

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUITABLE MODIFICATIONS TO INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY RELATED TO INDO MYANMAR RELATIONS SO AS TO FACILITATE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIA'S NORTH EAST

A seminar was conducted on 17 September 2012, at the ICCR Auditorium, Ho Chi Minh Sarani, Kolkata, on "Indo Myanmar Relations and Development of India's North East" by the Research Centre for Eastern and North Eastern Regional Studies Kolkata (CENERS-K) and the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) and in partnership with Calcutta University and the Maulana Kabul Azad Institute for Asian Studies (MAKAIAS). The event was supported by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Department of North Eastern Affairs, Oil India Limited, ABC India Limited, The Telegraph News Paper and the Indian Armed Forces. A copy of the Brochure containing the Concept Note, Programme and a write up on both CENERS –K and the ICWA; digital copies of the audio recording of the entire seminar and photographs related to the same, are attached to the covering note to these recommendations.

The presentations made in the Seminar covered different dimensions of the subject material. As many as 17 speakers from the region and outside shared their views and had interaction with the participants comprising students, government officials, officers from the Armed Forces, representatives of NGOS, academics and businesses including many from the North East Region.

The Seminar opened with the President of the Research Centre for Eastern and North Eastern Regional Studies Kolkata (CENERS-K), General Shankar Roychowdhury (Retd), PVSM, former Chief of Army Staff and Member of Parliament, giving the keynote Address. In his address he stressed on the strategic importance of both the North Eastern Region (NER) and Myanmar their being the overland gateway to S E Asia and that India's Look East Policy (LEP), which was initially directed towards development of this strategic advantage had failed to address the same despite the ethnic and cultural similarities astride the NER border of the two countries. He pointed out that since the NER was a frontline region against China with the Chinese claiming large portions of it it was imperative that the region be devp on priority. The General also put across a view that India had in the early 90s joined the West in following a policy of isolating Myanmar, consequently, we had lost out to the Chinese strategically and economically who exploited Myanmar's situation. Myanmar in turn also started giving sanctuary and assistance to Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs) much to India's detriment. He brought out that fortunately we modified our foreign policy subsequently to be more pragmatic and by the late 90s started trying to befriend Myanmar and giving the economic and military assistance. The keynote issue stressed by him was that we must learn from the way China was developing Yunnan as an industrial hub for the S E Asian Region and that we must do the same in the NER – he also stressed that there was a tendency to leave Tripura out of deliberations related to Myanmar – this was incorrect as the State had tremendous potential related to the subject.

The major recommendations related to modifications required to Foreign Policy pertaining to Myanmar and for development of the NER that emerged from presentations and the daylong deliberations are given in subsequent paragraphs.

1. India's Indo Myanmar Foreign Policy. India must continue with a pragmatic foreign policy with Myanmar irrespective of the changing political environment – India's

National Interests must at all times be foremost in this policy. Obviously therefore good relations are paramount so that we do not create another unfriendly neighbour bordering the strategic NER. The policy must also be such that there is adequate scope for the NER to benefit from these good relations. The policy must not be reactive to China and should instead factor in India's strengths such as soft power. It must be noted that India is not privileged neighbouring country – it has to compete with all other countries in its efforts to exploit good relations.

2. Take Note of Myanmar's Changing Political Situation. India must take note of the changing political landscape in Myanmar and follow it closely. The military is still a political power to be reckoned with; irrespective of the NLFD and Aung having won some seats in the elections, they are still to show their political strength – in the provinces Regional tribal parties who are by no means allied to NLFD still call the shots – developments related to ethnic minorities need to be taken care of – particularly grant of autonomy to them. With things being in such a state of flux it is important that India plays its cards very carefully whilst taking note of all these aspects – notwithstanding these political uncertainties India must upgrade the scale of her support and investment and people to people contact in Myanmar and her efforts in assisting Myanmar in Nation building.
3. LEP and PM's Vision 2020. Whilst the LEP originally had some of its aims directed towards development of the NER and the PM's vision 2020 document is specifically targeted at development of the NER; there is little doubt that very little has been done towards this end consequent to which the NER people have grave doubts as to whether there is any intention to develop the region and that excuses of a poor security situation are to cover developmental failures. There is an urgent requirement for the Government to put the PM's Vision 2020 into effect quickly, as that will also address the LEP related to the NER and Myanmar.
4. Prioritising Vision Docu. There was a very strong view that no new strategy for development is required, there was simply a requirement to prioritise the development planned in the vision document in consultation with the states and the MHA, MEA, and MOD. This should be done on priority.
5. Law and Order/Insurgency Situation in NER. Notwithstanding the above, it has emerged that the security/insurgency/law and order problems of the entire region require a political solution – in fact many of the security problems had been created due to politics and that there was a lack of political will to resolve the same. It has also emerged that resolution of security problems and development must go hand in hand and that if development is to succeed the issues of security related to extortion, kidnapping, blockades, killing, illegal collection of taxes have to be brought under control. Action in this respect is required to be taken both by the Centre and the States.
6. Security Issues to be Taken Up Strongly With Government of Myanmar. The Government of India must take up strongly with the Government of Myanmar that sanctuary must not be given to insurgents by either country and that Bangladesh/Bhutan type actions must be launched where necessary to liquidate any such presence. Paresh Barua's activities in Myanmar must be stopped – he should be arrested and handed over to the India Government. There are currently about 2500 IIGs taking sanctuary in Myanmar alongwith NSCN (K) camps. India must watch the Cease Fire and grant of Autonomy Agreements that Myanmar has very carefully as these will undoubtedly have repercussions on our side of the border.
7. Military to Military Relations. As part of the effort to improve relations; with the military being so strongly entrenched in Myanmar and the fact that there are insurgency related problems on both sides of the Indo Myanmar Border, it is imperative the the Military to Military relations between the two countries be further improved in terms of visits by senior officers, border meetings to resolve minor problems and build up camaraderie, providing Myanmar Army more training opportunities in India. The

Indian Army must also enhance its efforts to teach adequate personnel Myanmar to facilitate better interaction and the send selected personnel to attend training courses in Myanmar.

