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## Used of hill tracks and anti-social activities in Northeast India–A Indo-Burma border perspective

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### Abstract

*Hill passes on Northeast India had immense importance for its strategic and cartographic location. These hill tracks connect Northeast India with east, southeast and west. With Burma and China the contact were maintained through several hill tracks lying between India-Burma borders at Himalayan Ranges. These hill passes were used by groups of people for their movement on either sides from early past and it bears both, social and anti-social elements to this region. It had a great importance from the point of cultural intercourse, immigration, frontier war etc. The region had the experiences of World War and the inhabitants had the experience of guerrilla war fare, taught from the Allied power. At present Kachin is most important training ground for the outfit groups of the Northeastern region. They had taken training in lieu of money. Kachins are traded arms, earlier which were left by the Allied powers in dense areas of Burma after the end of war and at present bought from neighbouring nations. The Kachin area is an important site for drug also, and smuggled it. Thus this paper high lightings these anti-social issues which are in-filtered to the region through hill tracks.*

**KEY WORDS:** Hill track, Anti-social activities, Northeast India, Indo-Burma border

### INTRODUCTION

The Northeastern part of India has been a great cross roads, its valley and passes being witness to centuries of migration as tribal communities have moved to seek new homes in response to populous lowlands pressing on the uplands in the region bordering by Yangtze-Mekong-Salween in the east of Ganga-Brahmaputra to the west. The ethnographic mapping of these movements is of considerable interest and their latter-day geo-political fallout remains a fact of life. It is strategically located and being projected as India's gateway of commerce to the East and Southeast Asia. Even historically, it was always a part of large, dynamic Brahmaputra-Yangtze-Mekong economic region. In today's liberalized and Global Era, the geographical location of Assam (presently NE region) offers a position at strength that can help the state to rejoin its past glory by integrating more closely with the national economy and opening up to the dynamic economics of the East and Southern Asia and beyond. South-East Asia is a continuously growing formidable region having the best potential emerging markets with 220 million households. Due to the high rate of growth, the ASEAN country markets are expanding and there is a massive rise in consumer demand. North east thus has the potential to charge as the strategic base for foreign and domestic investors to tap the vast potential of contiguous market of Myanmar, China including Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia and other East and South-east Asian countries, which constitute nearly half the world population. Such changes certainly would transform Assam as well as the entire Northeast into one of the fastest growing economic regions in the world. In such an environment the forces

behind insurgency in the Northeast bound to be inoperative. “In growing economics especially, a wide range of solutions may be available for constructive bargainers.”

Though there are some projection of prospects the hill tracks of Indo-Burma border has transmitting some problems into this Northeast India, which would harm the people of Northeast India more. The states have already burdened with some burnt problems like illegal migration, insurgency, arms & drugs smuggling, human trafficking, prostitution/AIDS etc are fueled through use of these hill tracks for anti-social means. Some of those problems are discussed as follows-

#### **SMUGGLING OF DRUGS:**

The links with China and Burma falls in the infamous Golden Triangle, one of the two largest opium producing regions in the world. The International Narcotics Control Bureau (INCB), in a global report, has said that more than 70% of the amphetamines available worldwide are produced in countries around the Golden Triangle, particularly Burma. The INCB report ranks Burma as second to Afghanistan in opium production, but this position could well change in a year or two. It says international pressure compelled Burma's military rulers to undertake tough anti-drug measures that led to a 40 to 50% fall in Burma's opium production from the peak of around 2500 tonnes in 1996 to around 1700 tonnes in 2001 after a ten-fold increase in between 1976 and 1996. Between 1985 and 1995, Burma's heroin output rose from 54 tonnes to 166 tonnes. What is more worrying about the 'Golden Triangle' is the eight-times rise in the production of amphetamines from an estimated 100 million tablets in 1993 to 800 million tablets in 2002.

Two important developments have taken place in the 'Golden Triangle' that augurs ill for India: First, traditional druglords like Khun Sa have been eclipsed by ethnic rebel armies like the United Wa State Army in the Triangle. The Wa formed the bulk of the fighting force of the Burmese Communist Party until they revolted against the Burmese commissars in the late 1980s. The once strong BCP just withered away and its Wa fighters took to drugs. Now, the UWSA monopolises the amphetamine output to the extent that a Time magazine cover described the Wa as the 'speed tribe'.

