

## **Siliguri: A Geopolitical Manoeuvre Corridor in the Eastern Himalayan Region for China and India**

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### **Abstract**

Siliguri Corridor being part of Indian West Bengal is a diplomatic manoeuvre place located between Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India's Seven Sister States and Chumbi Hills in the Eastern Himalayan Region. Being located at the crossroads and centrally situated between all the neighbouring countries the landlocked Siliguri has an especially economic and political value for the regional countries. The corridor being in close proximity to China and India's Seven Sister States has added to the diplomatic mosaic of the Eastern Himalayan Region. The region consists of beautiful landscape, mountains and rivers which not only add to topographical diversity but also demographic mixture. Despite its geopolitical significance the area could not advance for not only being a northeastern border region but also for being a gateway to the Seven Sister States. Peripheral development of Siliguri Corridor is one of the reasons for illegal practices like smuggling and terrorism. In year 2002 Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh discussed a proposal to form a

free trade corridor to simplify the goods transportation through Siliguri Corridor but no such pact could be concluded that would have avoided the activities like smuggling and terrorism mainly through economic and diplomatic ventures.

**Keywords:** *India, Eastern Himalaya, China, “string of pearls”, corridor, economy, diplomacy, landlocked states, cultural mosaic*

**JEL classification:** *F51, F52, F59, O19*

## **1. Introduction**

Siliguri Corridor being part of Indian West Bengal is located between Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India's Seven Sister States and Chumbi Hills in the Eastern Himalayan region. It has been observed that despite being a political and diplomatic manoeuvre place Siliguri has not developed pragmatically. The corridor can be used by landlocked countries like Nepal and Bhutan to have the shortest access to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea for prudent trade opportunities through India and Bangladesh in a realistic manner. However despite an effort made in 2002 wherein India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh deliberated about a plan to establish a free trade zone this could not be done mainly because of Indian concerns about its vulnerability against the independence movements in its northeastern states (Panda, 2013). The corridor has emerged as a centre point for likely illegal passage between Bengali insurgents, Nepali Maoist insurgents and northeastern Indian rebels (Biswas, 2014). Siliguri is believed to be emerging as a safe haven for Indian rebels and other insurgents, which not only impedes the social and economic development but also diminishes the regional political stability. Partial political and economic stability in the corridor has

enhanced the illegal practices like smuggling. The combination of insurgencies with poverty and unstable political situation can lead to even more dangerous scenario for the entire Eastern Himalayan Region including India. Social and economic stability in the region in general and Siliguri Corridor in particular can improve the regional diplomatic situation for the entire region with special reference to India. It is the need of the hour that Siliguri Corridor should be used as a vital developmental opportunity by all the countries for regional peace, stability and prosperity.

## **2. Demography**

Siliguri is located in the foothills of the Himalaya Range and is one of the biggest cities in Western Bengal which connects the hill town with rest of India. River Mahanadi divides Siliguri City into two halves. The city is bounded by jungles with noticeable wild life and many other natural features like rivers and mountain. The corridor is a narrow strip of land which links mainland India with the Seven Sister States. Being unique and too narrow it is only 10 km away from Nepal and 40 km from Bhutan and Bangladesh just adjacent to it. The corridor is also close to China through Chumbi Valley. Siliguri is designated as an entrance not only for Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh but also for the Seven Sister States through Assam. Being centrally located Siliguri City is a logistics base for the region and thus is an attraction for all. Siliguri provides business activities for diverse stakeholders. Hong Kong Market near Khudirampally is a main hub for purchase of Chinese and other imported goods. Being part of high-altitude Himalaya Range, climate remains cold most of the year ranging from 7 to -9 degree Celsius from December to January. In the summer season from May to June temperature seldom crosses 35 degree Celsius. The climate is much

suitable for tea plantation and the corridor is bounded by tea gardens. The city is in vicinity of many fault lines which cause most of the earthquakes. The highest level of recorded earthquake was measured in 1988 up to 9.7 on the Richter scale. It is interesting to note that the earthquake which occurred in 2011 lasted for a noticeable period of four minutes and seventeen seconds.

