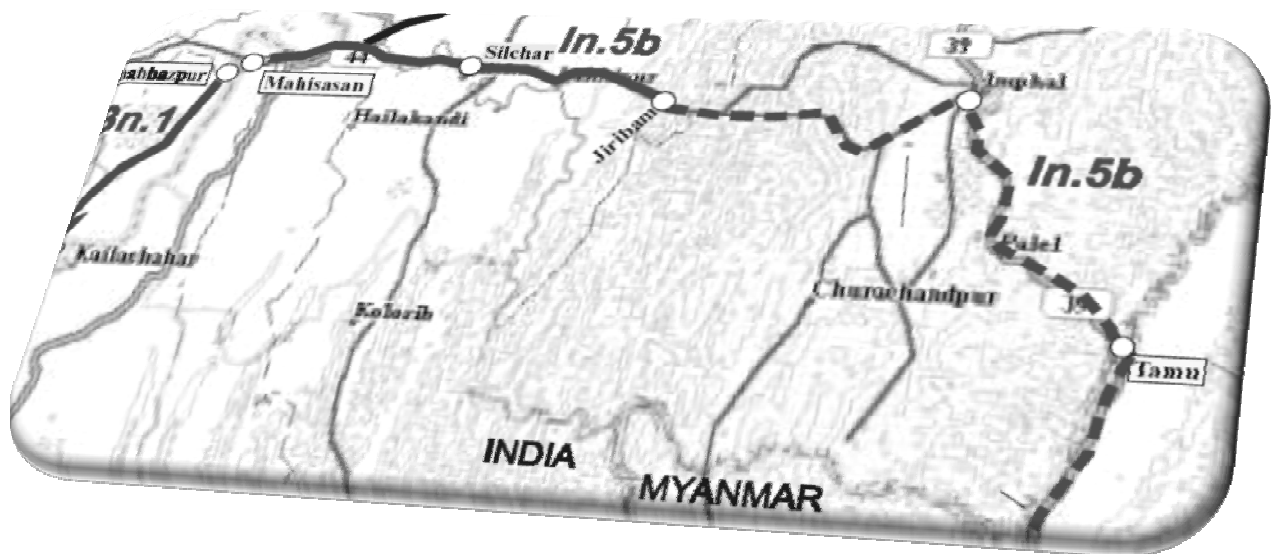


**THE GLOBALIZATION TRAIN: INITIAL ASSESSMENT  
OF TRANS ASIAN RAILWAY IN MANIPUR**

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FORUM FOR INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES AND ACTION

FOREWORD

THE DISCUSSION SERIES OF FIPA IS MEANT TO FLAG OFF CERTAIN CRITICAL ISSUES THAT CONFRONTS THE NORTH EAST. WHILE THE PRIMARY IS ON ISSUES OF GLOBALIZATION, DEVELOPMENT AND THOSE POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS THAT CAN CAUSE FAR REACHING CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PEOPLES IN THE NORTH EAST REGION. THIS IS THE FIRST IN THE SERIES AND IS INTENTIONED FOR CREATING MASS AWARENESS AND DISCUSSION ON THE ISSUE. THE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS ARE NOT THE FINAL WORD ON THE MATTER.

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### Acronyms Used

ADB	Asian Development Bank
WB	World Bank
TAR	Trans Asian Railway
TAH	Trans Asian Highway
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
NE	North East
SA	South Asia
SEA	South East Asia
MDONER	Ministry of Development of North East Region

