

## CHAPTER 4

### GEOSTRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF SILIGURI AND MILITARY ESTABLISHMENTS IN AND AROUND THE CITY

The sovereignty of any country depends on many factors. History bears testimony to the fact that maintaining one's border is important to any bilateral or trilateral ties with neighbouring countries. Henceforth the regions adjacent to international borders are of utmost importance for the Government of any Country. This chapter deals with the geostrategic, geopolitical and the geographical importance of Siliguri. The significance of the region under study has become connoisseur in the eyes of academicians and political analysts owing to its highly disadvantageous position in geo-strategic and security terms due to its peculiar geographical features.

Geopolitics simply means the study of the impact of geography on international relations and politics of the country. It aims to comprehend how geographical variables change international political behaviour. Hence the 'space' or the territory near the international borders comes to the forefront in determining the relationship between two neighbouring countries. Boundaries can be natural like rivers or mountains separating two regions or artificial i.e. man-made like the McMahon line etc. Cohn (2003) says that geopolitics is an analysis of the old and new interactions happening between geographical 'settings and perspectives' on one hand and the political processes on the other hand.<sup>190</sup> Geostrategy is a subfield of Geopolitics and was used for the first time by Fedrick L Schuman in his article "Let Us Learn our Geopolitics" published in 1942.<sup>191</sup> The two words geostrategy and geopolitics cannot be used separately and in simple words we can say that geopolitics emphasises on 'why' and geostrategy is 'how'. The

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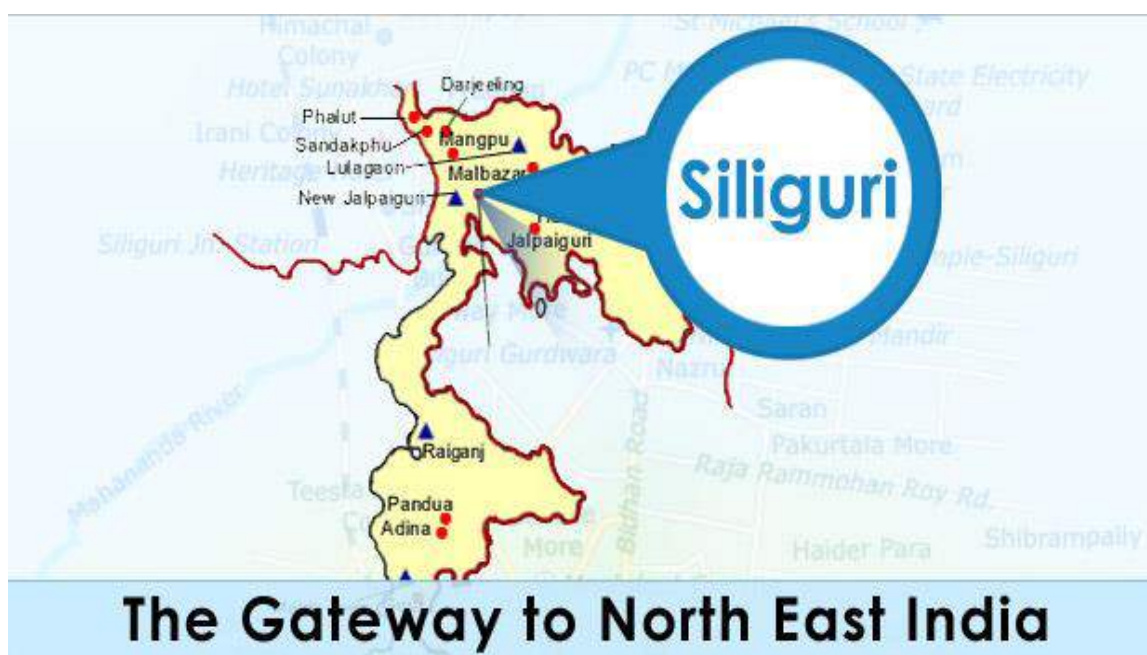
<sup>190</sup>Cohen, S. B., and Rowman and Littlefield. *Geopolitics of the World System*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003, p, 11.

<sup>191</sup> "Define geostrategic | Dictionary and Thesaurus." <http://geostrategic.askdefine.com/>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2020.

geostrategic importance of Siliguri can be understood only if we understand the geography of the region.

Located at the base of the Himalayan Mountains and nestled in the plains of Darjeeling district,<sup>192</sup> Siliguri is the second-largest city in West Bengal and popularly known as the gateway of North Eastern India. As we have already discussed, Siliguri is landlocked with international boundaries like Nepal towards North and West and Bangladesh towards its South and East. Bhutan is not very far from Siliguri as it is approximately only 93.3 miles<sup>193</sup>. It has no access to the sea and is traversed by NH-31, the only road that connects Sikkim to the Indian mainland. This highway also connects the North Eastern States with India peninsula through the Siliguri corridor making it one of the most strategic areas. It is also linked with the traditional trade routes of Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet, now a part of China. To understand the military importance of Siliguri we have to understand the Siliguri corridor and its strategic importance.

Map 5: The political map of Siliguri



(Source: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/newsletter/siliguri/> )

<sup>192</sup> "DARJEELING - West Bengal Tourism." <https://wbtourism.gov.in/destination/details/darjeeling>.

Accessed 3 Mar. 2021

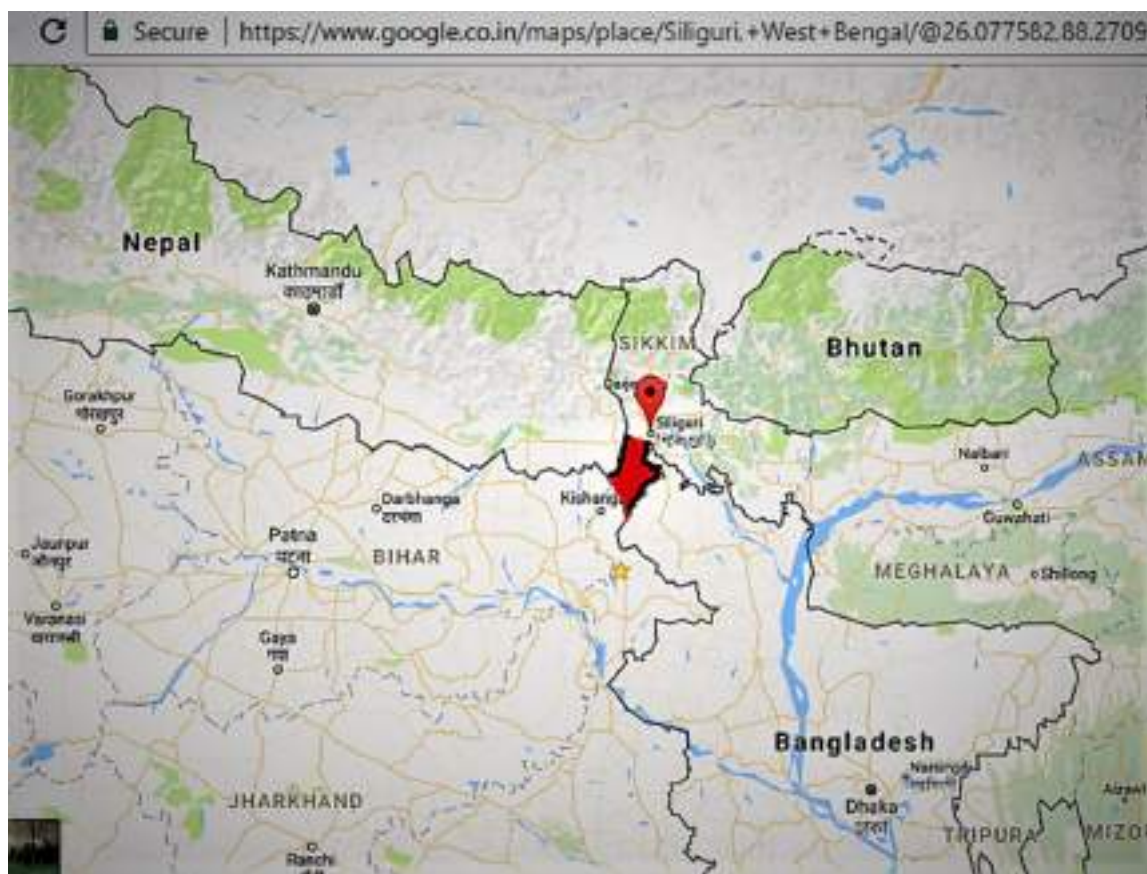
<sup>193</sup> "Distance between Siliguri and Bhutan is 150 KM / 93.3 miles."

