

MYANMAR MATTERS

Vol 18 : June 2017



**MYANMAR MARCHES ON
TOWARDS PEACE AND
PROSPERITY**



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OBOR PERSPECTIVE

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OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION MUMBAI

Ideas and Action for a Better India

THE BELT & ROAD INITIATIVE



India's perspectives on China's ambitious plan for infrastructural connectivity in Asia, Africa and Europe

Opening remarks by Ranjit Barthakur - 21st April 2017 – Regional Dynamics of Belt & Road Initiative: BCIM - Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation, CPEC - China-Pakistan Economic Corridor BIMSTEC - Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, IORA -

Indian-Ocean Rim Association.

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen, I am indeed grateful to Observer Research Foundation and Mr. Sudheendra Kulkarni for giving me the opportunity to speak at the plenary session on Regional Dynamics of Belt & Road Initiative.

I would also like to welcome my co-speakers Dr. Ren Jia from China, Dr. Abid Q Suleri from Pakistan, Dr. Sreeradha Datta from India and my friend, Ambassador Tariq Karim

from Bangladesh.

Executive Summary

China's Belt and Road Initiative also known as One Belt One Road (OBOR), is one of President Xi's most ambitious foreign and economic policies. It aims to strengthen Beijing's economic leadership through a vast program of building infrastructure throughout China's neighbouring regions. Many foreign policy analysts view this initiative largely through a geopolitical lens,

seeing it as Beijing's attempt to gain political leverage over its neighbours. There is no doubt that this is part of Beijing's strategic calculation. However, this analysis argues that some of the key drivers behind OBOR are largely motivated by China's pressing economic concerns.

All levels of the Chinese Government, from the national economic planning agency to provincial universities, are scrambling to get involved in OBOR. Nearly every province in China has developed its own plan to complement the national blueprint. Major state-owned policy and commercial banks have announced generous funding plans to fulfil President Xi's ambitious vision.

Xi launched this at a time when Chinese foreign policy has become more assertive. This plan seems to have geopolitical undercurrents to it than a purely economic interest.

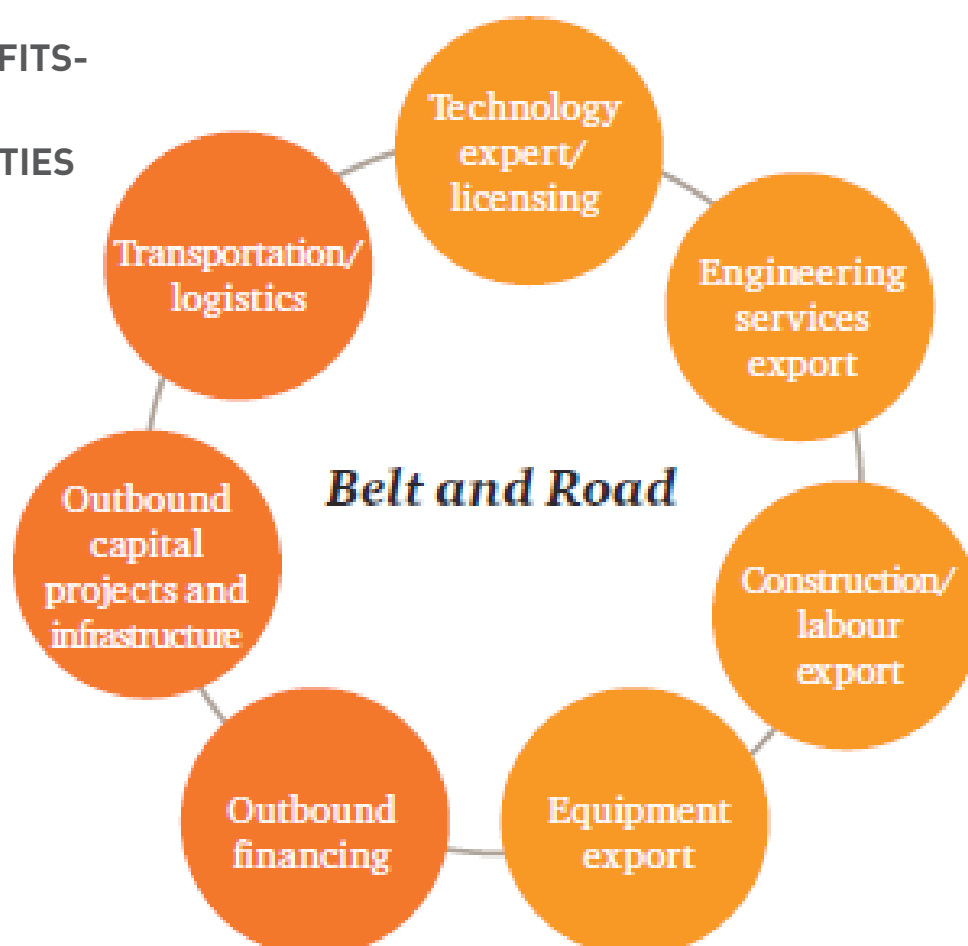
Admittedly, analysts are of the view that China's industrial policy shall be impacted by obscuring economic means to geopolitical concerns.

- This will encourage and aid in the process of regional economic integration, speed up the process of building up infrastructure and connectivity.
- China will assert its regional leadership through a holistic program of economic integration.
- It is likely that Chinese domestic components in projects will be built before any overseas components for the simple reason that Beijing can enforce its plans much more effectively within its own jurisdiction.
- Beijing is keen on engaging with different ways to reinvigorate underperforming provinces and OBOR has been touted as one of

the key solutions to achieve this.

- China is not just trying to export high end goods through OBOR but is interested in elevating the acceptance of Chinese standards.
- Apart from the high speed rail sector, the Chinese Government is also using OBOR to advance Chinese standards in other sectors such as energy and telecommunications.
- We want companies to move excess production capacity through direct foreign investment to ASEAN countries which require infrastructural support.
- We need to get some model projects done and show some early signs of success and let these countries feel the positive benefits of our initiative.

OBOR BENEFITS- TRADE AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES





OBOR-Route Map vis-a-vis Indian interests

GEOSTRATEGY OR GEOECONOMICS?

Before the 18th Party Congress in 2013, there were heated debates among Chinese policymakers and scholars about the strategic direction of the country's foreign policy, especially in its neighbourhood. In October 2013 Beijing convened an important work conference on 'peripheral diplomacy'. It was reportedly the first major foreign policy meeting since 2006 and the first-ever meeting on policy towards neighbouring countries since the founding of the People's Republic. It was attended by most of the important players in the Chinese foreign policymaking process, including the entire Standing Committee of the politburo.

OBOR and its relationship with BCIM - Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation, CPEC - China-Pakistan Economic Corridor BIMSTEC - Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and IORA - Indian-Ocean Rim Association are linked:

Three coordinating government agencies- The National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce issued the first official blueprint, 'Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road', just two years later in March 2015. However, there has been slow progress in terms of implementation of projects outside China.

The well-known geopolitical theorist, Halford Mackinder, postulated drainage and impenetrable by sea-power was destined to be the "Pivot Area" of world politics. It was his view that the rule over the heart of the world's greatest landmass would become the basis for world domination, owing to the superiority of rail over ships in terms of time and reach. Russia and China, if they came together, he predicted, could outflank the maritime world. Of course, the course of the First World War led him in later years to modify his initial perspective. In looking at the shape of the post-World War II order, he foresaw a world geopolitically balanced between a combination of the North Atlantic,

or what he termed as Midland Ocean and the Asian heartland powers. In effect, he conceded that geopolitical dominance required both a continental as well as a maritime dimension. The later geopolitical theorist, Alfred Mahan, too had a Eurasian centred global perspective, but his emphasis was on maritime power, mediating between a two-fold global framework, a Western and an Oriental system.