Siliguri, which means a pile of pebbles, has been a transit spot between Darjeeling and Karseong since the conclusion of “Treaty of Siliguri” between British India and Nepal in 1816. South of Siliguri, Phansideoa was a port which had agreement with Maldah, thereby with other areas of Bengal and Bihar. The Sikkimese and Bhutanese have been using the Mahanadi to transport their merchandise to Phansideoa Port since the eighteenth century. Siliguri progressively established into a small town once the British occupied Darjeeling in 1835. In 1947, the partition of India and the emergence of East Pakistan flagged the pathway of Siliguri becoming a significant transit spot and strategically imperative area which led to rise of immigrant population mainly from erstwhile East Bengal, Nepal, Bhutan, Seven Sister States, Bihar and Jharkhand in search of livelihood. The significance of area was enhanced further once British East India Company established a railway line to Northeast India that continuously increased the number of immigrants from Nepal, Bhutan and the Seven Sister States while the number of the original residents of Siliguri City; the Rajbangshis, were decreasing on a daily basis.

As per the records of 2011 the population of Siliguri city comprised of 705,579 individuals with 51 per cent being male population. The majority of Siliguri’s population is Bengali; other chief minorities include Gorkhas, Biharis and Mawaris speaking mainly Bengali, Hindi, English and Nepali languages. However, the locals of Siliguri speak Tibetan languages. Mosaic of religious celebrations including Durga

Puja, Chhath Puja, Laxmi Puja, Saraswati Puja and Dipwali are celebrated with religious fervor. Baishaki and Hostoshilpo Melas are the most popular ones. Siliguri provides educational facility to students from West Bengal, Sikkim, Bihar, and Assam and the bordering countries of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. The permanent presence of the Indian Army, Border Security Forces and other law enforcing agencies is keeping up the peace in the region due to which the local economy is improving. However, better political and diplomatic environment based on economy and trust can add stability to peace for the entire Eastern Himalayan Region. As a sign of regional co-operation the Siliguri road network is being used by countries including Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan for passage of vital commodities together with food grains. Apart from road network, Siliguri is also linked with mainland India through rail link which was initially established by British East India Company in 1880 and through Bagdogra Airport.

### **3. Regional Geopolitical Scenario**

Being centrally located within four countries, providing a linkage between Nepal, Bhutan, India's Seven Sister States and mainland India, and being a center for Eastern Himalayan Region's economic activities, the Siliguri Corridor has a regional geo-strategic value. However, facets like political unrest in the Seven Sister States region (Bhaumik, 2007: 5) and extra regional interests of neighbouring countries like Nepal and Bhutan are hindering socioeconomic development (Jha, 2013). The diplomatic twists and turns between the countries of the Eastern Himalayan Region and the ethnic diversity including variety of religions with almost equal numbers of followers are further affecting the regional geopolitical scenario. The number of insurgencies including those involving the Nepali Maoists and rebels from the northeastern Indian

states are point of concern for New Delhi which certainly justifies India's cautious approach towards sociopolitical development in the Eastern Himalayan Region. New Delhi is trying to control these insurgencies by mainly relying upon the use of force and has adopted a national security approach by maintaining a heavy force in the Siliguri Corridor. The Indian Army, Assam Rifles, Border Security Force and West Bengal Police are all guarding the entire corridor (Panda, 2013). Insurgencies are a menace for sociopolitical development and have to be fought pragmatically with a multi-dimensional tactic including the combination of economic development and friendly policy apart from the use of force for prudent efforts and results. In order to understand the geopolitical situation of the Siliguri Corridor it will be vital to discuss the dynamics of countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India and Nepal with a view to find solutions for sociopolitical stability in the Eastern Himalayan Region and extend it to the warm water of the Arabian Sea for enhancing the blue diplomacy.

### ***3.1. Indian Dynamics and the China Factor***

Axiomatically India is the main stakeholder in the Siliguri Corridor as compared to Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Although the Indian government is putting in efforts for the social and economic development of the corridor, it is doing so under a cautious approach to avoid any influence of freedom fighters from its northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram (Bhaumik, 2007: 18). Maoist rebellion in India since 1967 from the town of Naxalbari by those known as Naxalites have affected seven more Indian states of Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Orissa, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh (*ibid.*: 23). Such growing insurgencies in India's northeastern region are restricting any

potent activities of social and economic development not only in the Siliguri Corridor but have already spread to over 40 per cent of India (Ismi, 2013). Like most parts of India where approximately 75 per cent the populace is living in poverty and in comparison only 5 per cent of Indians are in possession of 38 per cent of its entire assets, Siliguri Corridor is no exception where only a very few companies are accumulating wealth while the rest of the populace have to resort to illegal activities like smuggling etc. to earn their livelihood (Biswas, 2014).

