



ICSSR NERC

# **ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

**India's Northeast  
and Neighbouring  
Countries**

*Edited by*

**C. JOSHUA THOMAS**

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*Edited By*  
**C. Joshua Thomas**

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### **ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT:**

### **India's Northeast and Neighbouring Countries**

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# Preface

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With the paradigm shift from state-centricism to interdependence and global cooperation, the Indian state has been sensitized about the geo-economic potential of its Northeastern Region (NER) as its gateway to Southeast Asian countries. India's Look East Policy, introduced in the early nineties, is, therefore, aimed at gradual integration of the NER with the thriving market across the borders, and thereby, opening up to the emerging opportunities in the Southeast Asia. The NER, because of its geographic location cradled by five Asian countries – Nepal, Bhutan, Tibetan-China, Myanmar and Bangladesh, has natural geo-economic advantages to become the economic bridgehead of South East Asia. The implications of India's relations with her north and northeastern neighbours for NER are far deeper than any other regions of the country. Hence, the prospect of development of NER lies in the strong, stable and mutually beneficial relationship between India and her north and northeastern neighbours.

Keeping this background in focus ICSSR North Eastern Regional Centre invited diplomats, journalists, academics, administrators, research scholars and social activists to a *National Seminar on Partnership for Development: Holistic Approach to Northeast* to deliberate upon the essence of bilateral relations between India and her northern and northeastern neighbours. The Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi sponsored and funded the two-day seminar that was held at Gangtok, Sikkim on 8 and 9 May 2002. This volume is the outcome of that Seminar. We profusely apologize for bringing out this volume so late due to some unforeseen and unavoidable reasons. However, the message of the seminar is as relevant today as it was four years ago. The views expressed in the papers presented and

in the discussions that followed have been put together in this volume under the rubric: *Engagement and Development - India's Northeast and Neighbouring Countries*.

There are a number of officials, scholars and friends who have directly and indirectly helped in organizing this seminar and also bringing out this volume. We would like to put on record our deep appreciation for all their help, assistance and encouragements. But some of them deserve to be mentioned here.

We are grateful to ICSSR, New Delhi for extending financial support to this Seminar and we appreciate much Professor Andre Beteille, Chairman, Professor T.C.A. Anand, Member-Secretary and Dr. Vinod K. Mehta, Director of the ICSSR, for giving us the privilege to edit this volume and bring out in this present book form and without their timely intervention and encouragement this book would not have seen its light.

Special thanks to Professor Mrinal Miri, former Vice-Chancellor, North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) and Chairman, ICSSR-NERC, Shillong for his key note address in the seminar and also for his encouragement. Professor David Reid Syiemlieh, Department of History, NEHU and former Honorary Director, ICSSR-NERC deserve our thanks for helping in many ways in the organization of the seminar. Professor P. Tandon, Vice-Chancellor, NEHU and Chairman, ICSSR-NERC for his constant attention to the activities of the NERC.

A word of appreciation to all the paper presenters for accepting our invitation to prepare their research paper and also personally making it a point to present their papers in the seminar at Gangtok and they are: Ambassador C.V. Ranganathan, Mr. B.G. Verghese, Dr. P.D. Shenoy, Dr. Walter Fernandes, Professor Sujata Miri, Mr. Sanjay Hazarika, Mr. Subir Bhaumik, Dr. Gurudas Das, Professor Sajal Nag, Dr. Partha S. Ghosh, Professor A.C. Sinha, Dr. Samir Kumar Das, Professor R. Gopalakrishnan, Dr. Konsam Ibo Singh, Dr. Udai Bhanu Singh, Professor L.S. Gassah, Professor Bimal Pramanik and others. We are also grateful to Dr. V. Bhattacharjee of Gangtok and Dr. Sujata Dutta Hazarika of

Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati for their assistance in the seminar.

Mr. Sanat Chakrabarty, Editor, *Grassroots Options*, Shillong deserve special thanks for sparing his valuable time to do the copy-editing for this volume.