Second, the Wa monopoly over amphetamines has forced traditional drug lords like Khun Sa to reinforce their control over the heroin output. Khun Sa has tried to establish monopoly on the heroin export routes to Laos and Thailand from the Golden Triangle. Three years ago, he imposed a hefty 60% 'profit tax' on smaller cartels, forcing at least three of them to relocate their drug refineries to the borders with India's Northeast and China's Yunnan province. These three cartels – headed by Zhang Zhi Ming (former BCP officer), Lo-Hsin Nian and the Wei brothers – have between 14 to 18 refineries in western Burma, mostly in the Sagaing division and the Chin Hills but some as far low down as the Arakans.

#### **SMUGGLING OF ARMS:**

Along with drugs trafficking arms proliferation are interlinked for many reasons. Most important of which are need for security and the need for new markets. The drug traffickers for their protection to move the bulk of the contraband items from one place to another build a group of arm holding personals of their own. For profit motive of the drug lords through new markets is another reason for arms proliferation. Arms also brought by criminal gangs that engage in activities that range from simple theft to extortion.

The linkage between arms and politics has remained under wraps while the nexus between arms and insurgency, arms and drugs and arms and terrorism were given prominence. Recent activities of politics and politicians have directly or indirectly supported the arms hauling activities of various persons. Huge profit in arms trade has lured individuals into business of arms trade. In Northeast India, the genesis of proliferation of sophisticated arms is historically rooted in its multitude of ethnic insurgencies and militant sub-national movements. Rise of insurgency and proliferation of small arms in this region have been largely assisted by its geo-political contiguity to Myanmar and Southeast Asia. Various insurgency groups have traditionally forged and maintained ties with Myanmar and China, who are providing training and weapons and access to the clandestine market in Southeast Asia.

Favorable region for insurgency activities Northeast frontier areas India is a destination for proliferation of illegal arms and light weapons. Most of the contrabanded weapons which flow into the Northeast India originated in Cambodia which has a surplus of such weapons. Weapons have also been acquired from East European countries after disintegration of 'East Bloc' by South East Asian arms cartels and routed to the small islands of the Thai coast from where contrabanded arms are shipped through Andaman sea and landed at Cox's Bazaar. From Cox's Bazaar, the arms are carried in smaller caches to various decimation in Myanmar and Northeast India through the Arakans, Eastern Naga and Patkai Hills.

#### INPUTS TO INSURGENCY:

More recently when questions of affinity and identity triggered off the Naga, Mizo and Meiti movements from affirmation of separateness from the non-Mongolian communities that dominate the Indian subcontinent, the jungle from Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh across seven other nations – Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Kampuchea, Malaysia and Vietnam – provided help.

#### NAGAS:

Phizo, the legendary chief of the Naga underground movement maintained that the Nagas were not an Indian or sub-continental community and that their roots lay Southeast Asia and beyond. For the Nagas the China front was opened by Phizo's trusted secretary, Muivah who intimated the Kachin connection in Northwest Myanmar. In 1966 Muivah was sent to the Kachin Hill Tracts to establish indenture with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) on 24 October and, after trekking through Sagaing division and Kachin State in northern Burma, they reached the Chinese frontier on 27 January 1967. The political leader of the 132-man strong group was Thuingaleng Muivah, and the military commander General Thinoselie M. Keyho. Thinoselie left China in November 1967 and reached Nagaland two months later. Muivah remained in Beijing as the unofficial representative of the Naga National Council (NNC) and its "Federal Government of Nagaland" until November 1970. He returned to Nagaland in December 1971 after spending a year in Kachin State. The Naga soldiers received military and political training Tengchong, and returned with modern, Chinese-made assault rifles, machine-guns and rocket launchers.

Isak Chishi Swu of the NNC's political leadership and General Mowu Gwizan from the Naga army led the second Naga mission to China. They left along with 330 men in December 1967 and reached China in March 1968. They also trained and equipped at Tengchong. Ngasating Shimray and Lieut-Col. Taka with 100 men left Nagaland in January 1968 and reached the headquarters of the 6th Battalion of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in western Kachin State in February. The KIA refused to let them proceed; the Nagas were disarmed by the Kachins and sent back to Nagaland.

