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INDIA'S LOOK EAST POLICY AND ECONOMIC PROSPECTS OF NORTHEAST INDIA - A STILWELL ROAD PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

As a part of the India's Look East policy Government of India is opening some new line of communication with East and South East Asia. Some are still to open. Among them The Stilwell Road is one, which formed a part of the legendary Southern Silk Road that linked China with India, crossed the Indo-Burma (Myanmar) border at Pangsau Pass and proceeds to Kunming in Yunan province of southern China. The road is about 1,736 km (1079 miles) long from India to China. The routes used by groups of people for their movement on either side from early past. The Naras, Phakes, Khamyangs, Singphos and others who are now living in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, most of them came by this route. It had a great importance from the point of cultural intercourse, immigration, frontier war etc. The culture viz. food habit, dress habit, economic behaviour, festivals etc. of the frontier inhabitant also too attractive which might open the door of trade, tour, and travels in this frontier region. If the Road will open in near future it will carry industries like above mentioned may uplift the economy of this part. The localities had a tie with the bordering people of other side which could not be stopped by the artificial boundary. From the last decade of the nineteenth century the reopening issue of Stilwell Road is advocated many quarters from the knock and corners of the country as a part of the India's Look east Policy. It has been assumed that the road will bring prosperity to the North-eastern part of the country along with the whole nation which has been discussing in this paper.

KEYWORDS:

Look East Policy, Stilwell Road, Northeast India, Economic Prospects.

INTRODUCTION:

Northeast of India is strategically located and being projected as India's gateway of commerce to the East and Southeast Asia. Even historically, it was always a part of large, dynamic Brahmaputra-Yangtze-Mekong economic region. In today's liberalized and Global Era, the geographical location of Assam (presently NE region) offers a position at strength that can help the state to rejoin its past glory by integrating more closely with the national economy and opening up to the dynamic economics of the East and Southern Asia and beyond. South-East Asia is a continuously growing formidable region having the best potential emerging markets with 220 million households. Due to the high rate of growth, the ASEAN country markets are expanding and there is a massive rise in consumer demand. North east thus has the potential to charge as the strategic base for foreign and domestic investors to tap the vast potential of contiguous market of Myanmar, China including Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia and other East and South-east Asian countries, which constitute nearly half the world population. Such changes certainly would transform Assam as well as the entire Northeast into one of the fastest growing economic regions the world. "In growing economics especially, a wide range of solutions

may be available for constructive bargainers.”

As a part of the P. V. Narasimha Rao government in July 1991, the Look East Policy was launched as the country's economic structural reforms programme. It was “a unique proposition” in the post cold war period in the world history. Through this policy Indian government initiated to re-establish the lost link with South East Asia, which was an antique relation with India. There are four approved trade zones that existed at Champai in Mizoram, Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh, Moreh at Manipur and Nathu-La pass at Sikkim. But still only two posts, Nathu- La and Moreh are open for trade. Other two are still closed for formal trade.

The Nampong pass, which is formed a part of the legendary Southern Silk Road that linked China with India, crossed the Indo-Burma (Myanmar) border at Pangsau Pass and proceeds to Kunming in Yunan province of southern China. The road is about 1,736 km (1079 miles) long from India to China. The routes used by groups of people for their movement on either side from early past. The Naras, Phakes, Khamyangs, Singphos and others who are now living in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, most of them came by this route. It had a great importance from the point of cultural intercourse, immigration, frontier war etc. But since the independence of India as well as Burma (Present Myanmar) the link, the Stilwell Road has been closed for security purposes, according to Government. The people of either sides putting pressure to re-open the road for its socio-cultural, economic, political as well as for security issues concerned. There are many vistas open for the economic prospects of Northeast, if the Stilwell Road would open. It would definitely bring trade, travel and tourism benefits of both sides.

