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# Security Vulnerabilities of India's Siliguri Corridor and their Implications

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## Security Vulnerabilities of India's Siliguri Corridor and their Implications

The Siliguri Corridor in the northern part of West Bengal that acts as gateway to North-East, Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh has been confronting lots of security challenges. Some recent developments, both inside India and in the neighbouring countries, could have far reaching implications for this sensitive border region.

Such threats emanate from various sources, including geographical constraints, China's upgradation of infrastructure in Tibet and its growing assertiveness in the region, illegal immigration from Bangladesh, cross-border terrorism and Islamic radicalisation in Bangladesh, possible spill-over effects of insurgency and ethnic conflicts in North East especially bordering Assam and transnational crimes. All these factors deserve particular attention because of the gravity of the present situation and its impact on national security, territorial integrity, peace, political stability, economic development, "Act East" policy and sub-regional cooperation in South Asia.

### Geographical Location and Security Infrastructure

The Siliguri Corridor is in a highly disadvantageous position in geo-strategic and security terms due to its peculiar geographical features. The corridor is approximately 33 km wide on the eastern end and 21 km on the western flank<sup>1</sup>. This thin stretch of land-- also referred to as "Chicken's Neck", is extremely vulnerable to external threats particularly from China which has undertaken a gigantic military modernisation scheme.

The security problem of the corridor cropped up after the partition of Bengal between India and Pakistan in 1947. The international land boundary was hastily drawn by the Radcliffe Commission and a result, India lost huge territories in North Bengal to the newly created East Pakistan. The corridor at its narrowest point is merely 21 km wide and the situation was further complicated by the hostility of Pakistan and China towards India in the 1950's and 1960's.

The security environment of this region marginally improved following the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 and the erstwhile Sikkim monarchy's decision to merge with India in 1975. But China forged close defence partnership with Bangladesh since the late 1970's in its bid to gain strategic depth vis-à-vis India in this sub-region of South Asia. Moreover, Beijing did not endorse Sikkim's accession to India for long and accorded de facto recognition only in 2003<sup>2</sup>.

The Siliguri Corridor is located between politically unstable Nepal and Bangladesh on the two sides while Bhutan lies on the northern front of it. Squeezed between Bangladesh in the south and west and an expansionist China in further north, the corridor has no access to sea other than Kolkata which is about 500 km away. This hyper-sensitive region is heavily guarded by Indian Army, Border Security Force (BSF), Sashashtra Seema Bal (SSB) and West Bengal Police (WBP), patrolled by them all collectively.

Barring the 4 Corps Headquarters at Tejpur in northern Assam, the Indian Army has maximum number of installations, including Hashimara and Siliguri in North Bengal than in any other eastern part of the country. The BSF is entrusted with the task of manning India-Bangladesh borders. Following the exchange of enclaves between New Delhi and Dhaka this year, the international border has been completely sealed. The SSB guards Indo-Bhutan borders while WBP look after law and order of the northern districts of the state.

Considering the sensitivity of this eastern edge of the country, the Centre in June 2012 decided to issue special identity cards to the people living in the Siliguri Corridor. The factors that prompted the Strategic

Policy Group formed under the Ministry of Home Affairs to suggest such measure were China's growing military exercise near Tibet and regular immigration of nationals from Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan<sup>3</sup>.

The central intelligence agencies too keep constant tab on the activities of the Bangladeshis, Nepalese and Bhutanese who frequently visit the corridor for transit, trade and other purposes. The presence of nationals from Nepal and Bhutan who do not need visa to travel to India and illegal Bangladeshi immigrants make the task of the security and intelligence agencies much harder and the forces inimical to India did try to infiltrate to the area. A report says Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence attempted to exploit the security vulnerabilities of this border region by using Nepal-based rebels<sup>4</sup>.

### **Transport Connectivity**

Safeguarding peace and stability of North Bengal is crucial since the region connects key North-eastern state Assam with the rest of the country. In fact, all the seven states of the region and Sikkim are fully dependent on this slim corridor for movement of people and goods. The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) links the corridor with Kolkata and Bihar on the eastern side and North East on the western front. The process of gauge conversion has already been completed. The laying of double track from Guwahati to New Jalpaiguri—North Bengal's largest railway junction, is almost over. Siliguri's Bagdogra airport provides air links between North Bengal and Guwahati, Kolkata and other places of the country.

