

## **RESEARCH WORKSHOP**

### **A SOCIAL MAPPING OF LOGISTICS, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INDIA'S LOOK EAST POLICY**

**Organised by Calcutta Research Group (CRG) in collaboration with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS)**

**Venue: Swabhumi, Sabhaghar-I, Kolkata**

**Date: 6 September 2017**

**9.30-9.45am Registration and Tea**

**9.45 am -10.00 am Introduction by Paula Banerjee (Director, CRG)**

Professor Banerjee welcomed the participants and introduced them to the theme of the research. She also noted that the five segments that would be presented were part of a larger research project that had begun in 2016. The draft papers presented here would be revised according to comments made by the experts and the discussion that followed.

**10.00 am -01.00 pm Presentations and Expert Comments followed by Discussion**

**Chair :RanabirSamaddar (Distinguished Chair, CRG)**

**10.00 am - 11.00 am:**

**Interwoven Realities: Logistics and the Reshaping of Global Governance by Anita Sengupta**

**Discussant: Professor Swaran Singh (Jawaharlal Nehru University)**

The paper examined the interface of geo-economics and geopolitics through an examination of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and a proposed economic corridor, the BCIM (EC), which identify logistic and infrastructural as central and involve both India and China. It went on to examine a number of issues: how the concept of a 'region' has been transformed by overlapping 'trans-regional' membership and 'regional' institutions that encompass global spaces; how the inclusion of China in Asian regional organizations has the potential to transform it into a new 'region' in terms of influence whereas India still remains peripheral in many of the organizations; how regional connectivity corridors, trade partnerships and preferential economic arrangements are bringing traditional regional arrangements into question; examining the possibility of areas along the corridors forming a central core 'region' and the resultant social conflict in the 'new' periphery, the regions on the outskirts of the corridor and finally how Indian engagement with 'regional organizations' on the one hand and economic corridors on the other would impact upon its policies. It underlined the fact that global dynamics related to the management of infrastructure across borders will contribute to the creation of semi-autonomous governing bodies and to a redefinition of social and labour laws and relations across a number of states. This would result not just from strategies developed by the Chinese government led companies but also because these would confront diverse relations between public governance and private policies about economic corridors in different states requiring the development of new forms of diplomacy and geopolitical projections and a subsequent redefinition of relations between representative institutions and the governance practice of global logistic organizations. It would also create the possibility of a situation where governance itself moves from traditional sites to the competing sites of economic corridors that coexist on a global scale. Most borders that these corridors would traverse are also by nature arbitrary. However, the malleability of post-colonial borders that the economic corridors and pipelines would negotiate would mean a tension between the fluidity of frontiers that allow cross border movements of people and goods and the ownership of infrastructures like pipelines built by multinational consortiums that these would navigate. The friction between the shared ownership of the infrastructures and national ownership of territory could become a competitive site.

As a segment of a larger study on infrastructure, governance and India's Look East Policy the article situated the arguments within the perspective of the Sino-Indian dynamics since the geography which most of these corridors cross and the overlapping space of many of the Asian 'regional' organizations is ascertained as 'strategic' geographical space for both. Territorial frictions, however, rarely affect economic flows. The recent standoff between China and India in Doklam, over varying perceptions of political frontiers and frontiers of influence, is a classic example of the complex connection between geo-politics and geo-economics as the political posturing seems to have had little impact on the economic sphere. On the contrary one of the factors that contributed to diffusion was the influence of business concerns that operate across the borders.

### **Discussant: Professor Swaran Singh**

Professor Singh found that the paper had several insightful and new ideas to offer. Given his interest in China, he particularly enjoyed reading about logistically China becoming the epicentre. That, in his opinion, was a very strong new argument to make since traditionally the focus is on China's trade volumes, trade figures and foreign exchange which are seen as fundamental issues. But logistically, how China will emerge as an epicentre proved an interesting read. The other important point addressed by the paper is how logistics is emerging as a significant determinant of life, from everyday life to the level of global governance.

There are several other reference points in the paper that require substantive discussion. When it comes to reshaping global governance in our world today, the fluidity of our times needs to be contextualized where this resurgence of logistics determining global governance would be better fitted. Global governance for the first time is becoming far more global than just governance. So we have moved from what we called great powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and superpowers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to focus on what we now call emerging powers. And emerging powers are often known as emerging economies. These emerging economies are similar to global emerging powers. So in governance becoming more global in terms of logistics, connectivity stands as more important in comparison to old hierarchical structures such as patron client relationships and core-periphery relationships.