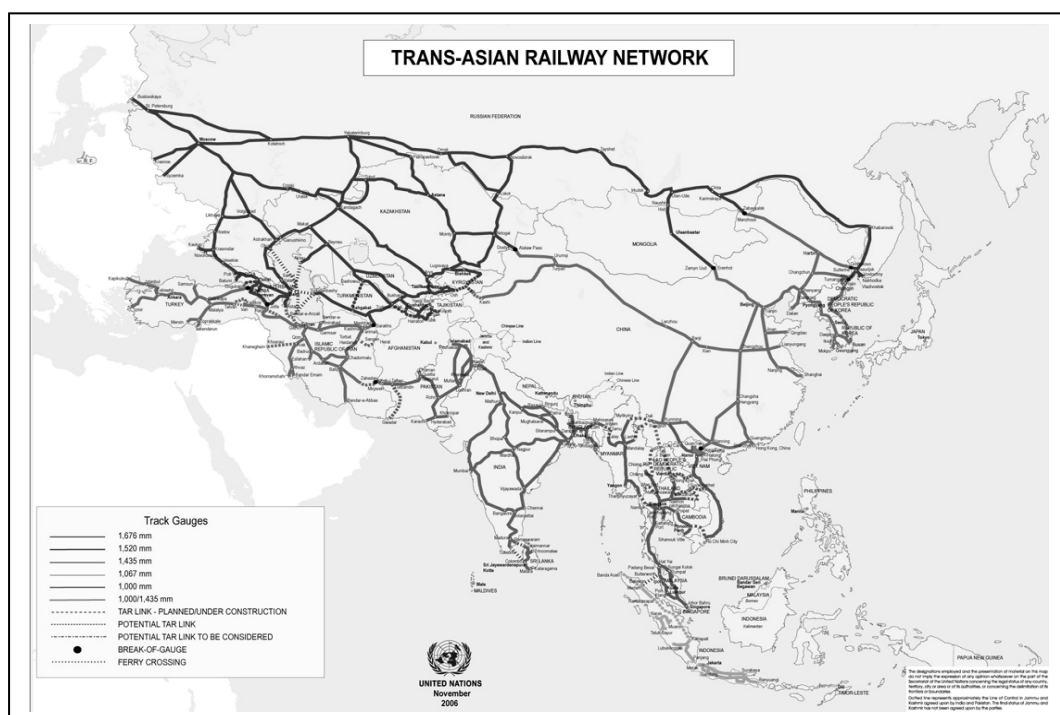
## I. INTRODUCTION

*"Tibet is reached by railway  
Indeed, it is ruining Tibet  
A black construction is snacking into the heart of Tibet  
..... this time, Buddha really can do nothing about it"  
A Chinese Poem*

Recent announcement of a Trans Asian Railway (TAR) passing through Manipur<sup>1</sup> evoked no response, except for approval in some corner. However, a little dig on the issue calls for a more elaborate understanding of the train and its implications. It was felt that in order to make a clear decision on the train, whether to allow it to pass through, or to oppose it, or to allow it with certain conditions etc, there is an urgent need to understand the train, make an analysis of the implications of the train and accordingly, after a wide discussion, make a collective decision. This Discussion Series is a result of three months of religious work put in by the members of FIPA.

This booklet is meant for public discussion and action. It is hoped that this Series will create a public debate- which often is not the case in Manipur where sporadic 'development' projects are implemented without proper planning and public scrutiny. In recent times we have witnessed protests by several groups against ill conceived projects that that has been brought in the state without proper process of planning. Projects such as Tipaimukh Dam, National Institute of Technology (NIT), Capitol project etc have been vertically brought in and without public discussions and proper process of long term assessment and implications of such project.

Map 1: Trans Asian Railway Network



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kanglaonline.com/index.php?template=headline&newsid=38444&typeid=1>

In a similar way, but with a bigger impending threat, it has been informed through the local and national media that a train will pass through Manipur. While this TAR may be news here, it is a relatively an old one that has taken several years of planning, painstaking negotiations between countries, resources and certain kind of interest groups that has keep alive the idea of a global train. Unfortunately or fortunately, Manipur has been on the map of TAR. If this train becomes a reality, Manipur will be one of the key links not only between India and Burma via Bangladesh but also between the whole of South Asia and South East Asia serving as a corridor of exchange of raw materials, semi-finished and finished products between the countries. The TAR is also likely to bring in a whole transformation of the North East, with a shift from the importance of chicken neck and Guwahati to Imphal and Jiri/Silchar.

There are also important associated projects that are complementary to TAR that will need equal attention in understanding TAR. A brief on them are also included here. An overall framework of India's look east policy and its associated projects is also briefly included in order to help capture India's design of using the North East as a resource as well as a bridge to South East Asia. It will be in this context that India has joined the group of countries pushing for TAR.

While the implications of TAR in Manipur, as discussed here are more speculative in nature, they are nevertheless based on understandings derived from international trade, transnational/boundary movement of goods and people in other parts of the worlds. We have also looked at some of the fears of the Tibetan people when the Qingzang Railway line from mainland and to the Lhasa was laid<sup>2</sup>.

The second chapter will briefly describe the history and the global TAR networks, the third will look at the component in India, North East and then of Manipur. The fourth chapter will make effort to capture the other associated projects and the last one will make effort to understand the implications of TAR in Manipur and the need for certain critical engagements on TAR related issues.

## II. What is Trans Asian Railway?

The Trans Asian Railway (TAR) was initiated in the 1960 with the objective of train networking 81,000 kilometers of lines serving 28 UNESCAP countries<sup>3</sup>. It starts on the Pacific seaboard of Asia and ends on the doorstep of Europe<sup>4</sup>. The idea was to shorten the distances and reduce transit times between countries and regions, while being a catalyst for the nation of international transport as a **tool for the**

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<sup>2</sup> Railway and China's development Strategy in Tibet: A tale of two economies.