We are fortunate to have a small team of talented young supporting staff in the Centre and their ungrudging help and cooperation, which made the entire work both during the seminar and also during the editing process much easier to accomplish. Their unassuming services deserve to be recorded here: Ms. Christine Blah, Ms. Narisha Kharbuli, Ms. Cerilla Khonglah, Mr. Romauldo Pasi, Mr. T. Aier, Mr. Rupert Momin and late Mrs. Jean M Blah.

Dr. Gurudas Das, formerly, Reader, Department of Economics, NEHU and currently Head, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, Silchar, who literally shouldered most of the preparatory works of the seminar deserves a big thank. Mr. M.P. Misra, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, has been a friend of NERC's publications and we are grateful to him.

Last but not the least both Kalai and Lind deserve special thanks for their love and understanding.

July 2006

**C. JOSHUA THOMAS**

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# Introduction

—C JOSHUA THOMAS

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Stability of a political system and economic development seem to be positively correlated. In an international system of States, especially in the era of globalization, no particular State can realize these twin goals in isolation. All modern nations, therefore use various international and regional fora to strengthen international support and enhance their 'national interest'.

Foreign policy of a country and its adept political and economic diplomacy are the effective instruments to promote its national interests, protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity and enhance its economic development. Modern States view the conduct of foreign relations as a dynamic exercise, which enables them in building national capability in order to respond optimally to new opportunities and challenges in a fast changing world. While the art of conducting foreign relations has far-reaching implications for national development, it is no less important for the development and security of the bordering regions.

It is important to understand as to how India's Northeast, being surrounded by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar is being affected by India's conduct of relations with these countries. The development interest of Northeastern region, as determined by its geo-strategic location, lies in greater interaction with the markets across the international borders. It may be noted that about 33 per cent of the country's total international border falls in NER involving five out of seven countries having border with India. As NER shares 98 percent of its borders with the neighbouring countries and merely two

per cent with the mainland India, its cross-border dimensions form an important parameter in its development strategy. Moreover, NER shares substantial common resources with areas across its international borders. The historically developed pattern of production and communications are also oriented towards markets across the border. As a result the utilization of natural resources of NER calls for greater cross-country sub-regional development cooperation.

It is also important to examine the role of the national government in promoting this development interest of NER through its conduct of external relations since Independence. It has already been pointed out that the implications of India's relations with her north and northeastern neighbours for NER are far deeper than any other regions of the country. The prospect of development of NER lies in the strong and mutually beneficial relations between India and her north and northeastern neighbours.

Keeping this background in mind the Indian Council for Social Science Research - North Eastern Regional Centre (ICSSR-NERC) organised a two-day National Seminar on 'Partnership for Development: Holistic Approach to North East' at Gangtok, Sikkim on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May 2002. The main objective of this exercise was to deliberate upon the essence of bilateral relations between India and her northern and northeastern neighbours. A study of the nature of engagements, the substance of bilateral relations, structure of reciprocity, and built-in tensions will be of immense help in articulating the policy direction, which will have implications for the development of the frontier region, i.e. NER.

The seminar had five academic sessions and there were 18 research papers presented by distinguished diplomats, journalists, academics, and social activists. Each session had vibrant discussions. We are indeed pleased to present the revised and modified papers with minor editorial touch under the title, *Engagement and Development: India's Northeast and Neighbouring Countries*. We have organised these papers in this volume and divided them into five sections.

**Section I entitled Northeastern Region and the Regional Organisations**, comprises four papers. Dr. Gurudas Das in his paper, *Security, Engagement and Development: Development Interest of India's Northeast and the Art of Conduct of India's Relations with the Neighbouring Countries*, articulated the idea of "development interest of NER" and then went on to analyse as to how India's conduct of relations with the neighbouring countries has delimited the external perimeter as well as inner content of development of the NER. He emphasised that the geo-economic and geo-strategic location of the region is such that cross-border factors are determinants for development of Northeast region. He further outlines three phases of India's relations with her neighbours covering 1947-1962, 1963-1991 and 1992 onwards. The first phase in which the idea of 'Asianism' as an element of India's foreign policy was compatible with the geo-economic potential of NER, but the same could not be utilised due to Nehru's tribal policy, which did not favour any structural change in the economy of Northeast region. Following the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict, the overriding security concerns had negatively influenced the public sector investment in the NER. The second phase, which included the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, brought promises to Northeast region particularly because the resource structure of the Northeast matched the demand structure of Bangladesh. In spite of the promises, Das feels, in retrospect, India's diplomacy failed to synergise the development interest of NER and the security interest of the country which had led the Indian State to intervene in favour of the liberation movement in Bangladesh. However, Das indicated that from 1992 onwards, with the onset of globalisation, new strategic partnership among neighbouring countries is being forged. It is important to harmonise these developments with the strategic location of the Northeast region.