North Bengal has an elaborate network of roads covering all the districts. The National Highway (NH) 31 connects Siliguri and other towns of the region with Guwahati. The NH 31 meets NH 34 at Dalkhola in North Dinajpur district of North Bengal<sup>5</sup>. North Bengal's tourist hot spots of Darjeeling, Mirik and Kalimpong are also easily accessible by road from Siliguri.

To enhance road connectivity between North Bengal and North Eastern region, the Centre has proposed building of a four-lane East-West Corridor from Silchar in southern Assam to Siliguri under the National Highway Development Project<sup>6</sup>. There had been delays in the construction of the 163 km-long National Highway 31D from Salsabari in Alipurduar district to Ghoshpukur near Siliguri. To make optimal use of the narrow Siliguri Corridor, the Centre is now exploring the possibility of upgrading it into six-lane in the near future. The western end of the road at Salsabari is not far from Assam-Bengal border<sup>7</sup> and the Centre has attached priority to this highway that links North-east with rest of the National Highway network. However, the West Bengal government has been facing some challenges to acquire land in North Bengal for the proposed road<sup>8</sup>.

The Centre is searching for alternative routes from North East to West Bengal so that North East could not be isolated during any future hostility<sup>9</sup>. Bangladesh's granting of transit facilities to the North Eastern states during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to Dhaka in June 2015 is a major gain for India as it would reduce the traffic load on the narrow and fragile Siliguri Corridor. A section of Indian media has also suggested that New Delhi should push Dhaka to open the 4 km Tetulia corridor, the northernmost point of Bangladesh bordering Darjeeling district that could minimise the distance between North East and rest of India by more than 85 km<sup>10</sup>.

Sikkim, which shares international borders with Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan, is connected to Siliguri by road. In order to do away with Sikkim's geographical isolation, the Planning Commission in June 2012 recommended that the key highway from Siliguri to Gangtok be upgraded by using modern methods of tunneling and bridging of valleys suitable for all-weather conditions. The Centre has also sanctioned a 51.38 km-long new railway line from Sevoke in Siliguri to Rongpo in Sikkim. The Centre seeks to extend the railway network from Rongpo to Bhusuk near Gangtok covering a distance of 69 km<sup>11</sup>. Efforts have also been made to establish an air route between Siliguri and Gangtok. But the hilly terrain and unstable geological conditions of Sikkim have retarded the progress of building an air strip near Gangtok.

The Siliguri Corridor is equally important in the context of the “Act East” policy as it provides connectivity to three eastern neighbours of India—Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Except Alipurduar, rest of the North Bengal districts such as Malda, South Dinajpur, North Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Cooch Behar share international borders with Bangladesh. The districts of Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling are contiguous to Bhutan, while Darjeeling is adjacent to Nepal.

The border town of Jaigaon in Alipurduar district is the largest overland route between India and Bhutan. Jaigaon—located opposite to Bhutan's Phuentsholing, is connected by road from both Alipurduar and Cooch Behar. The road from Siliguri to Kakarbhitta on the Indo-Nepal border is mostly used. There are a number of entry points along the Indo-Bangladesh borders, including Fulbari, Changrabandha, Bamanhat and Hili. The NFR serves as a rail head for the landlocked Himalayan countries Nepal and Bhutan and makes interchange facility available to Bangladesh in North Bengal<sup>12</sup>.

In June 2014, the Mamata Banerjee government of West Bengal submitted a proposal to the Union Cabinet for two strategic infrastructure projects under the South Asia Sub Regional Programme of Asian Development Bank, linking the state's Siliguri Corridor with three neighbouring countries Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. The 33 km-long Asian Highway 2, the first proposed road will connect Panitanki near Siliguri on Indo-Nepal border with Fulbari in the same Darjeeling district on the Indo-Bangladesh border. The second 110 km-long road Asian Highway 48 connects Changrabandha on Indo-Bangladesh border in Cooch Behar district with Jaigaon on Indo-Bhutan border in Alipurduar district. The Centre assured the West Bengal government of favourably considering the proposal<sup>13</sup>.