The second important point to be considered is in terms of logistical connectivity which also empowers it in today's world is the shift from global interstate to the global intersocietal. That is what makes logistical connectivity more empowered. Professor Singh talked about Gandhiji's idea of sovereign citizenship as opposed to sovereign statehood. And the way citizens are empowered today makes states lose track of what citizens are doing. In the limited field of nuclear arms disarmament, which is his area of research, the last inter-state treaty had been signed in 1993. All initiatives and agreements have since taken place at a level of communities or societies. Increasingly, inter-societal linkages have come to dominate both the structures and processes at all levels including global governance.

This element of fluidity is very clearly the protocol in future of technology, he asserted, the cell-phone being the most in-your-face example. The empowerment of youth in terms of collection and collation of information is fundamentally changing the way we look at the world. Therefore governance is co-opting youth and focussing on youth much more. The youth is mobile and mobility leads to logistics.

Governance is drifting from actual, on-the-ground to virtual. E-governance is becoming much more empowering and pervasive. And this point leads to the fourth point connected to fluidity which is the shift from top-down to bottoms-up approach in all situations from global level discussions to world social forums. We see all kinds of protests happening before G-7 and G-20 meetings which are not only acknowledged but also makes people liable to answering questions.

China and India are emerging economies in terms of their population. 35 million Chinese and 25 million Indians are living abroad. There is a dichotomy between these two rapidly emerging societies which will have a tremendous influence on the way of life, including global governance. How they approach logistics is fundamentally dichotomous. Right from India's technical and economic

assistance program of the 1960s, the entire focus of India was on skill building and capacity building. The assumption was that if people connect through skill building, information sharing and knowledge sharing, then that community connect will tell us what kind of physical structures they need. The Chinese have an exactly opposite view of this. The Chinese having for 30-35 years focussed on building up domestic infrastructure very successfully are suffering from what is thought of as overcapacity– overcapacity of experience, skilled workers, machine tools, finances at their disposal. This overcapacity is the compulsion behind OBOR. Compulsions are far stronger in Chinese case. They want to sustain social cohesion, political stability and safety of the regime which is ruling. And over capacity is pushing them to go outside. They are simply replicating what they have done at home. They are creating mega infrastructure projects almost unilaterally, whereas logistics should fundamentally be multilateral. In case of CPEC which is described as a flagship program of the OBOR, it is fundamentally a unilateral program of China. Therefore, because of this dichotomy between two major societies which are influencing the trends including the building of these logistics, the reality is plural corridors. We have parallel corridors. India has India-Japan growth corridor, New Silk Road, BBIM, Trilateral Highway, lots of corridors. China is building six parallel corridors.

There is a certain drift from geopolitics to geo-economics as Dr Sengupta says. Geopolitics is still lingering though as evidenced by the travelling exercise between these two emerging societies. Though these corridors are the main symbol of logistics connecting and recreating a new kind of global governance, they also risk making us fall back to the same geopolitics and same kind of structures and relationships that existed before. What we are doing at the present is muddling through these risks in pushing logistics to become the fundamental determinant of global governance.

### **General discussions**

The following questions were raised in the question-answer session:

**Q)** A passing reference was made to the relationship between geopolitics and geo-economics in the context of Bhutan-Doklam war. In the context of this dispute, how do we see the two things – geopolitics and geo-economics – distinctly?

**Q)** Also are the corridors emerging more as tools of geopolitics than of geo-economics?

**Q)** Is there a case for arguing that logistical expansions upset governance structures and you cannot have global governance structures through logistics? What is new in today's infrastructural development which would partly resemble the 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialism, wherein Ned Rossiter talks about the telegraph poles and the railways that brought about the logistical revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century? What is the difference?

Responding to the questions in a backward manner, DrSengupta began with the third question. What Rossiter argues, she says, is that prior to the telegraph era, territorial limits actually made much more sovereign sense. Once the transition is made, once telegraph lines actually cross borders, a huge difference comes about and once there are optic cables put in place that run under the seas into territories that may be a part of your countries and may not. That is where the difference in politics, infrastructure and logistics lies. As to the question of whether logistics makes global governance more difficult, it was dealt with in a more comprehensive manner in earlier segment, where the focus had been on local routes and how they operate in their own logic despite the large projects that also run along the same areas. So, there will always be a tension between logistics that governs according to infrastructural logic and one that governs on a more limited scale. With regard to the Doklum issue, there has been a lot of posturing on the Chinese side. The Indian side was very restrained in its response to the issue. There have been parallel reports that our trade and business interests were never affected. But what is interesting is that the relationship would continue to work despite the posturing because the Chinese need the market and India needs the investment. Borders have a logic of their own – geographical, political and social. That would have to be taken into account when talking about larger projects.