Both the Road and the Belt include regional loops and branches which extend the reach of the emerging transportation networks but also serve to tie the Road to the Belt at critical points. Thus the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is significant precisely because the port of Gwadar is one of the points where the Road and the Belt intersect. Of interest to India is the branch constituted by the BCIM corridor, which proposes to connect Yunnan in southern China with Myanmar, Bangladesh and eastern India.

GEOECONOMICS

The problem with narrow geostrategic interpretations of OBOR



OBOR-The Route, Region and the countries involved

is not that they are wrong but that they are incomplete. Many analysts tend to overstate geostrategic dimensions of the project, while under appreciating the economic agenda of OBOR. The two goals are not, in fact, contradictory. China is using OBOR to assert its regional leadership through a vast program of economic integration. Its aim is to create a regional production chain, within which China would be

a centre of advanced manufacturing and innovation, and the standard setter.

"A systematic project which should be jointly built through consultation to meet the interests of all and effort should be made to integrate the development strategies of the countries along the Belt and the Road."

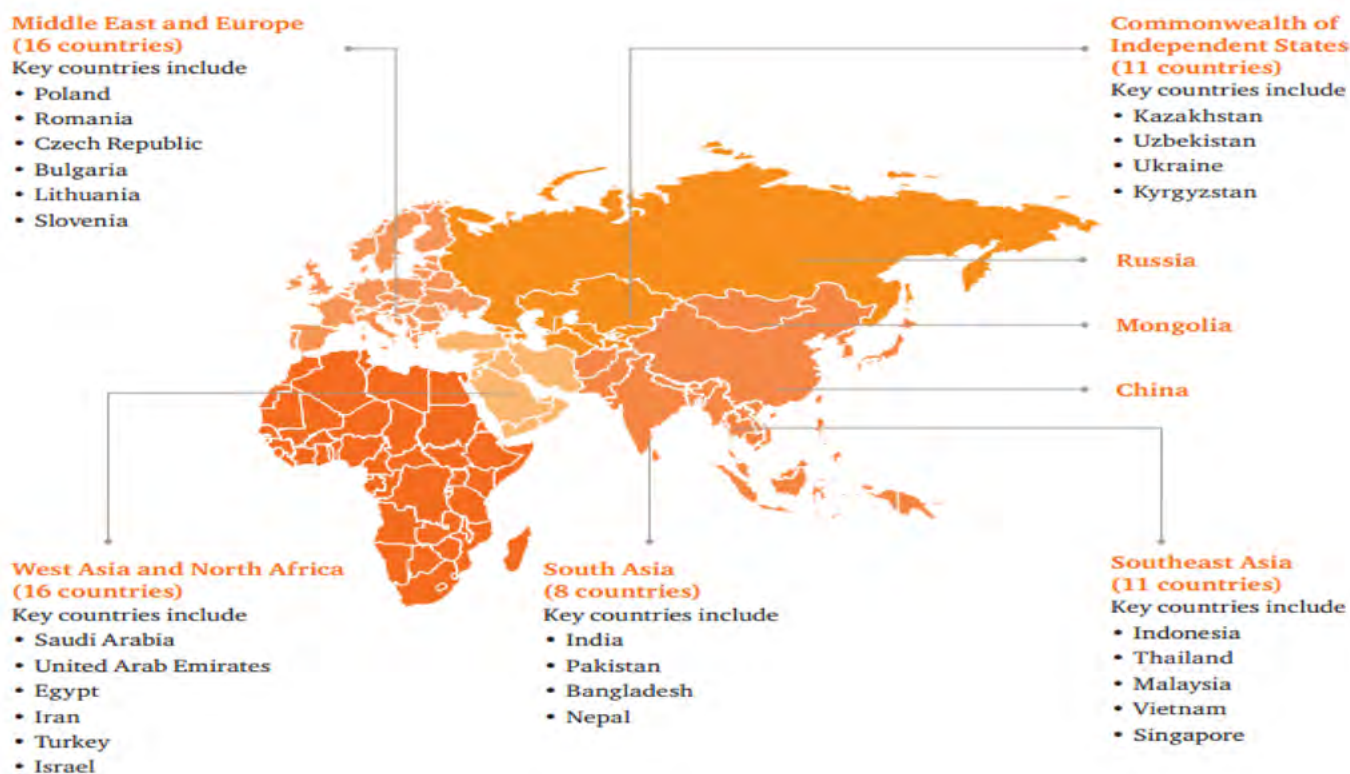
- Enhancing policy coordination across the Asian continent

- Trade liberalization
- Financial integration, and
- Connectivity including people to people links.

China has taken advantage of the Greek economic crisis to establish itself at the strategic port of Piraeus. The Chinese Shipping Company, COSCO, has a 35-year concession to expand the port by adding 2 modern container terminals. It is likely to bid for the 67% Greek government stake in the port when it is fully privatized. Greek shipping tonnage is one of the largest in the world and most ships for Greek Shipping lines are built in China, which has the world's largest ship building industry. Piraeus will thus serve as a major logistics hub for Chinese trade with Europe. China is planning a Land Sea Express which will link Piraeus with points on the European mainland. A US \$ 2.5 billion project is envisaged to build a key high speed rail link from Piraeus to Western Europe.

This aspect is important because it could and it probably already has weakened the trans-Atlantic alliance which has been a stable and predictable feature of geopolitics since the end of the Cold War. The





U.K. rush to join the AIIB followed by several other European powers, against U.S. opposition, was a clear indication of this emerging trend. The longer it takes for the T-TIP to be actualized, the greater the chances of China's Eurasian project succeeding. Interestingly, Cohen foresaw a time when India, like China, could carve out a fourth geo-strategic realm also continental and maritime in nature. This it would do by dominating the eastern and western reaches of the Indian Ocean and the sub-continental landmass, south of Eurasia but linked to it. If this were indeed possible then India would have an opportunity to deal with the challenge of the Chinese geo-strategic realm on its doorstep with greater room for manoeuvre. I have argued before and wish to restate again: If there is one country which has the potential to catch up with China and even overtake it, it is only India. The current asymmetry is not written in stone. What will it take India to achieve this long-term goal is well-known and I will not repeat it.

Currently, India has neither the resources nor the political and economic weight to put in place

competitive and alternative connectivity networks on a global scale. Therefore, for the time being it may be worthwhile to carefully evaluate those components which may, in fact, improve India's own connectivity to major markets and resource supplies and become participants in them just as we have chosen to do with the AIIB and the NDB. For example, building a road or rail link to Central Asia through Iran using the port of Chahbahar could then use Chinese built routes to access Central Asian and Russian destinations as well as Europe. It may be more important to deploy our limited resources to build the Indian Ocean network of ports, with connecting highways and rail routes such as exemplified by the planned Mekong-Ganga corridor and the Sittwe- Mizoram multi-modal transport corridor. There have been longstanding plans to develop the deep water port on Sri Lanka's eastern coast, Trincomalee, as a major energy and transport hub and yet despite the warning message in the shape of Chinese building the Hambantota port in southern Sri Lanka, and expanding the Colombo port, virtually no work has been undertaken since Indian Oil acquired

the tank farm located at the port. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands lie at the very centre of the Bay of Bengal and could be developed to serve as a regional shipping hub for the littoral states and beyond. And yet, these islands continue to be treated as a distant outpost rather leveraging their unique location at the very centre of one of the most strategic stretches of ocean space.

It is fair to say that China, in deploying the OBOR initiative, has demonstrated a level of ambition and imagination, which is mostly absent in India's national discourse. It is my earnest hope that the presentations that are made today will help both scholars and practitioners to think and act strategically on issues such as OBOR which will have a significant impact on India's vital interests.

