

Introduction

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1. Objectives of the Research

The present study forms part of a research project entitled 'Potential of Regional Relations among Eastern South Asian Countries' that is being conducted at IDE-JETRO during the 2004 financial year. The Eastern South Asia sub-region is defined in our study as the area comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the states of West Bengal, eight states of North Eastern India. We have also included Myanmar and Yunnan Province of China because of their contiguity with, and growing importance over, the sub-region.

This study, which focuses attention on the North Eastern Region of India, follows previous studies conducted jointly with the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh and the Centre for Bhutan Studies (Inoue, Murayama, Rahmatullah and Centre for Bhutan Studies 2004). IDE-JETRO approached the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (C-NES), India, because of the latter's active involvement in issues concerning India's North Eastern Region not only in the field of research but also as regards development programmes and projects as well as policy making. The wide and balanced human and organizational network of C-NES has made an indispensable contribution to our entire project.

The study has three objectives: firstly, to garner fundamental information with respect to the current state of economic, political and social inter-relatedness among the constituent areas of the North Eastern Region as well as with surrounding countries and regions, and secondly to seek out the down-to-earth views of local people, governments, the business sector and civil society organisations towards the future course of sub-regional co-operation. Lastly, through our research, we intend to deepen our understanding of the problems and potential of the North Eastern Region, which has hitherto been a rather a neglected area in our work on South Asia.

2. Rationale of the Research

While our objective is first and foremost to analyse the scope of socio-economic development through the strengthening of regional cooperation in South Asia, we wish to focus, mainly on practical as well as on academic grounds, on Eastern South Asia in particular, rather than on the whole of the South Asian region.

From a practical point of view, we can cite the recent development of the 'Look East' stance in some of the South Asian nations and of several sub-regional initiatives in the region. In the current global economic context, various initiatives to integrate national economies have been promoted at bilateral, sub-regional and regional levels. In the case of South Asia, however, the development of a regional framework, namely the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the consolidation of amicable bilateral relationships have been disappointingly slow. In response to this stagnation of relationships within South Asia, some countries in search of meaningful economic partnerships, including India and Bangladesh, have been increasingly looking east beyond the region, especially to ASEAN and China, whose economies are growing rapidly.

Meanwhile, since the latter half of the 1990s, new moves for strengthening sub-regional ties within the eastern part of South Asia have been gradually given shape by the initiatives of various actors including governments, the private sector, civil society institutions and multinational agencies. Included amongst these are the South Asian Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ), BIMST-EC, the Kunming Initiative (BCIM), and the Asian Land Transport and Infrastructure Development (ALTID) programme¹. We would like to clarify to what extent the 'Look East' policies and the 'sub-regional frameworks' are realistic approaches given the economic, political and social conditions of Eastern South Asia.

In the academic field, studies of regional cooperation among the countries of South Asia have so far tended to concentrate on economic cooperation between the various nation states. Despite numerous meetings and writings on SAARC, the regional association has made little headway in terms of strengthening economic and political ties. Thus, studies on SAARC *per se* seem to remain largely theoretical or normative in nature. On the other hand, focusing on bilateral relationships of particular countries has often fallen short in respect of both the macro framework of looking at issues in broad terms and the micro information

that is needed to reflect local realities. In this project, we take an intermediate approach to the issue of regional or sub-regional co-operation. In taking that approach, we delimit our field of study to the sub-region of Eastern South Asia while also looking beyond the limits posed by the boundaries of nation states.

In the methodological approach described above, the North Eastern Region of India is of great importance due to its geographical location. It not only occupies a central position in Eastern South Asia, bordering with all other countries and states, but is also a bridge for connecting the Subcontinent with East and the Southeast Asia. The North East has been a crossroads for people, trade and culture since ancient times. It will resume this function again in the future if sub-regional cooperation makes real progress. In reality, however, the post-colonial framework of nation-states and subsequent changes in bilateral relationships have served to hinder rather than promote the expansion of regional integration. Instead, an incessant flow of people across the borders of the North Eastern Region has instigated tensions among people competing for scarce economic and political resources.

An analysis of the sub-regional relationship from the perspective of the North Eastern Region would entail a complexity additional to that of a single country or a state, for the North East is a group of independent states in India as well as a region within India. The former fact raises the question of whether conflicts of interest might occur among the individual states of the North East as well as among different ethnic and social groups of people within the individual states. The latter point concerns the relationship between the Centre and the states, and how this relationship affects the North East. The relationship with the Centre has a far-reaching influence by way of limiting the power of the individual state to make decisions with respect to the promotion of sub-regional co-operation. Therefore, we should take note of the diverse views of people regarding sub-regional relationships and also look into their embedded social, economic and political conditions.

