



WWJMRD 2017; 3(10): 253-256
www.wwjmr.com
International Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal
Refereed Journal
Indexed Journal
UGC Approved Journal
Impact Factor MJIF: 4.25
e-ISSN: 2454-6615

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Indo-Bangla Relations and Tripura: Scope for Future Geopolitical Development

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Abstract

Tripura, one of the North-Eastern States of India is surrounded by the neighbouring country Bangladesh from three sides. The length of the Indo-Bangla International border is about 856 kms at Tripura. Partition of India-Pakistan (1947) and the Liberation war of Bangladesh (1971), cause a huge influx in the population of Tripura, owing to in-migration from the East Pakistan (presently Bangladesh). But Tripura acted like a true neighbour and gave shelter to homeless immigrants. Since that period, this tiny North-Eastern state of India continuously trying to build a strong geopolitical relation between these two countries i.e. India and Bangladesh. Now-a-days, new possibilities of strengthening bi lateral tie ups and developing people to people contacts can be traced here at the Indo-Bangla International Border of Tripura. This paper tries to focus on the present scenario and future development scopes between these two countries centering Tripura.

Keywords: Indo-Bangla, Geopolitics, International Relations

Introduction

International Borders always create impacts upon the social, economic and political environment of adjacent countries. Various types of issues centering the border areas are common in many countries of the world. Studies regarding boundaries, frontiers, borders or border areas, by tradition an important sub-area of political geography. With the specific study regarding border cases, scholars use to construct the condition in to the forms of theories attached with the boundaries with different means i.e. may be political, cultural, social etc. (Paasi, 2005).

India, sharing one of the largest lengths of International Border with its neighboring countries, has its own geo-political importance among the whole world. The total length of India's International border is 14,103.1 Km and within that India shares the largest border with Bangladesh which has a length of 4096 Km. Tripura, the tiny north eastern state of India has 856 kilometers of the fifth largest land border of the world i.e. Indo-Bangla International Border as its state boundary. Trade relationship is very important for the development of bi lateral tie ups and geographical nearness of India to Bangladesh, turned these two countries as strongly attached partners in trade. (Dutta, 2010). Having a thickly forested terrain on borders, Indian state of Tripura witnessed a well-established connection with its neighbouring country, Bangladesh. Not only in terms of recent developments, Tripura enjoyed a positive relationship structure with Bangladesh, long before its creation as an independent country in 1971. Possibilities linked with the development of strong geo-political relations between India and Bangladesh, are taking place very steadily in recent years. Important decisions and implementation of policies had been taken place by both the countries to ensure a strong, healthy bilateral relation.

Partition of 1947: India, Bangladesh and Tripura:

As per Suzuki A. (2011), partition always being an idea which affects the peace constructing moves more pertinent to the power sharing and re-arranging process to a state which experienced earlier disputes. In the year 1947, the Partition of India had an enduring effect on the process of social and economic development in the Tripura (Debnath, 2013). This

very event landed on Tripura with a very disadvantageous situation. Natural resources were limited and a large 'refugee population', who came from Bangladesh leaving all their belonging behind which effected the rate of capital formation in the state, very negatively. As per the records of Rehabilitation Department of Tripura, available in the state archives, about 175,000 Hindu Bengali refugees crossed the border and took shelter in Tripura, from Bangladesh i.e. the then East Pakistan (Ghoshal, 2012). The situation was so acute that the then state government arranged temporary camps for refugees on the outskirts of Agartala and in other small towns. But in 1950, the refugee influx increased massively that the government could not accommodate them in Agartala or neighboring areas. Salam Azad (2014) said that the common people of Tripura extended all sorts of help to the helpless people of the then East Pakistan (Bangladesh). Whereas the tribal people were major source of population before independence it reached at only about 29 percent of the whole state population after 1971 (Dutta, 2008). The continuous immigration process has created a sense of insecurity for the indigenous people of the state. Meanwhile, a negative identity started emerging, when tribal people lost land and reserve forests to non-tribals, coupled with the insensitivity of non-tribals to the local language and culture. This set the tone for ethnic conflict in Tripura (Ali, 2011). Birth of a big ethnic conflict which unrest the valleys of Tripura for last many years started taking place. (Bhaumik, 2002).