CONCLUSION

OBOR is President Xi's most ambitious foreign and economic policy initiative. Much of the recent discussion has concerned the geopolitical aspects of the initiative. There is little doubt that the overarching objective of the initiative is helping China to achieve geopolitical goals by economically binding China's neighbouring

countries more closely to Beijing. But there are many more concrete and economic objectives behind OBOR that should not be obscured by a focus on strategy.

The most achievable of OBOR's goals and social influence will be its contribution to upgrading China's manufacturing capabilities. Given Beijing's ability to finance projects and its leverage over recipients of these loans, China's high-end industrial goods such as high-speed rail, power generation equipment, and telecommunications equipment are likely to be used widely in OBOR countries. More questionable, however, is whether China's neighbours will be willing to absorb its excess industrial capacity. The lack of political trust between China and some of our countries, as well as instability and security threats in others, are considerable obstacles.

Chinese bankers are likely to play a key role in determining the success of OBOR. Though they have expressed their public support for

President Xi's grand vision, some have urged caution both publicly and in private.

Their appetite to fund projects and ability to handle the complex investment environment beyond China's border will shape the speed and the scale of OBOR. There is a general recognition that this initiative will be a decade-long undertaking and many are treading carefully.

The distinguished speakers of my panel from China, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, I am sure, will highlight the plenary session with detailed up scaling and possible downscaling even more specifically.

This speech has been delivered by Mr. Ranjit Barthakur - Founder and Trustee, Balipara Foundation, Chairman - Amalgamated Plantation and Advisor - Tata Consultancy Services. This speech includes references to the document and article written by Mr. Shyam Saran, Former Foreign

Secretary, Government of India and Mr. Peter Cai, Fellow, Lowy Institute for International Policy, Australia.

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**-Ranjit Barthakur, Founding
Chairman, Myanmar Matters**



BUSINESS



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BDMS Unit Opens Medical Lab in Yangon



National Healthcare System Co Ltd (N Health), a healthcare business unit owned by Bangkok Dusit Medical Services Plc (BDMS), has opened a medical laboratory in Yangon in partnership with some local firms. N Health considers this investment in Myanmar as just a first step as it has plans of opening up various other branches in this region. After Myanmar, the firm plans to spread its operations in Cambodia and after that further ahead in Indonesia and the Philippines. They want to spread their reach and provide high quality preventive healthcare services to much more people. The company's

annual revenue was US \$90 million for the year 2016 and it shows a 25% increase year-on-year which is the result of its business expansion. In Thailand, BDMS provides system services and products supporting the hospital business such as diagnostic testing, biomedical engineering, sterile processing, hospital linen management, telemedicine and medical equipment supplies.

In Myanmar, it will focus on operating the medical laboratory which will support large hospitals for high-end genetic tests, allergy tests and evaluations for tuberculosis, malaria and dengue fever. It also

aims to provide standard analytical services including medical check-ups for small and medium-sized hospitals as well as walk-in customers. In order to register itself in Myanmar, N Health has partnered with two local healthcare companies - Bahosi Hospital and Sea Lion Group. As a partner in this alliance, N Health will bear 60 % of the total US \$ 2.5 million investment in this lab while its two partners will put in 20 % each. N Health Myanmar plans to open another laboratory in Mandalay in the near future.

FORBES GIVES MYANMAR MARKETING MASTER COVETED CAPITALIST HONOR

Forbes

Myanmar has made it onto Forbes Magazine's "30 Under 30 Asia" list for the second year consecutively. Ms. Chan MyaeKhine, founder and CEO of Amara Digital Marketing Agency, is listed as one of the honorees for Media, Marketing & Advertising category this year. Ms. Chan's Forbes profile says the following: "Khine is responsible for the first ever digital marketing agency in Myanmar, which is also completely self-funded. Amara manages digital marketing projects for local and international clients.

In 2016, Amara's revenue grew by 400 percent to reach US \$ 200,000. It has served clients such as Nok Air, VietJet, Singapore Tourism Board, Cherry Mobile, Oppo, and the Singapore Institute of Management."

Ms. Chan opened her marketing firm Amara in partnership with her husband Mr. KyawMyoKhine. Previously she studied at Yangon University of Foreign Languages and National University of Singapore and then she started working in Singapore in both IT related and marketing roles. In relation to being

included in this prestigious list, Ms. Chan said: "Comparing to other honorees from different countries in this year's list, my achievement is next to nothing. Yet, I am grateful for getting featured while leading an independent agency fully owned by locals. As Forbes looks at company's results rather than individual's achievements, this recognition is mainly the result of my colleagues. I would love to see more Burmese making to the list under various categories in upcoming years."

ACCOR HOTELS TO OPEN 5 NEW HOTELS IN MYANMAR BY 2019



International hotel chain operator AccorHotels plans to expand its base by opening five new hotels in Myanmar by the year 2019. In order to re-brand an existing hotel apartment into a Mercure

in Myanmar, the company has signed a management contract with SC Capital Partners Group. The management contract will make it possible to rebrand the seven-story Micasa Hotel Apartments Yangon to Mercure Yangon Kaba Aye by July 2017. The new Mercure is located in close proximity to the famous Shwedagon Golden Pagoda. It offers 143 apartments and 40 deluxe rooms to its customers.

As per company's Chief Operating Officer (CEO) Mr. Patrick Basset, the company is opening five new properties by the year 2019 as a part of the larger strategy to expand its footprint in Myanmar. A press release issued by AccorHotels stated that presently there are five



of its hotels operating in Myanmar. These hotels include, The Lake Garden Nay Pyi Taw, MGallery by Sofitel, Novotel Yangon Max, Novotel Inle Lake Myat Min, and ibis Styles Yangon Stadium.

INVESTMENT



KIAN JOO MAKES MYANMAR A PRIORITY IN OVERSEAS EXPANSION



Kian Joo Can Factory Bhd plans to continue strengthening its presence in Myanmar. It aims to do so by opening up two new manufacturing plants in the country. The construction of these manufacturing plants has already begun and they both are located in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone. One of these plants is for Kian Joo's can production and the second one is for its subsidiary named Box-Pak (M) which will manufacture corrugated cartons. Kian Joo has tin can, box carton manufacturing and contract packaging capabilities in

Malaysia. Till now it has only been exporting products to Myanmar but now it intends to replicate the same business model that it has in Malaysia in this country as well. The construction of these two manufacturing plants requires an investment of around US \$ 23.5 million. The group anticipates spending another US \$ 81.6 million to set up both plants and their production facilities.

The commercial production is expected to begin at the plants before the end of 2018. Besides

these two plants that are under construction, Kian Joo has 18 plants in Malaysia and three plants in Vietnam. It also has a 20 acres plot of land in Indonesia which it has kept reserved for now but will utilize in the future to further its growth. Kian Joo's Malaysian operations generate the largest revenue; US \$ 219 million for the full financial year. This made 54.7 % of its total revenue while Vietnam was at the second place by generating around US \$ 129 and contributing 32.3 % of company's revenue.

NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA ACQUIRES 22% IN MYANMAR PAYMENTS OUTFIT ONGO

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National Bank of Canada has acquired a 22 per cent stake in ONGO, a leading mobile payments provider in Myanmar. ONGO is backed by Ronoc Asia, a subsidiary of the Ronoc which is an investment firm focusing on emerging markets. The Founder and Chairman of Ronoc Asia/ONGO, Mr. Michael Madden stated, "The addition of National Bank of Canada is an important milestone for our business. We have aggressive growth plans for Myanmar and have set ourselves a goal of providing over one million consumers with access to finance over the next three years." He further

stated, "The addition of NBC as a strategic investor will strengthen our capabilities and accelerate our timelines in Myanmar as well as our expansion to other markets in the region." The terms of the deals have not been disclosed.