3. Field Trip

The field trip was made for the duration of three weeks from August to September 2004². We visited New Delhi, Guwahati and Dibrugarh in Assam and Shillong and Dawki in Meghalaya. Thanks to the wide network of the C-NES, we were

given opportunities to meet people who were concerned with the problems of the North Eastern Region in various capacities including government officials, business representatives, academics and other members of civil society.

4. Some Findings

Detailed information concerning each state and its politico-economic relationships with surrounding states and countries is presented in the subsequent chapters. Here, as an introduction, I will briefly summarize points that occurred to me during the course of the interviews that were held during our visit. It should be emphasised that these essentially casual observations need to be followed up and substantiated by future in-depth research.

It is not a matter of money?

Our trip started from New Delhi where we met several high officials of the Planning Commission and also of Ministries relevant to our research, including Commerce, External Affairs, DONER (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region), and Human Resources. A renewed emphasis on the development of the North Eastern Region was orchestrated through the voices of the government officials.

Since the latter half of 1990s, there has been a shift in the approach of the central government towards the North Eastern Region. In 1996 the then Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda announced a Rs.6,100 crore economic package, following his visit to the region. This was endorsed by his successor I.K. Gujral. The previous BJP Government led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee provided another package of Rs.10,217 crores in 1998 to boost the region's development. As well as the 'gifts' by successive prime ministers, there is a stipulated allocation for the North Eastern Region from the budgets of the central Ministries/Departments. In October 1996, under the 'New Initiatives for North Eastern Region', it was stipulated that at least 10 percent of those budgets should be earmarked for the development of the North Eastern states. Responding to a fall in expenditure below the 10 percent target, the BJP government, following the Lok Sabha elections of 1998, created a Non-lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR). NLCPR pools the unspent balance of the budgets of the central Ministries/Departments concerned. The broad objective of the NLCPR scheme is

to ensure speedy development of infrastructure in the North Eastern Region by increasing the flow of budgetary financing for new infrastructure projects and schemes in the region. For the financial year 2003/04, NLCPR approved support for the projects amounting to a total of Rs. 3,484.76 crores against the opening balance of Rs. 3,643.67 crores (DONER 2004). Along with the administration of NLCPR, matters related to the planning, execution and monitoring of development schemes and projects of the North Eastern Region have been handled by DONER. It should be noted that DONER is the only Ministry of the Indian government that deals exclusively with a specific region. DONER was initially created as a Department in 2001 and was upgraded to a Ministry in May 2004 under the present Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government. The continued interest of the central government in the issues of the North Eastern region has been confirmed by the fact that the region has been proclaimed as a national issue in the National Common Minimum Programme.

However, the earmarked allocations have not been fully realised. The actual expenditure in the North Eastern States by the various central Ministries/Departments in 2002/03 was 8.54 percent, below the target of 10 percent, although an improvement has been registered over the years as the rate was 6.63 percent in 1998/99 (DONER 2004). At both the Centre and in the states of the North Eastern Region, there are factors inhibiting the smooth flow of money. A high official of DONER refers to the absorption capacities of the states at the stage of budget implementation. Although DONER admits monitoring and evaluation of projects has been essential for successful utilisation of resources, and several measures have been taken including frequent visits to the projects by high-ranking officials, close monitoring is hindered due to delays and to flaws in the reports submitted by the state governments.

In the eyes of the people of the North Eastern Region, the states are not solely responsible for the under-utilisation of central funds. A senior official in the North Eastern Council (NEC) based in Shillong states that the Centre's decisions are often not suited to the realities of the North East. For instance, construction of a number of small-scale dams is considered preferable to the building of a large-scale dam, a choice of the Centre, because the latter could cause irreversible social and environmental impacts and does not fit the topographical conditions of the North East. In general, the societies of the North Eastern Region have a problem of adapting to systems devised by the Centre. According to the official,

the communities of the North East have indigenous systems of governance that are in many ways superior to the unqualified adoption of universal systems imposed by the Centre. However, the laws and regulations enacted by the Centre for application to the North Eastern Region do not take cognisance of indigenous systems and customary laws.