### **Threat from China**

The Centre is worried about China's continuous up gradation of infrastructure near the border area, including the Chumbi Valley—situated at the trijunction of India, Bhutan and Tibet. The narrow segment of Tibetan territory between Sikkim and Bhutan is known as Chumbi Valley. It is 500 km away from North Bengal and of huge geo-strategic significance<sup>14</sup>.

New Delhi is concerned over the security of North Bengal as the Chinese troops' forward movement of little more than 100 km in the Chumbi Valley could disconnect all the North Eastern states and Sikkim from the country's mainland. The Indian intelligence agencies fear that China may try to take control of the Siliguri Corridor in a conflict situation<sup>15</sup>. Such a dangerous situation did arise during the brief Indo-China border conflict of 1962.

Any Chinese military advance in this region also endangers security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bhutan—India's closest South Asian ally. The landlocked Himalayan nation is totally dependent on India for its security and supply of essential commodities.

Bhutan is strategically important for both India and China. This South Asian kingdom shares a 470 km-long border with China and has traditionally acted as buffer zone between the two Asian giants. New Delhi is closely monitoring the increasing activities of China in Bhutan. Modi's maiden foreign trip to Bhutan in June 2014 assumed significance against the backdrop of China's growing efforts to woo the Himalayan nation and forge full diplomatic ties with it<sup>16</sup>.

China's increasing participation in the infrastructure development of Nepal also worries New Delhi. Ever since the Maoists made inroads into the country's power structure, China has been used as counterweight to India which had enjoyed clout in Nepal for long. The cross-border ramifications of Nepal's seemingly unending political turmoil on North Bengal especially Darjeeling district that shares border with the Himalayan nation remain another key concern for India.

### **Illegal immigration from Bangladesh**

The maintenance of peace and security in North Bengal, which is home to 50 million people, has turned out to be a challenging mission. The high density of population in this region could be attributed to the continuous influx of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. Millions of people have been migrating from Bangladesh even after its independence in 1971 to the comparatively well-off neighbouring West Bengal that shares more than 1000 km international border.

The successive state governments have adopted a “Bangladeshi migrant-friendly” approach consciously avoiding step to check the influx of foreign nationals for political expediency. In their bids to enlarge the support bases, both the Left Front (LF) and Trinamool Congress (TMC) governments have provided Ration Cards and Voter Identity to the illegal immigrants.

However, in the process of rehabilitating millions of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, the ruling parties in Indian border states like Assam and West Bengal have totally ignored the grave implications of “vote-bank” politics on the host country’s demography, society, culture, economy, stability, peace and security. While the inflow of the Bangladeshis has to an extent been contained in Assam thanks to the proactive role of several organisations of the indigenous people, including All Assam Students’ Union, the illegal immigration of foreign nationals in Bengal appears to be unending primarily due to homogenous socio-cultural conditions on both sides of the international border. The proper implementation of the India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement, which was signed earlier this year, could put an end to illegal immigration from the neighbouring country.

### **Cross-border Terrorism**

This sensitive region is under the Centre’s scanner since 2000. India’s current National Security Advisor Ajit Doval perceives that unchecked influx of the Bangladeshi immigrants constitutes the biggest security threat facing the country<sup>17</sup>. The people of neighbouring Bangladesh continue to illegally cross the border in search of better livelihood in India.

The accidental blast in Burdwan on October 2, 2014 amply demonstrated that the Islamic militants had also slipped in along with the economic migrants. A Kolkata-based report suggests that the state intelligence agencies’ apparent inaction stemming from their politicisation and the ruling parties’ (both LF and TMC) “tacit directives to the police to go easy illegal immigrants” did contribute to the proliferation of militant activities in Burdwan and other places<sup>18</sup>. West Bengal had often been used as a transit corridor by the Islamic terrorists to carry out subversive activities in neighbouring Bangladesh. But the Burdwan blast has highlighted that the state figures prominently in the hit list of jihadi groups as well<sup>19</sup>.

Among all Islamic terrorist outfits operating in this sub-region, the Jamaat-ul-Mujahidin-Bangladesh (JMB) has emerged as the most serious threat to peace and security. The National Investigation Agency’s (NIA) findings exposed JMB’s terror networks to a number of Indian states, including West Bengal. The JMB leaders disclosed in 2010 that they had recruited and trained several Indian Muslims hailing from Assam and West Bengal for waging jihad. The training and indoctrination of the JMB cadres had been continuing in Burdwan and Murshidabad districts for the last few years. Taking advantage of the geographical proximity and porous international borders, the JMB was making concerted efforts to set up bases in West Bengal and Assam<sup>20</sup>.