Major Vesai and Jonathan led a 275-man contingent (which also included Lieutenant-General Dusoi, a prominent Naga rebel leader) that left for China in February 1968. On their way through northern Sagaing division in Burma, they were ambushed by the Burmese army. Many Naga rebels from India were also killed by hostile Burmese Nagas (eastern Konyaks). The survivors, 76 men including Dusoi, were captured by Burmese government troops on 18 June 1968. S. Angam and Brigadier Koshang left in March 1968 with 150 men. They were ambushed by the Burmese army while attempting to cross the Chindwin River in northern Sagaing division. Angam and three of his men were captured alive; the rest retreated to Nagaland.

General Thungti and 200 of his men left later in 1968. They reached Chindwin, but had to return since the Kachins beyond the river were unwilling to escort them any further. Lieutenant General Thinoselie M. Keyho, who had returned to Nagaland in January 1968, went to China by air from then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1969. He was accompanied by Brigadier Neidelie. In Beijing they met Muivah before returning to Dhaka in November 1970. East Pakistan remained a major foreign base for the Nagas until the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Major Vedayi Moire left with 58 men in December 1971 to receive Muivah, who was on his way from China. They missed him, however, and Moire and his men continued to China. They returned to Nagaland in 1973.

Muivah left for a second mission to China in September 1974, escorted by 130 men. Isak Chishi Swu and 146 Naga rebels followed on 15 December. Only 11 men from Isak's group made it to China. They reached Tengchong in Yunnan on 14 August 1975, and stayed there until November 1975. They were back in Nagaland in February 1976. This was the last contingent of Nagas that received arms and ammunition from the Chinese. "The Lhasa 27" became the nickname for a group of young Nagas who reached Lhasa via Nepal in September 1976. They remained in Tibet until March-April 1977, when they started to trickle back into India again. Several of them were apprehended by the Indian police on their way back. Although they did attend some political seminars in Lhasa, they were given no support or military training. Muivah and 200 of his men left for China a third time in October 1976. They reached China in March 1977. Colonel Ashiho with 100 men caught up with them at the general headquarters of the KIA near the Yunnan frontier. This was Muivah's last mission to China, and although he was allowed to stay in China for almost a year, he was told that no more aid would be forthcoming from the Chinese. He left China in November and reached Nagaland in February 1978. The Naga rebel movement split shortly afterwards. Colonel Abam Shimray and S. Angam left in September 1977 as leaders of a 140-man strong contingent (mostly Tangkhul Nagas from Manipur), but they were turned back at the 2nd Brigade headquarters of the KIA. Abam Shimray died in Kachin State. Ten stragglers, including Angam, remained at the 2nd Brigade headquarters until Muivah



### **MIZOS:**

Inspired by the Nagas, the Mizo National Front (MNF) also began to send groups of soldiers and political cadres to China in the early seventies. Damkhosiaka and 38 of his men left Mizoram in 1972 and reached China early the following year. They received military training in China at Kotong post opposite Panwa Pass, on the Yunnan frontier with Burma's Kachin State. A second delegation left its hideout in Burma's Arakan State (opposite Mizoram) in November 1974, returned to Mizoram to collect more recruits, and then set off for China on 20 January 1975. They trekked through northern Burma for seven months, reaching China in August. The leader of the group was a Mizo commander called Biakvela, and his 108 soldiers received military training in Meng Hai, Xishuangbanna (Sipsongpanna), in southern Yunnan. They left China on 4 January 1976 and returned via Kachin state to Mizoram. The MNF overlord, Laldenga, his foreign secretary, Lalhi-ningthanga, and a few others also visited China, including Beijing, but they went by air from Bangladesh and did not trek through the jungle.