A critique against the central government for its lack of understanding regarding the realities of the North Eastern Region was echoed also by one of the Khasi chieftains (*Syiem*) whom we met in Meghalaya. At issue was the impact of the Supreme Court verdict of 1996, imposing a ban on the felling of trees. Although this case initiated by public interest litigation is considered to be a victory for environmental protection, it abruptly deprived a large number of tribal people of their livelihood without finding them an alternative means of survival. For the chiefdoms, it also meant a loss of their largest source of income in the form of the earnings that they derived from forest products and related levies and tolls³. The *Syiem* questioned the attitude of the Centre as well as the random application of legal judgements to regions which exhibit varied social, economic, cultural and climatic environments (See also Nongbri 2001).

Cleavages exist not only between the Centre and the states but also between Constitutional bodies such as the State Governments and District Councils⁴, and traditional institutions of governance. Khasis have a traditional system of governance called *Dorbar*⁵. The Panchayat Raj local government system was institutionalised by the 73rd and 74th amendment acts of the Constitution in 1992. At that time Meghalaya, along with other areas such as the States of Nagaland and Mizoram, was exempted from implementation of the system because it was equipped with pre-existing self-governance institutions. Nevertheless, conflicts exist between the District Councils and the *Dorbars*. The Sixth Schedule stipulated that the District Council has the power to make laws with respect to the appointment or succession of Chiefs or Headmen. Subsequently, the Succession of Chiefs and Headman Act of 1959 conferred on the District Councils powers to appoint or dismiss any *Syiem* (Mukhim 2004). This tends to cause the arbitrary dismissal of *Syiems* who are not cooperative from the point of view of the District Councils' officials. The increased flow of development projects is exacerbating this tendency. According to the *Syiem*, the expansion of Indian political system through the State and the Districts has been responsible for a proliferation of corruption. By co-opting rural elites, corruption has also permeated into the traditional systems as well.

On the whole, people accept with respect the authority of traditional institutions. Nevertheless, the indigenous institutions are not free from innate problems, as was pointed out by Patricia Mukhim, our facilitator in Meghalaya. A subtle point is that the *Dorbar* excludes women from assuming leadership (Mukhim, undated). Although the Khasi is a matrilineal society and seemingly more egalitarian, the traditional institution has a clear gender bias whereas Panchayat Raj takes gender issues into consideration as it stipulates that not less than one-third of the seats should be reserved for women. Moreover, there are other 'undemocratic' elements inherent in the traditional system, such as its exclusion of the non-tribal population living in the localities concerned, and its stipulation that only people belonging to a certain clan can elect *Syiem*.

Some of the village *Dorbars* are involved in development projects and according to a top official of Meghalaya government, their indigenous knowledge is highly valued in projects such as natural resource management. Nevertheless, we could not help but conclude that conflicting relationships among the various governance bodies are bound to hinder the smooth implementation of development projects as well as the effective delivery of social services for the people.

The approach of the Centre towards the North Eastern Region was for a long time based on the government's security interests. Earlier, in 1972, the NEC was established as a development wing of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The creation of DONER in 2001 signifies a policy shift towards putting more emphasis on development rather than on security. It is assumed that insurgencies or more moderate forms of general dissatisfaction among the people of the North East will be pacified through providing them with the fruits of development. However, pumping in money without proper streamlining and utilisation has opium-like effects, says Bhagat Oinam of Jawaharlal Nehru University, who is from Manipur. This opinion is endorsed by Jairam Ramesh, Member of Rajya Sabha, in his inaugural lecture at a symposium organised by the Centre for Northeast India, South and Southeast Asia Studies (CENISEAS)⁶. After delineating the paradigm shift in the approaches of the central government towards the North East, Ramesh categorically said, 'public expenditure is the least of the problems as far as the North East is concerned. It's not the problem, in fact it has become the problem' (Ramesh 2004).

Looking for the North Eastern way of development

During our visit to India, we met with the Governors, the Chief Ministers, the Ministers and the high ranking bureaucrats of both Assam and Meghalaya, with business representatives of institutions such as the Federation of Industries and Commerce of North Eastern Region (FINER), the North East Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NECCI), the Confederation of Indian Industries, Assam Chapter, Bharatiya Cha Parishad and a group of Meghalaya-based entrepreneurs, the Indian Oil Corporation, Assam Division and Oil India Limited, with academics at North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Dibrugarh University, Guwahati University and Assam Institute of Management, with officials of the North Eastern Development Finance Corporation (NEDFI), and we were present at roundtables organised by C-NES and CENISEAS. On each of these occasions, we were made aware of the vast development potential of the North Eastern Region (see for instance NEC 2004). Personally, I am indeed impressed with the abundant natural and human resources of the North East, resources that include the co-habitation of a myriad of different ethnic groups. The North East makes a sharp contrast to its neighbour, Bangladesh, on which I have worked, and to which I therefore referred as an implicit framework of comparison. Nevertheless, compared with Bangladesh, which seems to have discovered its own path of development after numerous experiences of failure, I feel that the North Eastern Region is still in the process of embarking on its course of development⁷.