Economically northeast India's prospect is very wide. Its natural resources show the possibility of the future prospects. This region is very resourceful and proper utilization of these resources could develop the whole region along with China and Myanmar. These three nations indicate economically underdeveloped or developing through it has rich natural and human resource according to Human Development Index (HDI). According to HDI of 2010, prepared by UNDP, China with 0.663 HDI ranks 89 out of the total 169 countries in 2010; India 0.519 HDI ranks 121 and Myanmar 0.451 HDI ranks 132 in the same year. The per capita income of these three counties is extremely low in comparison to USA. Export share slowly increasing in China - 4.72%, India - 0.70% and Myanmar export share slightly insignificant in the year 2010.

The Stilwell Road, if it transformed as a Trans-Asian Express Highway and along with it if a Trans-Asian Railway line, then in near future the entire nation, could have direct access by both road and railway not only to Myanmar and South Chinas trading centres, but also to entire East and Southeast Asia.

From the border point of Arunachal Pradesh exports of India could reach by the Stilwell Road to Kunming in South China 1079 miles, within two days, Yangoon in Myanmar within two and half days, Bangkok in four days and Singapore in five/six days. This land route of trade would be shorter and cheaper in comparison to existing maritime routes. India's trade may take a diametrically opposite direction from the West to the East and that too with much more gains, since the buyers and sellers of these market of the East are culturally more akin to the buyers and sellers of India.

With these developments, the Northeast with its locational advantage could emerge as a business transit hub for both the SAARC and ASEAN group of nations. In that case in certain strategic places of the Northeast, large warehouses with business offices to exporters and importers from both sides would be built up. Such places would emerge a commercial hub of the region bustled by business executives, hostels, clubs departmental stores etc.

In North-East, there some thrust areas can emerge as an exporter to the east on some items –

FLORA AND FAUNA:

Northeast India is famous for its flora and fauna. Out of the 925 varieties of orchids available in India, as many as over 600 can be grown in the region due to the favourable climatic conditions. In fact approximately 200 varieties are unique to this region and 60 per cent of these are ornamental in nature with high demand in the international market. It also ideally situated to produce spices, fruit and vegetables, flowers and herbs. Therefore, the Northeast India can emerge as an exporter of orchids, flowers, apple, orange, pineapples, spices, herbs etc. Moreover, the forests of Northeast after a vast array of aromatic plants which can be used in the aromatic industry for the manufacturing of perfumes incense etc. In fact, there is an increasing international trend towards natural perfumes and room fresher, shifting the focus from chemical ones. With proper planning there exists scope for establishing aromatic industry in the region.

MINERALS:

The tri-junctions of India, Myanmar and China, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam lies over the

Eastern Himalayas, Mishmi Hills and Naga-Patkai belt of Mountains comprising geographical formations of different ages and it bears potentiality for occurrence of economic mineral deposits. Huge reserves of coal are present in Dilli-Joipore and Margherita coal belt of Assam. Most remarkable fact is that the Stilwell Road originates from this place and along with Arunachal's mineral the road had a great potentiality to becoming an international corridor. The Road expected to play a key role for export and import of economic minerals among East Asian countries.

The region is a deposit house of mineral resources. After exploration in 1960, Arunachal focuses out its resources. The eastern part of Arunachal is also rich in mineral resources. So far investigated mineral are as follows which can bears the potentially of a great industry. Abrasive minerals garnet and quartz are two minerals that occur as grains in sufficient quantities in river sand, Garnet is found in Khetabari formation while quartz occur in abundance in sedimentary rocks, granite geris can be used separated easily and used for making sand paper in cottage industry.

Brass-metals, Copper, nickel, cobalt and Zink are found in different part of Arunachal Pradesh. Poly-metallic Sulphide is also available in this region.

Sulphide minerals in Lohit, Limestone in confluence of Tidding and Tellu river, Marbals in Tezu river, Dona river, Lohit valley, Dibong valley, Mica in Dibong valley, Pyrite and Pyrrhotite in west Orsam village of Lohit valley, platinum in the sand of the Noa-Dihing river, Graphite in Lalpani, Malybdenite in near Apruni village in Dibong valley, Coal, Petroleum etc. some important deposit of minerals in this region.