In the second paper, *Unfinished Business in Northeast*, B.G. Verghese, mentioned that the Partition of India in 1947 caused extreme geo-political isolation for Northeast, making it emotionally, though not quite physically, South Asia's third land-locked area along with Bhutan and Nepal. The post-Independence period also brought other pulls and pressures

into play, which strained the integration of the loosely administered or *excluded* frontier regions. This gave rise to a situation where the people of diverse tribal origins sought to differentiate themselves in order to prevent their identity from being submerged in the vast ocean of Indian humanity. According to him the problem of Northeast can be dealt by first recognising that Northeast is a part of India, which is composed of people from a different racial stock, namely, *Mongoloid India* and culturally part of South East Asia.

This is primarily because this huge land mass somewhat shaped like an elephant's ear is connected to Indian heartland by a 37 km wide Siliguri corridor whereas the external boundary of Northeast runs over 4500 km, contiguous with five countries, viz., Nepal, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

He highlighted the necessity of making a distinction between Boundary and Border. He says the words border or frontier and boundary represent very different concepts. While *boundary* would simply refers to the line demarcating the external political jurisdiction of a State, a border or frontier refers to transitional zones or bands of territory that lie on either side of the boundary. Border people share ties of culture and commerce and most often exhibit commonalities of race, people, language, religion, etc. Although India, like any other nation, must be concerned with the determination and inviolability of its sovereign boundaries, however, in its preoccupation with boundary fixation and related issues of border management, the government appears to have lost sight of the importance of developing an appropriate border policy.

Vergheese says, the government's indifference towards bilateralism and intellectual failure to differentiate between boundary and border has alienated the Northeast region further, despite positive geo-political changes in the neighbourhood. It is not that nothing happened across or around Northeast borders, but instead of regional cooperation that should have fostered connectivity, trade facilitation and people to people exchange, these borderland witness insurgency, smuggling of drugs narcotics and spreading of HIV/AIDS, and trafficking in women and illicit immigration.

He thus stressed the need for a more holistic approach to device development strategies that are sustainable and socially just, taking into consideration their unique, livelihood and value system.

Sujata Miri, in her paper, *The Paradox of Development*, examined the concept of development, which she feels is popularly equated with economic development. In her opinion, there is a growing realization in the Northeast that radical economic changes cannot be contemplated without corresponding cultural and political reorientation. Thus, according to her, what is needed is not mere economic development but a cultural and political transformation of the society duly assisted by modern technology. Northeast being home to various great cultures with a history of mutual interaction and exchange makes this difficult as a vitality of these cultures lead many to think that they can appropriate the powerful forces of modern economy while retaining their cultural and social specificity.

This monster of cultural identity often threatens the formation of national identity and mass communication has succeeded in generalising a form of collective identity to some extent. This national identity is seen as a necessary component for the process of modernisation. Although Northeast has been carved out on the Indian side with similar guideline in mind, we have not exactly achieved a level of solidarity between different cultural identities dashing our hopes for acquiring what is called modern development. She finally concludes by saying that the forces of change that impel us are also liable to uproot us and can also provide us with resources which can create for us the collusion that this uprooting is not uprooting at all, that now our roots have only found new sources of energy.

The last paper in this section is on *Shortages, Ethnic Conflicts and Economic Development in NE India*. In this paper, Walter Fernandes felt that lack of any sustainable development has increased the sense of alienation in this region, which has then led to political upheaval and insurgency. He writes that although this region experiences political upheaval, we often forget the reasons behind it - the main

reason being the imposition of control that people outside the region exercise over its economy and the effort to impose a single culture on its people, which threatens both their livelihood and identity. Moreover being highly educated and identity conscious, the population find itself more and more being used as a source of raw material extraction for development rather than being equal partners in the national development process.

