

about Bodo insurgent groups trying to establish links with a Bhutan-based Maoist militant outfit.⁶

6. Terrorism issues — There have been reports in the media that ISI-backed terrorists are in action to penetrate across the porous Nepal and Bhutan border, which is an alarming issue for India's border security. There has been a mushroom growth of madrasas on the border fringes, thus hinting a serious issue for India.

In fact, these ISI-backed terror groups can also indulge or instigate activities of northeast insurgents on the Bhutan border, thereby causing a situation of potential threat.

Sources argue that since Bhutan and Nepal are friendly countries, use of lethal weapons is not recommended and this emboldens smugglers and militants who know they would not be fired upon unless forces are challenged.⁷

Conclusion

However, the debate on the prospect of trans-Himalayan regionalism is fast gaining momentum. In fact, Prime Minister Modi has also been articulating his idea on these lines in his recent speeches. The idea could open up vast opportunities for India. Drawing from Modi's momentous speeches in Bhutan and Nepal, the trans-Himalayas holds the keystone for Asian culture, environmental, political and regional security. His speech was remarkable and if expounded it could change the Asian context. India's trans-Himalaya policy thinking should include areas beyond the mountain ranges to cover wider Eurasian space the access to which is blocked by Pakistan.⁸

This is an area which is yet to be successfully ventured. India ought to work on these areas in order to safeguard its interest vis-a-vis Bhutan as well as the South Asian region.

An important here lies that in the aftermath of fall of Monarchies in Nepal and Bhutan, the problems have only become more challenging. India needs to recognise that

Bhutan too shares borders with China especially with Tibet with which Bhutan has long historical association. Instead of curtailing Bhutanese contacts with its neighbour in the north, India should visualize Bhutan playing the role of a bridge.

This will in future guarantee India of security and protection across border and also benefit the bilateral ties between India and the Himalayan state. Moreover, Bhutan has been an Indian ally since ages that needs to be restored through mutual harmony and cooperation.

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