PradipPhanboujam was of the opinion that the trade issue and the logistical issue not be treated separately from the military aspect was his suggestion. For instance, in the Doklam issue, the roads were being built, but the trade and other interests are always supplemented by military interests, as is also the case with Russia's interest in Syria. With this final observation, the session was concluded.

**11.00 am - 12.00 pm**

**Finance Capital and Infrastructure Development: The Asian Context by Iman Kumar Mitra**

**Discussant: AnjanChakrabarti (University of Calcutta)**

The paper explored the connection between networks of finance capital and infrastructure-led development in the context of India's Look East Policy (renamed as the Act East Policy in 2014) whose main thrust has been to forge sustainable political and economic relationship with its neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia so that it can compete with China as a regional power, especially in the context of Asia's emergence as the leader of globalization following the economic meltdown in the West. It explored this connection between the idea of a 'seamless Asia' (often mentioned in the documents of the regional conglomerates like ASEAN and the financial institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank as an ideal state of an interconnected continent through transport facilities and specially designated trade routes, border policies and economic liberalisation) and the many infrastructural requirements for its realisation in connection with the emerging networks of finance capital in the region. The concept of finance capital is often reduced to discussions around the figure of the solitary, speculative economic agent and her speculative decision-making abilities. This study, however, sought to bring the concept of infrastructure development at the core of its conceptualisation and looked at the institutional paradigms of regional conglomerates and their conversations with the expansive networks of finance capital.

**Discussant: AnjanChakrabarti**

The relation between integration, finance and infrastructure in the context of Asia where infrastructure is the key word, is looked at in the paper. It is seen as both the magic pill of shaping connectivity and integration of otherwise disarticulated Asia as also of generating only growth by imparting positive effects of various kinds. In this sense, the author accepts the utopia and associated narrative of the geopolitical ruling disposition and then tries to produce an analysis of how far this narrative is justified and made possible. At times the failures are pointed out but then these are seen as problem areas to overcome so that the dream of an economically and spatially connected Asia leading to virtuous growth everywhere is realised in its full potential. This marks the strength as also the weakness of the paper. The strength of the paper is its clear exposition of its position, its evolution and expansion of arguments made by institutions in terms of policy restrictions and ultimatums. What it gains in terms of descriptive value is lost however in terms of critical reasoning and arguments.

The paper will gain substance if it brings some of the latter into consideration. First the paper seems to have taken out the aspect of geopolitical tension between India and China from the analysis, even as he claims that the calculation of critical risk is a major actor in investment decision of private players, both in finance and production. There seems to be an unacknowledged economism that is operating here even as the described relation in the context of Asia is said to be containing factors surpassing economic ones. This complicated factor and its nuanced analysis requires to be introduced into the paper. The distinction between privatisation which is the transfer of distinct assets and investments which is the creation of new assets is then drawn on. The presenter seems to be suggesting wittingly or unwittingly private players have always been the pioneer in investment, particularly infrastructural investment. However, while private players have existed for long, the investment boom in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was driven predominantly by state-funding and enterprise. Even with 19<sup>th</sup> century infrastructural investments, Ha-Joon Chang's book, Kicking Away the Ladder

revisits the thesis of *laissezfaire* dream and investment, arguing that state plays a major role in it. The presenter is requested to look up this book.

In case of private public partnership also, the economics of it is not referred to in the paper in any way. The demand side of ppp is not dealt with, the supply side receives all the focus. Greater the economies of political uncertainty, the more the investors will be disinclined to invest. This aspect of political uncertainty, associated with global finance and production has been completely removed from the paper. It is afflicting the contemporary global order and Asia is no exception. The complexities of the global economic order needs to be brought into play at length in the paper when talking about global finance and global production and its fallout. Why private players are not inclined towards investments despite incentives is a question that needs to be addressed by the paper. This is what the paper engages with, as opposed to the whys that need to be answered to make the paper more comprehensive. The discussion ended with the discussant with a query: why despite beginning with Asia, the paper shifts its focus to India, since international finance or cross-lateral infrastructural development is not exactly the same as finance for domestic infrastructure.

### **General Discussion**

RitamSengupta had the following suggestion for the presenter. Since a lot of these projects are long-term, and there are a lot of uncertainties associated with the, these uncertainties have to be hedged. It would be interesting to see how intangibles, not just in terms of rent but also like what China is expecting in terms of trade, and how those can be brought into calculative matrices because it is around this that a project of critical understanding of making of economies can escape a functionalist bent

Professor Swaran Singh queried whether external stimulus generates repaying capacities and other conditions that can be identified in those cases? Additionally, he asked how the infrastructure of countries is affected when there is no delink between the global South and Global North as presently is the case.