<http://distancebetween2.com/siliguri/bhutan>. Accessed 24 May. 2020.

### The Siliguri Corridor:

A corridor or a passage in geographical sense is a land mass that connects two or more places. Such types of passages play a very important role in political and economic relationships between neighbouring countries. There can be many types of corridors like development corridor, domestic trade corridor, foreign trade corridor, transnational corridor, transit trade corridor and trans boundary corridor(for animals).<sup>194</sup> Siliguri corridor connects North East India with the rest of India. This piece of land is situated between two international boundaries of Nepal and Bangladesh, lying on either side of the corridor and on the northern side lies the State of Bhutan.

Map 6: The Siliguri Corridor



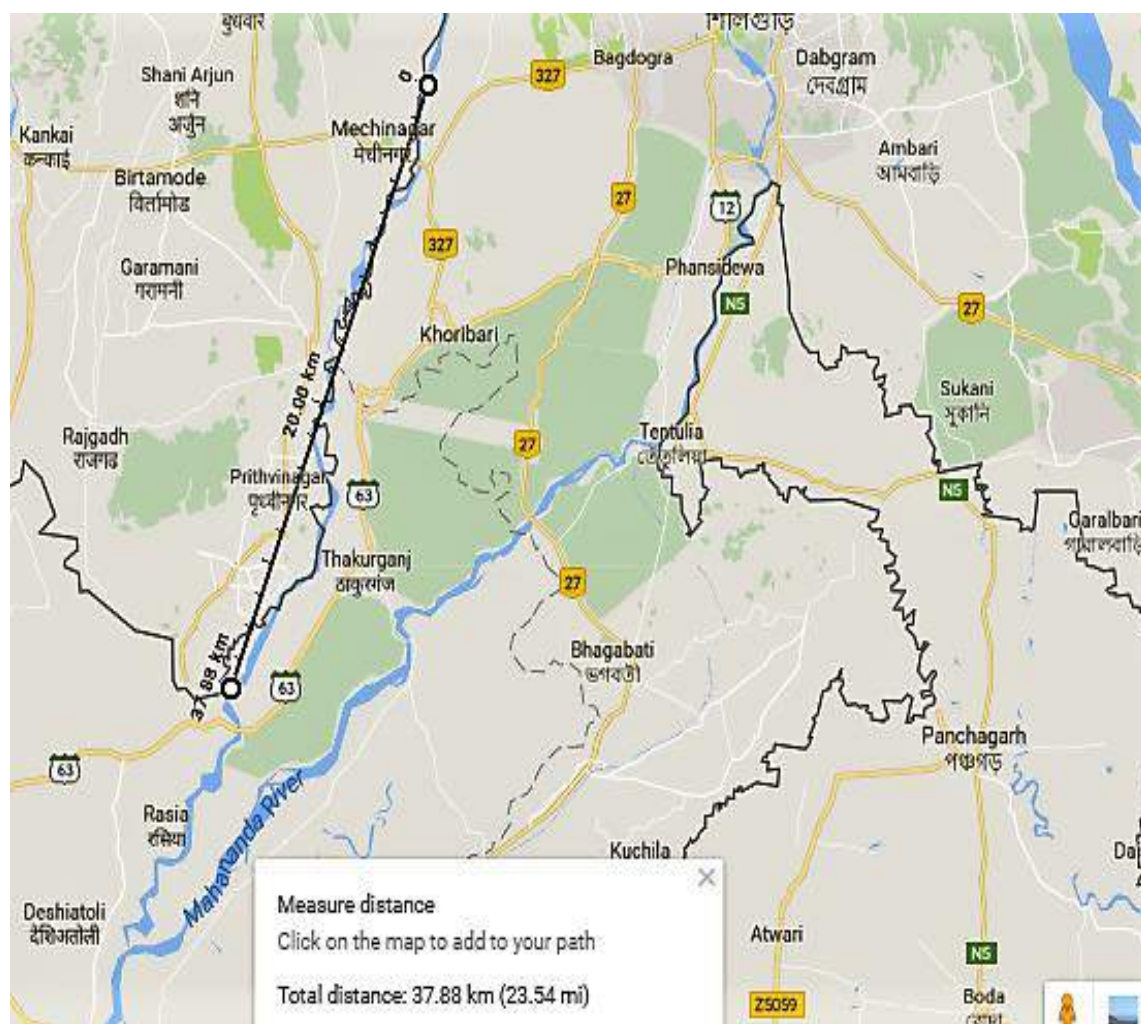
Source: Google Satellite Image.

<sup>194</sup> "Development Corridors - Gov.uk."

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08995e5274a31e000016a/Topic\\_Guide\\_Development\\_Corridors.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08995e5274a31e000016a/Topic_Guide_Development_Corridors.pdf). Accessed 25 May. 2020.

Siliguri corridor also called 'Chicken's neck' is an example of Colonial delusions created in 1947 during the partition of India and Pakistan. It is a very narrow stretch of passage of about 23.5 miles or 37.88 kilometres. This stretch of land is in Darjeeling District of West Bengal and it connects North East India.

Map 7: The length of the corridor (23.54 miles)



Source: Google Satellite Image

The Siliguri Corridor serves Indian military bases established in North East India and Sikkim with supplies, reinforcements and other military formations. The security forces operating in these areas point out that as geographical configuration<sup>195</sup> puts the North Eastern States of our

<sup>195</sup> "The Siliguri Corridor: Question Mark on Security - Pinaki ...."

<https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume10/Article7.htm>. Accessed 24 May. 2020.

country at a disadvantage for a lack of strategic depth, the Siliguri Corridor is considered as an indispensable area to provide a buffer.

Map 8: The breadth of the Corridor (12.28 miles only between Nepal and Bangladesh).