It has been recorded that during 1951-71 the population of Tripura has been increased by 150 percent due to infiltration from Bangladesh (Dutta, 2008). Most of the people were dependent on agriculture for their livelihood and were extremely poor. With a young population getting more violent by the day, the Govt. had its task cut out. The govt. started tackling the challenges by bringing in more security forces as well as by taking development to the people. The power of State administration in Tripura was initially in the hands of Indian National Congress (INC). But soon, the power in state legislature has been shifted in the hands of Left Front. For a long time a huge part of 'indigenous' youths with a slogan of 'Swadhin Tuipra' (Independent Tripura) opposed the State Government with sophisticated arms in hand. But after a long blood shaded history the whole scenario has been changed very fast. The State Government of Tripura started the rehabilitation program of those 'Rebellions' and with a great success percentage, solved the extremist issue within a short span of time. Later the process of making a good and healthy relationship with Bangladesh continued to be in action.

Recent Developments of Indo-Bangla Relationship and Tripura

Several different sectors have been developing now-a-days in between India and Bangladesh centering Tripura.

Integrated Check Post (ICP) inaugurated at Akhaura, Agartala, Tripura

Good Border Management is mandated by India's security concerns and therefore it is necessary to install systems which address these concerns while also facilitating trade and commerce. To provide basic services like, security, immigration, customs, human, plant and animal quarantine etc. it is important to establish a common platform between the international boundaries. It has been decided by the

Central Government of India to set up Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) at major entry points on our land borders. (Table-2). These ICPs would house all regulatory agencies like Immigration, Customs, Border Security, Quarantine etc., along with support facilities in a single complex equipped with all modern amenities. On 23rd November, 2006 Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approved to set up 13 ICPs at different exit points of land borders of India. Among these points the Proposed ICP of Akhaura, Agartala, (Fig-1) Tripura has already been inaugurated on 17th November, 2013. This is the only ICP that is situated in a state capital and in a municipal corporation area too. This was inaugurated as India's second International standard multi-purpose ICP after Attari in Punjab along the India-Pakistan international border.

Trans-Border Counter Terrorism Activity Infrastructure

The demographic change paved the way for a fierce ethnic conflict that has ravaged the tiny state for the last two decades. The independent kingdom also lost its direct geographical link to the Indian mainland and this isolation obstacle the possibilities of its rapid economic growth (Bhaumik, 2002). After the arrest of All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) Chief Ranjit Debbarma and being pushed by BGB to Indian security forces the overall insurgency practices probably came to a sudden end. The strong strategic relationship between India and Bangladesh make this possible to bring peace in the valleys of Tripura. Number of fatalities due to terrorism activities came to low abruptly. (Table-3).

Transit Access to Ports of Bangladesh

The permission of Transit Access to the ports of Bangladesh had been a long request from Indian side. The Chief Minister of Tripura, Mr. Manik Sarkar and the state cabinet had urged for the same at several occasions. In the year 2012, the PM of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina expressed her positive tone over India's request for a transit access to ports in Bangladesh. Apart from the sea port of Chittagong, permission for transit access has been granted for many inland river ports of Bangladesh like Ashugunj river port etc.

Border Haats

Border Haats can be explained as a new idea to increase trade between two countries and to strengthen the bond ship of peace and tranquility. "Border Haat", is a small market between the zero lines of International Borders. In this small market people can sell and buy limited quantity of available goods from both the countries. Total thirty locations have been proposed by the respective state governments of India along the international borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Out of which the state of Government of Tripura had proposed for eight locations. Union Home ministry had finalized four of those. The first Border Haat in Tripura at Srinagar (India) - Chagalnaiyaa (Bangladesh) has been inaugurated on 13th January, 2015. Kamalasagar (India)-Tarapur (Bangladesh) Border Haat, the second of its kind in Tripura, inaugurated on 6th June, 2015. Border haats not only act as a center for trade but also a point of meeting two nations beyond all boundaries.

More Possibilities

Many more bi-lateral projects are already in developing stage with Bangladesh, where Tripura plays an important role. Work for Agartala(India)-Akhaurya (Bangladesh) rail link has already begun. Work for building a bridge over river Feni at Sabroom (India), which will connect the Chittagong sea port of Bangladesh was also started. Tripura's ONGC Palatana Power Project is serving needful amount of power to Bangladesh. Tripura is being mapped as the gateway for superfast internet connectivity as Bangladesh government is agreed to allow India to use

unspent bandwidth placed in Cox's bazaar of neighboring country.

India and Bangladesh, two countries with differences in many sectors but connected with borders, are trying to develop more healthy geopolitical relations. Tripura, the tiny state of India, may be having difficulty in several aspects, mainly with geographical obstacles, is playing a vital role within the Indo-Bangla development network. People of Tripura, acted like a true friend of Bangladesh in history and now they are present for shaping the old relations in to more constructive in nature.

