

Policy Dialogue on Economic and Transport Development in Border Areas in Eastern South Asia

Organized by

The Transport Division and Sub-regional Office for the South and Southwest Asia of the UN-ESCAP
together with the ADB and the Government of Meghalaya

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Catapulting Eastern South Asia from Periphery to Mainstream

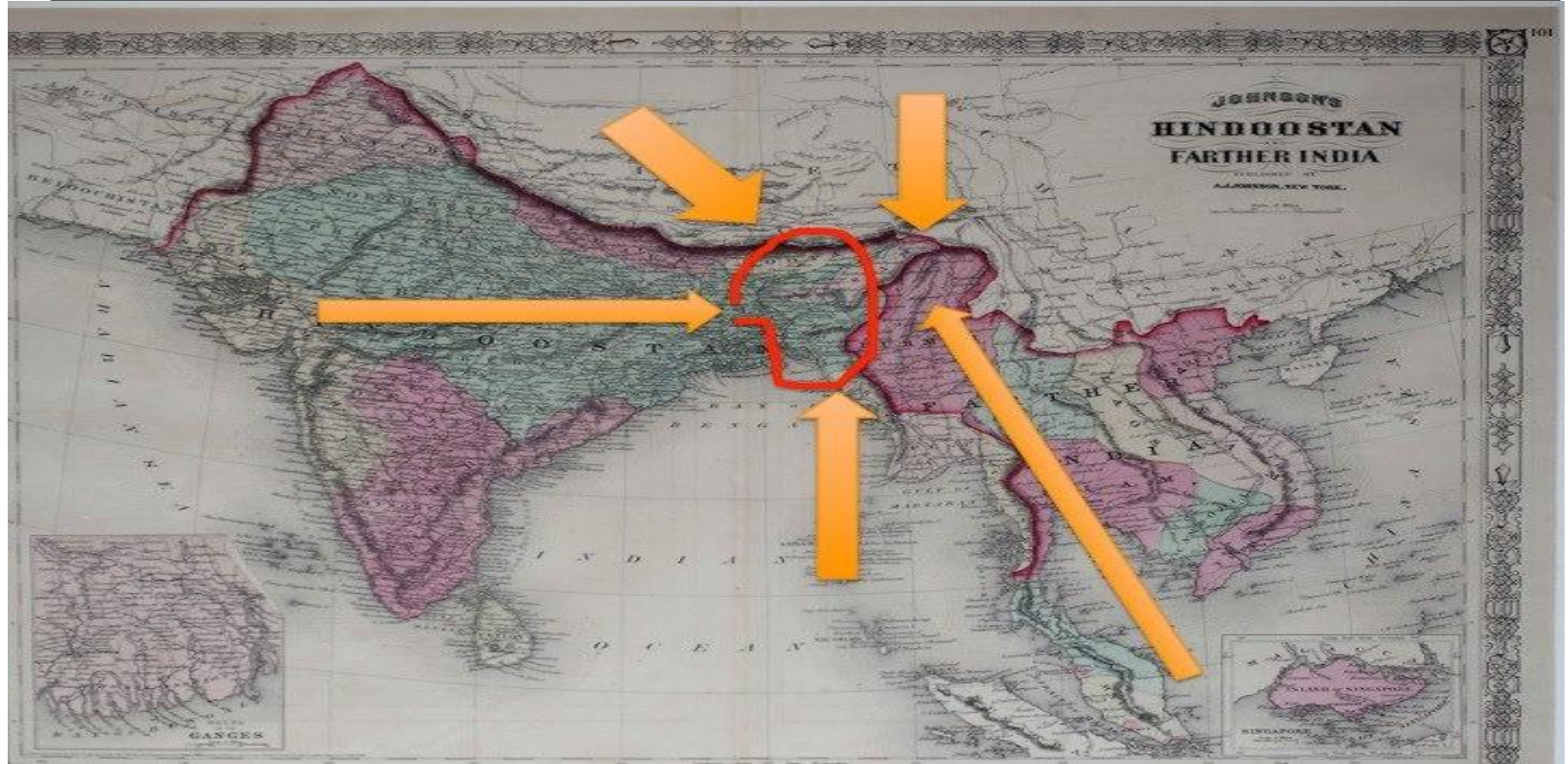
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Content

- India's North-East region is on a high trajectory growth path, by virtue of its strategic location, natural resource base, high literacy rate and English speaking population.
- Growth and development of the North-East region can help India carve for itself a place in the larger Asia-Pacific and to showcase its economic potential for investments and trade.
- Government of India's *North Eastern Region Vision 2020*, document identifies various challenges as well as the strategies required to bring about peace and prosperity in the North Eastern Region by 2020.
- Several measures have been undertaken to uplift the region. First amongst these measures has been a proposal to build the "Asian Highway" and "Asian Railway Link" and "Natural Gas" pipeline.