Source: Google Satellite Image

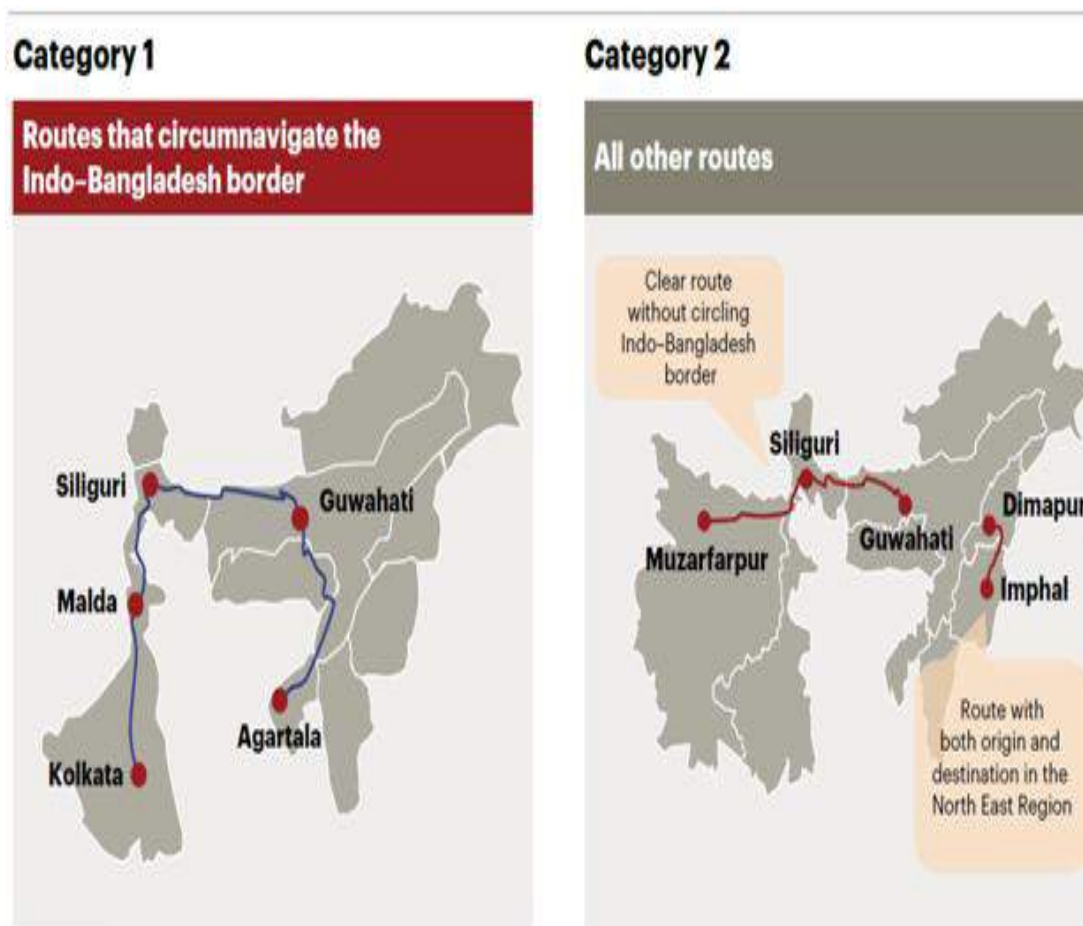
The corridor is also important in light of the vital installations which are located around it, like the airfields of Hasimara and Bagdogra, and also the oil pipelines, which run through the corridor.<sup>196</sup> The Corridor can be a blessing for landlocked countries like Bhutan and Nepal as it could be used as the shortest route to access and participate in the maritime economic activities in the Arabian Sea. A prudent effort was made in 2002 by Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal

<sup>196</sup> "47341-001: South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation Road ...."

<https://www.adb.org/projects/47341-001/main>. Accessed 24 May. 2020.

(BBIN) to establish a free trade zone through Siliguri Corridor<sup>197</sup>. This cooperation initiative of BBIN was highly appreciable and also important to enhance cooperation and unity in the region, but later on the project was backed off by India due to sensitivity of the region and vulnerability concern of the Corridor.

Map 9: The Routes that connect mainland India with the North East region



Source: Google maps

Siliguri Corridor has both restricted as well as open borders at different sides on the international front. The words open border and closed border are imperious terms in geostrategic studies. The exigent demand for open borders has been made not only in terms of ‘distributive justice’ but also arguments have been put forward for freedom of movement of

<sup>197</sup> Panda, Ankit. Geography’s curse: India’s vulnerable ‘chicken’s neck’ – The Siliguri Corridor is a terrifyingly vulnerable artery in India’s geography. *The Diplomat*, 8 November, 2013.

Available at <http://thediplomat.com/2013/11/geographycurseindiasvulnerablechickensneck/> (accessed on 25 May 2019).

people.<sup>198</sup> Shelly Wilcox advocates that the free international movement constitutes basic rights of humans to migrate to the country of personal choice.<sup>199</sup> In the case of the Siliguri Corridor, it shares an open border with Bhutan and Nepal, but shares restricted borders with China and Bangladesh. There are many reasons for adopting restricted border policy with China and Bangladesh like insurgency issues also involving human trafficking, smuggling of narcotics, anti-India terrorist activities, the trepidation of Golden triangle (Thailand, Laos and Myanmar), and the policy of String of Pearls of China etc.

Human civilization in the past got divided through cultural boundaries. These boundaries though invisible had a very strong presence. These international cultural boundaries grouped people on the basis of their physical features, customs and cultures. With the passage of time humans imposed new international borders inspired by the political environment of the existing time. This made overlapping of the invisible cultural boundary and the visible imposed new international political boundaries. This overlapping of the boundaries is the root cause of international tensions between China and India. The right to ‘Claim’ a piece of ‘Land’ is the bone of contention between these two countries.

In order to understand the Geostrategic importance of Siliguri we have to understand the Sino-India relationship that has witnessed both good and bad times. The two countries are recognised as the most rapidly growing economies of the world. They hold considerable influence on global as well as regional politics. Both the countries are giants racing for modernisation, development and militarisation, to establish themselves as leaders in the region.

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<sup>198</sup> See, for example, Ann Dummett, "The Transnational Migration of People Seen from within a Natural Law Tradition." *Free Movement: Ethical Issues in the Transnational Migration of People and of Money*, ed. Brian Barry and Robert Goodin, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992. Sager, Alex. 'Critical Cosmopolitanism and the Ethics of Mobility'. *Toward a Cosmopolitan Ethics of Mobility*, Springer International Publishing, 2018, pp. 69–90, pp. 69-90. Bauder, Harald. 'Perspectives of Open Borders and No Border: Perspectives of Open Borders'. *Geography Compass*, vol. 9, no. 7, 2015, pp. 395–405, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12224>

<sup>199</sup> Wilcox, S. "The Open Borders Debate on Immigration". *Philosophy Compass*, 4, 2009, p. 813-821.