Thus according to Walter, power plants and multi-purpose projects for the Northeast are set up for power supply to the rest of the country, whereas people in the region face displacement and dispossession. He further argues against the concept of development more popularly adopted in the Northeast, that is, infrastructure development without any sustainable rehabilitation plan. We need to understand that *land* is very closely linked to their traditional identity, and any development effort, which lacks respect for local culture by alienating them from their land, is bound to fail. He suggested that development models in the Northeast should make an effort to convert *land* into a production resource, and communities into cooperatives. Therefore he concluded that only an economic approach is not enough; what is required is a combination of economic and social investments.

In the second section on **Indo-China and Bhutan Relations - Implications for Northeastern Region**, there are three papers. In the first paper, *India's China Policy: Implications for the Security and Development of the Northeast Region*, C.V. Ranganathan, former Ambassador to China and France appries the group of Sino-Indian relations from the late 1950s to 1976 under the Mao Tse Tung regime where Sino-Indian relations at that time were misperceived. The boundary conflict has been widely documented. Both sides gradually adopted provocative posturing until 1962 when the trauma was witnessed. He describes the present situation to be a *status quo* since both sides have a matured relation and they are engaged in a mutual understanding of each other's position. This has promoted a situation of a non-violent nature. Even though until recently, China has not recognised the merger of Sikkim with India, the positive aspect is that,

administratively, there is no hindrance from China. It is possible to foresee that there is no conventional security threat to India from China. While the Chinese support to Pakistan is a negative feature, bilateral relations are leverage on the issue.

He emphasises certain aspects noteworthy in the context of China. China has successfully pursued external forces to promote development and this development has been used to promote its position in international relations. There is a synergising of both external forces and domestic forces for the purpose of establishing a conducive neighbourhood. Another notable feature is of China's evolving attitude to the ASEAN. China has accorded recognition to every member of the ASEAN, and the latter has enmeshed China in such a network that it cannot provide military support to dissident movements very easily. There is enough evidence to prove that China does not support dissident movements in the Northeast region. China has built land-border connectivity with its borders, thereby using geography to its advantage. Through the Western Regional Development Programme (WRDP), it has concentrated development of specific regions in the country. The question is how we can leverage the Chinese developments to benefit the Northeast region. It is possible, Ranganathan concludes, by enlisting methods of using Sino-Indian relations advantageously – peaceful resolution of territorial disputes, confidence building, intensification of exchanges, cooperation on international forums etc.

A C Sinha, in his paper, *Ethnic Engagement in Bhutan and its Regional Consequences*, covers the ethnic background, the land tenure and feudal social structure of the region. The focus of Sinha's paper is on the ethnic conflict in Bhutan and how to tackle the problem. He identifies three circles of the Bhutanese foreign policy – the Indian circle, the regional circle and the multilateral circle. He observed that the Indian silence on the ethnic conflict in Bhutan is too eloquent to be ignored.

P.S. Ghosh, the author of the last paper in this section, *Bhutan and India: Partners in Progress*, highlighted the fact that Bhutan represents a good example of how Indo-Bhutan

relations can do well for the Northeast. Ghosh said that India plays a significant role in the economic development of Bhutan, such as funding its two Five-Year Plans in the sixties. Other major endeavours in this direction involve the setting up of Penden Cement Project and the Chukha Hydroelectric Project in Bhutan. India provided 60 per cent of the grant for Bhutan major hydroelectric project. Bhutan now not only meets its domestic needs, but also export both cement and power to India.

Ghosh further stated that India has also played a vital role in assisting the foreign trade of Bhutan. He pointed out that Bhutan, in the second half of the seventies began trade with other Third World Countries and India provided transit facilities. Indo-Bhutan trade was further renewed in 1990, and in 1995. The result was that Bhutan's economy registered a commendable growth rate of 6.7 per cent. Besides primary products like coal and dolomite, secondary products were also on the export list.