The Bangladeshi radical Islamic groups’ bids to expand their tentacles across the borders are not a new phenomenon. New Delhi had intelligence inputs long back in 2005 that JMB, Jagrata Muslim Janata-Bangladesh and Harkat-ul-Jihadi-al Islami (HuJI) had been infiltrating into the Indian territory with “strategic, long-term” plans to extend their support to the North Eastern militant groups and make West Bengal a launching pad for spreading their activities<sup>21</sup>.

Earlier reports indicated that the Bangladeshi jihadi groups were enjoying considerable influence in the India-Bangladesh border regions especially in Bengal. The mushrooming of Madrassas funded by foreign Islamist financial institutions on both sides of the international border might have facilitated the radicalisation of local youths. These Madrassas are providing recruits to the JMB and other jihadi outfits. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government was alarmed in the wake of revelation of a deep terror network in West Bengal and Assam. NIA chief Sharad Kumar claimed that as many as 58 terror modules had been operating in Bengal<sup>22</sup>. Intelligence inputs suggest that JMB's ulterior motive is to form an Islamic state in Bangladesh by encompassing three border districts of Bengal—Murshidabad, Nadia and Malda by violent means<sup>23</sup>.

The continued illegal migration from Bangladesh can not be viewed in isolation. The presence of large number of Muslim immigrants makes the job of mobilisation much easier for the Islamic terrorists. The JMB militants of Bangladeshi origin involved in the Burdwan terror module were able to obtain Indian citizenship documents thanks to political patronage<sup>24</sup>. Thus the rise of radical Islamic groups in Bangladesh presents a potent threat to the border regions of India especially West Bengal that shares the major part of the international boundary.

### **Religious Extremism in Bangladesh**

Despite relentless efforts of the Awami League government to curb Islamic militancy, the Bangladesh polity has witnessed a resurgence of radical Islamic groups. There are more than 100 Islamist organisations operating throughout the country. The emergence of jihadi groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir, Hefazat-e-Islam, Ansarullah Bangla Team, al-Quida-affiliated Ansar al-Islam and a few obscure outfits owing allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has unnerved Bangladesh's civil society especially its intelligentsia.

The recent Islamist violence directed against secular bloggers, writers, publishers and foreign aid workers may have repercussions across the border. A report says Bangladeshi jihadi outfit HuJI had been active in areas bordering Assam and Bengal<sup>25</sup>. The ultra-conservative Wahabi ideology is spreading like wildfire across Bangladesh and may reach the migrant population of Bengal any time. The border districts of North Bengal could easily be intruded by radical Islamic ideologues, jihadi groups, West Asia-based terror financing agencies and Non-Government Organisations in the guise of philanthropic activities.

In addition to the terrorist groups, Bangladesh's largest Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami is totally opposed to the present secular-democratic dispensation of Bangladesh and has long been engaged in diabolic designs to subvert the country's friendly ties with neighbouring India.

It is disturbing to note that a few leading dailies of Kolkata accused the ruling TMC of hobnobbing with the fundamentalist Jamaat<sup>26</sup>. The authenticity of such reports could not be confirmed but many observers were surprised to discover the populist chief minister's outreach to the Bangladeshi elements hostile to India for sheer political gains. The Islamist Jamaat has always been under New Delhi's watch for its regressive ideology, radical agenda and virulent anti-India propaganda.

The regrouping of the Bangladeshi jihadi outfits affiliated to the dreaded international terror networks poses another threat to India especially the border regions of Bengal. New Delhi is concerned over the reported formation of a common platform by the Bangladeshi Islamic terrorist groups to expand their activities within as well as outside the neighbouring country.

The security experts are of the opinion that ISI is the real "mastermind" behind all sinister designs. The notorious spy agency's larger objective is to convert Bangladesh into an Islamic state run by religious fanatics who would foment trouble in India particularly North East and West Bengal. It can not be denied

that Bangladesh's Defence Forces Intelligence did facilitate the ISI to make inroads into India's restive North East under Khaleda Zia's premiership (2001-06).