They comprise 1/3rd of the world population and share 20% of the world economy.<sup>200</sup> After the Independence of China, India was the first non-communist country to establish diplomatic relations with China.<sup>201</sup> China considered Tibet (now China) as an integral part of its territory. The existing trade relations between India and the then Tibet, which had continued since past centuries<sup>202</sup>, was seen by China as ‘interference of India in the internal affairs of China’. India’s stand on Tibet (now China) and giving political asylum to the Dalai Lama further aggravated the situation. The Sino-India war of 1962 created further rifts in relations between China and India. To think that China attacked India due to the issue of Aksai Chin and India’s policies on Tibet would undermine the idea that China had foreseen India as her biggest rival for Asian Leadership.<sup>203</sup> The war of 1962 and the defeat of India completely changed the geo-politics of Asia. In 1965 China asked India to surrender its claim on Sikkim but India refused as Sikkim was a protectorate of India. The strategic importance of Sikkim could be realised during the 1962 Indo-China war and also during the subsequent clashes at Nathu La and Chola in 1967.<sup>204</sup> Sikkim (Sikkim was incorporated into Indian territory in 1975) is a strategic territory not only for India but also China. Sikkim shares borders with TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region) of China in the north and north east. The State of Bhutan lies in the east and Nepal in the west. To the south lies West Bengal and the only road (NH-31) that connects Sikkim to India passes through Siliguri.

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<sup>200</sup> Zhang Li, "China-India Relations" - *IFRI - Institut français des relations*, Center For Asian studies, 2010.

<sup>201</sup> "Sino-India Relations including Doklam, border situation, and ... - PRS." Accessed May 29, 2020. <https://www.prsindia.org/content/sino-india-relations-including-doklam-border-situation-and-cooperation-international>.

<sup>202</sup> Datta, Karubaki. "Tibet trade through the Chumbi Valley— Growth, Rupture and Reopening," *Vidyasagar University Journal of History*, Vol.2, 2013-14. The article can be accessed at <http://inet.vidyasagar.ac.in:8080/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1815/1/7.%20Karubaki%20Datta.pdf>

<sup>203</sup> Urmila Phadnis, "Ceylon and the Sino-Indian Border Conflict," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1963, pp. 189–196.

<sup>204</sup> "Strategic Importance of Sikkim - GKToday." 1 Mar. 2016, <https://www.gktoday.in/topic/strategic-importance-of-sikkim/>. Accessed 3 Mar. 2022.



China's discernible and flagrant stand is String of Pearls doctrine to encircle India. It is one of these steps taken by China to ensure its growing maritime ambition in its territory and in neighbouring oceans as well. Analysts<sup>205</sup> believe that the String of Pearls theory refers to a Geopolitical theory to ensure the regime of China in the Indian Ocean against India. China is trying to make various deep sea ports in neighbouring countries of India which will provide commercial and military facilities to China falling on the Indian Ocean region between the Chinese mainland and the port of Sudan. The theory not only includes sea lines but also land choke points. The sea line runs through several countries having various choke points such as the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Mandeb, the Strait of Hormuz and the Lombok Strait also including other strategic maritime centres located in various countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Somalia.

The proposed new silk route is also of big concern to India. One of the branches of the New Silk Route will pass through the Siliguri Corridor via Sikkim.<sup>206</sup> This will provide a dividing passage to China to access Chinese goods into Indian Territory. This will also enhance the influence of China over North Eastern Indian States due to increased flow of cheap goods from China. The insurgency activities may rise due to direct supply of arms via this trade route. Knowing all these hindrances, the Indian government has not shown any interest in the revival of the Old Silk Route. India never accepted the above proposed route map. No Indian representative was sent to attend the Chinese conference held in Beijing. Shyam Saran, India's

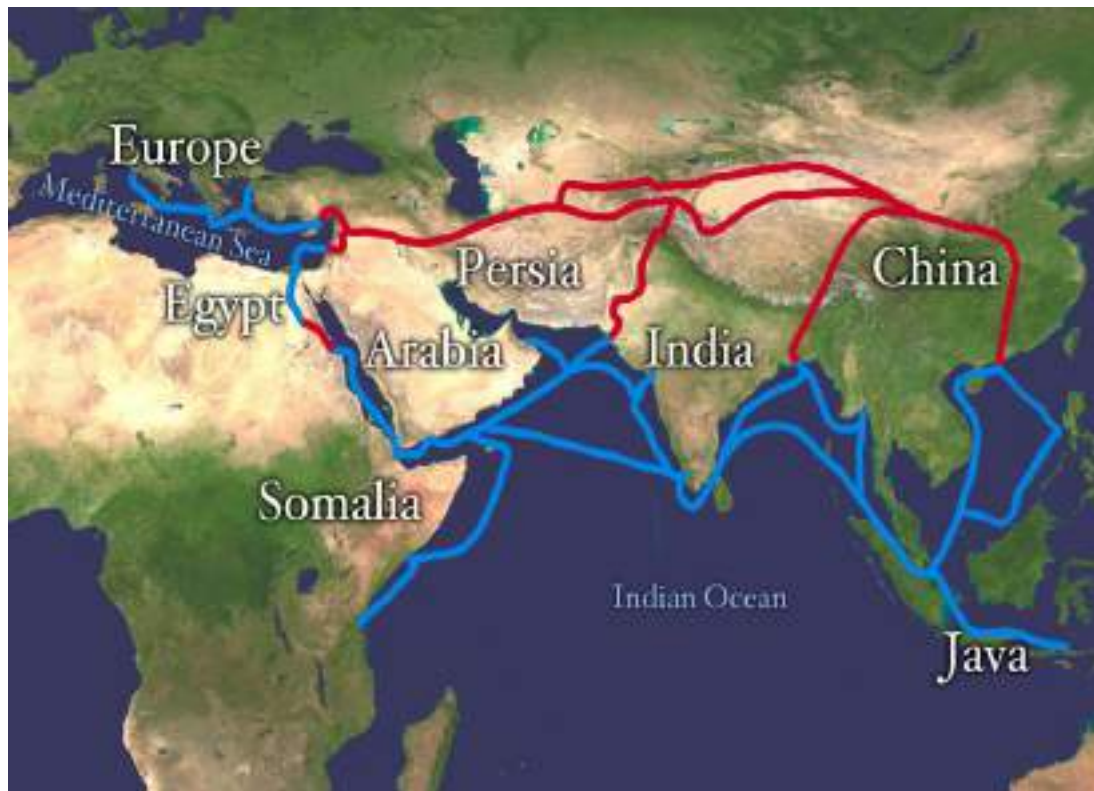
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<sup>205</sup> Benjamin David Baker, "Where is the 'String of Pearls' in 2015?," *Diplomat*, October 05, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/10/where-is-the-string-of-pearls-in2015/> . Marshal Jr., "The String of Pearls: Chinese Maritime Presence in the Indian Ocean and its effect on Indian Naval Doctrine," *Calhoun* (2012), [http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/27865/12Dec\\_Marshall\\_Richard.pdf?sequence=1](http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/27865/12Dec_Marshall_Richard.pdf?sequence=1) . Igor Pejic, "China's String of Pearls Project," *South Front*, October 05, 2016, <https://southfront.org/chinas-string-of-pearls-project/>