The presenter responded to the discussant's query saying that the paper is the result of an initial study of the phenomenon. It was the intention of the presenter to identify the players involved in the financialization of infrastructure, how connections were being made between infrastructure development and capital in most of the government and private documents, reports of the various stakeholders.

In response to an audience member's query on speculation, the presenter responds saying that many of the investments which are made in infrastructure, particularly non-regional affairs, are closely following the developments in the world order, such as India-China relationship. Speculative decisions are affected by that. The investors actually make money on the basis of speculations. Geopolitics is not merely a backdrop but an asset itself. Institutionalisation finance in the context of infrastructure is not non-speculative at all. Risk becomes another aspect that can be analysed.

The presenter further agrees with the discussant's critique of his stance on 19<sup>th</sup> century infrastructure, an unwitting mistake on his part. His intention had been to show how the nature of private funding is changing, since the relationship between the state and private actors is also changing.

About the question on the global South, there has been a shift from the Global South forum. Most of the players are focussing on Pacific Asia. The nature of investments in Latin America and Africa are very different from investments concerning China.

**12.00 pm – 1.00 pm**

**Representations of connectivity: the politics and economics of routes in the Asian context by Priya Singh**

**Discussant: Atul Mishra (Shiv Nadar University)**

The contemporary version of the Silk Road consists of the land based Silk Road economic belt or corridor as it is commonly referred to that comprises a wide strip of central China, reaching through a large number of Asian countries and extending into the eastern European region. These countries are supposed to be connected by existing or planned railways and roads, with bridges and tunnels, airports, as well as pipelines, energy projects, industrial parks, free trade zones and logistics centres. The Maritime Silk Road or corridor is essentially a sea route from the South China Sea and South East Asia, through the Indian Ocean and the Middle East into the eastern Mediterranean. It also spreads in other directions. Its distinctive characteristic is port infrastructure projects, some connecting with parts of the land-based project. The professed objective therefore is to create a new economic belt of connective infrastructure westward into Eurasia and a new maritime “road” connecting China to Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. The accompanying narrative is one of “a community of common destiny,” of “inclusive collaboration,” of an Asian enterprise/project not merely a Chinese initiative; of an integrated developmental strategy, aimed at global peace and the pursuit of common prosperity.

The role of routes in establishing and maintaining geographical, political, cultural, educational, economic, military, technological, religious and ideological linkages within and between regions is significant. An analysis of the politics of routes in an extended Asian neighbourhood is crucial for both a historical as well as a contemporary understanding of the relationship between ‘security’ and ‘development.’ The competition over routes between rival powers, adds another dimension to the politics of routes. Regional economic connectivity with an emphasis on ‘energy’, ‘trade and transport’, ‘customs and border operations’ along with a connect in the realm of ideas constitutes the nucleus of the ‘New Silk Roads’ project. Further improvisations and strategization on the ‘New Silk Roads’ are underway, being primarily undertaken by China and India. As multiple attempts to break the ‘bottlenecks in Asian connectivity’, make headway in the form of major infrastructural investments, unusual equations between the major players unfold, promising an era of regional reconfigurations. The attempt was to briefly comprehend the various dimensions and political implications of the routes which aim to establish and re-establish connects within Asia, its extended neighbourhood and beyond.

In this framework and context, it examined the following questions:

Does the New Silk Road Initiative represent the next stage of globalization by way of multilayered connectivity culminating in greater regional/global integration?

Conversely, can or will the New Silk Road Initiative trigger or intensify existing rifts and fault lines between nations and regions?

Is there a possibility of reworking on certain facets of the OBOR and situating the Indian Governments Look East/Act East Policy (with its emphasis on Link West policy), within the New Silk Road Initiative?

So what is the New Silk Road Initiative; an imperialist urge, an economic compulsion, a “geopolitical maneuver” or a “spatial fix”?