Among these minerals Coal and petroleum are two most important with respect to the Stilwell Road. In the time of World War II, along the Road a pipe line also followed up to Kunming for fuel supply.

The economic minerals resource of this region has not been properly assessed. Out of the minerals discovered so far, the limestone and marbles can be used for manufacturing of cement and decorative slabs respectively. Huge deposits of graphite will find its importance in different industries. Extensive intrusive of Mishmi massif may prove to be store house of many metallic minerals in future. The ophialite, serpentinites and other ultra-basic convergent boundary rocks bear prospect for occurrence of many sermonic minerals the Lohit complex of Mishmi Hills is believed to be northern continuation of the Precambrian rocks of Mogok belt of Myanmar which is very rich in precious gemstones. One may hope for finding the same in Arunachal Pradesh also. The huge reserves of coal in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, very close to the Stilwell Road, is to be given due importance. There is a great possibility of export of the coal from India to adjacent countries through this important Road in future.

Table 1: CANDIDATE MINERAL DEPOSITS FOR QUICK EXPLORATION

Deposit	District/State	Industry Proposed	Capacity
1. Granite Bura Mayangh	Morigaon, Assam	Dimensional Stone	4000sq.m. polished slab
2. China clay Upper Deopani	Karbi-Anglong, Assam	Ceramic Industry at Bokajan. Insulators and white wares at Deopani	300TPD for insulators and white wares
3. Coal Margherita/Bora Golai	Dibrugarh, Assam	Thermal Power Station	1m.t. annually
4. Limestone New Umrangshu	NC Hills, Assam	Cement plant at Lanka	1m.t. annually
5. Glass Sand Jiyajuri/Borhola	Nagaon, Assam	Glass Industry	
6. Cement plant based on Phungvor limestone	Ukhrul, Manipur	Cement	200 TPD
7. Limestone Maumluh-Mawsmai Ichamati/Shella	East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya	Export oriented cement plant	3 lakhs TPY
8. Limestone Litang valley	Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya	Cement plant Sutnga	3 lakhs TPY
9. Limestone Lumshong	Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya	Paper grade lime plant	200 TPD
10. Kaoline Muleih	Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya	Ceramic plant	
11. Limestone Ichamati/Shella	East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya	Calcium/Carbide plant	45 TPD

**Table 2: KNOWN MINERAL RESOURCES OF NORTH EASTERN REGION
(EXPLORATION STATUS)**

State	Name of mineral	of Locality	District	Reserves	Remarks
Arunachal Pradesh	Coal	Chanhlang-Namchik	Changlang	93.00mt	For coking blend, synthetic petroleum, power generation
		Namphuk			
	Limestone	Tidding	Lohit	91.00mt	Suitable for cement and lime burning
		Dali	Siang	225.00mt	
		Hunli	Lohit	-	Suitable for cement and lime burning, Suitable for cement and lime burning
	Dolomite	Rupa	Kameng	185.00mt	SMS and Refractory
		Menga	Kameng	3.75mt	SMS and Refractory
		Dedza	Kameng	58.00mt	SMS and Refractory
	Graphite	Taliha	Lohit-Sabansiri-Siang	84.673mt	
		Lalpani-La-Ramdak			
Assam	Quartzite	Kalaktang	Kameng	3.13mt	Ferrosilicon grade
	Coal	Makum	Dibrugarh	235.00mt	High sulphur, low ash, high caking index and calorific value
		Koliajan	Karbi-Anglong		High moisture, high ash and high sulphur
		Dilli-Jeypore	Dibrugarh	55.36mt	Low ash, high sulphur coal
	Limestone	Garampani	NC Hills	104.00mt	Cement grade blendable, high R ₂ O ₃ limestone