<sup>3</sup> Established in 1947 with its headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand, The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is the regional development arm of the United Nations for the Asia-Pacific region. With a membership of 62 Governments, 58 of which are in the region, and a geographical scope that stretches from Turkey in the west to the Pacific island nation of Kiribati in the east, and from the Russian Federation in the north to New Zealand in the south, ESCAP is the most comprehensive of the United Nations five regional commissions.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unescap.org/ttdw/common/TIS/TAR/faq.asp>

**trades expansion, economic growth and culture exchanges.** For a long time from 60s, to early 1980 the idea of TAR was shelved but saw its revival in 1990s.

The TAR purpose is to serve the network's primary objective of international trade. As a result, countries of the region agreed that these lines had to link or provide access to (i) capital cities; (ii) main industrial and agricultural centres; (iii) major air, sea and river ports; and (iv) major container terminals and depots.

TAR network is initially divided into **four major components**. These components are:

1. **Northern corridor** connecting the rail networks of China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Russian Federation and the Korean Peninsula;
2. **Southern corridor** connecting Thailand and the southern Chinese province of Yunnan with Turkey through Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran with Sri Lanka also part of the corridor;
3. **Sub-regional network** covering the ASEAN and Indo-China sub regions; and
4. **North-south corridor** linking Northern Europe to the Persian Gulf through the Russian Federation, Central Asia and the Caucasus region.

Table A: TAR Brief Overview

South-East Asia:	Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam	12,600 km
North-East Asia:	China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation	32,500 km
Central Asia and Caucasus:	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	13,200 km
South Asia + Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey:	Bangladesh, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Turkey	22,600 km
<b>Total:</b>		<b>80,900 km</b>

Since the focus of this Series is on Manipur and North East India, this Series will focus only on the Southern Corridor. Any further information on the other networks and corridor including the Southern one is available online at <http://www.unescap.org/TTDW/index.asp?MenuName=TheTrans-AsianRailway>.

### **The Southern Corridor**

The Southern Corridor of the Trans Asian Railway (TAR) is one of three Asian- Europe rail land bridges studied by ESCAP as part of the Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development (ALTID) project which was endorsed by the 48<sup>th</sup> ESCAR commission session in Beijing in April 1992.

*The objective of this corridor is to*

1. Evaluate the development and operation of a network of routes allowing through railway transport of containers between South Asia and Europe.
2. To identify and evaluate routes which will allow the rail **transportation of containers** from central Asia to the ports of Bandar Abbas and Bandar Imam Khomeini and from the south Asian hinterland (in particular, from Nepal, Bhutan and the Northeastern state of India) to port on the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.
3. To provide, ultimately, a continuous railway connection between Southeast Asia and Europe as well as between Southwestern China and Europe.

Under this, **two types of railway routes** have been identified within the corridor,

These are:

- i) **Routes of international significance**, which will facilitate uninterrupted traffic between; southeast Asia and Europe; and central, South and Southeast Asia;
- ii) **Routes of sub regional significance**, which will facilitate country to country, or hinterland to port, transportation within the corridor.

**Three routes of international significance** were identified in the southern corridor of the TAR, They have been designated **TAR-S1, TAR-S2 and TAR-S3**

**Route TAR-S1** would cross 7 national borders (with another 5 to be crossed west of Turkey)

**Route TAR-S2** western most railheads on the Thai system at NamTok, Thailand to Mandalay

**Route TAR-S3** north- south axis between Fariman and Bafq

**Route of sub regional significance** are considered within the description of links comprising the TAR network in each participating country. They comprise a considerable number of long routes connecting major hinterland locations with seaport. Example the 1.319 km route linking Delhi with Mumbai (Bombay) and the 2.866 km route linking Delhi with Chennai (Madras).

The first such link, **Bn.1** forms part of the principal transcontinental route TAR-S1. It starts from the Northeastern Bangladeshi border station of Shahbazpur, Shahbazpur link Bn.1 follow the existing Bangladeshi metre gauge branch line in a southwesterly direction to the junction with the mainline to Sylhet at Kulaura. Dhaka is connected by a 22km double tracked metre gauge line, From Tongi, this link runs north to Joydebpur, from which point a new dual gauge (1000/1676mm) line is being constructed.

The second link, **Bn.2** connects Dhaka, northern Bangladesh and northeastern India with the port of Chittagong. It has a length of 321 km. It shares the alignment of link Bn.1 with the exception of the 22 km section between Dhaka and Tongi.

A third link, designated **Bn.2a**, is an extension of Bn.2 which terminates in Chittagong link Bn.2 has been proposed by the Bangladesh Railway as a means of connecting with the central part of Myanmar via a border crossing inland from Teknaf. This link would have a length of 192 km of

which 47 km is in place and from Chittagong to Dohazari before turning south to the Bangladesh/Myanmar border.