But the situation improved significantly following Sheikh Hasina's assumption of power in 2009. Her government acted decisively against the ant-India insurgents operating from Bangladesh and addressed some key security concerns of India. Both Dhaka and New Delhi reiterated their commitment to fight trans-border militancy and crimes through greater interaction between the security agencies of the two countries and sharing of each other's intelligence inputs in the aftermath of the Burdwan blast.

### **North East's Insurgency**

Several North Eastern militant groups, including United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland had been using North Bengal as a transit route between Bhutan and Assam. Among them, only KLO, which seeks to establish a sovereign Kamtapur for Cooch-Rajbongshis by integrating ten contiguous districts of Assam and West Bengal, might have endangered peace and security of North Bengal<sup>27</sup>. But the setbacks the KLO leaders suffered during the 2003 "Operation All Clear" launched by the Bhutanese Army rendered the outfit inoperative.

There were occasional reports indicating KLO's close links with the hard line faction of ULFA led by Paresh Baruah and its joining of umbrella platform floated by some Myanmar-based North Eastern separatist groups. But those were desperate attempts of a few surviving KLO leaders to prove their relevance among the indigenous Cooch-Rajbongshis. The KLO has ceased to be a security threat to North Bengal.

However, the region faces the danger of spill over effects of neighbouring Assam's ethnic conflicts. The repeated violent clashes between indigenous Bodos and migrant communities like Bengali-speaking Muslims and Adivashis (tea tribes) could trigger an exodus of refugees in bordering North Bengal districts of Alipurduar and Cooch Behar and cause law and order problem. Hundreds of victims of communal riots did take temporary shelter here in the past.

The likelihood of adverse implications of ethnic conflicts on bordering districts of North Bengal that have sizeable migrant population can not ruled out completely. There is an increasing trend of Islamic radicalisation in three Lower Assam districts of Goalpara, Dhubri and Kokrajhar. These areas are geographically contiguous to North Bengal where security and peace could be threatened if things go out of control. The recurrent ethnic violence in Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD)—Kokrajhar, Chirang, Udalguri and Baksa targeting Bengali-speaking Muslim settlers, who are often dubbed as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants by the indigenous Bodos, has radicalised a section of Muslim youths<sup>28</sup>.

Several Lower Assam districts have been facing low-level Islamic militancy for more than a decade. There are at least 14 Islamic extremist groups, including Muslim United Liberation Tiger of Assam, Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam, Islamic Liberation Army of Assam and United Reformation Protest of Assam active in the region<sup>29</sup>.

These outfits have been trying to gain foothold in minority-dominated areas due to large-scale and continuous illegal immigration from neighbouring Bangladesh. The spectre of Islamic radicalisation in North Bengal, where the Bangladeshi migrants comprise more than 25% of the population, looms large in the context of the prevailing situation.

### **Transnational Crimes in the Region**

North Bengal's peace and security have also been threatened by the presence of numerous transnational crimes. The region is fast turning into a thriving centre of trafficking in drugs and weapons and illicit

trade. The Bhutanese refugees of Nepali origin were arrested from different parts of North Bengal with explosives in the past<sup>30</sup>.

Moreover, the region has emerged as a safe heaven for Nepal's Maoist rebels and Bangladeshi criminals and jihadi elements. The illegal Bangladeshi immigrants settled in North Bengal may indulge in smuggling and assist cross-border movements of militants like their counterparts in Assam<sup>31</sup>.

### **Economic Prospects**

Amidst security challenges North Bengal presents a bright scenario in economic terms as this region has fairly developed transport infrastructure. A landmark deal which could be a game changer for this region is the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA). The four South Asian nations inked this pact on June 15, 2015 in Thimphu for seamless movement of people and goods among them. The prime objective of the multilateral agreement is to accentuate the pace of regional integration in South Asia and its economic development<sup>32</sup>.

North Bengal could earn huge revenue as two of the key land routes envisaged under the BBIN MVA, namely: Thimphu-Phuentsholing-Jaigaon-Burimari-Mongla/Chittagong and Kathmandu-Kakarbhitta/Phulbari-Banglabandha-Mongla pass through the region<sup>33</sup>. The local economy is set to receive a major boost when the pact becomes fully operational.