There is no denying that the region suffers from peculiar constraints especially in relation to political, economic and social integration with the rest of India as well as within the region itself. These constraints make it extremely difficult to reach consensus and to promote concerted efforts for development, the ultimate goal of which is the well-being of the people. Even when the same opinion is expressed by a number of people, it seems to me that there is an absence of coordination among the various organisations and groups of individuals, a failing that reduces the explanatory power that they deserve. An example of another kind of difficulty is that in the North Eastern Region the social space of NGOs is limited compared with Bangladesh where NGOs have managed to occupy leading positions in the development discourse, especially with respect to social development and poverty reduction. An important reason for this is the problem of the credentials of the NGOs which, in the view of the government which anticipates the arrival of a great number of such organisations, have links with anti-government militancy

groups. Because of this, a high official of DONER states that partnership with NGOs is very difficult. On the other hand, we should not neglect the fact that so-called 'insurgent' groups have in a way facilitated development activities by drawing attention to localities about which the government was previously indifferent. (Hazarika 1994). As already mentioned, the indigenous institutions are also playing a role of development catalysts⁸. And then there are government agencies. Thus, there is a plethora of development agencies and capable individuals all differing in their approaches. What makes it more difficult for the North East is that differences of opinions and approaches tend to be solved by means of arms and money and not by dialogue.

That promoting economic relationships, particularly trade with the surrounding countries, is an important key for the development of the North Eastern Region was one of the common views shared by the people we met. It was stressed that promoting trade is not just for economic advantage, but that trade would bring with it different kinds of relationship as mentioned by Mrinal Miri, Vice-Chancellor of NEHU. With respect to the insurgency problem, too, trade might open a new vista for coping with contentious issues through involving people beyond man-made borders in dialogue (Baruah 2004).

In the various sub-regional initiatives mentioned above, the North Eastern Region occupies a strategic location. Nevertheless, the geographical advantages of the North Eastern Region do not necessarily ensure the continuation of its role as a main player in initiatives developed since the 'Look East' policy of India. The interests of China could well advance in directions that bypass the region while, moreover, the North East could be dragged down by age-old confrontational politics within and beyond its borders. At this particular juncture, there is a pressing need to grasp the opportunities of the moment, and exploit them with a carefully worked-out plan for bringing the utmost benefits to the region's people. In this regard, the efforts of networking by civil society groups such as C-NES and CENISEAS, and the convergence forum involving businessmen, academics and other members of civil society in Dibrugarh referred to by Manoj Jalan, an entrepreneur, are highly welcome as contributions toward the creation of synergy effects. Sanjib Baruah of CENISEAS states that in order to overcome the opposition to sub-regional cooperation, which is based on security concerns, it is necessary to fire people's imaginations as to what sub-regional cooperation can achieve.

Perceptions towards the Neighbouring Countries: Myanmar and Bangladesh

Although a new perspective is important, when one considers sub-regional cooperation, one needs to be realistic and specific, warns Sanjoy Hazarika of C-NES, our main facilitator. His comments were made in relation to the re-opening of the Stilwell Road. This road connecting Ledo, Assam and Kunming, Yunnan Province of China, through Myanmar was constructed during the Second World War under the leadership of American General Joseph Stilwell in order to provide logistic support to then Kuomintang Government which was fighting the Japanese army. After the war, the road lost its *raison d'être* and its condition deteriorated (Webster 2003). Pradyut Bordoloi, the Assam Minister of Environment and Forests, and a popular MLA from the Ledo area, together with many other people strongly emphasised the merits of re-opening the road.