The North Eastern Freedom Movement which started as early as 1927 which was based on religion and ideology is still causing ethnic and religious crisis in India. One of the incidents is where in May 2013 Maoist rebels in Chattisgarh killed nearly the complete headship of the Congress Party by massacring twenty-eight of its members during an ambush in a state which was being ruled by the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (Harper, 2014). Apart from peace and stability, mixed ethnicity of the corridor is yet another concern for India. Presently the Bangladeshi Muslims are the majority in the corridor. Apart from an ethnic issue, this is also presenting a political issue for India.<sup>1</sup> Any socioeconomic development in Bangladesh through the Siliguri Corridor will be at the Indian coast as Bangladesh being a littoral State, unlike Nepal, Bhutan and the Indian Seven Sisters States, is not dependent on India to reach out to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea. Apart from the various unsettled land border issues between India and Bangladesh, the South Tilpati Island issue in the Indian Ocean is also affecting the diplomatic relations between both of these neighbouring countries (Uddin, 2009: 28). Bangladesh's just and rightful effort to buy a submarine from China can also increase the wedge (Gupta, 2013).

Maoist and North Eastern Freedom movements mainly in India's north and northeast are emerging as snags for sociopolitical development

in India. However, the Indian government is doing its best to overcome these problems but relying mainly on force has not proved as a prudent solution. Sociopolitical development through economic initiatives and confidence-building measures to include sharing of some seats in parliament will be more suitable to fight the menace of insurgencies. If not addressed pragmatically in time these freedom movements can link up with the Kashmir Freedom struggle, further augmenting the Indian politico-diplomatic complications. Pragmatic and focused socioeconomic development of the corridor can provide opportunities for the deprived people and bring them into the main national development grid which will prove to be good for India,

Bhutan is a landlocked country located on the Himalaya Ranges and is situated between China and India. Since the inception of Bhutan and India, Bhutan is economically and diplomatically dependent on India. Apart from the topographic, Bhutan and India have religious and cultural differences. However, Siliguri is one such opportunity which can improve and strengthen the friendly relations between both. Hence, India being at the giving end should allow more economic and cultural access to Bhutan. Bhutan can expand its trade in the Indian Ocean through the Siliguri Corridor. It seems that India is apprehensive due to emerging ties between Bhutan and China wherein China and Bhutan both are resolving their territorial issues mutually. The Tibetan territory called Chumbi valley is close to Siliguri, and any Chinese armed initiative of about 130 km can cut off Bhutan, portion of West Bengal and all the northeast Indian states including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram with nearly 50 million of populace. Any land linkage between China and Myanmar can serve a prudent economic and diplomatic opportunity for Bhutan and the deprived Indian citizens of the Seven Sister States due to which Indian may lose a trusted and a dependent friend like Bhutan.

Nepal is again a landlocked country located on the Himalaya Ranges and is situated between China and India. Like Bhutan it is also dependent on India for its trade. Nepal's orientation towards China is a point of concern for India. The relationship between India and Nepal is now cautious due to the Maoist issue, wherein India highlighted that Maoists are supporting its North Eastern Freedom Movements (Bhaumik, 2007: 32). The recent road accesses provided to Nepal by China can fetch more opportunities for Nepal which is likely to reduce its dependency on India (Jha, 2013).

China is an emerging global economic power with friendly relations with most Asian nations except India mainly because of Indian aspirations to support the U.S. against China in the Indian Ocean region as most of energy supplies pass through it (Zeb, 2003-04: 48). India also feels being isolated due the Chinese manoeuvre in the form of the "string of pearls" strategy with which Beijing is securing ports in the Indian Ocean to make its sea lines of communication safe.<sup>2</sup> Apart from the blue diplomacy in the Indian Ocean, Beijing and New Delhi have territorial disputes in the Indian northern highland of the Himalayas. India being at the giving end should understand the limitation of Bhutan, Nepal and the Seven Sister States. It should also make use of globalization pragmatically.