Link **Bn.3** (Ishurdi-Birol) provides a connection to the border with India through the border station of Birol (Bangladesh) and Radhikapur (India). It forms part of a rail and road transit route allowing the flow of Nepal's third country trade between the India/Nepal border at Jogbani (India)/Biratnagar (Nepal) and the Bangladesh ports of Chittagong and Mongla link Bn.3 between Ishurdi and Parbatipur is broad gauge line between Ishurdi and Parbatipur, now in progress as part of the Jamuna River Rail link project. An alternative rail transit route between Nepal and Bangladesh is available through the India border station of Singhabad, this route connecting with the India /Nepal border at Raxaul. Bangladesh Railway has nominated link Bn.4 (Abdulpur-Rohanpur) as a key component of this route.

A total of **six TAR links** has been nominated for India are:

**i) Link In.1**

This link forming part of the main inter-continental route TAR-S1, starts at Gede on the India side of Bangladesh western border and follow the India board gauge east-west trunk line system up to the border with Pakistan.

**ii) Link in.2**

Connects Delhi with the ports of Chennai (Madras) and Tuticorin on the eastern and southern coast of India respectively.

**iii) Link in.3**

Constitutes connection of Delhi with the two gateway ports in the Mumbai (Bombay) i.e. Mumbai and Jawaharlal Nehru ports which together handle nearly 60 percent of container traffic through India's principal ports. It shares the alignment of link in 2.

**IV) Link In.4**

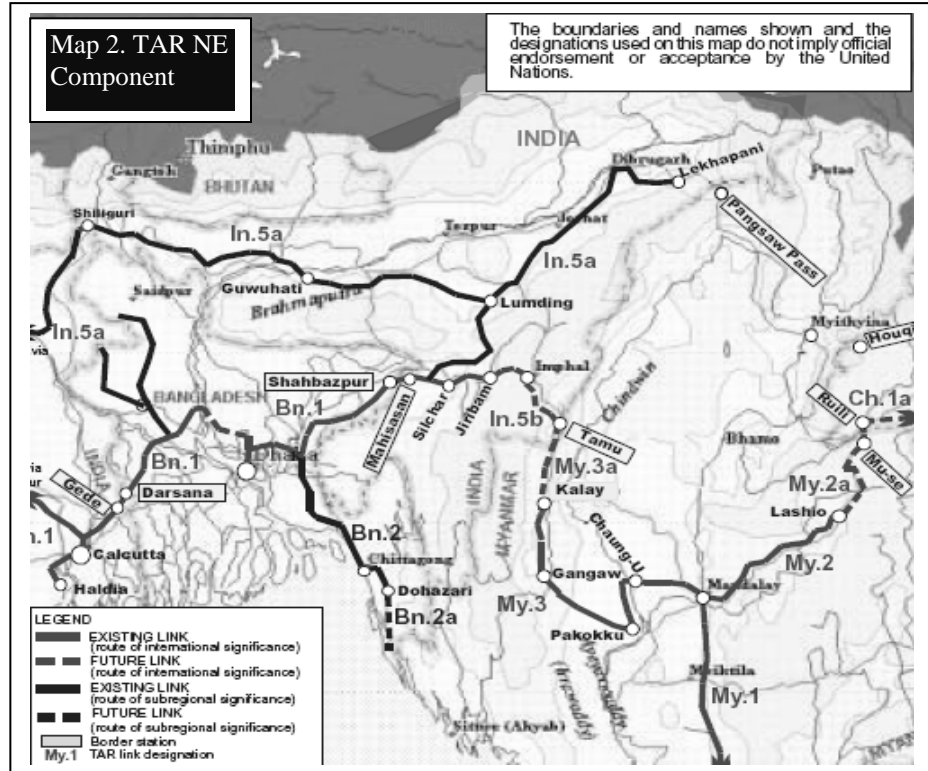
Provides a regional route for the movement of transit cargoes between Nepal and its principal port outlets in Calcutta and Haldia. This link starts at Raxaul on the India/Nepal border. The rail links also exist for connecting the gateway ports of Mumbai and Chennai with the Link In.4

**V) Link In.5**

Provides connection between the north eastern states and the rest of India. It provide and international connection with Yunnan province of china via northern Myanmar. **Link in .5a** would start at the border between India and Myanmar it runs for 1.830 km east Assam. West Bengal, and Bihar state, passing through the narrow (30 km) Known as the Chickens Neck and between the borders of Nepal and Bangladesh before joining Link In.1.



**Link In.5a** serves as a within country link between northeastern states and the industrialized states of Northern India. Significance commercial centres served by link In.5a include Tinsukia, Dimapur, Lunding (junction with the northeastern metre gauge network), Guwahati (location of the only ICD in north eastern India) New Jalpaiguri, Katihar, Barauni, Patna and Danapur.