Sanjoy Hazarika who has driven along the other major road, which is being pushed by Myanmar – Moreh in Manipur through Tamu and Kaleaw in Myanmar down to Mandalay and then down to Yangon (the road goes further east to Kunming), while admitting the significance of the road, questioned the viability of the project. Besides pointing to the deplorable condition of the road, he has also drawn attention to the possibly less than keen reaction from the Myanmar government, for the road passes through areas in Myanmar where anti-government forces are active. The Indian government also seems to prefer a different road, which passes through the Moreh (Manipur) and Tamu (Myanmar) border areas. However, there is another opinion regarding the response of the Myanmar government towards the Stilwell Road as reported by a representative of the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII). CII is one of the active players in promoting trade and investment with Myanmar. According to their representative, the Myanmar Government is positive about the renovation of the Stilwell Road and is asking India for financial assistance. CII is also calling for interested investors on the basis of a BOT arrangement. As for the character of the current Myanmar Government, there is a difference of opinion among the academics and the journalists, and the business people. Whereas academics and journalists harbour reservations about the repressive nature of the military junta and its attitude to human rights, the business people seem to think that economic imperatives will prevail and that economic development will lead to the democratisation of the country. How do local people view the changes and possible impacts stemming from closer economic relations with Myanmar? We are informed that the social ties of the same ethnic groups are spread across

political boundaries and that the local people will therefore benefit from development on the far side of the border⁹. However, on this matter it remains necessary for us to continue to listen carefully to the voices of the local inhabitants.

We had an opportunity to visit the Land Customs Station in Dawki, on the Meghalaya border with Bangladesh. Thanks to the arrangements made by Income Tax Superintendent, A. Bhattacharjee and his counterpart on the Bangladesh side, we were able to walk down to the Sylhet Customs Station. Dawki customs office was opened in 1948, and is one of India's oldest customs offices. Both people and goods move across this border so there are two immigration officers present as well. About 14 to 20 people cross the border daily, and according to the officers, they are mostly Bangladeshis and a few Indians crossing into Bangladesh. A primary Indian export going through this customs office is coal produced in Meghalaya. As Indian trucks are not allowed to enter Bangladesh territory, there is a coal dumping ground close to the border. Recently, an innovative business practice has been on the rise. Boulder stones are exported through this customs station to Bangladesh where they are broken into small pieces by employing cheaper labour, and are then re-exported to Agartala, Tripura. In terms of road connectivity, however, even the long-existing route from Shillong to Dawki, and beyond to Sylhet in Bangladesh, is not well cared for by the government. A bridge constructed in 1932 over the Piyang River (Umngot River) near Dawki outlived its fifty-year usage period more than 20 years ago. To protect its durability, a weight ceiling of six tons has now been imposed. Construction of a new bridge was approved some time ago but nothing has yet been done. An alternate road provides a detour but it, too, requires much repairing.

The significance of Bangladesh for India and particularly for the North Eastern Region was succinctly stated by Rajiv Sikri, Secretary (East) of the Ministry of External Affairs, in the CENISEAS forum: Bangladesh, he pointed out, is the joint connecting the North Eastern Region to the rest of India (Sikri 2004). As far as I have seen, the North Eastern Region's perception of Bangladesh is very complex, with both superior and inferior attitudes being held towards Bangladesh. In the North East, perceptions have been based on historical experience, and mainly concern the issue of massive migration of people from Bangladesh, the area formerly known, over the last 200 years, as East Bengal and East Pakistan (Hazarika 2000; Baruah 1999). In the understanding of the people of the North East, Bangladesh is nothing but a poverty-stricken country, and the main source

of migrants aiming to exploit the abundant land resources of the North East. The people of the North East fear the Bangladeshis because they cleverly snatch away the resources and the opportunities that rightfully belong to the North East. Whenever the Bangladesh issue is raised it seems that all the people's identities converge into one, namely that of the Indian. I wonder to what extent groups such as the Muslim Bengalis and the Garos who are currently living in the North Eastern Region, share common identities and preserve relationships with the Muslim Bengalis and the Garos in Bangladesh, as is the case among the Nagas who live on either side of the India - Myanmar border.

At the diplomatic level, Bangladesh is considered to be a stubborn, difficult opponent to deal with. In addition to Jairam Ramesh and Rajiv Sikri, C.V. Ranganathan, former Ambassador to China and one of the main promoters of sub-regional cooperation, admits this difficulty. Diplomats have expressed some pessimism about improving relationships with Bangladesh although they also expect that the sub-regional framework, rather than bilateral negotiations, will ease the attitude of Bangladesh towards India¹⁰. Industrial concerns such as the Indian Oil Corporation and Oil India Limited based in Digboi and Duliajan in Assam have expressed the hope of tapping the Bangladesh market and taking opportunity of the business chances related to natural gas reserves in Bangladesh. With respect to the latter, however, the top executives of Oil India Limited have stated that since there is no immediate likelihood of Bangladesh changing its attitude, they are currently more interested in gas reserves in Myanmar.