### ***3.2. Dimensions for Bangladesh amidst Increasing Chinese Influence***

Bangladesh is a Muslim country with a population of about 180 million. Bengali-speakers constitute 98 per cent of the total populace, while other racial clusters consist of Khasi, Meitei, Chakma, Santhals, Garo, Oraons, Biharis, Mundas and Rohingyas. These communities are mostly residing in the hill tracts of Chittagong and nearby Rajshahi, Sylhet and Mymensingh. Hindus constitute about 10 per cent of Bangladesh's

population and are residing in all parts of the country with maximum concentration in the areas of Khulna, Chittagong, Dinajpur, Jessore, Faridpur and Barisal. Ever since 1971 Bangladesh and India have been main trade partners. However, since 2002 Bangladesh's trade with China has increased manifold crossing the trade volume which Bangladesh has with India (Sahoo, 2011). The declining trade relations and the political concerns between both are points of concern for India (*ibid.*). In the year 1991 Indian exports in comparison to Chinese exports for Bangladesh were 150 per cent; nonetheless by 2010 those had reduced to 30 per cent only (*ibid.*). Beijing is seizing the Bangladeshi market due to cheaper rates and easy trade procedures as compared to India. Apart from the declining trade volume and political relations, Bangladesh being a neighbouring country of India is having a few land- and sea-based territorial disputes since the partition of India in 1947. The present Bangladeshi diplomatic balance is not only tilting towards Beijing but that tilt is also expanding. Bangladesh, being centrally located between Nepal, Bhutan and millions of deprived people from India's Seven Sister States and being a littoral state, can provide trade opportunities to these countries and states.

The sea-based territorial issues between India and Bangladesh have compelled Bangladesh to establish a potent naval force to secure its boundaries and to protect its sea lines of communication which is likely to acquire a submarine from Beijing. The Bangladeshi interests to secure its water and sea trade in the Indian Ocean region are a diplomatic concern for India as this may improve the Chinese leaning into the Indian Ocean. The increasing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean region is also considered as an effort to isolate India through the "string of pearls" strategy with which Beijing is securing its sea line of communication through port facilities and the Pakistani Gwadar Port is the best among the pearls. India is also constructing ports in Sri Lanka

and Myanmar so it will be prudent for India and all the other East Himalayan regional countries to work together for regional politico-economic development. Economic cooperation between all the countries of the Eastern Himalayan region will add to blue economy and blue diplomacy through the ports of Bangladesh as well.

### ***3.3. Concerns of Nepal: Between China and India***

In accordance with the results of the 2011 census, 82 per cent of Nepalese populace is Hindu, 10 per cent Buddhist, and 4 per cent Muslim, while the other 4 per cent are Kirant, Yumaist, Christians and others. The main castes are Chhetri with 17 per cent of the population, trailed by Brahmans (13 per cent) and Magar (7 per cent). The current rise of Maoists and Nepalese native policies in combination with the strengthening financial and political facets with Beijing are causing a gap between Indian and Nepalese governments. Nepal and India had concluded a treaty called “Treaty of Peace and Friendship” in 1950 in accordance with which border between both will remain open for the benefits of people from the two countries. The cross-border movement is free of passport and visa formalities.

However; regrettably the Nepalese border regions with India and China remain deprived of social and infrastructural development. Nepal shares 1753 km of border with India since 1814 running through even villages. On the other hand, in 1955 for the first time India and Pakistan signed an agreement as per which strict visa protocols were enforced on the cross-border movement of people between the two countries. The populace living within 30 km border on either side were permitted to continue trivial customary trade on barter origin and to meet relatives across the border and even in a few cases were allowed to reside across the border as per the weather dictates without legal travelling

documents.<sup>3</sup> Ambassadors were appointed by both Nepal and China in 1960. In 1960 Nepal refused the Chinese claim over Mount Everest (Jha, 2013). However both resolved their territorial disputes about Sankhuwasabha, Taplejung, Rasuwa and Humlain in accordance with Nepal-China Joint Boundary Commission on 5th October 1961 (Shrestha, 2003). In 1960 China and Nepal concluded to demilitarise the 20 km zone along the border to reduce border security expenditures. The Tibet region of China became the top trade partner with Nepal in 2001. Trade between Nepal and Tibet reached the highest valuing US\$945 million in 2011 in comparison to US\$235 million in 2000.<sup>4</sup> Kathmandu and Beijing have decided to establish dry ports at Yari-Pulam, Rasuwa-Jilong and Kodari-Zangmu, Kimathanka-Dingri, Olangchungola-Riwa and Mustang-Ligzi.<sup>5</sup> Kathmandu and Beijing are constructing a land route called Syaphrubesi-Rasuwa Gadhi Highway. Nepal and China are improving bi-lateral relations which are a concern for India as it will lose its hold over Nepal. The enhancing diplomatic and economic relations between China and Nepal can affect the Indian regional diplomacy so it will be prudent for India to utilise the Siliguri Corridor in a pragmatic manner for better politico-economic environments in the Eastern Himalayan region.