State	Name of mineral	of Locality	District	Reserves	Remarks
	Koilajan	Karbi-Abglong	124.00my	Cement/Lime buring	
	Sylvetta-Meyongdisa	Karbi-Anglong	2.00mt	Ferro-Portland cement	
	Umrangshu	NC Hills	35.00mt	Cement grade, High R ₂ O ₃ limestone	
	Koillajan and sylvetta	Karbi-Anglong	0.71mt	For pottery and fire bricks	
	Namdang-Lido	Dibrugarh	0.05mt	Fire bricks	
	Sylvetta	Karbi-Anglong	0.06mt	Ceremic and refractory purposes	
	Upper Deopani	Kari-Anglong	0.61mt	Gr. I Type	
	Subankhata	Nalbari	0.24mt	Petroleum refining and fertilizer mfg.	
	Chandardinga	Goalpara	30.00mt	Suitable for sponge iron	
		Karbi anglong, Goalpara, Kamrup, Nagaon	2700million cubic metre (540 mcm)	Polished blocks and Dimension stone industries	
	Chipilangso	Karbi-Anglong	50.00mt	Mostly of more than 10% sillimanite concentration-Refractory.	
	Ukhrul	Ukhrul Ukhrul	4.60mt	Cement grade mostly being utilized by mini cement plant	
	Phungyer	Ukhrul	3.20mt	50 TPD of Department of Industries, Manipur	
	Hundung		1.80mt		
	Kongvan	Churachandpur	2.52mt		

Sources: The report of the Task Force for the North-Eastern States 1996, Government of India.

TOURISM:

The Northeast India is well known for its bio-diversities and heritage sites too. In Arunachal Pradesh, Tawang, Namdapha, Lack of no return, Jaipur, Tezu, Parshuramkunda etc. very attractive place for tourist. In Assam Majuli, Kaziranga, Manas, Pabitora etc can be developed further as tourist spots attaching more tourists. If modern transport and communication systems along with the requisite infrastructural facilities between the ASEAN countries and India developed, then tourists visiting the ASEAN countries are likely to extend their tour programmes to the Northeast India, a few hundred miles away, for visiting its exotic bio-diversity and heritage sites. In 1996, an internationally reputed consultancy firm, Coopers and Lyband submitted a report to the Govt. of Assam, which states that if the vast tourism potentials of the north-east India are fully tapped and developed, within 20 years the region will receive more tourists than Singapore on Bangkok. Because almost all the western and Japanese tourists visiting South East Asian region would fly or drive a few hundred kilometres more to enjoy the scenic and cultural beauties of the

north eastern region.

The adjacent areas of the Stilwell Road provide great scope for development of tourism. The Pangsau pass located at an attitude of 1,242 meters and short drive about 3km from this point, a panoramic view of Hukoong valley can be observed where mystic 'Lake of no return' is located. In this lake large number of airplanes of Allied forces had crashed during the time of World War II and many soldiers also vanished from the lake when they were had gone to bath or swimming. That's why the American called it the 'Lake of no return'. Another tourist place of the area is the cemetery of War, where thousands of unknown soldiers lies for over. The Dibru-Saikhowa National park is also an attractive tourist spot in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The areas, which passes the historic Stilwell Road is a virgin area and here a great potentialities of growth of tourist industries. The unpopulated ever green forest and natural beauty as well as valuable resources are available in this area. There have the potentialities of multi-dimensional tourism prospect like sight-seeing tourism, wildlife tourism, advantage tourism, eco-tourism, river-cruise tourism, heritage tourism, cultural tourism, business tourism, tea tourism, sports tourism, festival tourism, educational tourism etc.