Ronoc was founded by Mr. Michael Madden in 2007 and is headquartered in Dublin. It focusses on retail financial services and fintech in emerging markets. ONGO was launched in Myanmar near the end of the year 2016 and just in few months it has already rolled out some payment services

in Myanmar. It has partnered with Coca-Cola and Myanmar Oriental Bank in Myanmar and presently provides payroll services; P2P money transfer, B2B payments and phone bill top ups and utility bill payments using their application. As per the company, it has more than 200 cash agent locations in Yangon. The availability of mobile financial services in Myanmar is on the rise. However, this is very new for the local population which is used to handling cash and therefore the usage of these services might take some time to pick up.

NATION NEWS



NORTHERN ALLIANCE ESTABLISHES A NEW NEGOTIATING BODY TO MEET WITH GOVERNMENT



The four Northern Alliance members announced they will no longer meet with the government separately but only jointly through a committee. This new committee was formed at Pangkham during a summit from April 15-19. The decision was taken after a meeting that was held at the Wa Army's summit. The committee is named The Union Political Dialogue Negotiation Committee (UPDNC) and it includes seven ethnic armed organizations. It was formed when The Shan State Army (SSA), the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) and the UWSA

joined the original four alliance groups which include the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Arakan Army (AA), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).



UNITED WA STATE ARMY FLAG

UWSA leader Mr. BaoYouxiang urged the ethnic armed organizations to cooperate and find strength in unity. He told the attending groups that ethnic groups have formed many political alliances in the past but they all disappeared due to a lack of common political direction. The government's peace commission had been planning on meeting with the TNLA, the AA and the MNDAA before Thingyan, but the meeting has not yet taken place. All previous attempts by the Government to meet the Northern Alliance groups individually have also failed.



MS. SUU KYI SAYS PEACE CONFERENCE AGREEMENTS ARE A SIGNIFICANT STEP

At the closing ceremony of the second 21st Century Panglong in Naypyidaw, Myanmar's State Counselor Ms. Suu Kyi said that these negotiations mark a significant step toward future democratic federalism in Myanmar. Even though these meetings saw some disagreements among the Myanmar Government, the political parties, the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed organizations, the members of the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) are optimistic. UPDJC was the organizer of this event and it feels that the conference achieved its aims to some extent.

During this event, the chairperson of the UPDJC Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

participated in negotiating the key terms of the federal principles, such as those concerning secession from the Union and equality between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed organizations. She stated: "The agreements that we have been able to sign today mark a significant step on our path toward peace, national reconciliation, and the emergence of a democratic federal Union. Reaching these agreements has not been easy; we have encountered moments of disappointment as well as inspiration along the way."

She said that the foundations for democracy and federalism for future generations have been laid through dialogue. "Yet I am greatly

encouraged that despite our many different views and perspectives, we have been able, through frank discussion and negotiation, to reach common positions," she further added. After the negotiations, stakeholder representatives from the government, Parliament, the Burma Army, political parties, and ethnic armed groups who were signatories to the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) agreed to 37 of 41 basic federal principles and signed part 1 of the Union Accord. However, key principles regarding equality, self-determination and federalism have not yet been included in the accord, and further discussion would continue in this regard.

PEOPLE AND LIFESTYLE



BURMESE FOOD COULD BE THE NEXT GLOBAL CULINARY PHENOMENON

Myanmar's rise from the ashes of political turmoil, cultural stagnancy and severe isolation is a monumental historic feat. The ushering in of democracy has adequately released it from the unsparing shackles of military suppression and has catapulted it onto the expansive path of progress, aggressive aspirations, development and integration with the mainstream global canvas.

Buried in its shadowy past has been its most delectable and distinct food experience, popularly known as the Burmese cuisine. Inhabited by various ethnicities and nationalities, Burmese food specialty varies from region to region; each region serving a specific delicacy with their own recipe and style of cooking. In effect, a trek through Myanmar's coast towards the inland or traversing the northern and southern regions of Myanmar are sure to delight one's epicurean journey.

An authentic Burmese palette blends in varied flavors –hot, sweet, sour and salty, by serving multiple side dishes and accompaniments along with the main dish. For example, bitter leaves, dried chilies and salty fish paste may accompany a mild curry. It is this richness that makes it so unique and appetizing, and worthy of being placed on the global cuisine frontier.

Situated on the crossroads of gigantic civilizations of China and India, and bordering the countries of Laos, Thailand and Bangladesh, Myanmar has naturally and inadvertently acquired their distinct characters and culinary influence, while exploring and retaining its own novelty. From the gamut of Chinese dumplings and boiled vegetables to the Indian inspired curries, samosa and biryani, Myanmar staple food has remained constant for years: rice.



Htamin Jin, Burmese rice

From driving the country's economy as being world's largest exporter, rice has become the bedrock diet for many people in Myanmar. Htamin Jin in Burmese, rice is usually served with curry, soup and multiple condiments that a Burmese cuisine is characterized of. Either boiled or relished as flat noodles, from being a breakfast or a light snack to being savored as a dessert on the streets, it remains the backbone of any Burmese meal.

Rice noodles or locally known as

Mohinga or Mohinka. It is a favorite dish among the locals, enjoyed as breakfast and also as a filler light snack in between meals. These round rice noodles are served in fish paste and shallot broth with a hint of onion garlic adding to the flavor. Topped with veggies, boiled eggs, sliced banana pith and akyaw fritters, it is usually sprinkled with dried chili, lime and coriander. Its preparation varies throughout the region, depending upon the availability of ingredients.



Mohinga

A salad for Burmese people is an aggregation and experimentation with diverse elements. An unusual mixture of everything which is crunchy, salty, spicy and sour is concocted as a salad. Laphet Thoke, the most popular and thoroughly enjoyed salad constitutes pickled green tea leaves interfused with amalgamation of sauces, and crunchy and sour assortments; sesame, shrimps, ginger, lime, fish sauce, peanut oil, peas, nuts etcetera. It can be served as a snack or accompany a plate of rice.

**Laphet Thoke**

Nan gyi Thoke, dry rice noodles in the shape of spaghetti is also a salad based dish, relished with chicken, fish curry and garnished with chickpea flour, chilies and turmeric.

**Nan gyi Thoke****Shan Noodles**

The Northern interiors of Myanmar are famous for Shan Noodles, reflecting country's predominant Buddhist group's delectable food trails. Served in chicken or pork broth, it is seasoned with garlic oil and sesame with pickled vegetables. In comparison to southern or coastal Burmese noodles, Shan noodles are bland and simple in texture.

**Khow Suey**

Another dish that exhibits Shan specialty and deserves to be mentioned is fish rice or commonly called Shan style rice. Served with the sides of raw garlic and leek roots, it's oily and is cooked in turmeric.

Curried noodle soup, Khow Suey, is another dish fundamental to Burmese cuisine. Its ingredients involve coconut milk, curried chicken and egg noodles. Like any other Burmese dish, this too gets accompanied by disparate condiments. However, as per the availability of ingredients, its recipe can be tailored to one's preference.

Tea houses cannot be given a miss while talking about the eclectic Burmese cuisine. These are the small and scattered tea and snack hubs brimming with voices greeting political affairs and social customs with great gusto and zest. Bursting with a medley of Chinese, Indian and local dishes; noodles, steam buns, samosas, the local tradition of teashops have evolved as an integral part of the Burmese cuisine.

Burmese desserts, colloquially termed as moun, usually gets its sweet flavor from its corresponding ingredients than sugar itself; sticky rice, fruits, grated coconuts act as sweeteners. Moreover, they are relished as snacks like semolina flour with coconut milk, pancakes with raisons etcetera.

If the food trajectory of Myanmar feeds the non-vegetarians quite sufficiently, vegetarians are served adequately well too with fresh vegetables and fruits available abundantly. Also, the Buddhist sanctity prevalent in the country makes vegan diet an essential part of everyday life of Myanmar.

With Burmese bounty ready to be served on the world platter, and geared to exhibit its vast regional spread through plethora of its native treats and cuisine, the World awaits Myanmar's food treasures to satiate its South East Asian appetite in glory all renewed and rediscovered.