**VI) Link In.5b**, the final Tar link in India, has two components. The first is an existing metre gauge line of about 110 km connecting Lunding (Located on link In.5a) with Badarpur which lies on international Route TAR-S1.

The second is part missing link and part existing metre gauge link joining the border towns of Tamu in Myanmar and Mahisasan on the border with Bangladesh (opposite the Bangladesh border town of Shahbazzpur), via Silchar and Badarpur.

### III. Components in Manipur

This link would form part of the main international route TAR-S1. Within Myanmar, it has been designated Link **My.3a** and within India, Link In.5b.

Link My.3a would start from the station of Kalay on the recently completed line to Gangaw and would follow a northerly alignment for about 135 km up to the border checkpoint at Tamu. (Tamu has been designated by the Government of Myanmar as the only official border checkpoint with India). It is assumed (but has yet to be confirmed) that alignment of this link would follow the valleys of the Myittha and Khampat Rivers (both tributaries of the Chindwinn River), thereby avoiding the steeper gradients which would be associated with the range of small mountains through which those rivers pass.

**Link In.5a** would start from Tamu, following Highway 39 in a northwesterly direction through Imphal, the capital of Manipur State, and from there following Highway 53 in a westerly direction to Jiribam which is the existing railhead on the Indian northeastern metre gauge network. From Jiribam the existing metre gauge line provides a direct connection with Bangladesh at the Indian border station of Mahisasan (opposite Shahbazar in Bangladesh), passing through the significant historical city of Silchar en route.

The distance from Tamu to Mahisasan is about 340 km, of which the missing section comprises about 180 km, nearly all of it requiring construction through mountainous terrain, with several peaks of 2,000 metres or more. In.5b will be broad gauge and a unit construction cost of about US\$ 2.25 million per kilometre and overall capital cost of US\$ 405 million.

The construction of this missing link, as per feasibility study conducted by the ministry of external affairs through RITES Limited, is estimated to cost Rs. 2941 crore. On this portion, Ministry of Railways had sanctioned construction of 97 km new rail link between Jiribam and Tupul costing Rs. 727.56 crore<sup>5</sup>. It has also been in the official press communication that the establishment of Indo-Myanmar Rail Link is a Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India initiative under the aegis of Mekong-Ganga cooperation. Discussions were held on providing Indian Myanmar Rail Link during a foreign Office Consultation with Myanmar in New Delhi in October, 2005. Accordingly, RITES Ltd. had conducted a feasibility study which will

(i) Construct new rail link between Jiribam-Imphal-Moreh at a cost of Rs. 2941.08 crore.

In Myanmar

(ii) Construct of a new rail link between Tamu (Moreh) – Kalay – Segyi at a cost of Rs. 1339.02 crore and rehabilitation of existing line from Segyi-Chaungu Myohaung at a cost of Rs. 283.959 crore<sup>6</sup>.

Out of the missing portion, the 97 Kms Jiribam-Tupul rail construction project has been sanctioned by the Union ministry of Railways in the year 2004-05 and the survey work commenced in May, 2005<sup>7</sup>. As of now the land acquisition process is underway.

Efforts have been made to collect the details of the route, number of tunnels, villages and towns where the railway is likely to pass and cause displacement, environmental and social impact, all of which has not been made public till today.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.kanglaonline.com/index.php?template=headline&newsid=38444&typeid=1>

<sup>6</sup> Information given by the Minister of State for Railways Shri R. Velu in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha. <http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=14310>

<sup>7</sup> <http://hmar.net/?p=1338#more-1338>

## IV. OTHER ASSOCIATED PROJECTS

Beginning around 2001 there has been tremendous attention paid to the north east in overhauling the institutions, both traditional and modern, and also in preparing for future programs and projects. The Ministry of Development of North East Region (MDONER) has been the key agent in this effort. While there are controversies on the formation of this Ministry as some argue that it has been created as a Special Utility Vehicle by the government of India and with International Financial Institutions (IFI), there is an urgent need to scrutinize the Ministry as well as the programs and projects which has been sanctioned or under preparation.

In particular, the Asian Development Bank (ADB)<sup>8</sup> has played a key role in this effort to transform the NE. Over the last 5-6 years ADB has provided grants and loans worth billions of dollars for Technical Assistances (TAs) in almost all the sectors. These include North East Region Urban Development (I & II), North East State Road Project, Inland Waterway Transport Connectivity Project, North Eastern States Trade and Investment Creation Initiative, North East Power Development Project, Budget Procedure reform, expenditure Management, Agriculture Development Support etc. As part of its sub-regionalization<sup>9</sup> process, ADB also has been preparing detailed study on South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Sub-regional connectivity (Bengal Corridor), Hazardous Waste Management, SASEC Tourism Plan, Air Quality Management. Under this program ADB also has funded the highly controversial<sup>10</sup> French Lafarge Surma Cement where raw materials (limestone and Shale) is carried by a conveyor belt to Bangladesh for producing cement.