**Discussant: Atul Mishra**

The paper is empirically rich, but requires a little restructuring. A great deal of the beginning of the paper has been given to the background and to two or three of the schemes, which could be shortened a little and instead more space could be given to BRI since that is the centre stage project that is being worked on. The paper looks like a catalogue of initiatives and a catalogue of readings, ending with the Indian perspective. The second element of restructuring involves replaying the empirical bit and making things more conceptual to bring the idea of representation into focus,

opined Dr Mishra. One of the elements associated with both these projects is the scale of the ambition. Dr Mishra provided the examples of China and India to illustrate his point – in some readings, the Chinese, with reference to the Great Wall, are believed to have the capacity for sub-continental scale infrastructure projects. How does that representation play off is a query that needs to be pondered. Contrarily, Indian initiatives as far as the region is concerned, are thought of as attempts to match up to the Chinese, even though on the capacity front, the gap between the two might be wide. The Chinese initiatives are thought more dominant in terms of the land domain, while Indian ones project themselves as good in the maritime domain. These representations need to be understood, urges Dr Mishra. The maps included in the presentation may be included in the paper as they will serve to enrich it, he advised. He also proffered recommendations and suggestions regarding literature on connectivity, mentioning Sanjay Subramaniam's 1997 piece where he initiates the program of connective history and the subsequent volumes where he worked on the Eurasian connective network. One of the facts that comes out in this literature is that Eurasia in the early modern period was a region comprising multiple worlds. These worlds were interacting with each other, and ideas and people were circulating all around. Tapping into that literature would be useful, iterated Dr Mishra. One of the things that connectivity projects are doing, particularly Indian and Chinese ones, is that they are treating natural regions as opposed to regions created by decolonisation. Dr Mishra finds it intriguing that SAARC was in South Asia, yet India had to have the Gujral Doctrine. We need to look at what India is doing now with the sub-regional projects vis-a-vis the Northeast and connecting it to Southeast Asia. Local ecosystems are restored, bringing in trade, leading to the thriving of culture. Popular anxieties of those who live at the frontiers of the nation are also alleviated to a great extent. Even though we have this pan-Asia connectivity phase, connectivity projects in different parts of Asia are serving different purposes. We are given the instance of Afghanistan, where connectivity is seen as the way out of the geo-political wars it is plagued by. There is an unfortunate political implication in these Asia-wide connectivity projects. Several of the political systems in Asia through which these connectivity projects are being constructed are either quasi democratic, undemocratic, or democratic in interesting ways. We have seen, as in the case of Gujarat, infrastructure-oriented conception of development is necessarily depoliticising. If people are given a modicum of quality life and good infrastructure, they stop complaining about political injustice. The Chinese and Indian connectivity projects do not expect these regimes to reform themselves and make themselves more accountable to the people. The more integration of this sort happens, the more development that is infrastructure oriented is facilitated, the lesser would be the incentive for these political systems to reform themselves, says Dr. Mishra. It may not just be an outcome of the decline of the West generally but also something that is innate to us as Asian political systems.

### **General Discussion**

In response to the paper, the following observation was shared by Professor Ranabir Samaddar. The point that needs consideration is scale, says Dr Samaddar. If the longitudinal scale is considered, can there be a connection between what happened in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. and what is happening today? This is what Dr Priya Singh appears to be doing in the paper, bringing out how histories are connected, comments Professor Samaddar. On the other hand, histories can be latitudinally connected such as the history of India and Central Asia. From our history of India being a hydraulic civilization, we know that there was the digging of canals and waterways, the sharing of resources, which not only performed a socio-economic function but also played the role of connecting the empire with the state and the people. Many have challenged this notion that Asiatic despotism actually worked based on hydraulic galvanisation and mobilisation of the society. Today's events show us how water bodies bring states into contact, such as Nepal-India's negotiations over Kosi, or Bengal's wrangling with the Central Government over Topsha and Teesta rivers. But more significant is the Supreme Court's judgement and the Central Government's decision to execute the interlinking of rivers. The question that is then raised is that is there a specific nature of

infrastructural imagination? In case of the Silk Route, the historical imagination is acting much more actively. In case of India, it is very clear that certain types of connections do not rouse our imaginations. Why is it the case, queries Professor Samaddar.

In response to Dr Atul Mishra's comments, Dr Priya Singh responded saying that the BRI did not start from a blank. There was an example. There is a contrast with India. The glaring difference is the non-spontaneous nature of this. With respect to the scale and magnanimity, there are Youtube videos that show that there are bedtime stories about the BRI, the protagonists being Caucasians. What has been attempted in the paper was to draw out the contrast between spontaneity and absolute lack of spontaneity.

In response to Professor Samaddar's query, Dr Priya Singh says that the Turkish Silk Road has been talked about in the paper, because they were harping on their shared history. When talking about a project as magnum as this, Dr Priya Singh admits that the extent to which shared history can be used is not known to her. The rest of the suggestions about interconnectedness and connectivity are matters that would be looked into and added on to the existing work, assured Dr Singh.