WILDLIFE MATTERS

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BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER ISLANDS: EMERGING CORRIDORS FOR TIGERS

The Brahmaputra valley acts as a vital link for wildlife populations by facilitating the movement of various large mammals between numerous Protected Areas in central Assam. Key tiger habitats in the flood plains of the Brahmaputra include Orang NP, Laokhowa and Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuaries and Kaziranga NP. Nameri National Park and Pakke Tiger Reserve are located at the Northern end of the Brahmaputra basin, along the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Kaziranga and Orang National Parks support the largest extant tiger populations in north-east India and Kaziranga NP has been recognized to serve as a 'source site' for the entire region. The Brahmaputra ecosystem is not only a stronghold of tigers, but is also home to a plethora of other wildlife species, several of which only occur lowlands abutting the Himalayan ranges.

Photographic evidence from camera traps has revealed that tigers may traverse long distances in the Brahmaputra Basin, using river networks and even moving through human dominated areas. For example, in 2013, a tiger was documented to have moved from

Kaziranga National Park to Nameri National Park. The tiger is believed to have covered an approximate distance of 90 kilometers—swimming across the Brahmaputra River, using river islands, moving through a vast expanse of agricultural land, and even fording the busy National Highway 52. The persistence of tigers in this landscape requires that viable meta-populations exist; animals can successfully move between various PAs and habitat patches via the Brahmaputra River Islands and through the agricultural matrix.

Connectivity between various forest fragments that support tigers has drastically reduced in recent decades on account of increasing human pressure and growing habitations along the river bank and on the islands. In addition, flood-dynamics of the Brahmaputra River result in annual creation of new river islands, even as some existing islands are washed away. Habitat integrity and connectivity has also been compromised by increasing human pressure on the Laokhowa and Burachapori wildlife sanctuaries in recent decades. Recognizing these challenges,

WWF India's conservation program in the North Bank and Kaziranga-KarbiAnglong Landscapes has emphasized the maintenance of habitat connectivity between forest patches in the Brahmaputra river valley.

Brahmaputra River Island Survey

To investigate the use of Brahmaputra islands by tigers and other wildlife, and document the extent and intensity of human use in these areas, WWF India and the State Forest Department collaboratively initiated a series of island surveys in 2010. These surveys were designed to assess functionality of the riverine islands as corridors for dispersing the wildlife (primarily, carnivores and prey species) from Kaziranga NP to proximate habitat patches.

Surveys encompassed the islands on the Brahmaputra River between the eastern end of Kaziranga NP and western end of Orang NP. Thus far, WWF India has carried out the survey in four phases (2010-11, 2012-13, 2015-16 and 2016-17). The first phase covered the islands between Laokhowa and Burachapori WLS and Kaziranga NP. In the second phase, the islands between Orang

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NP and Laokhowa and Burachapori WLS were covered. During the third phase in 2015-16, the survey covered portions of three major tributaries of the Brahmaputra i.e. JiaBhoroli, Borgang and Buroi which serve as connecting links between Kaziranga NP - Nameri NP, and Kaziranga NP - Behali Reserve Forest. Concurrently, we also carried out a socio economic assessment of human settlements on the river islands to map and understand anthropogenic pressures and threats. The most recent survey was conducted between November 2016 and January 2017 from eastern point of Kaziranga NP to Kolia Bhomora bridge. During this phase, camera trap sampling was carried out for a 20 day period along with sign surveys. 14 pairs of camera traps were used in 14 different islands to record photographic evidence of animal use.

Sign surveys were an important part of the river island surveys. Such sign surveys involved sampling islands on foot transects to detect indirect evidence for the presence of wildlife (eg. tracks, spoor, scrapes, scent markings). Visual detections of mammals were also recorded. Survey effort (transect length) varied between 0.5 and 2km, depending on the size of the islands, and other field conditions including accessibility.

Results and Outcomes

During the Brahmaputra River Island Survey, evidence of tiger presence was detected in 18 of the river islands, including direct sighting of a tiger in Hatibalu Chapori of Bishwanath Range of Kaziranga NP. During the second phase of the survey, presence of tiger cubs was also recorded in Kartika Chapori. Evidence of breeding tigresses on the islands may be indicative of the fact that some islands may in fact lie within the territorial boundaries of some tigers.

In addition to tigers, the presence of other carnivores was also detected on most of the islands. In the 2016 camera trap survey, tigers, rhinos, fishing cat, jackal, sambar, hog deer and water buffalo were photo-



captured, while water buffalo, swamp deer, elephant, sambar, wild boar, and hog deer were sighted on transect surveys.

Of the 45 river islands surveyed, more than 50 % had human habitations. People belonging to five different communities are found to have occupied these islands, mostly on a seasonal basis, with livestock rearing and agriculture being their mainstay. Incidents of human wildlife conflict are very common in the islands, mainly by way of crop depredation by large herbivores (elephants, deer and wild boar) and livestock depredation by tigers and leopards. However, there has been no systematic documentation of conflict by Government agencies.

The Way forward

The Brahmaputra River Island surveys revealed the presence of several endangered mammals on islands. These islands serve as stepping stones and may provide connectivity between some of Assam's most important PAs.

The ephemeral nature of river islands and their relative inaccessibility has resulted in being neglected from both administrative and wildlife

management perspectives. Thus, jurisdiction and law enforcement needs to be strengthened to ensure protection of these ever important wildlife habitats that also serve as vital corridors. Information generated through these series of surveys has been used to influence and inform decision making for proper protection and management of this unique ecosystem, and there is increased patrolling by forest guards on a number of islands adjacent to Kaziranga National Park. In the coming years, WWF India in collaboration with various Government Departments intends to take up initiatives to ensure the protection and management of the much crucial islands of the Brahmaputra River. Efforts will also be undertaken to reduce anthropogenic pressure in these islands by taking steps to reduce impacts of local communities on wildlife habitats, and also garner their support for the conservation.

-Courtesy: WWF India

MYANMAR INDIA CONNECT



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TRIPURA REVISES IIPIS TO ATTRACT INVESTMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

Tripura is transforming itself into an immensely valuable business and trade destination. Brimming with natural landscape and manmade marvels of infrastructures, its economy is exploding with the excitement of new possibilities and fruitful collaborations.

However, it is a matter of utmost importance to harness the transition from a remote, neglected region to becoming North East's most productive and nationally rewarding state. Employment based subsidies, revamping investment topography, enriching IT and software segments

and providing incentives for Agri-businesses are some of the prominent facets driving the state's economic engine of growth.

With the recent revision in Industrial Investment Promotion and Incentive scheme (IIPIS) 2012, Tripura has accoutered infrastructural and logistic support, along with capital subsidy being raised from 30 to 35% of the fixed capital investment.

With dismissal of bottlenecks and ease in connectivity between India and Bangladesh, the investment windows have been generously flung open to welcome South Asian

markets. Hassle-free operations have given Bangladesh the confidence to provide accessibility to its seaport at Chittagong and river port at Ashuganj.

Known for pragmatism and circumspect vision, Chief Minister Mr. Manik Sarkar has fueled the state of Tripura with investment beckoning opportunities, specifically for establishing small and medium scale units. The rich reservoir of natural resources like bamboo, rubber, tea and natural gas make the investment pool even more expansive and wide-ranging.



Tripura's Chief Minister Mr. Manik Sarkar

NORTH EAST INDIA'S LARGEST IT HUB OPENS IN TRIPURA

Extolling Tripura's industriousness in Information and Technology sector and its excellence in the endeavor of e-governance, Central government awarded the state with accolades and rewards.

With the potential to generate and boost employment opportunities for its IT schooled individuals, Northeast's largest IT hub was inaugurated in Tripura by its Chief Minister Mr. Manik Sarkar, along with IT and Education Minister Mr. Tapan Chakraborty and Mr. Omkar Rai, Director General of Software Technology Parks of India (STPI).