The third section of this volume focuses on **Indo-Bangladesh Relations - Implications for the Northeastern Region**. There are five contributors. Sanjay Hazarika in his paper, *Bangladesh and the Northeast: Facing Migration, Ending Rhetoric, Embracing a Realistic Strategy for Change*, examines the issue of migration and its impact on the neighbouring Northeastern region, especially from Bangladesh. The speaker drew the attention of the participants to the substantial growth in the Muslim population of Assam through the process of migration. At the same time the growth of the Hindu population in Bangladesh is on the decline. Migration, he reiterates, is a *survival strategy* for the Bangladeshis, but the use of law to solve the migration problems, as is the present practice in India, has not worked. He further points out a realistic workable strategy for change and progress in Assam-Bangladesh relations. Marketing vegetable produce, processed food minerals and providing scope for tourism were some of these strategies. Hazarika also suggested setting up of a National Immigration Commission to take a detailed look at the laws that exist on the issue of immigration. The issue of identity cards to Indian Nationals should be mandatory, he further stressed.

Samir Kumar Das, in his paper, *Ethnicity and Security in Assam: A Plea for Greater Indo-Bangladesh Partnership*, highlights the fact that India and Bangladesh share many a commonality in its culture and language, but these commonalities turn out to be a symbolic threat to the nationhood of both these countries. He grounded his argument on the old English proverb that "familiarity breeds contempt". Das, briefly dealt with two relatively different yet interconnected parts. The first part drew attention to two major threats born out of the commonalities, i.e., immigration and insurgency. The second part shows that bilateralism may not be the panacea for solving the problems of insurgency faced by the two neighbours. It also outlines the framework of a future partnership regime as a step towards resolving these problems and threats.

While elaborating on issues of immigration, Das points out certain alarming trends. Firstly, that immigration is not haphazard and sporadic; in fact, it is very organised. The role of early settlers coming from the same village or district of Bangladesh is important in getting the latecomers settled and economically rehabilitated. In fact, immigration is so organised and planned that it defies any easy detection resulting into an official fall in immigration figures. Secondly, immigrants seem to flock in areas where their brethren are already in substantial number. Thirdly, these immigrant pockets seem to turn fast into hotbeds of fundamentalism and insurgency, because the newly ascended Islamic fundamentalism has acquired an organised and militancy character.

In the paper, *Partnership in Indo-Bangladesh Economic Development: The Case of Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya*, L.S. Gassah traces the trade and commerce activities between the peoples of Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya and Bangladesh. He also pointed out the pre-independence and post-independence trade and economies of both the countries from a historical point of view. He further discussed the border trade agreement between the two countries and argues that what is urgently needed today is the perception on partnership for the overall development of the economy of the areas along the Indo-Bangladesh border.

A.N.S Ahmed, in his paper, *Indo-Bangladesh Relations and its Implication for Northeast India* stresses on the long historical relations shared by India's Northeastern region and eastern Bengal, now Bangladesh. With the end of the Cold War and changing regional and international scenarios, the past experience of regional cooperation between Northeast and Bangladesh has provided clue for a futuristic paradigm for cooperation on a number of issues. Ahmed believes the major problems, such migration, which hampers regional cooperation, can be tackled by active security patrolling and border fencing. However, the issues like minority problems, harbouring rebels from Northeast and cross-border militant activities, remain contentious and require greater political consensus and will to address them.

He hoped that in spite of these unresolved issues, India and Bangladesh could work together on issues of mutual benefits, such as, environmental protection and bilateral trade. In fact, he believes, the bilateral trade between the two neighbours could transform the economy of the entire region. Ahmed emphasised on the need for the promotion of SAPTA as a long-term solution to the entire issue of trade relations.

The last paper in this section by Bimal Pramanik entitled, *Plight of Minorities in Bangladesh with Special Reference to Their Exodus to Northeast India and the Related Issues* highlights the pitiable conditions of the minority communities, which are subjected to unmitigated terror and torture quite frequently in Bangladesh. He expressed concern over the gradual Islamisation of Bangladesh politics, which is fanning the virus of communalism and anti-Hindu sentiments. He cited extensive statistical accounts to show the increasing trend of Hindu migration to India. He also advocated that a national immigration authority should be set up to look into the migration issues. It is mandatory to define and distinguish between a refugee and an illegal migrant and also there is a need to make a distinction between old and new migrants, which in many cases have led to conflict situations.