**01.00 pm - 02.00 pm Lunch**

**02.00 pm -04.00 pm**

**Presentations and Expert Comments followed by Discussion**

**Chair: Prasanta Ray (President, CRG)**

**02.00 pm – 03.00 pm**

**Conflict and Social Governance in North East India by Paula Banerjee and SucharitaSengupta  
Discussant: Rakhee Bhattacharya (Jawaharlal Nehru University)**

Social governance is a form of governance that evolved in relations to conflict management and peace in the last few decades. With its origin partly in western style mass democracy, social welfare and market economy and partly in the evolution of a sense of justice that emanated from struggles against colonialism, social governance has grown into a system that has many trajectories. Post-colonial states have often addressed demands for justice through the axis of development and in a neoliberal world that has meant the growth of market economy, capital accumulation and changes in infrastructure in tandem with a neo-liberal politics and crony capitalism. This has created an occasion for massive transfer of resources necessitating new logistical apparatus. The logistical spaces that are used as conduits are the favoured spaces. This caused massive increase in governmental expenditure and the beneficiaries were a favoured few. In this circuitous mode of development of capitalism, induction of new groups became increasingly a necessity when older groups were no longer willing to participate, creating new fissures in society. This has resulted in new kinds of governing patterns that has stemmed the radicalism of sub-nationalist demands through development oriented conflict management making logistics intrinsic to conflict resolution. Therefore, logistical imperatives were created that favoured allies to the detriment of those that chose to defy, thereby bringing conflict within the communities that for years opposed the state. In this mode of governance conflict was managed by changing state verses community conflicts into conflicts within communities. One can see this phenomena emerging in large sections of Northeast India. In this background the paper examined new forms of political mobilizations that will obstruct the flow of the logistical apparatus and bring them into question. Within this context examine whether prolonged obstruction of logistical operations has evolved as a strategy of political action in Northeast and what can be the new forms of disruption of the new logistical apparatus in the background of past conflicts, what can be the policy responses?

**Discussant: Rakhee Bhattacharya**

Much of the observations here are technical and were made keeping in mind the connection between new Capital, emerging conflict and social governance in Northeast India'. The history of capital in Northeast India from colonisation to globalisation has a linear sequentiality on developmentalism and to locate differences in North East context where some tribal and local economies are seen as remnants of the earlier times. It is important to understand critically and objectively to engage with the new forms of people's contestations and mobilisation in Northeast India. The capital flow and external market connection in the constructed space of Northeast India is not a new phenomenon. The colonial state typically created this frontier for the exportable surplus through external capital with the minimum logistic apparatus. This arrangement can best be described by ArunBagchi's idea of siphoning capitalism and this capital had created enclave economies and configuration of modernity in the frontier while creating metropolises and cities in other parts of the world through global linkages. This production of geography by colonial narratives largely aimed to destroy the economy, polity and traditional practices in this place. This new construct of colonial capitalist was resisted fiercely by the highlanders and hills were thus sealed and their economies has been un-colonised by their own politics of exclusion and distinction whereas the plains area was the target, a view in contrast to the paper presenter. This has created both hill and plain modern and traditional binaries. This approach has been well captured in the paper, but the discussant approaches it differently. In post-colonial times, the colonial framework changed to national framework. Indigenous capitalist class were formed with state support to reassert the logic of resource excess and land accumulation. This started penetrating the hills of Northeast. State developmentalism got legitimised in the decade of the 70s and 80s. With political geography, there were demands for infrastructure creation. State capital was acceptable for the people of the region for the creation of social and economic provisions. With neo-liberal economic order coming in the 1990s, economic expansion was important to join the global world order. Thus the need for next set of logistical apparatus was felt urgently. India's economic imperatives gave birth to the Look East policy. The need for connectivity infrastructure became essential to explore Northeast India as a potential economic hub and corridor. State capital was multiplied through the policy of resources, ensured grants, packages for infrastructure creation road, railways, etc. The paper has extensively dealt with it. Policies of economic development such as Spatial Accelerated Road Development Program, and Vision 2020 have opened a new chapter for Northeast India. However, hydrocarbon extraction beyond Assam from Tripura, Nagaland and Manipur is a contested area of developmentalism and Government of India has released documents to secure Northeast's hydrocarbon economy.