The decision was rolled out with the enthusiastic vision to encourage

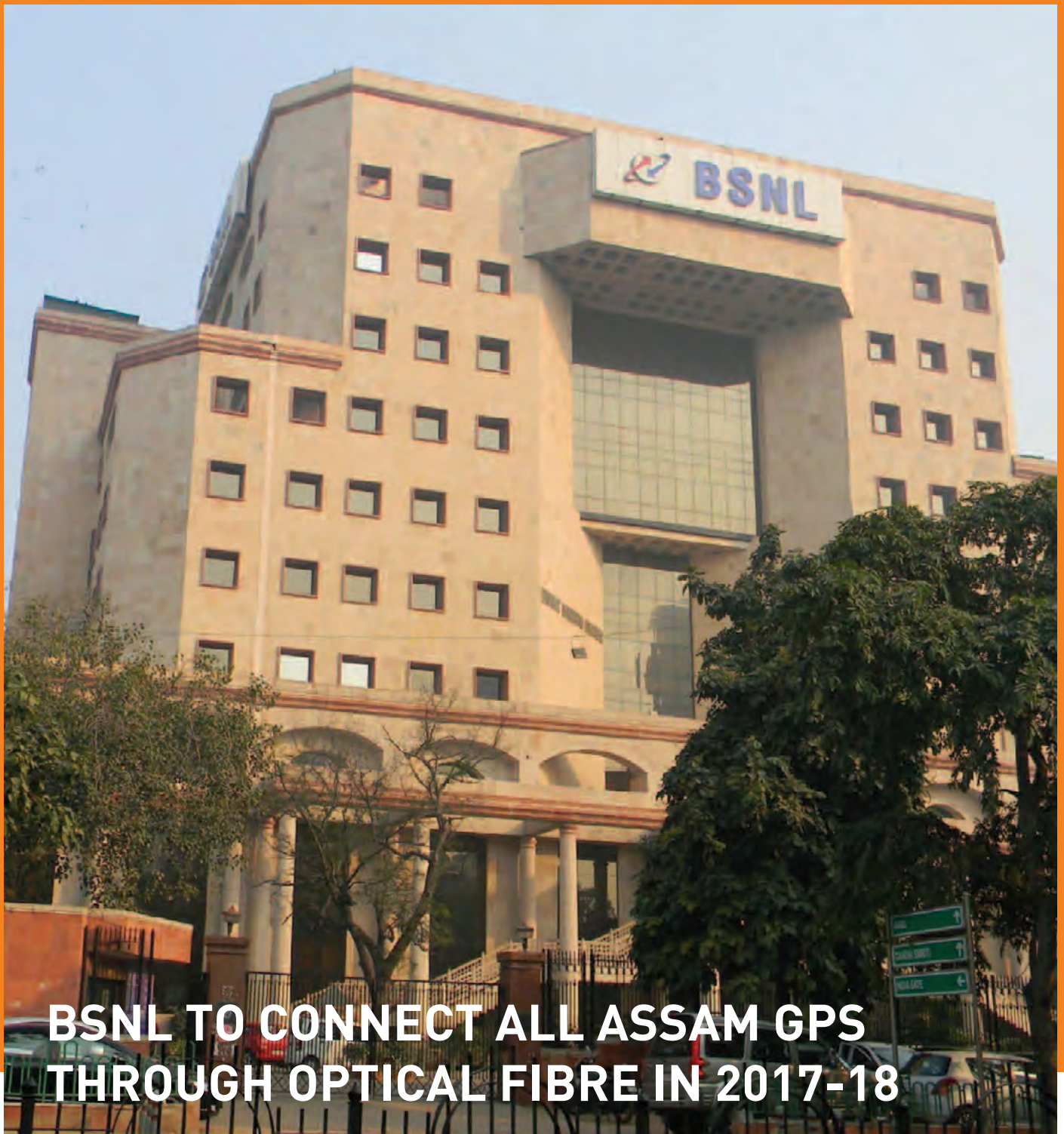
prominent IT companies of India to commence their business; making utmost use of the beneficial services and holistic facilities that sprouted with the establishment of North East India's sixth and largest IT hub, costing 50 crores.

Motivating and inspiring the new age spirit of entrepreneurship; beckoning start-up companies to the new haven of IT hub can be rendered as a positive and promising initiative, underscoring Government of India's ideology of 'Start-up' culture and 'Digital India'.

The effectual impact resulting in the export of software technology and furnishing e-governance

accessibility to the door step of people is also an important aspect being looked forward to and awaits the test of time.

Tripura booming with English skilled IT educated youth and now supplemented with the upcoming IT hub in the North-East, would surely reap benefits from its close proximity with Bangladesh. Capitalizing on its qualified personnel and infrastructural development, Tripura could prove to be an asset for Bangladesh's nascent IT industry, thereby driving economic enhancement for itself by doubling Bangladesh's IT exports by 2017.



BSNL TO CONNECT ALL ASSAM GPS THROUGH OPTICAL FIBRE IN 2017-18

Influx of new digital ventures or giving digital makeover to old and traditional structures, India, subtly yet swiftly is becoming part of a smart culture. The most recent sector to embrace this innovative change is India's most venerable telecom service provider-BSNL.

With the intent to empower rural connectivity and development, optical fiber has been laid in gram panchayats of Assam by BSNL. Easy

accessibility to television, internet and telephone through a single point will enable youth to be academically inclined and become literate in a manner, more direct and digital. Target of one lakh people becoming part of this electronic revolution has been targeted for 2020.

Under the probable plan, about 1500 gram panchayats shall be covered under this scheme; 70 % of the total gram panchayats in the state of

Assam. Along with that multiple Wi-Fi hotspots spanning through the optical fiber route have also been installed.

The whole arrangement is tantamount to elevation of rural conditions for education and business. Trickling down technological know-how to the lowest tier in the society is a mark of growth and development.

NGT IN CONFLICT WITH MEGHALAYA GOVT. OVER COAL MINING



Rampant commercial mining with least adherence to healthy environmental impact has led National Green Tribunal (NGT) to probe into the matter and take strict actions, leading to time bound ban on coal mining activities in the state of Meghalaya.

This intervention by NGT is a result of reckless and unchecked transportation of coal extracts taking place on a massive scale, surpassing the limits imposed by the authorities. In its quest to ensure clean and sustainable environment to the citizens of the country, specifically the wellbeing of the laborers and the inhabitants residing around the coal activities laden areas, NGT has promulgated orders to the state to frame a mining

policy that substantially caters to the protection of the environment.

However, the government of Meghalaya has challenged the ban on the grounds of Constitutional guidelines wherein the 6th schedule gives Meghalaya the choice to seek exemption from central laws due to its tribal status.

If the ban persists, the commercial gains accruing from these unlawful activities would surely get thwarted and arrested. The web of coal mine owners, politicians and the agents benefitting from the rush of money from these coal mines could disarray their settlement and change their dynamics during the time of election.

Meghalaya's river Kopili has been

severely damaged and has exhausted its biological productive strength owing to coal mining. Acidification of its water has hampered its marine life and rendered it unsuitable for human consumption.

Thus, it is imperative to comprehend the urgency that surrounds the issue and be addressed holistically and expediently. Scientific measures and significance of green life needs to be given precedence over illegal, unethical ways of mining and mindless deforestation.

National Green Tribunal operates through this empowering paradigm of clean and green ways, advocating development in a manner more scientific, sustainable and healthy.



India's P.M. Mr. Narendra Modi

PM NARENDRA MODI INAUGURATES INDIA'S LONGEST BRIDGE IN ASSAM

Commemorating the late Assamese music maestro Mr. Bhupen Hazarika while completing 3 years as the Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi instituted India's longest bridge connecting Dhola in Arunachal Pradesh from Sadiya in Assam. This infrastructural splendor is a jewel shining bright, remarking the pride of Seven Sister states.