Rethinking self-perception is very difficult. One may not be able to understand how others view oneself until one stands in the other person's position. I have personally experienced this predicament in the course of our trip to the North Eastern Region. My view of Bangladesh and India was constructed from the vantage point of Bangladesh, and while staying in the country, I saw Bangladesh as a state overshadowed by Big India. The geographical location of Bangladesh on the map symbolises its disadvantageous position vis-à-vis India. However, when the map shifts our focus to the North East, we are obliged to recognize that the region is 'Bangladesh-locked' and that Bangladesh is by far the bigger and stronger player, as has been mentioned by Rajiv Sikri (Sikri 2004). The experiences of leading Bangladeshi intellectuals and a business tycoon who visited the North East also corroborate the importance of re-evaluating self-images and knowing one's own strength and weaknesses (C-NES 2004).

In a lively discussion chaired by Udayon Misra of Dibrugarh University, one professor introduced a commonly held opinion to the effect that the devastating flood which affected Assam in 2004 was caused by Bhutan opening its dam. This struck a chord with me because it was the same logic that I often heard in Bangladesh, as applied to India when Bangladesh is affected by floods. Such statements symbolise people's mind sets, which are plagued with phantom and sinister images of 'India', 'Bangladesh' and 'Bhutan'. However, if it were possible for one to know that the other person fears and blames one just as much as one fears and blames the other person, one may easily appreciate the futility of such logic. It will be the local-to-local contacts of people rather than government-to-government contacts that are more likely to bring about the alteration of fixed mind sets. In that sense, sub-regional cooperation could make an important contribution by creating a new space of interaction and by providing new perspectives on important problems.

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¹ See Inoue et.al.2004 for the details of those initiatives.

² Our team members are Kyoko Inoue of Daito Bunka University, Masanori Koga of Nihon Fukushi University, Yoshiko Suzuki and Etsuyo Arai of IDE and myself.

³ The Supreme Court ruling had a substantial impact also on industrial activity as it caused the closure of plywood factories. According the report of the North Eastern Development Finance Corporation, nearly 300 plywood factories in Assam producing 371 lakh sq. meters of commercial plywood per annum have had to close down since 1996.

http://databank.nedfi.com/content.php?menu=1113&page_id=74

⁴ District Councils were created by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

⁵ *Dorbar* consist of three tiers of institutions comprising *Dorbar Shnong* or village level council, *Dorbar Raij* or a conglomeration of villages and *Dorbar Syiem* or the chieftainship.

⁶ Two day symposium titled as 'Towards a New Asia: Transnationalism and North East India' was held on 10th and 11th of September 2004 in Guwahati. See <http://www.ceniseas.org/newasia/guwahati.html> for the details of the conference.

⁷ The instances of micro credit, population control and export-oriented readymade garments can be cited as instances of success for Bangladesh. I do not deny that there remain many serious problems as well as hidden agendas behind each 'success'. However, at least the successes have contributed to improving the image of Bangladesh in the global arena and have shed light on the livelihoods of the poor and the socially weak including women, recognising the value of their agency. Lt. Gen. Nayar of C-NES admits there are things that the North East should learn from Bangladesh.

⁸ NEDFI provides micro credit to traditional organisations such as the village council of Nagaland and the Young Mizo Association in Mizoram.

⁹ Lt. Gen. Nayar, as cited earlier, made this observation. When he was stationed in Nagaland from 1981 to 1983, there was no educational institution in adjacent Myanmar territory, so Nagas living in Myanmar sent their children to India while Indian Nagas acted as their guardians until the children had completed their education. On their return, educated Naga children had a better scope of employment in Myanmar.

¹⁰ In the tripartite meeting of the energy ministers of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar held in Yangon on 12 and 13 January 2005, Bangladesh for the first time agreed to give permission for the construction of a cross-border gas pipeline, which carries natural gas from Myanmar to India. In the meeting, Bangladesh sought trade transit to Nepal and Bhutan through India. Although a more detailed analysis will be needed to clarify the Bangladesh stance, this can be cited as an example that a sub-regional framework rather than bilateral negotiations can provide more comfortable space for Bangladesh in its dealings with India.