In particular, ADB's North East road project is primarily for opening trade routes in all the NE states.

An additional road project is the Bengal Corridor that links all the SASEC countries in order to facilitate free trade in the sub-region. In order to promote trade route ADB also has funded a TA to study the Barak and Brahmaputra Waterways that can link the North east with Sitwe and Chittagong ports. These road and waterways are complementary to the Trans Asian Highway and railway and will serve the free flow of goods.

While the above projects benefit both India and ADB, India also has been keenly pursuing its north east component of the look east policy. The Trans Asian Highway also passing through

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, ADB was formed under UNESCAP initiative.

<sup>9</sup> Sub-regionalization refers to a process where, rather than resulting from 'pre-determined' national or sub-national plans, proposals primarily emerge from non-state agents (here ADB or other IFIs) to club together contiguous countries or portions of countries in keeping with their model of economic integration. The effort is marked by market and economic priorities where production, extraction and finance do not respect borders such as the one, which in the case of North East, where communities fiercely defend. See <http://www.adb.org/SASEC/default.asp>, [http://www.icrindia.org/pdf/IFI\\_in\\_Northeast\\_India.pdf](http://www.icrindia.org/pdf/IFI_in_Northeast_India.pdf). Under SASEC, which also has been endorsed by other financial institutions, ADB has clubbed the North East with Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

<sup>10</sup> Curb on Lafarge tribal land mortgage.

<http://www.grassrootsoptions.org/index.php?module=Pagesetter&func=viewpub&tid=1&pid=7>

Manipur has been on the agenda for long. Daboka (Silchar)-Imphal- Moreh route which connects Myanmar is already part of the Trans- Asia Highway which will extend to Thailand and Singapore<sup>11</sup>. The existing Indo-Myanmar trade which began in 2004 is the precursor to furthering India's intrusion in South East Asian (SEA) countries. It is likely that India will aggressively invest in Burma for trade and, in the long term, for dealing with armed groups from NE. In other words, the India will work towards de-stabilizing armed movements both in NE as well as in neighboring countries and that these roads can serve both for the purpose of trade and suppression of armed movements.

India is also keen on using the Chittagong port in Bangladesh and the Sittwe port in Burma<sup>12</sup> for improving its trade war with China and with SEA countries. These routes along with the waterways through Barak and Brahmaputra will facilitate both inward and outward movement of goods to and from NE. If these projects come to light, it is likely that the importance of the Chicken's Neck will decline.

This Series has restricted itself to TAR and most relevant projects and will skip other projects in North East. However, a fuller understanding of the policies, programs and projects must be explored in order to capture the new north east which is likely to unfold. There is almost complete non-transparency and accountability in the way how these programs and projects have been conceptualized and implemented. There is an urgent need to intervene if at all the people in the NE region would like to pull/steer the globalization process in their favor.

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news\\_section.Top\\_Stories.Trans\\_Asia\\_Highway\\_on\\_Card](http://www.e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.Top_Stories.Trans_Asia_Highway_on_Card)

<sup>12</sup> India is also likely to develop the The Kaladan River in Mizoram as a waterway that connects Sittwe port and Barak to facilitate bilateral trade and commerce.

## V. IMPLICATIONS FOR MANIPUR AND NORTH EAST

Indigenous peoples worldwide are considered as examples of sustainable societies, historically evolved in diverse ecosystems. The negative impact of globalization is strongest on these populations perhaps more than any other because these communities have very little power and can get easily swept aside by the invisible hand of the market and its proponents. In the face of these forces sweeping across the world, there is an imminent threat of further marginalization.

Areas such as the North East which are considered ‘landlocked’, ‘inaccessible’ and ‘un-conducive’ for business due to security reasons have been targeted as these lands are some of the remaining repository of scarce resources.

It is also found that due to these aggressive ‘invasions’ to open up such areas for resources and/or for corridors, people have tried to defend their homelands. In the north east, this is not a new phenomenon. Along with the ‘traditional’ defense against occupation of their land by colonial forces, we are now witnessed to several communities trying to fight against dams, mines, pipelines, oil drilling, highways, new infrastructures, against large scale cash crop and monoculture plantations etc.

North East India has been a contested space. For the government of India, it is an Indian territory while it is being challenged by several armed resistance and movement groups. Due to India’s historical and geo-political events north east has been cut off from its economic, social and political ties with countries and peoples in Burma, Bangladesh, China and Bhutan. These 60 years of ‘forced’ isolation and interruption has caused tremendous loss for NE. This irreparable loss has not been recognized. During these 60 years, the traditional routes of exchange were switched off and the people in the region had to depend on produces from mainland India. Many agree that the region has been a **captive market** for Indian corporations.