The fourth section dwells on **Indo-Myanmar Relations - Implications for Northeastern Region** and consisted of three papers. Subir Bhaumik in his presentation on *Burma*

*Policy and its Impact on its Northeastern Region*, analysed the impact of Indo-Burmese policy on the Northeast and highlighted India's primary concern for Northeast and how the *China* factor actually led to the formulation of Indo-Burma Policy. Apart from the *China* factor, India's interest in Burma has much to do with the security of her own sensitive Northeastern region, her desire to access markets in South East Asia including Burma, her concern to stop the inflow of drugs and weapons from Burma's turbulent frontier region, and to ensure the safety and security of the people of Indian origin who continue to live in Burma.

Bhaumik examined how each of these concerns has influenced India's Burma Policy since 1950s and sought to assess the impact of that policy on India's Northeast. He traced out the entire process of military cooperation between India and Burma's military regime from as far back as 1960s, which suffered a setback only when India grew suspicious of Burma's growing relation with China from early 1980s. Although when the student uprising started in 1986-87, India's support to the pro-democracy movement became evident in the shelter India provided to hundreds of Burmese students who fled the country. However, by late 1990s, again India and Burma had reviewed the military alliance in order to tackle cross-border terrorism and drug trafficking.

Bhaumik argued that the thaw in the Indo-Burmese relations would have three-fold impact. Firstly, growing Indo-Burmese military cooperation could effectively deny the rebel groups to one of the longest and safest base areas. Secondly, better bilateral economic ties between the two countries could provide the necessary boost to industrialisation of Northeast India. Thirdly, growth of bilateral trade could improve local economies of the adjoining region. However he agrees that all this will happen only at the cost of India's support for Burma's pro-democracy movement.

Kansom Ibo Singh, in his paper entitled *Indo-Myanmar Relations since 1988: Its Implications on India's Northeast* observes that although initially, India supported the pro-democracy movement of Burma spearheaded by its students, it remained silent when the western democracies and Japan

condemned the State Law & Order Restoration Council (SLORC) for its undemocratic and repressive measures; India did not join them. He said since 1991, India's policy towards Myanmar has been guided by two imperatives: Firstly, that Myanmar should not form an exclusive area of influence of other great powers and secondly, Myanmar being geo-strategically important to India as it borders China and Bangladesh, Singh feels that, Indo-Myanmar cooperation is necessary to counter drug trafficking, insurgency and insecurity of the Northeast.

Uday Bhanu Singh in his paper entitled *Geo-Economic and Geo-Strategic Importance of Myanmar in India's 'Look East Policy'* highlighted that India's Look East policy made an effort to strengthen India's relations with South East Asia in early 1990s and the evolving relationship with Myanmar has been an integral part of that process. He emphasises not just on the historico-cultural component of this relationship but also on the more pragmatic economic and strategic considerations, which could form the basis for a reliable partnership. He pointed out that India's look east policy coincided with its economic liberalisation program and Myanmar's endeavour to assimilate with the international community. His suggestions are: firstly, greater Indian participation in investment and financial sectors in Myanmar and secondly, opening up of land routes through the Northeast, would provide an alternative to the sea route to reach out to the larger South East Asian region.

In section five on **'Look East Policy', Security Aspects - Implications for Northeastern Region** three papers were presented. P D Shenoy in his paper on the *Importance of Northeastern Region in India's Look East Policy* discussed on the development scenario in the northeast, the various initiatives taken by the Government of India to accelerate development in the northeast; to contain militancy in the northeast and strengthen India's ties with the SAARC nations. In another paper on *India's Eastern Neighbours and Insurgency, Small and Heavy Arms Proliferation and Narcotics in Northeast India*, Sajal Nag describes the Northeastern region as one of South Asia's most disturbed regions due to the prevailing insurgency all over the region and the massive influx

of small arms and narcotics in northeast India. He also identified the routes by which drugs and small arms are smuggled into the region and also the linkages between small arms, narcotics and insurgent groups. In the last paper on *Some Geo-Political Aspects Concerning Internal Security in Northeastern India*, R Gopalakrishnan stated that insurgencies, militancy, terrorism, etc. are all symptoms of socio-economic crisis and political uncertainty and he explains the present day conflicts and the internal security problem in the northeast India. Gopalakrishnan asks why despite the various development programmes in the Northeast, insurgency continues and even spread further to other parts of the region. Is this due to the location and numerous neighbours that the region has? Or is due to the political, social and economic predicaments, which the region has found itself into? Or is it a geopolitical heritage? These aspects need to be enquired into for an understanding of the region, which is in a state of revolt.