Thus, there emerges two narratives of development in North-east India. One is where the local economies are expected to integrate with state initiatives and hence experience growth and development. This argument is forwarded by new urban elite who look for lobbying opportunities. The other debate revolves around local courses and ethnic groups who view elites as livelihood threats, moral and cultural threats and everyday life threats. They are organising and mobilising protests around three aspects- needs, rights and justice to protect against immediate consequences like displacement and marginalisation. The narrative of Northeast is fast changing and the fight for economic right is dominating at the present. That the tables provided in the paper on Per Capita Income and Monthly Per Capita Expenditure be updated was suggested by the discussant as fresh figures have come in. The new form of contestation can take advantage of the communication networks and disrupt state agenda. This has proved pretty successful in other parts of the world. This can also be a new kind of intervention in the northeast. Independent institutions must come up with a new rigorous system of vigilance, and their intervention should be in the public domain for better management of social problems. As new economies are seen as encroachments on people's rights and on regions and resources, the first important policy response should gain the confidence of the people through an informed and responsible mechanism. For this, policy and decision making

should follow a democratic process where people's voices, views and opinions across ethnic lines are taken into consideration.

### **General Discussion**

The following question was put before the panel by ImanMitra:

Q) How would sequentiality and insurgency understood as moments of disjuncture be connected, given the way they are presented as dichotomous in both the paper and the discussion?

The following comment was shared by PradipPhanboujam:

The word exclusion can be traced back to the British government policies actually. The 1919 Government of India Act was the excluded area act where all the territory beyond the Inner line was considered as excluded. Excluded areas were under the government. Partially excluded areas were given some opportunity of representation in the local government. It was only in 1874 that Assam became separated from Bengal because of the rise of Asamese nationalism. When the British came there, they came because of Burmese occupation. The British came and threw out the Burmese from Assam. Then Manipur, in addition to Assam was taken over. The British had their own interests there- extraction economy. According to Col. L.W. Shakespeare, the British raised civil militia there because it was less expensive than the military but better armed than the police. The British were only interested in revenue collection

Nagaland was taken up as the subject of research since it presented a very different picture compared to the rest of Northeast, offered Dr Banerjee. The trajectory suggested by the discussant applies to Tripura, but not to Nagaland. The exclusion from within talked about by the discussant came much later. Exclusion started much before that as explained by PradipPhanjoubam in his comments on the rubber plantation economy, the extraction economy. The British wanted to tap the economy of logging. The Nagas for the longest period of tie actually wanted to relate to the British. When the Simon Commission came in 1939, the Nagas were very willing to be part of the British empire so that they would be treated differently from the state. The notion of exclusion talked about by the discussant grew later from policies adopted by the government.

Responding to ImanMitra's question, Dr Banerjee opines that insurgencies are not moments of disjuncture. Both of them follow on parallel lines. Capitalism and state behaviour and the response of ethnic communities are not mere departures or disjunctures. These are all happening in the same sphere, and the configurations have become even more mixed up now. If one looks at the movements, it is very difficult to say who the antagonist is, who is doing the right thing as we see from the example of uranium mining. MACM is supporting uranium mining. However, there are lots of protests against that. Nagaland has the lowest income from uranium mining. The development indices are very different in Northeast India.

Another point of difference between the discussant and the presenter is that Dr, Paula Banerjee does not place as much faith on the policies of the Government. The policies are not meant for better governance is her opinion. The case remains one of extraction according to her.

**03.00 pm - 04.00 pm**

**Trade, Capital and Conflict: Frontier Towns of Northeast India and Myanmar: A Case Study of three frontier towns: Moreh-Tamu and Champhai by SnehasisMitra and Soma Ghosal**

**Discussant: PradipPhanjoubam (Imphal Free Press)**

Border regions have often been described as a 'zone of contact', where they act as areas where enterprise networks and other networks cross the border creating new possibilities and advantages. The border becomes permeable and trans-border activities become the norm. In Asia, in general, and South Asia, in particular, borders had been the constants in the projections of the state's strategic, economic and diplomatic acumen. Here borders were the frontiers, in the literal sense of the term, where isolation, limited development and perpetuation of regional inequalities were more

manifest. However, the geopolitics of economics set the trajectory for creating a “borderless” region in South and Southeast Asia, albeit relying on the existing borders. The need for adequate infrastructure facilities, transportation, communication and other links across borders and removal of the so-called bottlenecks were seen as precursors for bridging spaces between the world’s two fastest growing regions. The border trade between India and Myanmar showcases how development of a border trade can be the precursor to the economic development of the region, in turn, making it a repository of transitory and geopolitical agendas. Over the last few years India’s northeast had witnessed an emphasis on developing the infrastructure through widening roads, expanding air connectivity, extending railway networks, opening new and reactivating old dormant trade routes, and facilitating border trade and transit points. The infrastructural and logistical expansion had therefore infused a new lease of life into the towns and cities of the region, which were mostly serving as administrative centres. In 2015, 7 cities from the region, namely- Guwahati, Imphal, Agartala, Pasighat, Aizwal, Kohima and Shillong were among the ‘smart city’ nominees. Moreh in Manipur, situated on the Indo-Myanmar border was declared a ‘Free Trade Zone’ by the Government of India in 1995 and has developed into a township. Manipur government had taken the initiative to build a market complex in Moreh with a budget of Rs. 22 crores. The number of items to be traded between India and Myanmar had increased from 40 to 62 in November 2012. A report titled “Emerging North East India” published by FICCI proposed 2 similar approaches in Dawki, Karimganj, Akhaura, Mankachar, and few other towns along with similar initiatives on the other side of the border in Bangladesh. Likewise, the Land Custom Station (LCS) in Akhaura near Agartala town is functional now with the facilities of passenger terminal, warehouse, and entry gate. In this context the paper examined the frontier towns of India and Myanmar, Moreh-Tamu and Champhai, that are being projected as the gateways to the two upcoming mega projects uniting South and South East Asia, the Trilateral Highway and the Trans Asian Railway Network.