<sup>206</sup> "Sikkim and the Silk Road: Is China making a move on India ...." 18 Jul. 2017, <https://globalriskinsights.com/2017/07/sikkim-and-the-silk-road-is-china-making-a-move-on-india/>. Accessed 1 Jun. 2021.

former foreign secretary has written that if One Belt One Road succeeds then India would be relegated to the margins of land and maritime both.<sup>207</sup>

Map 10: The String of Pearls in blue lines and China's new Silk Route that passes through Sikkim and Siliguri Corridor



(Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/En6j461v6UHKBRlw9> )

Apart from the political and economic games of China, she is now engaged in a new plot of constructing new roads in the disputed territory of Bhutan. India is apprehensive due to dialogue between the Government of China and Bhutan, wherein both are resolving their prolonged territorial disputes mutually. Various diplomatic rounds of talks have been conducted between the two countries. Indian interest in these talks lies behind the historic attack of China in 1962, when China tried to block Eastern Corridor of India. China is making a road in the

<sup>207</sup> Taneja K. Mar 28, 2016, Why India is worried about China's ambitious One Belt One Road initiative, Available at <https://scroll.in/article/805632/why-india-is-worried-about-chinas-ambitious-one-belt-one-road-initiative>

disputed territory of Bhutan and India sent its troops to save the sovereignty of Bhutan. The current standoff in Doklam Plateau is proof of Chinese aggressive nature. The strategic importance of Dokhlam and Siliguri Corridor are interrelated. To understand the Dokhlam issues it is imperative to look into the Indo- Bhutan relationship.

#### India's Bhutanese Concern:

Bhutan, a small country, finds itself sandwiched between these two giant countries. Bhutan is the second most populous Himalayan country after Nepal. Bhutan in the past has always remained a target for Tibet, now a territory of China. The occupation of Tibet by China and the policy of territorial encroachment of China have given deep ordeal to Bhutan and in return upheld the friendship relation between these two countries, a relationship that was based on cultural exchange of religious ideas of Buddhism. The population of Bhutan is about one million but has rich ethnic diversity. Both countries have been sharing a friendly socio-economic and political relationship which is based on the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed by the diplomats of two countries in 1949 and was reorganised in February 2007. The Treaty ensures free movement of goods and people between two countries. Treaty also provides peace, equality and friendship between Indians and Bhutanese. Both the countries have established intimate bonds in the areas of foreign affairs, economy, trade, education, technology, international defence and security. According to the treaty, India provides assistance in safeguarding the borders of Bhutan from foreign aggression but will never interfere in any foreign affairs.<sup>208</sup> The treaty does not mention Bhutan's status as a sovereign state and Bhutan agreed to take India's guidance and consideration while dealing with any third country especially in the matter of foreign and defence affairs. The treaty also established free trade and extradition protocols.<sup>209</sup> Even after being one of the major role-players in the foreign policy of Bhutan, India never interfered in the sovereignty of Bhutan. India supported

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<sup>208</sup> Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship between the Government of India and the Government of Bhutan,"<http://www.Bhutannewsonline.com/treaties.html>.

<sup>209</sup> Indo-Bhutanese Relations [Http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi bin/ query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+bt0078](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi bin/ query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+bt0078)

Bhutanese government when the country expressed her wish to renegotiate parts of the treaty to enhance Bhutan's sovereignty. India has also accepted the provision that Bhutan need not take guidance from India on foreign policy.<sup>210</sup>

Bhutan is a landlocked Himalayan State and shares an international boundary of about 1019 Km borders with China in and India. Indo-Bhutanese boundary measures about 607 Km and Sino-Bhutanese border measures 412 Km. The boundary with India meets with the southern Himalayan range in the Duar Plains. Nepal and Bangladesh are also located in close proximity to Bhutan but do not share any international border with them.

China considers Sikkim and Bhutan as part of Tibet<sup>211</sup> since the second century even though India has rejected such irrational claims of China. This claim of China is based on cultural affinity and China's own incorporation into the Mongol-controlled Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368 AD).<sup>212</sup> China has also addressed these territorial disputes with Bhutan on International fronts. The Chinese claim a total of 764 Sq Km covering the North-west (269 Sq. Km) and central parts of Bhutan (495SqKm) as their own territory. The north western part consists of the regions of Dhokla, Sinchuling Drramana and Shakhotoe in Samsthe, Paro and Hao districts and the central part includes the Pasamlng and Jarkarlung Valley of the Wangdue Phodrang districts.<sup>213</sup> Bhutan National Assembly has consistently raised the issue of the intrusion of the Chinese soldiers into the territory of Bhutan. The 470 Km Sino-Bhutanese border falls under the watershed of Chumbi valley and the crest of the great Himalayan range. The Chumbi Valley is flanked on either side by Bhutan and the Indian state of Sikkim .

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<sup>210</sup> Singh Visits Bhutan to Show India Backs Its Democratic Changes

[Http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601091&sid=ae7X6KWq6mCk&refer=India](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601091&sid=ae7X6KWq6mCk&refer=India)

<sup>211</sup> Rajan, D. S. China: An Internal Account of Startling Inside Story of Sino-Indian Border Talks, *South Asia Analysis Group*, 10-June-2008. Available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20081013182029/http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers28%5Cpaper2732.html>

<sup>212</sup> Walcott, Susan M. Op. cit., 2010, 62-81

<sup>213</sup> Sarkar, Tuhina. "India - Bhutan Relations." *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 73, no. 2, Indian Political Science Association, 2012, pp. 347–52.

Chumbi Valley, an important tri-junction between Bhutan, China and India is a 100-km dagger-shaped north- south salient that lies between Sikkim to the north-west, west and south-west, and Bhutan to the north-east, east and south. Approximately 100 km south of this dagger point lies Bangladesh and is also very close to Nepal and in between, lies 70 km of rugged mountainous terrain and the Siliguri Corridor.<sup>214</sup>

According to China, the tri-junction is positioned at a place known as Gamochen, which is a few kilometres in the south of Doka La. China has constructed a road till Doka La and wants to lengthen it till the claimed point of tri-junction which is guarded by the Indian army. Gamochen, is the initial point of the Jampheri Ridge which is in Bhutan territory. China's claim is not only limited to construct roads but also to extend its reach to Siliguri Corridor. China's construction has a hidden objective to threaten Indian defence and prevent possible Indian expedition into the Chumbi Valley.

We can also see that China has upgraded the roads from Lhasa to Yadong through which the journey of 500 kilometres can be covered in just seven hours. China has also extended the railway line from Beijing-Lhasa till Yadong; that would be a high speed railway line and the mobilisation of troops and goods would be easier for Chinese PLA along LAC. New Chinese claims till Gamochen enhances the Chinese reach till Siliguri Corridor. For the last three decades, China unlike India has been betrothed in constructing roads and railway networks along the Indo China border to ensure movement of heavy war vehicles during any war like situation right up to LAC. For the same motive China has been constructing roads along Chumbi Valley up to its claimed tri junction point which was blocked by Indian troops. The construction of this road will ensure cutting off the North Eastern basic three primary formations and their units, drastically by reducing the supply of equipment and corroboration to the Indian army posts.