### ***3.4. Bhutanese Concerns: Beijing and Thimpu in Border Dispute Resolution***

Bhutan has a population of about one million with various ethnic groups including Bhote (50 per cent), Nepalese (35 per cent) and migrant tribes (15 per cent). Bhutan and India enjoy friendly relations and the elementary structure of India-Bhutan bilateral relations is based on the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed between the two countries in 1949 which was further reorganized in February 2007. The treaty

ensures free trade between both countries. The treaty also signifies the peace, equality and friendship for the citizens of both countries. With 75 per cent of its population being Buddhist, Bhutan has an increasing affinity with its Chinese neighbour. Beijing and Thimpu are enhancing their sociopolitical milieu based on border dispute resolution and economic ties. Indian media has lately reported that Beijing is constructing a huge infrastructure in Bhutan. It has also been reported that the Chinese army has constructed a new road from Gotsa to Lepola via Pamlung (Arpi, 2013).

On diplomatic front there have been 21 rounds of talks to resolve the border disputes between Beijing and Thimpu. China and Bhutan have agreed to carry out combined survey of Jakarlung and Pasamlung areas measuring 495 sq km to swap over with 269 sq km area of Doklam Plateau which is linked to strategic Chumbi Valley and this is a real military and diplomatic nightmare for India (Wangchuk, 2013). Doklam Plateau is very close to the Indian Siliguri Corridor which connects the Northeast to the rest of the country (Dhakal, 2003). Due to the strategic prominence of Chumbi Valley, India is dubious about approving any concessions by Bhutan to exchange land in such area to allow more room to Beijing (Bhonsle, 2013). Beijing has never liked Indian domination over Bhutanese foreign affairs. “New Delhi sees Bhutan as little more than potential protectorate,” said Chinese scholar Liu Zengyi. About Chinese efforts to found diplomatic relations with the Bhutanese, the Chinese scholar has admitted: “India won’t allow Bhutan to freely engage in diplomacy with China and solve the border issue.”

### ***3.5. Chinese Dimensions***

China being one of the largest countries in Asia and the world most populous country with 1.5 billion citizens is situated in the eastern part

of Asia. Its land borders measuring over 28,073 km are shared many nations including Mongolia, Russia, Democratic Republic of Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Beijing also owns a coast line measuring 14,500 km. China is one of the four oldest civilisations dating back to the Shang Dynasty (1525 BC), maintaining a written history of 4,000 years enhancing its rich educational and antique sites (Vermillion and Sagardoy, 2001: 42). In 1919 socialist scholarly groups were shaped in the Peking University where Mao Zedong co-founded the Chinese Communist Party in July 1921 (Mozingo, 2007: 304). In the 21st century like other advanced countries, China has also dovetailed its military tool of strategy in national policy. With its defence budget enhanced to US\$148 billion by 2014, the novel Chinese military strategic can be abridged as follows:

- China shall try not to engage in war.
- In case of war, it will be contained to limited conflict.
- China can no longer rely on the “People’s War” strategy.
- Chinese should have force projection skills.
- China must maintain a limited nuclear deterrent (Harding, 1995).

China’s official stance is the belief in peace and prosperity and the adoption of a strategy known as “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” which are appended below<sup>6</sup>:

- Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- Mutual non-aggression.
- Non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
- Equality and mutual benefit.
- Peaceful coexistence.

China's official stance posits that all nations should resolve their disputes and conflicts peaceably through discussions (Zhao (ed.), 2004: 3) which facilitate the formation of a new global political and economic order that is just and balanced. According to this stance, China is prepared to establish and develop friendly relations for cooperation with all the nations especially the neighbouring states on the basis of mutual respect and sovereignty, and it remains prepared to enhance international cooperation so as to address worldwide difficulties faced by mankind including worsening environment, resource shortage, AIDS and rampant transitional crimes (Munro, 2002: 108). Following this line, China has also augmented its contribution in peacekeeping maneuvers, supporting contingents in East Timor, Congo, Liberia and elsewhere (Johnson, 1997: 2).