### **MANIPURIS:**

In April 1976, 16-18 Manipuri militants went to Tibet via Nepal. They received political training, and some military instruction, in Lhasa. They returned to Manipur in 1979, where they became known as ohjas (master or teacher in the Meitei language). The People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur was formed, and later the "army" also set up a political wing, the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF). On their return, they launched a number of attacks in the Imphal valley, but the Indian authorities managed to capture several of the ohjas including their overall leader, Bisheswar Singh. The acting chairman of the RPF, Soibam Temba Singh, left for Kachin State in 1983. The Kachins promised him training and equipment so he returned to Manipur to collect his followers. Subsequently, 87 PLA activists received training by the KIA in Kachin State. The KIA agreed to arm them as well, but when they were about to leave for Manipur, a split occurred. Temba was ousted and remained at Kachin headquarters at Pa Jau, near the Yunnan frontier. In the end, only 51 PLA soldiers, led by Dina, returned to Manipur. Another 50 RPF/PLA cadres arrived in the Kachin area in July 1986, led by Manikanta (aka Laiba). About a dozen of them defected to the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in late 1986. They are now staying at Panwa Pass with Ting Ying's group of CPB mutineers. All Manipuri insurgents were told to leave the KIA area in 1991; the majority went back to Manipur while some remain behind in Ting Ying's former CPB area in Kachin State. The United National Liberation Front (UNLF), another Manipuri rebel group, sent their chairman, Sanayaima Manipuri, to Kachin State in 1985, to unite with the RPF/PLA. That failed, however, and he returned to Manipur in early 1986. Both the RPF/PLA and the UNLF tried to contact the Chinese authorities in Yunnan, but were unsuccessful. However, sources have suggested that RPF/PLA cadres have been used for intelligence purposes by the Chinese, through the KIA until 1991, and, perhaps more importantly, through the former CPB.

### **ASSAMESE:**

Besides the Naga, Manipuri and Mizo groups who have used this corridor, even the Assamese from the United Liberation Front of Assam, have found this convenient route. The United Liberation Front of Asom [Assam] (ULFA) sent delegations to Kachin State in 1986 and 1987. Their chairman, Arabindra Rajkhowa, remained at Pa Jau for more than a year, and his men received training from the KIA. China's attitude is uncertain; some reports suggest that they were discreetly debriefed by Chinese intermediaries about the situation in India's north-east. But there is little evidence to support the suggestion that the Chinese gave them any assistance. However, the ULFA (like the UNLF, the NSCN and the RPF before them) tried to buy arms on the black market in Yunnan. It is uncertain whether this was successful; most ULFA weapons seem to have been obtained from Pakistan (the Afghan border) and, possibly, through contacts in Bangladesh. All ULFA activists were ordered out of the KIA held areas in Kachin State in 1991.

### **CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion it would like to say that the Indo-Burma hill tracks and its adjoining areas is an important episode of the economic, cartographic and strategic history of eastern frontier of India. The hill tracks had used for military economic and cultural purposes, for which a road was build in later period in the mid of 18th century. The road has a prosperous past and potential future. If the potentialities are properly utilized the region must be a developed one in the history of mankind. Cooper and Lybrand, one internationally recognized firm said that North-east will be become a developed region than Singapore within twenty years if its tourism prospects fully utilised. For the development of the region the local entrepreneurs must hold

the key instead of outsiders. Otherwise the road will be a transit path and the areas will be a transit point without any benefits. If the key goes to the foreigners and the local people will not be aware then the area will be dumping by outsider communities and the region suffers must. To establish some beneficial projects local youths should come forward and start to set their dreams to reality by establishing farms like food processing, horticulture, floriculture, tourism, craft Industry etc. which are continuing in the neighbouring countries like China. If the problems mentioned above would be resolved with proper measure the region would be economically prosperous one. According to Nehru, “Assam has the look of great reserve of strength and potential power. .... I have no doubt that great highways by road, air and rail will go across her connecting China with India, and ultimately connecting East Asia with Europe, Assam will then no longer be an isolated far away province by an important link between the East and West.”

Recently Govt. of India is attaching top priority in opening all traditional trade routes between the North-eastern states of India and the neighbouring countries to encourage trade and commerce leading to economic development of the region. Recent diplomatic developments hinted at the major policy shift and expressed that “The North-eastern states have to have an access eastward. Opening up of the natural outlet for the north-east is a challenge and have to achieve it. The natural movement of goods, people and services from northeast is not through Calcutta”- which is a hope for the region and will be a good treat for the anti-social elements, whom used the hill tracks for their purposes.

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