The importance of North Bengal has been reinforced after the NDA government decided to enhance India's economic ties with the South Asian neighbours especially Bangladesh. During Modi's June 2015 visit, New Delhi and Dhaka finalised a deal to export 1 million ton of diesel per year from Assam's Numaligarh Refinery to the neighbouring country through a pipeline from Siliguri to Parbatipur in Bangladesh after the completion of the Rs 200 crore pipeline project<sup>34</sup>. To minimise time and transaction cost of trade, both the countries also decided to up grade the existing railway interchange points at Rohanpur in North Bengal and Singhabad in Bangladesh<sup>35</sup>.

Geography plays a pivotal role in North Bengal's economic integration with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The North Bengal has the rare distinction of sharing borders with three eastern neighbours and the two key road projects proposed by the state government could rejuvenate economic activities in the region and boost India's "Act East" policy once they are materialised.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The Centre is aware of North Bengal's susceptibility to the changing geo-political environment of the Himalayan region and chronic instability in neighbouring Nepal and Bangladesh. A number of developments taking place in this sub-region of South Asia are beyond India's control but New Delhi has to engage consistently with the neighbouring countries through proper diplomatic channels to avert crisis.

Besides, the Centre should bolster the internal security with the active collaboration of West Bengal government and ensure better coordination between the state and central security agencies. West Bengal is still one of the most peaceful states in the country and any attempt to destabilise it must be nipped in the bud.

The state government should play a central role in the maintenance of peace and stability in this sensitive border region. North Bengal's tourism sector has flourished in a peaceful ambience and every care has to be taken to sustain the recent trend. In the absence of any major industry except tea, thousands of local youths have been engaged in tourism, transport and allied activities.

However, the persistent inflow of the Bangladeshi nationals could threaten the economic security of the local people. It is imperative that the ruling elites of Bengal realise the debilitating impacts of unchecked

influx of the Bangladeshis. The continuous rehabilitation of foreign nationals may jeopardise social cohesion and distinct identity of the Bengalis. With the ratification the India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement and smooth exchange of adversely possessed enclaves, the illegal cross-border movement of people must be stopped.

It is important for India to maintain border security, peace and stability in the Siliguri Corridor surrounded by politically-volatile Bangladesh and Nepal and hegemonic China. The Centre is seriously concerned over the precarious geo-political and security situation prevailing in the region. It is even exploring the possibility of constructing underground multi-utility tunneling link (road, rail and power and telecommunication lines) through the “Chicken’s Neck” for optimum utilisation of the narrow land corridor connecting the entire North Eastern region with the mainland<sup>36</sup>.

Due its strategic location, North Bengal may emerge as hub of trade, transit and connectivity when the four South Asian nations—India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan would reach consensus for a multilateral free trade agreement. The prospect of striking such a deal has brightened after the signing of the BBIN MVA.

#### **DISCLAIMER:**

All views expressed here are personal.

#### **About the Author:**

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<sup>2</sup> Panda, Ankit, “Geography’s curse: India’s vulnerable Chicken’s Neck”, *The Diplomat*, November 8, 2013, [www.thediplomat.com/.../geographys-curse-indias-vulnerable-chickens-neck](http://www.thediplomat.com/.../geographys-curse-indias-vulnerable-chickens-neck)

<sup>3</sup> For details, see Ghosh, Shubham, “Sensitive Siliguri Corridor under centre’s scanner”, August 17, 2012, [www.oneindia.com/...sensitive-siliguri-corridor-under-centres-scanner-1055163.html](http://www.oneindia.com/...sensitive-siliguri-corridor-under-centres-scanner-1055163.html) .

<sup>4</sup> See Panda, n.2.

<sup>5</sup> The 44.3 km-long NH 34 runs from Dum Dum in North Kolkata to Dalkhola. See the document “National Highway 34 (Siliguri to Kolkata)”, [www.wikimapia.org/.../NationalHighway-34-Siliguri-to-Kolkata](http://www.wikimapia.org/.../NationalHighway-34-Siliguri-to-Kolkata), retrieved on December 17, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Dutta, Amitabha, and Bhattacharya, C.C., “Development of highway infrastructure in North East & WB”, *The Economic Times*, September 5, 2008, [www.articles.economistimes.indiatimes.com/.../27718738\\_1-road-connectivity-road](http://www.articles.economistimes.indiatimes.com/.../27718738_1-road-connectivity-road).