8. Issues Related to Handling Ethnic Group Problems on Both Sides of the Border. With both countries having the same ethnic groups and insurgency related problems on both sides of the border, there is a view that both countries will at some stage need to resolve common issues through dialogue – if we are seriously looking at soft borders in J & K perhaps we may need to apply a similar concept to borders with Myanmar in the NER. This facet could be examined by the States, the MHA and the MEA jointly.
9. Development of North East. The North East must look within and concentrate its efforts on problem resolution so as facilitate development on models to be developed by respective States – it must develop itself with or without help related to Indo Myanmar Relations. **Further, NO North Easterner takes kindly to the efforts to develop infrastructure through the NER with a view to transport goods from the rest of India to Myanmar or S E Asia or China. They quite rightly demand that value addition to the primary products be carried out in the NER and then only they be exported to neighbouring countries** – this implies investment and setting up PSUs and the private sector in the NER. They say that if Tatas and Birlas can all invest abroad then why not in the NER. The start point really would be to set up more PSUs in the NER – the private sector would then follow suit. This would progressively lead to a Yunnan type of strategy that has been adopted by China.
10. Trading Points at Moreh and Zowkathar NOT Functional. Both trading points on both sides of the border are as good as non functional as, legal trade is not enforced and adequate facilities as required at such trading points is not available. This must be enforced at the earliest as the illegal trade is many times more than the reported legal trading.
11. New Trading points on the Myanmar Border at Pangsau Pass, Nagaland, Zorenpuii. These must be set up only after the State Governments straighten out the situation at Moreh and Zowkathar. Notwithstanding the above, efforts must also be made to regularise the traditional trading patterns already existing and the Agreement to allow freedom of movement and trade upto at least 20 kms on either side of the border where the security situation permits the same. A more effective system of preventing trade in contraband such drugs, precious stones, timber must be evolved.
12. Stilwell Road. It is still not advocated that this be developed for security reasons of opening up a new front to be defended. In case a route is desired for trade with China at Kunming and Chengdu then the Tezu – Walong – Kibithu – Rima – Chengdu - Kunming route be opened.

Scope for NER to have relations with Myanmar to facilitate development.

13. Cultural Similarity. Exploit it through greater people to people contact, cultural and academic exchanges, creating more awareness and learning on Myanmar including languages.
14. Make NER Strong. Make NER strong – then only trade with Myanmar on Yunnan pattern possible.
15. Exploit NER Advantages. NER deal with Myanmar using following advantages – soft power – language (English) and IT; education - - allow Myanmar students to study in NER and concentrate NE States efforts in setting up top class educational facilities including technical education/vocational training; expertise in NE based agro industries such as tea, medicinal plants/herbs and pharmaceutical industry; horticulture and floricultural – strengthen, develop and export; strengthen service industry in NER and export these facilities.
16. Create and Improve Infrastructure.
 - Imphal Moreh road a disgrace – do up immediately and improve the road on the Myanmar side. Improve alternative routes to those existing including the Silchar –

Bishenpur – Moreh axis, the Mizoram - Tipaimukh – Moreh axis so as to make the trade route difficult to blockade.

- Improve highway to Mizoram to facilitate its use upto Zawkathar – get Myanmar Govt do up the Road to Rhi and Tiddim and if they have difficulty – do it for them.
 - Improve NH link from Tripura to Mizoram to facilitate Tripura and Assam to use this axis also.
 - Develop Road route through Nagaland to Myanmar via Avakhung Pansat to be used by Nagaland, Assam and Arunachal.
 - Develop Road Route along Kaladan to Sitwe as the multi mode transport system will be difficult to implement due to the hydro projects coming up on the Kaladan and also as transshipment is always a difficult proposition.
 - Extend railway line from Manu in Tripura to Mizoram and then through Mizoram foothills to Sitwe.
 - Build railway line from Silchar to Moreh via Bishenpur and then into Myanmar to connect onto their network.
 - Improve air connectivity by constructing airfields and helipads in the interior of Nagaland, Mizoram (near Champhai/ further South), improving airfields in Arunachal, Manipur and Assam.
 - The above can only be achieved if capacity of cement production is increased exponentially by setting up more cement factories; setting up steel mills for steel production for bridge and railway and airfield construction, setting up heavy vehicle plants all of which will initially will have to be in PSU domain.
17. Hill States to take Small Steps to Improve Trade with Myanmar. Set up small scale power and hydro plants near border to provide electricity on both sides; handicrafts; sports; education – provide schooling and medical treatment. Give NEC and DONER and the states money for development; set up monitoring mechanism to ensure money meant for a job is used for same purpose. Assist in developing oil and mineral resources in states.
18. Ensure strong Navy and shipping resources to feed the NER via the Sitwe rout and ensure security SLOC.
19. Incentives for Export and Entrepreneurship from NER. Give adequate incentives to entrepreneurs and exporters from the NER. (Request of President FINER Mr R S Joshi attached) NE entrepreneurs should enter into joint ventures with Myanmar Businessmen.

The seminar concluded with a closing address by My Rajiv Bhatia, DG ICWA who thanked all present for making the seminar a success and for their enthusiastic participation. The DG stressed on the fact that the NER must not be dependant on Myanmar for development but must do so on its own strengths and accord and that Indo Myanmar relations must always follow a pragmatic course tailored to India's strengths and National Interests.

The seminar concluded with a vote of thanks to all concerned.