Since 2004-5, with realization that India need to tap the markets and resources of SEA, it began to look east, and the first trade route to Burma was opened in 2004. After that new trade points were also opened in Mizoram and Sikkim with several more planned<sup>13</sup>. India also has been eyeing Burma for its rich resources of oil and gas, and India’s gifting the General with roads, port development, despite the double talk of supporting democracy, there is also the effort to shut down the camps of NE armed groups in Burma. While this has not progressed as India wanted, the demands of globalization is increasingly been seen in the way India and Burma have quickened their strategy to make for finance and ‘development’ projects.

The Chinese ‘fear’ is also another factor that has been shaping India’s policy in SEA. While India might not want to confront directly with China, it has been pursuing an indirect way to contain China, much like the way China is controlling India’s neighbor. It is likely that much of trade war will be with India and China, and the TAR can be one of the major tools.

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<sup>13</sup> As many as 16 Trade routes are being planned to Burma, China, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

What we find in all these 60 and latter years, is that the past and future of NE has been largely shaped by the political and economic exigencies of India. Today, Indian government making policy decisions on diplomatic relations, trade and investment rules etc do not consult communities in North East. From the policy decision on the kind of relations that India will maintain with Burma or with China or the numerous dams, highways, railways etc are decided without people in NE getting a say in it. The fact is that, without the reality of peoples in North East taken into considerations, these communities with their diverse knowledge, culture, economy and traditions will find it difficult to survive.

### Locating TAR in the above Discourse

While there can be movement of goods and people across borders, as clearly laid out in the UNESCAP documents, the TAR is meant primarily for movement of containers<sup>14</sup>- those oversized colorful metal boxes. For international travel, more people either use road or air leaving trains for cheaper means of movement of goods. The small murmur in the daily conversations in Manipur of the idea of getting nearer to its kiths and kins in Myanmar and beyond seem unfounded. While *Nongpok Thong Hangba* is a cause of celebration, and rightly so, it is important to know who are actually opening the gates on our behalf and for whose benefit.

The ‘new’ effort to unwrap this ‘landlocked’ region is not for itself but largely for an ‘Indian’ economy and globalization processes with its uncritical growth and markets. The new and the old water, road and rail routes, the new resource management strategies, processes to transform existing institutions, neo-territorialization are largely meant for globalization and neo-colonial demands as well as to feed the uncritical and unsustainable economic growth Indian economy.

TAR was never conceptualized as a project for Manipur or for North East. For long India did not signed the TAR agreement, may be because of Bangladesh’s reluctance to have India at both ends of their boundary. Bangladesh wanted TAR to connect to Myanmar directly but could not negotiate through, due to the reluctance of Myanmar to build this section. India’s desire to pass through NE is clear as it has been for a long time establishing its relation with Burma and beyond, and the need to keep the NE engaged for reasons of security and its resources.

While movements will be multimodal, with TAR, it is expected that there will be some movement of containers<sup>15</sup> between SA and SEA. UNESCAP has not studied the volume of traffic through NE and through Manipur, but based on their analysis, the generated traffic through the missing link in Manipur will depend on the transit time, reliability, cost and also on the industrial development in the North East.

While these are of international trade dimensions, Manipur as a state of India but with strong historical and present differences with the rest of India, will have to have to evolve its own strategies that benefits and contributes to its development.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.unescap.org/ttdw/common/TIS/TAR/faq.asp>

<sup>15</sup> As adopted in the Policy-Level expert group meeting on TAR: Southern Corridor, 25-28 May 1999 in Dhaka, 8ft 6in ISO containers with an Axle-Load of 20 Tonnes will be gradually adopted. The meeting also noted the need to keep the minimum of 70 Km/h speed (to achieve 20 Km/h commercial speed) to keep TAR in competition.

Starting in a softer note, India's requirements and trade expansion may not fit well with Manipur (or for the NE). Manipur, primarily, an agrarian state will have little to export or import. The contribution to TAR will be taking over a long stretch of land comprising hills and valley where the route will pass through. While in the beginning, land will be acquired (using the outdated Land Acquisition Act) from villages or from individuals, who may or may not get compensated, after which there will be not much to expect from TAR either for the government or for the people. During the construction stage too, which will soon commence for Jiri to Tupul, employment as laborers or those technical jobs are likely to be sourced primarily from outside the state.

The 'traditional' route through the Chickens Neck then to Guwahati used for movement of people and goods is likely to radically transform with TAR and other associated projects such as the Trans Asian Highway, Barak and Brahmaputra Waterways etc. If in case these new projects gets its way, movements of goods and people coming from other parts of India can find its way to Silchar, via Kolkata and Dhaka, for further distribution to other parts of North East. Similarly, Imphal, Jiri and Silchar can also be the stoppages for those coming from Myanmar, China and other SEA countries<sup>16</sup>. The difference from the earlier linkages is the quantity of transaction, as these new routes will mean carrying goods and possibly people between South Asia and South East Asia.