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

Beside these border issues with Bhutan, India is also concerned about the increasing criminal activities along the India Bhutan border. However, Bhutan government has always been on the go to rally round Indian side to combat the problem of Illegal Smuggling and Human Trafficking along borders. The 699 km long border of India-Bhutan is properly demarcated and issues were completely solved in 2006. Smuggling of Cattles, Money, Wild Animal's Part (especially of Tokhey which is a species of lizard found in Bhutan and Nepal), Drugs and Gold has been increasing year by year. Steps have been taken on both sides to impede the Illicit Trade. Additionally, the Indian government has allocated a budget of 1259 Crore to improve the infrastructure along the 313km border along Bhutan.<sup>215</sup> In 2003-2004 insurgents camps in southern Bhutan were destroyed with the help of Bhutanese government. The military operation is widely known as "Operation All Clear". Both the governments have completed various rounds of talks to solve emerging disputes among themselves.<sup>216</sup>

India, Nepal and the Siliguri Corridor:

Likewise Bhutan, Nepal also acts as a buffer country from an Indian security point of view and shares an open border with India and has social, cultural, political and economic exchanges. Siliguri Corridor becomes a strategic area in context to Nepal because of the Kakarvitta (Nepal) - Panitanki (India) Land Customs Station. India and Nepal relationship is based on the pillars of friendship and cooperation. It is unique because of open borders and deep-rooted heart to heart, people-to-people connection. We also see a tradition of free movement of people from across the borders since ancient times. Nepal has an area of 147,181 sq. Km. with a population of about 29 million. It has to share its border of approx. 1850 km in the east, south and west with five Indian States of Sikkim, Bihar, West Bengal, Uttarakhand and

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<sup>215</sup> [http://164.100.47.193/intranet/India%27s\\_Border\\_Management.pdf](http://164.100.47.193/intranet/India%27s_Border_Management.pdf) Lok Sabha Secretariat Parliament Library And Reference, Research, Documentation And Information Service (Larrdis) India's Border Management

<sup>216</sup> "Was India's Special Frontier Force Engaged in Bhutan's Operation ...." 22 Sept. 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/was-indias-special-frontier-force-engaged-in-bhutans-operation-all-clear-to-flush-out-militants/>. Accessed 3 Mar. 2021

Uttar Pradesh and also in the north with the TAR region of PRC. The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed in 1950 and it forms the base of distinct relations that exist between both the Sovereigns. This Treaty has given immense freedom to the Nepalese citizens to enjoy unparalleled advantages in India. In Nepal the majority of the people living in the terai region have kin- linkages to India. This is mainly due to inter marriages between these regions. The Indian government has continued the legacy of Britishers in maintaining the Gurkha regiment in the structural edifice of the Indian Army.

Trade and Commerce has always been the mainstay in any bilateral relations between any two countries. *Bal Chandra Sharma*, a reputed historian of Nepal has held that the beginning of India's Commercial relation with Nepal and Tibet can be pushed back as 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.<sup>217</sup> The dynamics of Indo Nepal Trade can be understood through four phases. First phase corresponds before the Treaty of Sugauli 1816, secondly, from the Sugauli Treaty 1816 to the 1923 Treaty, thirdly, from the 1923 Treaty to the 2002 Treaty and fourthly, post-SAFTA, BIMSTEC, WTO and other BTAs.

The bilateral relation between Nepal and India has also gone through different phases. A section of Nepalese has never accepted the role of India as a big brother in the subcontinent and it always wanted to ward off the 1950 friendship treaty.<sup>218</sup> The treaty addressed the issues pertaining to ownership of property, residence, trade and commerce between India and Nepal. The treaty had created special bond and dependency of both the nations for the issues related to supply of goods and security against foreign aggression. Beside social and economic bonds, the treaty also reemphasized security and strategic interdependence in between two countries. Both countries shared intelligence reports, fought together against threats of illegal immigrants and incoming refugees and initiated joint military exercises. Several points of tensions began in

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<sup>217</sup> "India's Trade with Central Asia via Nepal."

[http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot\\_08\\_02\\_03.pdf](http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot_08_02_03.pdf). Accessed 1 Jun. 2020.

<sup>218</sup> Articles VI and VII of the 'Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the Government of India and the Government of Nepal', July 31, 1950, in *India, Bilateral Treaties and Agreements*, Vol . 1, 1947–1952, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1999, pp. 273–275.

between 1985-1990, that eventually diluted the treaty. Anti-Indian feeling in Nepal was politically motivated since the reinstatement of monarchy in 1951. The Nepalese monarchy saw India's democratic sovereignty as a threat to its molecule structure. The monarchy practices the propaganda of uniting the people of Nepal through a common anti-Indian sentiment. With the deterioration of monarchy in 2006 and arrival of Communist Party of Nepal Maoist as the largest party in 2008 increased tensions for India as because the Communist Party of Nepal most of the times show affinity to the Chinese Communist Party.

The Indo-Nepal border is roughly 1751kilometres. Though the border is open and not fenced, for the entry of goods, various transit and trading points are present at the border, which are jointly patrolled by civilians and parliamentary forces of both the countries. Mobility along Indo- Nepal territory is free of permission due to which citizens of both the countries require no visas to cross the border. Sometimes this frequent cross border movement becomes debatable as terrorists take the benefit of the situation and move freely in both the countries. Land of Nepal has been used to escape from the Indian Territory and to reach Pakistan via China by ISIS agents.<sup>219</sup> After 2000, cross border crime has been increased with the rampant increase in cross border crimes of Human Trafficking, Smuggling, Insurgents' Movements and Weaponry. Indian Seema Suraksha Bal along with state police of three States adjacent to Nepal border patrols the borders.

Along the Corridor Kakarbhitta-Panitanki-Naxalbari is one of the busiest cross border routes in West Bengal. The open border has been misused by Racketeers, Criminals and terrorists. During the 80s-90s, Sikh and Kashmiri militants entered the Nepal border to infiltrate Indian adjacent States. ISIS agents were also arrested in North Bengal entered through the Nepal border. Beside these Indian militants many suspected perpetrators of sequential bomb blasts in India slink out of the country through the open border and secrete in Nepal. Due to strict laws against criminals in India and leniency in the legal system in Nepal many hard-core

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<sup>219</sup> Shrestha, Buddhi Narayan. 'Diplomacy in the Perspective of Boundaries'. *Journal of Foreign Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 1, Apr. 2021, pp. 37–57. DOI.org (Crossref), doi:[10.3126/jofa.v1i1.36248](https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v1i1.36248).



criminals of India escaped to Nepal to set up smuggling networks and criminal syndicate gangs to smuggle gold, fake Indian currency, wild animals, drugs, human organs including children and women, arms and exposures. Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Ganja from Nepal is also a serious apprehension for India. India has been used by traffickers to gather innocent women of Nepal and then channel them to Gulf Countries. During the earthquake in 2015 numerous Nepal girls were trafficked and caught in Delhi airport. Organ trading is also at its high rate due to the immense poverty in the region. Nepal border is also used for gold smuggling from Tibet to India. WikiLeaks documents have revealed that ISI is using Nepal as a source to create terrorist fronts against India and has also pushed men and explosives through open borders various times. Constructions in no man's land along the border and destroying or removing Indian pillars are new problems that have aggravated.<sup>220</sup> The extent of the issue of borders has crossed its limit and has been misused by the criminals and terrorists; it has led to the condition of rethinking the open border status with Nepal for the security of the nation. India and Nepal have conducted a Cross-Border Crime Control Action Plan in 2013 to combat the cross border crime. Eighteen crimes identified by the agency include smuggling, trafficking, and fake currency, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, unauthorised trade, human smuggling etc. even after so many efforts done by both the government countries are not able to check the volume of cross border crime<sup>221</sup> due to some loopholes as well in the security. The importance of the Siliguri corridor would be incomplete without mentioning the Indo -Bangladesh relations.