#### **Discussant: PradipPhanjoubam**

The paper is an in-depth ethnographic study. A good picture of the ethnic customs and rules of each of the places has been painted, as has been a picture of the inner conflicts and dynamics. To understand the ethnography of the region, we need to look at Burmese politics. In Burma, there was a democratic government initially, then a coup was staged by **Newin** and businesses were nationalised in 1963 which were targeting Indians. Because business in Rangoon was also controlled by Indians for a long time because of British legacies. There were huge number of Indian migrant refugees who had been rendered paupers. If the history of the business community in Imphal or Dimapur is looked at, many of them were Burmese refugees. More township is very important and there was a big contest for that place between the Kukis and the Nagas resulting in massive riots. More area became cleansed of Nagas, a forced kind of ethnic cleansing. The Kukis have migrated to the foothills where now they have a separate district. Instead of looking at just Tamu and More, we need to look at the larger picture. The figures provided in the paper on world trading and Indo-Myanmar trading are quite different. But the difference in turnover between border trade and Indo-Myanmar trade is much greater. Interstate trade volume is high but border trade volume is significantly low. The Look East Policy thus has to be tackled in two ways – one from the point of view of business and the other from the point of view of building connectivity and culture, so that we ultimately think of peace and a natural region consisting of upper Burma, the Northeast, Northern Thailand also perhaps and such areas. Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and the Yunnan province together is a different region altogether. Simply the act of opening up doors and windows instead of just thinking about business can solve a lot of problems. We shouldn’t be thinking only in terms of connecting Southeast Asia, we should be thinking in terms of backward regions. The Trilateral Highway, the road that will go from More, then Tamu, to Mesaw in Thailand are helping connectivity, the technical side of which also needs to be looked at. Thus, the Look East policy must be implemented from both angles.

## **General Discussions**

The following questions were put forth to the presenter:

Q) Is the recent spate of incidents in the Northeast – the five-month long agitation and the attacks against security forces stationed there – is a reaction to the Look East Policy?

Q) Is there any chance of Look East policy succeeding in Manipur unless the government settles with the groups in Manipur?

Q) Are the small and medium towns dealt with in the paper experiencing developmental activities assured by schemes of the Indian government? The discussant added the comment that there has been an upsurge in the demand for an inner line in Manipur, and other places in Northeast India, stemming from a legitimate xenophobia, a fear of being outnumbered by migrants. What he suggests is that people should not be stopped from coming in, but acquiring of permanent property like land should be outlawed, as it happens in Himachal Pradesh. This was meant to keep away the richer plainspeople from Punjab. Non-locals there can buy flats but not land.

Dr Paula Banerjee added to the discussion by talking about the case of Tripura. There has been a democratic shift in Tripura. One sees that in Nagaland as well in Dimapur. There are large groups of the youth whose sole protest is to bring about an innerline permit area. There is great apprehension about the Look East, Act East policy. The problem in the equation is it is okay when the people from the hills and the plains go to Southeast Asia to work; they want the border to be flexible. But they want the border to be rigid when the possibility of the opposite arises. This is where one has to come to a policy decision. There should be I.D. cards, and a mechanism where people coming across the borders can be taxed. They should be on the radar of the government, and insecurities can be addressed in that manner. Kohima is another instance where land can be owned by the Marwaris, leading to insecurities.

The presenter responded saying that there has been continuous agitation regarding the ILP. There is a strong apprehension amongst the plainspeople. Hangal Bazar, the commercial hub in Imphal has been taken over by the non-migrants. There is this apprehension since there is no restriction for the people settling down there. The way the dynamics in Northeast India is changing is very interesting.

**04.00 pm Concluding remarks and vote of thanks by Anita Sengupta (Senior Researcher & Programme Coordinator, CRG)**