Introduction

A 2-day International Conference "India's **North-East and Asiatic South-East: Beyond Borders**" held in Shillong, Meghalaya during June 6-7, 2014 with the cooperation of North Eastern Hill University. According to the participants, this was perhaps the first such high-powered and well represented conference that has taken place in the North-East India. The Conference was attended by well-known scholars, diplomats, administrators, planners, parliamentarians and ministers from the Northeast region and experts from other parts of India and countries comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Srilanka. The perusal of the proceedings of the conference which had extensively debated the issues such as Ethnicity, Connectivity, Wide gap between planning and implementation, Infrastructure, Trade, Investment, Health, Education and Problems and Prospects of Development of Border and Beyond Borders Cooperation. Although the problems are known and so are the .solutions, yet very little has been done to resolve them to benefit the people of this region and their desired linkage with the rest of India and the neighbouring countries. This is also attributed to the unchanged mindset and psychological factors. The Government of India has over a period of time pumped a lot of money but without achieving the corresponding gains which present a perceived picture of deprivation and grievances. This is notwithstanding the fact that the need for strengthening the linkage, between the Northeast regions with the rest of India and neighbouring countries are yet to be fully realized. The Conference has succeeded in providing a road map to undertake

the task that lies ahead in bridging the gap between planning and its implementation.

The participants in one voice underlined the need to involve the Institutions, Universities, Civil Society Groups and the Community Leaders and other Stakeholders in structuring long term strategies to seriously undertake the task in resolving the problems and converting them into prospects to strengthen the desired understanding and relationship between the Northeastern region on the one hand and rest of India and neighbouring countries on the other.

The Conference has come out with some workable paradigms and concrete solutions to utilize the potentials this region offers by tapping them for the benefit of States and Societies. Considering the need of timely action by the concerned instruments of the state, institutions and other stakeholders, it was decided to publish the proceedings along with the recommendations and thereafter bring out a volume in support of the initiative taken by India in strengthening its Look East Policy (LEP).

At the end it is pertinent to inform the readers that the present initiative is a part of the ongoing programme "Cooperative Development, Peace and Security in South and Central Asia", supported by the Ministry of External Affairs. Besides providing financial assistance the required advice and active participation in holding Conferences, Seminars and Round tables has substantially contributed in the meaningful outcome of the events.

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Recommendations

- MEA may consider instituting quarterly meetings at Joint Secretary's level with the DONER, NEC and State Governments officials

- Foreign Secretary and DONER Secretaries may consider semi-annual meetings with Chief Secretaries

- EAM and DONER MOS (also concurrently MOS, MEA) may consider an annual meeting with the NEC –Governors and CMs are members

- Above meetings may review LEP related issues

- Special border trading arrangements may be considered along Myanmar-India border, waiving certain aspects of regulations, so that informal trade and formal trade merge

- Upgradation of banking facilities close to border trading routes

- Speed up building of ICPs and upgrade LCSs along Bangladesh-India border

- Broaden the scope of border trade and allow freer access along border trading routes for local traders (Manipur government has investigated patterns of border trade and concluded that border trade with Myanmar has gone up three times

- Broaden border Haats to include a wide range of products and permit more border Haats

- Build, incentivize and set up medical facilities along border with Bangladesh and Myanmar; as a policy, medical interns should be sent to these border medical centres

- Consider sending IFS officers/trainees to NEHU and other Institutions in NE States for familiarization during in service and initial training

- ICCR should reorient and focus on the NE States and Myanmar to create people-to-people contacts and goodwill

- Tourism Ministry should develop packages for the NE States and GOI should consider subsidies to encourage domestic tourism

- Important connectivity issues for the region are: Access to (i) the inland waterways in Bangladesh and (ii) to the seaports in Bangladesh to enable us to reach the rest of the world. Therefore, a massive investment needs to be made to modernize the production base both in agriculture as well as in the industry and upgrade road, rail and air infrastructure

- Consider setting up special economic zones and incentivize participation by manufacturing companies

- The psychological mindset about nativity has to change in favour of Indianess so that Northeasterners think that they are first Indians, then Mizos or Nagas and only after that they are Khasis, Garos, or Gentias etc.

- Encourage Geological Survey of India (GSI) to start a special programme of survey; only 5% of the NE States have been properly surveyed

- Consider setting up an Air Hub in one of the North East States

- Surveys and multidisciplinary studies at the grassroots must be conducted to understand the local and related conditions, resources and aspirations of people. And to build up strong empirical base to foster developmental plans and their implementation, based on data and reliable information

- Involvements of Institutions, Universities and local communities must be ensured in planning for development of region focusing on specifities and commonalities as well of Northeast Region and its borders.