India and Bangladesh are close neighbours sharing a boundary of 2491 miles in length and this boundary is shared with three Indian states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. Bangladesh and India share a riverside border also. Rivers along the borders of the country have been an obstacle for fencing. It is not possible for either side to fence the reverie coast due to the meandering nature of the rivers. Almost four major rivers flow along the Indo-Bangladesh

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<sup>220</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 37–57.

<sup>221</sup> Das P. September 19, 2013, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Need to effectively manage the India-Nepal Border, Available at- [https://idsa.in/idsacomment/ManagetheIndiaNepalBorder\\_pdas\\_190913](https://idsa.in/idsacomment/ManagetheIndiaNepalBorder_pdas_190913)

border in the Siliguri corridor. These rivers receive heavy rainfall during the months of August and September and are heavily flooded leaving the plain population in a hostile situation.

Bangladesh is important for the security and development of the North East region and the success of Look East policy and now Act East Policy also depends on cordial relations between Bangladesh and India. The assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman brought an era of troubled relations between these two countries. However, Sheik Haseena's visit to India in 2010 and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visit to Dhaka in 2011 led to the establishment of new bilateral relations between Dhaka and New Delhi. The history of Bangladesh cannot be thought of in separation from the history of Bengal of Indian State. Islamic solidarity is one of the mainstays in Bangladesh and still its links to India are Civilizational, cultural, social and also economic.

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 till 2002, India had been the topmost trading partner of Bangladesh, but after 2002 China overtook the trade.<sup>222</sup> China has seized the market of Bangladeshis due to the easier trade rules than that of India. Construction of China's deep sea port in Bangladesh even after the concerns of India shows that the game is inclined in favour of China now. Bangladesh is now the 'Third largest trade partner' of China, the bilateral trade reaching US Dollar 3.19 Billion in 200. Under Asian Pacific Free Trade Agreement (APFTA) tariff barriers to 84 different types of commodities imported from Bangladesh were removed. China offered to build nuclear power plants to meet the country's growing energy demands. China imported raw materials from Bangladesh like leather, cotton textile, fish and other major exports include Textiles machinery, and also electronic products fertilisers, Cements etc.

Chinese premier Wen Jiabao's official visit to China in 2005 led to opening of gates for many agreements. Direct air-link between Dhaka and Beijing via Kunming was started. China had to

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<sup>222</sup> Sahoo P. August 20 2011, East Asia Forum, India losing ground to China on trade with Bangladesh, Available at <https://www.dailyo.in/politics/noida-mahagun-moderne-domestic-workers-class-divide-bangladesh/story/1/18359.html>

rely on Myanmar to directly access Bangladesh through rail-route. The Kunming- Chittagong road link via Myanmar is considered to be a strategic move on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party. Besides trade, China has also heavily invested infrastructure in Bangladesh. The Bangabandhu International Conference centre, the Chittagong Bridge and many others are some examples of Chinese Investment in infrastructure. For military equipment and army modernisation Bangladesh totally relies on Chinese Counterpart. Artillery combat aircraft, missiles, patrol ships, military tanks are a few examples which Bangladesh purchases from China.

China shares no direct boundary link with Bangladesh like India; however, it has been successful in making inroads into Bangladesh political, economic and military affairs. India has missed some of the best opportunities in counting her shares in Bangladesh. China aims not only to colonise Bangladesh economically but also harness the economic and military benefits of the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh, once a part of India shared many things in common with India even though there are many areas of contention between these two countries.

One of the major areas of contention between Bangladesh and India is India's 'Construction of Farakka barrage'.<sup>223</sup> This was done to divert Ganges water to increase water supply in Hooghly. Bangladesh complained that she neglected the right share of the water and construction of the Barrage had converted the huge area fit for cultivation into waterless parched land during the dry season and flooded marshy land during the monsoon season when India releases excess amounts of water.<sup>224</sup> Other areas of concern shown by Bangladesh are that this diversion has led to an increase in salinity level and hence fisheries have been contaminated, navigations have been hindered and it also causes effects to the health of Bangladeshi citizens. The Water sharing Treaty was signed in the year 1996 for sharing the Ganges water however Bangladesh seems not to be satisfied with the Treaty.

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<sup>223</sup> "Political history of Farakka Barrage and its effects on ... - SpringerLink." 4 Jan. 2016, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40728-015-0027-5>. Accessed 21 Dec. 2020.

<sup>224</sup> "Farakka Barrage Project." <http://fbp.gov.in/>. Accessed 21 Dec. 2020.

Another area of concern for India is that Bangladesh has denied India's transit facility to landlocked North Eastern regions of India<sup>225</sup>. This has led India to rely heavily on the Siliguri Corridor for its connectivity with North Eastern states. Other than this the most important problems faced by India is the issue of illegal migration. All governments of Bangladesh have denied the existence of this phenomenon even though this has been regularly flagged in the meetings of Border Security Forces. The migration of Bangladeshi into India has altered the demographic pattern of neighbouring states like Assam, West Bengal, and Tripura Meghalaya.

Two causes can be attributed to the migrant flow, firstly the pull factor and secondly the push factor. The pull factor was mainly due to economic as well as political reasons. The first phase of migration was purely political. However, later onwards India became very disappointed with the issues of illegal Bangladeshi migrations. India is seen as a land of opportunities by the poverty stricken Bangladeshi nationals. The pull factors augmented with push factors like increasing population, depreciating Bangladesh economy and others.

The Indian government has tried to maintain the status quo for bilateral relations despite growing ambience of suspicion and abhorrence due to history and partly due to Chinese intrusion. In 2011 the two countries signed a border demarcation Accord to end the four decade dispute. This was called the *‘Tin Bigha Accord’*.<sup>226</sup> In the same year Indian Army and Bangladesh Army participated in a joint military exercise called ‘Sampriti II’. India is also looking forward to solving the ongoing energy crisis in Bangladesh by introducing the concept of Regional Power Trading System. Siliguri Corridor becomes more important to be taken care of because of Banglabandha Land Custom Station.

Banglabandha is a key inland port in northern Bangladesh to provide a trade link with India, Nepal and Bhutan and it is linked through the Siliguri Corridor. This inland port is only

<sup>225</sup> "Constraints and Opportunities in the India-Bangladesh Transit Dispute."

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43550358>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.