Region's Potentials

- The proposed Asian Highway is the Imphal (India)-Tamu (Myanmar) road going on to Kalembo railway onto Mandalay in Myanmar.
- There is also a plan to construct a 1,360km Trilateral Highway from Moreh (India) to Mae Sot (Thailand) through Bagan (Myanmar). Moreh in Manipur is seen as the most strategic international trading point in the region.
- The Mekong-Ganga Corporation initiative, launched on 10 November 2000, is another ambitious project.
- The development of infrastructure and connectivity are a sine qua non for making North-East region as a key component of promoting development in Eastern South Asia.

The Stumbling Blocks

Key stumbling blocks to closer cooperation between India and other Eastern South Asian countries inter alia include:

- lack of infrastructure,
- geographic location characterized by topsy-turvy terrains,
- lack of will on the part of political leadership;
- absence of confidence-building measures in cross-border areas to improve livelihoods of the affected people;
- negation of the role of the civil society,
- absence of regional media's role;
- lack of mutual cooperation and coordination in tackling environment related issues;
- absence of capacity-building of the stakeholders etc.

India's Strategies

The strategies being undertaken by the Government of India to develop the region and its sectors inter alia include:

- providing resources focusing on social and physical infrastructures;
- integration of NER with its regions and development of their natural resources.
- Promoting important sectors like tourism, handloom, bamboo- based industries and oil.
- Emphasis on undertaking infrastructure development;
- Eliciting investments for increasing the growth rate of the economies;
- Developing the educational and skill development sectors for poverty alleviation;
- Increased focus on Infrastructure, Information System and Innovation

Challenging Opportunities

- Huge opportunities in sectors of strategic importance like energy and infrastructure; oil, natural gas and hydrocarbons; agro, food processing and horticulture; floriculture; IT and ITeS and Tourism.
- Scope for infrastructure development, greater promulgation of e-governance;
- Possibility for affordable rail, road, air and inland waterway connectivity;
- Potential for tourism development initiatives and greater stakeholder participation;
- Imperatives of time-bound project implementation, conducive centre-state relations, political stability, monitoring of fund-flows and necessary marketing and branding, etc.

Inland Water Transportation & Other Opportunities

- Inland Water Transportation (IWT) is a potential source for interaction with neighbouring countries.
- IWT is an all-weather and reliable mode to contribute to rapid economic growth of Northeast region.
- IWT mode can boost trade and commerce with Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- Hence NER's connectivity through IWT is of strategic importance.

Meghalaya's Potentials

- Meghalaya's strategic location and other geo-economic factors, enhance its significance in the infrastructure corridors between India-Myanmar-Thailand and India-Bhutan- Bangladesh.
- It entails potential of emerging as 'development hub' of North-East region. Such a scenario would afford ample opportunities for investment from the neoghbouring countries.
- Construction of railway line in Meghalaya would provide a cheaper mode of transport in the land-locked state.
- Meghalaya's geographic proximity to a part of Rangpur district of Bangladesh in the west and the Mymensingh and Sylhet districts of Bangladesh in the south makes it strategically significant in the infrastructure corridors between India-Myanmar-Thailand and India-Bhutan-Bangladesh, which will pass through Meghalaya.

Catalyst for South-South Cooperation

- Inadequate capacities are one of the major constraints for the sustainable management of natural resources.
- The capacity for addressing the environmental aspects of natural resource management is even more limited;
- Emphasis on training initiatives tends to focus on the social and economic aspects with minimum consideration of the environmental aspects.
- Some countries have expertise in one or more Integrated Natural Resource and Environment Management (INREM) disciplines while other countries need assistance in the same disciplines.
- Need for bring countries together in a South-South Cooperation (SSC) mode to address capacity gaps;
- and to find an operational model for exchanging knowledge, expertise and other forms of capacity building approaches.

Role for Civil Society

- The governments have fiscal and technological resources but lack resource persons;
- Governments alone incapable in capacity-building of all stakeholders;
- Civil society can provide trained resources persons for capacity-building;
- The CSOs can pool their energies to build up capacities of the stakeholders at the grassroots level;
- Synergy between CSOs and the regional governments essential for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Way Forward

- Future resource scarcity and climate change can be a constraint on development;
- A paradigm shift needed in national policies to manage natural resources;
- Civil Society essential for fostering dialogue and linking grassroots issues to the negotiation process.
- Using Asia Regional Forum, Mekong-Ganga Forum for consolidating regional cooperation;
- Need for a Regional Dialogue Forum for Eastern South Asia comprising civil society and government representations.

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