Table 1: Year wise Tribal and Non-Tribal Population Growth in Tripura

Year	Total Population	Tribal Population	Tribal Growth (%)	Non-Tribal Population	Non-Tribal Growth (%)
1931	3,82,450	2,03,327	-	1,79,123	-
1941	5,13,010	2,56,991	26.39	2,56,019	42.92
1951	6,39,028	2,37,953	-07.40	4,01,075	56.65
1961	11,42,005	3,60,070	51.31	7,81,935	94.95
1971	15,56,342	4,50,554	25.12	11,05,788	41.41
1981	20,53,058	5,83,920	29.60	14,69,138	32.85
1991	27,57,205	8,53,345	46.14	19,03,860	29.59
2001	31,99,203	9,93,426	16.41	22,05,777	15.85
2011	36,73,917	11,66,813	17.45	25,07,104	13.66

Source: Modified after Census Reports, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Table 2: Location of 13 ICPs those have been approved for construction

No.	Location	State	Border
1.	Petrpole	West Bengal	India - Bangladesh
2.	Moreh	Manipur	India - Myanmar
3.	Raxaul	Bihar	India - Nepal
4.	Attari	Punjab	India - Pakistan
5.	Dawki	Meghalaya	India - Bangladesh
6.	Akhaurya	Tripura	India - Bangladesh
7.	Jogbani	Bihar	India - Nepal
8.	Hili	West Bengal	India - Bangladesh
9.	Chandrabangha	West Bengal	India - Bangladesh
10.	Sutarkhandi	Assam	India - Bangladesh
11.	Kawarpuchia	Mizoram	India - Bangladesh
12.	Sunauli	Uttar Pradesh	India - Nepal
13.	Rupaidiha	Uttar Pradesh	India-Nepal

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Table 3: Annual Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Tripura, 1992-2017

Year	Civilians	Security Force Personals	Terrorists	Total
1992	59	18	21	98
1993	148	28	7	183
1994	206	22	10	238
1995	178	34	45	257
1996	140	31	18	189
1997	205	50	19	274
1998	214	25	26	265
1999	240	41	22	303
2000	453	16	45	514
2001	239	31	42	312
2002	94	43	38	175
2003	195	39	61	295
2004	66	38	63	167
2005	34	8	31	73
2006	11	19	30	60
2007	10	5	21	36
2008	7	4	17	28
2009	9	1	1	11
2010	0	2	1	3

2011	1	0	0	1
2012	0	0	2	2
2013	0	0	0	0
2014	2	2	0	4
2015	0	0	0	0
2016	0	0	0	0
2017	0	0	0	0
Total	2511	457	520	3488

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal. (Last Accessed October, 2017)

Figures

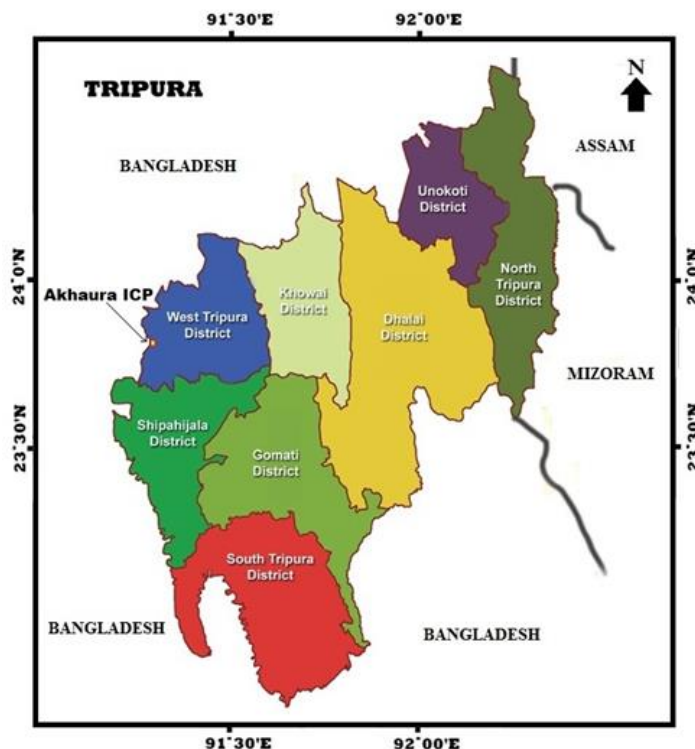


Fig. 1: Location of Akhaura ICP

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