The bridge would ensure quicker road connectivity and accessibility, mitigating the travel time by 4 long hours. Its three lane construction spans through a length of 9.15km over and above the grandeur of Brahmaputra's tributary river-Lohit. This is a great step assuring productivity in fuel usage, cost efficiency and the possible hydropower projects paving way to economic remunerative gains.

This architectural marvel's strategic importance was a well-planned and prudent endeavor which

commenced in 2011 with the vision to aid the military with facilitate passage to the border areas of China, more smoothly and seamlessly. The structure's strength to endure heavy military tanks and machinery would serve as a huge asset in the coming times.



Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Assam, India

Mr. Modi's interest in uplifting and ameliorating the economic and

social status of the 'Seven Rainbow States' and its citizens can be gauged through his determination to lead this project to its culmination. His efforts involved in integrating the north eastern states to mainstream India deserve appreciation.

Since years, the north eastern states have suffered alienation and non-inclusive treatment from the locals and the officials alike; inviting notions of disunity and disengagement. However, with the inauguration of India's longest bridge; 30% longer than Mumbai's Bandra - Worli sea link, Mr. Modi has embarked upon the path of unity in diversity, more aggressively than ever, with the trumpeting of economic and infrastructural resuscitation of the north eastern states which would act as the microcosm to India's mighty potential to enhance its economic development and GDP growth.

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INDIA'S NEWEST IRIS SPECIES FOUND IN MANIPUR

The popular flower of Manipur, fondly known as Kombirei by the locals of Manipur has been accorded with the 'new species' status-Iris Laevigata Fisch. Until now it had

been mistakenly named as Iris Bakeri wall. Presently, it is declining from its native habitat.

The recent course of its name

recognition and attention stemmed from its pictures being sent to the Royal Botanic Gardens in London where it was categorized as the critically endangered species.



Species like Iris Wattii, Iris Singuinea and Iris Kumaon also inhabit the state of Manipur. However, kombirei germinates from the wetlands of Lamphelpat and Yaralpat outskirting the town of Imphal.

This mauve-blue flower has a flowering period of about 15 days in April every year and annually, it also forms an integral part of the rich tradition of Manipur's New Year celebration as well.

BHUTAN



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KINGDOM OF BHUTAN REMAINS INDIA'S BIGGEST FOREIGN-AID RECIPIENT



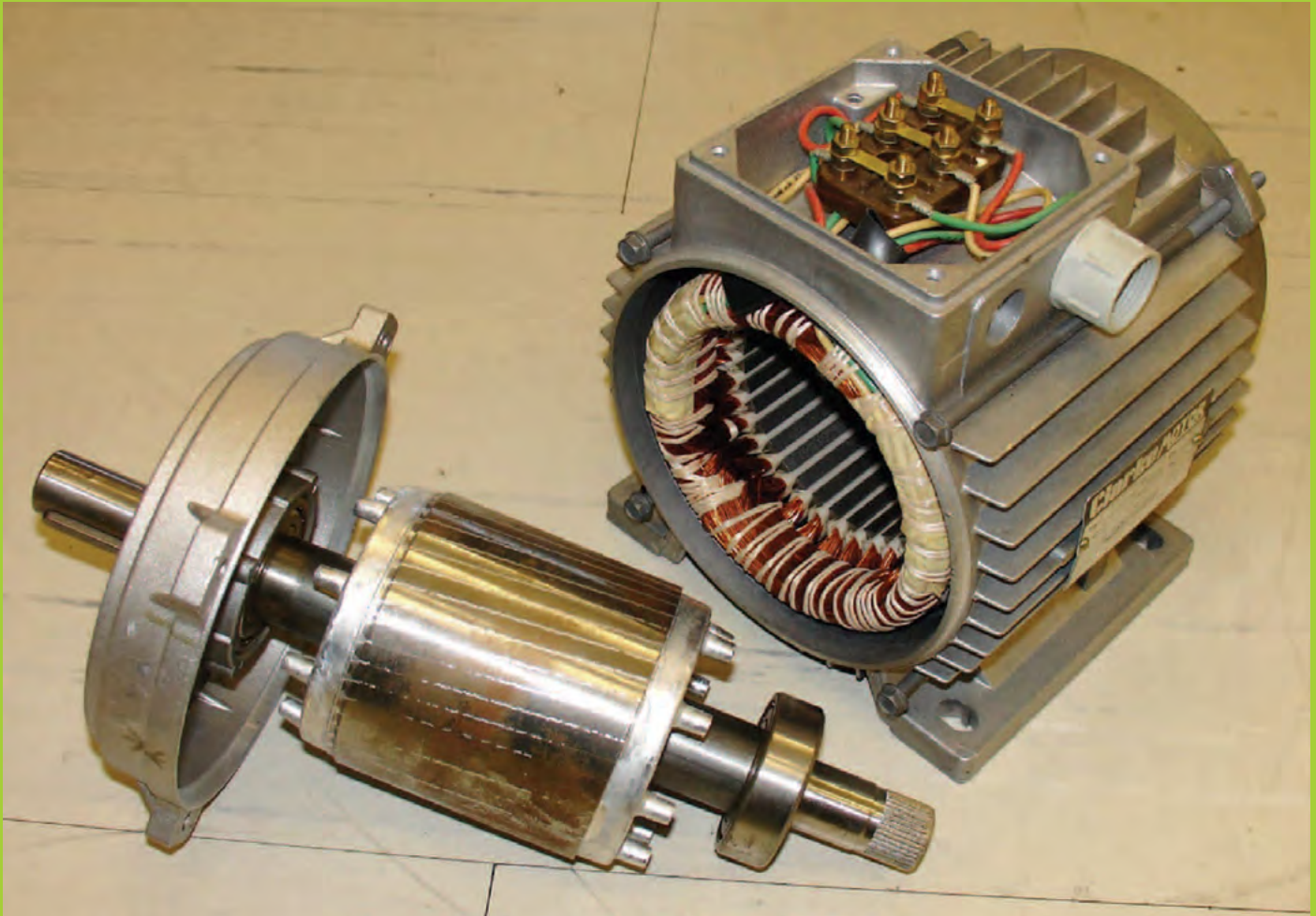
The Kingdom of Bhutan has always had good relations with India. For the last 17 years it has also remained the biggest beneficiary of Indian foreign aid by both amount and share. Bhutan has remained India's unfailing priority because of its strategic location, its dependence on India and its hydropower potential. Besides Bhutan, India provides aid to various other countries not only from this region but from other parts of the world as well. Other countries that India has been providing financial aid to include Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives

and some African countries among others. However, the aid given to other countries by India has fluctuated over the years while in case of Bhutan it has always been constant.

Over the last nine years, Afghanistan has made it to the second spot and has been preferred over Nepal and Bangladesh which have been the traditional recipients. Indian aid to Sri Lanka has seen a lot of fluctuations; it fell 69% year-on-year in the financial year 2016-17, and rose 118% and 166% in 2012-13 and 2009-10 respectively. In the

pre-2007-08 period, Nepal was the second-largest recipient in all years except three, when Bangladesh held that position. Before the financial year 2007-08, the foreign ministry did not even report aid for Afghanistan individually. However, in eight of last 10 years, Afghanistan has held the second spot by share. Bhutan's share has fallen by 10.45 percentage points in the last 17 years as other countries have been eating into its share but yet it has consistently held the first spot.