TABLE 3: TOURIST SPOTS &FUNCTIONS OF NORTH EAST INDIA

	Tourism	Places	Functions
1.	Site-seeing tourism	All over North East	Site Visiting by road/waterway/air
2.	Wildlife tourism	Namdapha, Kaziranga, Manash, Pabitora, Dibru-Saikhowa	Visiting and observing the sites
3.	Adventure tourism	Patkai hill, River Brahmaputra, Dihing, Dibru, Lake of no Return	Tracking, racing Rafting, gilding, rock climbing para-sailing.
4.	Eco-tourism	Stilwell road and its adjoining areas	-
5.	River-cruise tourism	Brahmaputra and other Rivers	Fishing, rafting, boating, para -sailing, river cruising etc.
6.	Heritage tourism	Historical place of Assam like Sivasagar, Majuli, Arunachal Pradesh etc.	By visiting the places
7.	Cultural tourism	Culturally rich zone of NE at India	By attending of ethnic groups cultural ceremonies.
8.	Business tourism	NE and its adjoining areas	-
9.	Tea tourism	Tea gardens of NE	Ceremonies of Tea - tribes, Visiting Banglows, tea garden etc.
10.	Sports tourism	Rivers and land of NE	Swimming, Golf, racing, etc.
11.	Festival tourism	North-Eastern zone	Celebration of different festivals organised by various ethnic groups.
12.	Educational tourism	Whole NE	According to their interests.
13.	Pilgrimage	Holley and religious places of NE	By visiting the places.

Though the area has potentialities to developing the tourism industry, most of these are yet to be explored. If materialised property, each and every idea will be able to attract both the domestic and foreign tourists from all corners of the world. It is not that tourist will go back to their homes after visiting these sports of the foot of Stilwell Road. Rather, Stilwell Road will act, if reopened as an arrow-mark for the tourists to visit other tourist spots of India. Again Stilwell Road would not link India with Myanmar and China only, but will be a road link to other Southeast Asian nations like Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, etc. Realization on these potentialities and prospects will be possible only when there exist a suitable and planned tourism policy. The policy should certain will the strategies to overcome the infrastructural problems, and administrative barriers like the 'Restricted Area Permit' system etc. Again, the reopening of Stilwell Road is alone not enough for tourism development without developing the other aspects, specially the border trade concept. So, both will be complementary and the tourism policy should be supplemented by another pragmatic cross-border trade policy. But for this road and airways between the Southeast Asian region and India have to be developed.

TEA INDUSTRY:

No more explanation is required about tea industry of Assam. Assam alone produces about 50% of country's tea and these industries of India needs some new international markets. Assam tea exported to Thailand, Canada, Germany and for this some special treaty already been signed. Thus tea industry of Assam can find new outlet for exploring its products to the Southeast Asian countries, if Stilwell Road is developed.

CONCLUSION:

Though the Stilwell Road was reconstructed into military purposes, pre-renovation phase was its socio-cultural and economic importance for both the sides. It was an important episode of the cartographic and strategic history of frontier also. Beside this the road has a prosperous past and potential future; the potentialities are properly not utilized for the benefits of the region. If the potentialities utilise in proper plan and program the region must be a developed one in the history of mankind. Cooper and Lybrand, one internationally recognized firm said that North-east will be become a developed region than Singapore within twenty years if its tourism prospects fully utilised. For the development of the region the local entrepreneurs must hold the key instead of outsiders. Otherwise the reopening of the road will be a transit path and the areas will be a transit point without any benefits. If the key goes to the foreigners and the local people will not be aware then the area will be dumping by outsider communities and the region suffers must. To establish some beneficial projects local youths should come forward and start to set their dreams to reality by establishing farms like food processing, horticulture, floriculture, tourism, craft Industry etc. which are continuing in the neighbouring countries like China. Otherwise the Stilwell Road will be a history, instead of reopening of the road and implementing of Look East Policy. So to honour the great work of Joseph Warren Stilwell, which was considered as strategic and military importance during Second World War period should be converted to economic interest, which will boost the region to a developed one. According to Nehru, "Assam has the look of great reserve of strength and potential power..... I have no doubt that great highways by road, air and rail will go across her connecting China with India, and ultimately connecting East Asia with Europe, Assam will then no longer be an isolated far away province by an important link between the East and West."

Recently Govt. of India is attaching top priority in opening all traditional trade routes between the North-eastern states of India and the neighbouring countries to encourage trade and commerce leading to economic development of the region. Recent diplomatic developments hinted at the major policy shift and expressed that "The North-eastern states have to have an access eastward. Opening up of the natural outlet for the north-east is a challenge and have to achieve it. The natural movement of goods, people and services from northeast is not through Calcutta."

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