The papers presented in this volume were read in 2002 and now it's 2006. Four long years has passed and during these four years there are three major changes that took place in the Northeast: *one*, China has recognised Sikkim as part of India; *two*, Northeastern Council has Sikkim as the eighth member, and *three*, NEC has undergone a thorough structural changes. These aspects of course we could not include in this volume, however, we would like to take up the same, perhaps, in our next volume on ***India-China Border Trade: A Strategy for Frontier Development***.

In conclusion, it is clear from the presentations collected together in this volume, *Engagement and Development: India's Northeast and Neighbouring Countries*, earnestly attempts to deepen the understanding of the issues that the region is faced with and calls for accelerating the engagement process with the Governments of the neighbouring countries and opening of the borders for trade and people to people contact, which will be beneficial both for India's Northeastern region and its neighbouring countries.

With the paradigm shift from state-centricism to interdependence and global cooperation, the Indian state has been sensitized about the geo-economic potential of its Northeastern Region (NER) as its gateway to Southeast Asian countries. India's Look East Policy, introduced in the early nineties, is, therefore, aimed at gradual integration of the NER with the thriving market across the borders, and thereby, opening up to the emerging opportunities in the Southeast Asia. The NER, because of its geographic location cradled by five Asian countries - Nepal, Bhutan, Tibetan-China, Myanmar and Bangladesh, has natural geo-economic advantages to become the economic bridgehead of South East Asia.

This book earnestly attempts to deepen the understanding of issues that the Northeastern region of India is faced with and calls for accelerating the engagement process with the governments of the neighbouring countries—Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Nepal—and opening of the borders for trade and people to people contact, which will be beneficial both for India's Northeastern region and its neighbouring countries. It seeks wider readership cutting across the academia, policy makers, diplomats and the northeast watchers.

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## **Opinions...**

A comprehensive analysis that locates the economic development of India's Northeast within the context of its complex linkages with the South and South-East Asian neighbourhood. A focused and well argued case for what is increasingly seen as an essential paradigm within which the alienation and lack of development in the Northeast can be addressed.

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Engaging with the projected prospects of a "post-national" and "post-Wesphalian" globalized order shall be preposterous if one does not take into account the experiences and realities of the "ordering of space" and the twin rationales of development and security of the modern "nation-state", and the state-system of the present "international" order. And, for those people who were once under the dispensation of the colonial rule, a critical assessment of the promises and actual transformations that have marked the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial in South Asia cannot be anything but an indispensable aspect of a meaningful engagement. I suspect that as far as the "Northeast India" is concerned, these issues have yet to be coherently and meaningfully grappled with, leave alone understood or articulated. In this context, the present volume, comes as a valuable attempt to initiate a dialogue on some of those issues. Although one may not agree with some of the views of the contributors, the essays undoubtedly provide us the glimpses of a wide range of pertinent issues such as the impact of the "partition" of South Asia in 1947, Indo-China and Indo-Myanmar relations and the emergence of Bangladesh, and facets of the preponderance of the security concerns in thinking about the region. Besides, the essays also register a differential tenor of perception between those from within the region, and without. I am sure that the volume shall serve as an important step towards further engagement with some of the crucial issues addressed by the contributors, and go a long way in generating informed and meaningful perspectives on the region, its present and future prospects.

**A. Bimol Akoiyam**

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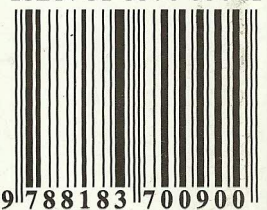
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