While details of the route in Manipur is still missing, despite the news of a survey being completed, it is likely that the route will likely follow from Tupul to Imphal then to Tumu via Thoubal and Chandel. This route will have some junctions with a major container junction at Imphal possibly near the Tuliha Airport<sup>17</sup>. The stations will be stoppages for transaction of goods, and hence will develop as mini towns. With these there will be new demands for water, electricity and other urban infrastructures. Associated crimes and health problems will also arise. The government will require very minute study of the implications of such a possibility and work for better regulations of new railway township.

For cross border transactions, UNESCAP proposes introduction of "one-spot joint checking" by neighboring countries for inspections related to customs, technical requirements, security<sup>18</sup> etc. for Manipur and Assam will require checking at both the Bangladesh and Burma border. Railway lines are relatively difficult for checking illegal goods and people, and hence there is requirement for proper regulation and thorough checking system.

The fear of the people from Bangladesh outnumbering those in NE and even in Manipur has been reported and even marked with violence in some parts of NE, it will be of critical importance that there are proper policies that does not allow people to come in illegally and that those who come with legal papers too are regulated in order to avoid long term implications of demographic imbalance. There may be requirement for policy that prohibits transfer of land to those coming from outside the state.

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<sup>16</sup> The diversion of potentially divertible traffic through this channel will depend primarily on the net benefits offered to freight customers offered by TAR. In NE factors such as risk and security will also be applicable.

<sup>17</sup> It is speculated that the airport expansion can also serve as a multimodal link for goods.

<sup>18</sup> Report of the Policy-Level Expert Group Meeting on TAR: Southern Corridor, 25-28 May 1999, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Dumping of goods is also a cause of alarm for Manipur and for NE as a whole. We are witnesses to the cheap goods that have found its way. While there is a need to study the impact on local environment and economy of being a captive market of India, we are now confronted with an additional impact coming via the Moreh trade. Like every country that defends its own economic interest, Manipur and the rest of North East will need to set up certain mechanisms that will prohibit trade components that can harm its economy. In particular, the farmers, weavers, fishers will require defense mechanism.

Another issue is diseases that can come from trans-boundary movement of people and goods. Recent outbreak of Avian Flu in Manipur<sup>19</sup> are clear reminders of the need for strict monitoring and preparedness. For communities with small populations the possibility of getting wiped out through 'un-known' diseases may become a reality.

An additional issue is the invasive and exotic faunal and floral species that requires strict vigilance when trains originate from distant places. Such species can become highly destructive for local environment and economy even to the extent of exterminating local indigenous varieties. It will be critical for Manipur to have laws and regulations that looks at this issue.

There are also now fears of trafficking of women and children from North East to other parts of India and beyond. The train and other international can be tool for increased trafficking and will require constant and strict monitoring.

What is also expected, as in most projects in NE, the train will also increase military presence both for guarding the railway tracks as well as for India's geo-political reasons. As contracting member of the 26 countries TAR network, India will also have to commit for safe passage of international movement of goods<sup>20</sup>. As an already heavily militarized region almost resembling a war zone with little democratic space, it is difficult to imagine participation in India's development or to be part of the larger globalization process.

## Conclusion

Based on the preliminary picture above, the following areas for discussions and actions have been proposed. While this is not an exhaustive list, future engagements on TAR is expected to throw up more issues.

1. If the present government or any other in power continues to remain as a mere implementing agency for what Delhi or other global forces dictates, the people of Manipur need to rise up to re-install new alternative government. Taking to the street is also an option to consider.

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<sup>19</sup> While it is too late to claim that the Flu might have come through the Moreh Trade route, the possibility is not ruled out. Manipur is also witnessed to the Drugs and then HIV/AIDS problem as a result of cross border trade.

<sup>20</sup> As part of the TAR Agreement, India or any contracting parties will not be prevented from taking such action, as it considers necessary for its external or internal security.



2. While TAR can bring a sea change, negative and positive, for Manipur and for the NE too, the transformation can be beneficial only if the people have direct participation in the policy planning, implementation, regulation and monitoring of TAR. This will require maturity of our leaders and will require collective action.
3. There is an urgent need for an inclusive Committee to study the implications of TAR and other related policy and projects in Manipur. The Committee will need to set up a Terms of Reference that will guide the study.
4. As peoples group, in addition to engaging with India, there is scope for representing at the UN system, here UNESCAP, to raise concerns on TAR.
5. There is an urgency that calls for putting up a common struggle to face the global forces. These forces do not respect differences and diversities.

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