WIDENING WORKS DISCONNECT TANGSIBJI MINI HYDEL



Tangsibji mini hydel was disconnected on May 30, 2017. This plant lit around 43 houses in Tangsibji village in Trongsa in the 80s. The boulders that were dug out during the East-West highway widening works blocked the water at the intake point in the middle of December 2016. Mr. Karma Leki, Bhutan Power Corporation's (BPC) Division Manager in Trongsa said that he has written to the Department of Roads (DoR) to have the blockade and damages cleared at the earliest as the boulders are huge and cannot be cleared by men.

This hydel power plant being closed does not have much impact on the life of the people in the village. However, Mr. Leki feels that it remaining functional is important as it was a gift to them from Japan and holds sentimental value. The energy that the plant generates is synchronized with the eastern grid. Mr. Phub Dorji, BPC's assistant technician stated that this plant has never broken down before, unlike many other mini hydels in the country. He further said that the engine is in good condition and can resume generation once the block is cleared. This mini Hydel is one of 10

in Bhutan and it generates 37.5 KVA.

Mr. Taugay Choidup, Chief Engineer of DoR in Trongsa, stated that he was unaware that a mini hydel is located below the highway. He further stated that what they were informed is that there is an irrigation channel below and the contractor has left the cutting incomplete at a stretch near Zalamchu fearing disruption to paddy cultivation. The cutting is planned to resume after the village completes paddy cultivation. The mini hydel is located a little above the Tangsibji village and is about 10 minutes walk from the village road.



Bangladesh's Finance Minister Mr. AbulMaal A. Muhith

BANGLADESH HOPES SPEEDIER IMPLEMENTATION OF INDIA-AIDED PROJECTS

Bangladesh is hopeful that the India-assisted developmental projects in the country will be implemented quickly. "The hope has risen after the Indian Government announced a fresh US \$ 4.5 billion aid package", stated Mr. AbulMaal A. Muhith who is the Finance Minister of Bangladesh.

The announcement for this line of concessional credit was announced by India's Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi during Bangladesh's Prime Minister Ms. Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in April 2017. India previously promised financial aid of US \$ 1.5 billion and adding this

new amount it takes the total to US \$ 6 billion. Mr. Muhith said that the implementation of projects under the previous assistance package took longer than expected but he hopes that this time these projects will be implemented quickly.



Indian Finance Minister Mr. Arun Jaitley

The bilateral aid package and projects associated with it were discussed in a bilateral meeting with visiting Indian Finance Minister Mr. Arun Jaitley. This meeting was led by Mr. Muhith and various important issues and topics were discussed in detail. Mr. Muhith said that Bangladesh getting a US \$ 6 billion credit line from India is quite a remarkable event. He further stated that even though the financial aid from China is much more and amounts to US \$ 22 billion but Indian projects are time oriented and implemented quickly while there is no such timeline for Chinese aid. He also expressed his happiness at seeing that Indian private sector investment is now flowing into Bangladesh.



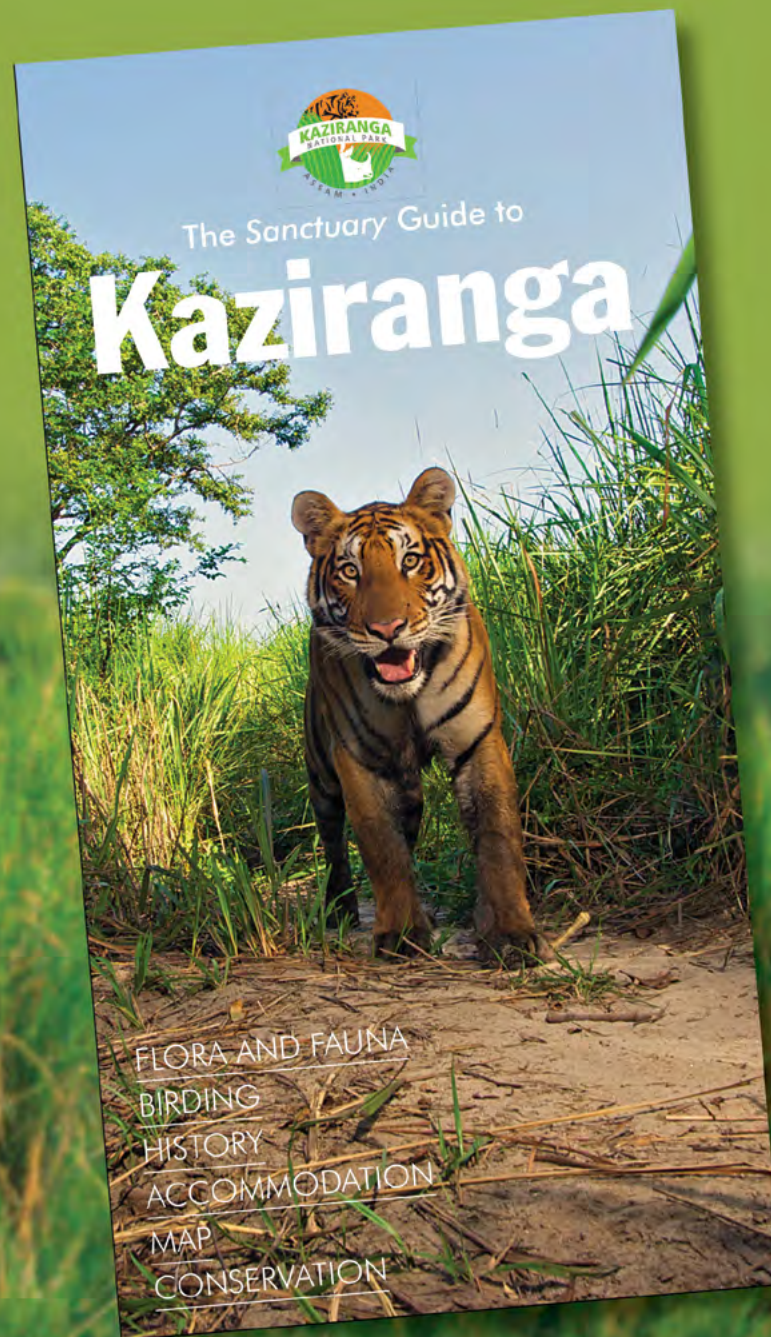
BHEL BAGS RS 10,000 CRORE CONTRACT FROM BANGLADESH

Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) has bagged its largest-ever export order which is valued at Rs. 10,000 crore. This order is for setting up a thermal power project in Bangladesh. The Indian company was able to win this contract in spite of very hard and competitive bidding. The order has been secured from Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company Limited (BIFPCL) which is a 50:50 joint venture between NTPC and Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB). BHEL is India's largest power equipment

manufacturer. The company has arranged debt financing for the project from Exim bank for which loan agreement between Exim bank and BIFPCL was signed in March 2017.

BHEL's scope of work in the project includes design, engineering, manufacture, supply, construction, erection, testing and commissioning of the 1320 MW thermal sets with ultra-supercritical parameters on turnkey basis. It will also set up a jetty and a river-water intake system. The main equipment to be used by

the project will be manufactured at BHEL's Trichy, Haridwar, Hyderabad, Ranipet, Bhopal, Bangalore and Jhansi plants. The responsibility for the construction and installation activities at site will lie upon the company's power sector construction division. BHEL has done some projects in Bangladesh earlier as well which include 100 MW Baghabari Gas Turbine Power Project and 2x120 MW Siddhirganj in Bangladesh. It has also set up 220 KV Baghabari & Ishurdi substations.



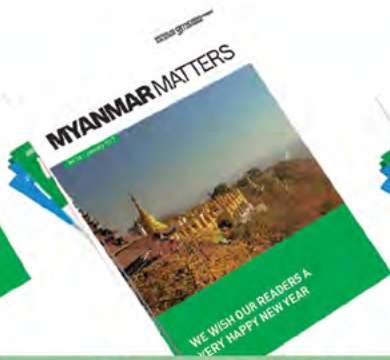
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More Information: <http://baliparafoundation.com/en/blog/kaziranga-national-forest-guidebook>

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