<sup>7</sup> Salsabari is located near Assam’s border village Srirampur.

<sup>8</sup> See n.1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Bhattacharjee, Rupak, “Trade, Transit and Connectivity between North East and Bangladesh: Emerging Trends”, *Eastern Panorama*, November 2014, vol.xxiii, no. 08, pp. 42-44.

<sup>11</sup> See, n. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

- <sup>13</sup> Singh, Shiv Sahay, “Bengal proposes road connecting State with three countries”, *The Hindu*, June 4, 2014.
- <sup>14</sup> Bhattacharjee, Rupak, “The Chinese shadow over India-Bhutan relations”, *South Asia Monitor*, Spotlight, July 29, 2014, [www.southasiamonitor.org](http://www.southasiamonitor.org).
- <sup>15</sup> See Ghosh, n. 3.
- <sup>16</sup> See Bhattacharjee, n. 14.
- <sup>17</sup> See the report “How serious is the Bangladesh issue for North East India”, [www.quora.com](http://www.quora.com), retrieved on October 24, 2015.
- <sup>18</sup> Nandy, Chandan, and Ghosh, Rudraneel, “Burdwan blast underscores the threat unchecked population flow poses for India and Bangladesh”, *The Times of India*, October, 8, 2014, [www.blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com).
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- <sup>20</sup> Bhattacharjee, Rupak, “Jamaat-ul-Mujahadin-Bangladesh: A potent threat to South Asia”, *The Daily Star*, (Op-ed page) February 2, 2015.
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- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Bhattacharjee, Rupak, “JMB: a common threat to India and Bangladesh”, *The Eastern Today*, (Editorial page) April 28, 2015.
- <sup>24</sup> See the report by Nandy and Ghosh, n. 18.
- <sup>25</sup> Datta, Saikat, “Bangladesh turning into another Pak”, [www.creative.sulekha.com/bangladesh-turning-into-another-pak-12812-blog](http://www.creative.sulekha.com/bangladesh-turning-into-another-pak-12812-blog), retrieved on October 25, 2015.
- <sup>26</sup> Sharma, Reetu, “Burdwan blast case: Is Mamata trying to cover-up the TMC-Jihadi nexus?”, October 7, 2014, [www.oneindia.com/feature/burdwan-blast-case-is-mamata-trying-to-cover-up-the-jihadi-tmc-nexus--1536242.html](http://www.oneindia.com/feature/burdwan-blast-case-is-mamata-trying-to-cover-up-the-jihadi-tmc-nexus--1536242.html).
- <sup>27</sup> The KLO’s objective is to form an independent “Kamtapur” by unifying Cooch-Rajbongshi-dominated six districts of North Bengal—Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, North and South Dinajpur and Malda and four adjacent districts of Assam—Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Goalpara. For details see [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).
- <sup>28</sup> Bhattacharjee, Rupak, “Threat of Islamic terror looms large over Assam”, IDSA Comment, November 12, 2014, [www.idsa.in](http://www.idsa.in).
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> See Ghosh, n.3.
- <sup>31</sup> Basumatary, Jaikhleng, “Implications of Demographic change in the security environment of Assam”, January 19, 2013, [www.claws.in/implications-of-demographic-change-in-the-security-environment-of-assam-jaikhleng-basumatary.html](http://www.claws.in/implications-of-demographic-change-in-the-security-environment-of-assam-jaikhleng-basumatary.html).
- <sup>32</sup> For details see Bhattacharjee, Rupak, “BBIN MVA: A historic step towards regional integration in South Asia”, *bdnews24*, Opinion, July 11, [www.bdnews24.com](http://www.bdnews24.com).
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> See the report “India to start supplying diesel to Bangladesh”, *bdnews24*, June5, 2015, [www.bdnews24.com](http://www.bdnews24.com).
- <sup>35</sup> Bhattacharjee, Rupak, “Modi’s Dhaka visit: A game changer for regional connectivity?”, *South Asia Monitor*, Spotlight, June 24, 2015, [www.southasiamonitor.org](http://www.southasiamonitor.org).
- <sup>36</sup> See n. 1.

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