Indeed, Beijing is involved in various social development projects in Asia and other parts of the world. China is at the verge of finalising a fuel transporting contract with Myanmar including numerous schemes of harbour construction, establishment of docks, development of oil plus gas terminals, construction of roads and other relevant structures. China has lately proclaimed plans to build a 810 km-long rail linkage between Ruili (China) and Kyaukphyu (Myanmar) via Muse, whereas in Thailand it is involved in building the Dawei Port.<sup>7</sup> Besides, China is also constructing the Hambantota port west of Colombo to make its sea line of communication secure (Davidson, 2010: 92). It also includes the protection of the Chinese sea lines of communication encompassing an expanse of the Indian Ocean from China to Sudan (Goldstein, 2005: 17). In order to pursue its economic and diplomatic policies China is improving its foreign relations with most nations especially with its Asian and South Asian neighbours like Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and India. As discussed above, China is resolving its territorial disputes with Bhutan to enhance the environment of peace and stability in the Eastern

Himalayan region. The resolution of Doklam Plateau dispute with Bhutan will ease out the Chinese access to Siliguri Corridor in India. China is improving its economic and diplomatic relations with Nepal not only by opening and constructing roads leading to Nepal but also by demilitarising the 20 km zone along the border to reduce border security expenditures. This will allow both China and Nepal to concentrate on working towards peace and prosperity in the Eastern Himalayan region. Peace and stability existing between China and Nepal will surely have positive effects on the entire Siliguri Corridor as well. The Chinese are improving their relations with Bangladesh, including enhancing trade relations. The most important aspect is that with the desired naval assistance from China, Bangladesh wants to make the Bay of Bengal more secure so that it can also provide secure warm waters to the East Himalayan countries like Nepal, Bhutan, China and the Seven Sister States of India. As the strategically significant Siliguri Corridor lies in India, so it will be prudent for India not only to understand its regional value but to also make use of it more pragmatically by making it an open economic corridor which will not only add to its economic securities but will also diminish the insurgencies through socioeconomic development in the deprived areas of the Indian northeast. Apart from being an opportunity for peace and stability, the Siliguri Corridor should also be considered and utilised as a diplomatic tool as well.

The Siliguri Corridor in combination with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that was finalised to link western China with north Arabian Sea through Pakistan specifically through Gwadar Port will provide more geopolitical, economic, diplomatic and strategic opportunities for China and other regional countries. The Siliguri Corridor will also ease out the Chinese anxieties in the Tibet region, Aksai Chin and Kashmir. This corridor will also secure the Chinese trade links through the Karakorum Highway and Wakhan Corridor and will

also ease out the border dispute between China and its southern neighbour, India.

#### **4. Further Analysis and Conclusion**

The Siliguri Corridor is a strategically significant place which is vital for the entire Eastern Himalayan region, but due to the political interests of regional countries especially India the corridor is not being utilised pragmatically. India being at the giving end should understand that even the progress of Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh will not only have prudent effects on the Indian Seven Sister States but for the Siliguri Corridor as well. Recently Beijing and New Delhi are scrapping over Nepal in socioeconomic and diplomatic affairs. Beijing has increased its visible influence over the Maoists and India is reluctant to lose its leverage in Nepal. In the wake of the evolving globalisation and geopolitical situation of the region, India should analyse its policy of “Akhand Bharat” (Greater India) and should attempt to live in peace with regional countries. In the region the Chinese are building a signal intelligence structure on Coco Islands just 240 km from Andaman Islands which will help China to improve its friendly relations with Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal. Sittwe Port of Myanmar and Coco Islands are the main areas linking China with Myanmar which shares about 1600 km of boundary with India. Being located on the eastern edge of Bay of Bengal, Myanmar also acts as a gateway to Southeast Asia. India seems to understand the sociopolitical value of the Siliguri Corridor but is not allowing other countries to access the corridor due to diplomatic concerns. India is even not allowing its own northeastern states to make maximum use of the corridor because of the insurgents’ threat.

On border issues, India appears to be worried and feels endangered of being outflanked due to Chinese activities in the Wakhan Corridor. New Delhi is of the view that the Chinese “string of pearls” strategy – China’s involvement in Gwadar Port in Pakistan, Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, Hagyyi Port in Myanmar, Chinese infrastructural linkage with Nepal and its likely preparations to open the Wakhan Corridor – has compelled India to contemplate about its perceived isolation. India must realise that by tilting only towards extra-regional player the peace and harmony in the region will not be possible and without that it will not be possible for India to prosper.

## Notes

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