<sup>226</sup> "Freedom from virtual captivity - The Hindu." 2 Nov. 2011,

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/freedom-from-virtual-captivity/article2592167.ece>. Accessed 12 July. 2020.

4.3 miles from Siliguri and Jalpaiguri of West Bengal. Kakarvitta, the India-Nepal border transit point is only 38 miles and the India-Bhutan border is 42 miles from the India-Bangladesh border, which borders Bangladesh. Despite the geographical proximity to the borders of India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan, the issues of border control along with the territorial sovereignty increases the strategic importance of Siliguri many fold.

#### Siliguri: Present Military Deployment

The republic of India is guarded by the Indian armed forces that comprise Indian Army, Indian Air Force, Indian Navy, Paramilitary Forces, Central Armed Police Forces, and Strategic Nuclear Command. Siliguri by virtue of its geographical location falls under the Eastern command.

The Eastern command with its headquarter in Kolkata consists of following subordinate units:

- a. 23 infantry division placed at Ranchi
- b. III Corps at Dimapur which includes 2<sup>ND</sup> Mountain Division, 57<sup>TH</sup> Mountain Division and 56<sup>TH</sup> Mountain Division.
- c. IV Corps at Tezpur Assam including 71<sup>ST</sup> Mountain Division 5<sup>TH</sup> Mountain Division and 21<sup>ST</sup> Mountain Division.

Siliguri is Headquarter of 33 Corps which includes 17<sup>TH</sup> Mountain Division, 20<sup>TH</sup> Mountain Division and 27<sup>TH</sup> Mountain Division. The Siliguri based 33 Corps was once a part of 14 Army during World War II. The Regiment was established in Siliguri along with Corps Headquarter in 1962. The 33 Corps Base at Sukhna is responsible to look after the security of North Bengal, Sikkim and if needed Bhutan. The 33 Corps comprises three mountain divisions which includes 17<sup>th</sup> Division, 20<sup>TH</sup> Division and 27<sup>TH</sup> Division and along these three Mountain Divisions we also have different Brigades Artillery and Cavalry. In the year 2003, a housing Complex was inaugurated for the jawans of Sukna Military Station and it was called Ugrah

Vihar. The project was completed with approximate 1.25 crore rupees under the Fast Track scheme within a record time of 365 days.

Sukna just on the outskirts of Siliguri at present is a part of Kurseong block, Darjeeling District. It is only 4 km from Upper Bagdogra, 6 km from Matigara, 7km from Mahananda Para and 7 km from Saktigarh. One can witness that Sukhna is surrounded by Siliguri, Naxalbari , Phansidewa and Rajganj Block. The establishment of 33 Corps has altered the demographic pattern of the area. The total population in the year 2011 according to Census of India was greater than the earlier recorded population. The total population on record was 1011 with a total number of 214 houses. The percentage of the female population was 53. Bagdogra railway station is the nearest railway station and the station is only 10 km away from Sukhna.

The impact of the establishment of 33 corps at Sukhna is that the whole area has witnessed an increase in the establishment of housing complexes. The route from Matigara traffic to the camp office witnesses Mangaldeep Sevashram Sangha, NBSTC Division Office, Modi Public School Zion Church, Sivananda Vedanta Yogashram, Mother Dairy Calcutta Matigara unit, Kagyu Buddhist Centre, a petrol pump. A big Housing Complex under the name of Vastu Vihar is nearing completion and it immediately reflects how the establishment of the locality Sainikpuri had a huge impact on the overall area. Within the Army campus we can find Kendriya Vidyalaya, Trishakti Army pre-primary school, State Bank of India, MES playground, Parth Simulbari playground and others. The camp is lush green traversed by Manekshaw Marg, which is strictly used by Army personnel.

The 33 Corps with its Headquarters at Sukhna is assisted by 2 Air Bases, at Bagdogra and the other at Hasimara. The Bagdogra airfield located in Bagdogra is only 8 km from Siliguri and is a part of district Darjeeling. The airfield is home to 1 AF's No. 20 wing. Earlier this airbase was also home to MIG -21 FLS of number 8 Squadron. The airfield also witnessed the legendary number 7 Squadron flying the Hawker Hunter at the critical period of 1971 war. Till 2012 as per field report the Bagdogra airfield was home to at least two Sukhoi-7S and a GNAT.

These aircraft were later renamed as I E -1245(GNAT) and SUKHOI B-844 became the pride of the airfield. MIG-21 airframes of retired aircraft could be spotted scattered about two dozens in number in and around the airfield.<sup>227</sup>

The Bagdogra Siliguri Military Complex was established because of the strategic Siliguri Corridor and it was very near to the nearest point between Nepal and Bangladesh. It was also 47 nautical miles away from the Chinese invasion spot of Sikkim in 1962. The Bagdogra Military Complex included barracks storage areas, residential buildings in thousands and this was one of the main reasons behind the urbanisation of Bagdogra and surrounding region.

Bagdogra in no time acquired the status of a census town of Darjeeling district. Census town is a type of town which is not statutorily notified as administered but its population has attended the urban characteristics. The criteria is that the population has to be more than 5000 and 75% of the main working population should be employed in a non-agricultural sector. Other than these two characteristics the third characteristic is that the area should have a minimum population density of 400 people per square km as per census of India to prove itself as an urban entity. Bagdogra forms a part of the greater Siliguri Metropolitan area and is well connected by roadways as well as railway stations.

The importance of Bagdogra is that it serves the region with the only ‘custom airport’ of the whole North Bengal. Traversed by two national highways NH 31 AND Asian highway it connects many important towns like Kishanganj, Gangtok, Jalpaiguri, Birpara, Malbazar Islampur Khoribari Nepal, Mirik, Pankhabari. In the analysis of the Airway facility, Bagdogra Airport acts as a civil Enclave and also as Air Force Station serving as a Gateway airport to Hill towns of Darjeeling , Kalingpong and Sikkim. This airport also has the facility to entertain the foreign tourists and provide them special permits required to travel Hill Stations.<sup>228</sup> The airport

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<sup>227</sup> "Search Results for “qinetiq” – Defense Industry Daily."

<https://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/search/qinetiq/feed/rss2/>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2020.

<sup>228</sup> "Bagdogra Airport Profile | CAPA." <https://centreforaviation.com/data/profiles/airports/bagdogra-airport-ixb>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2020.

also has flights connecting all the major cities of India like New Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai Guwahati and Kolkata. It also provides facilities for helicopter flight to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim. As already discussed in chapter 3 on Economy and Communication of Siliguri, the Government of India, in 2002 granted the status of a customs airport with limited International operations. The air traffic at Bagdogra crossed the mark of one million in the year 2014-15 reflecting 43.6 percent growth. Bagdogra is also connected with the Railway station which is under Northern Frontier Railways Siliguri, Katihar division. This railway connects many towns like Siliguri, Nakshalbari, Kishanganj and Katihar.

Bagdogra which was once an abode for tigers, as the meaning of the name suggests turned to an urban centre only because of the establishment of a military unit at Bagdogra. At present the economy of Bagdogra is mainly service sector chiefly because of the presence of Army personnel and Air force personnel. Though we find scattered tea gardens in and around Bagdogra, the 'Airport Market' which is renowned for its Chinese products cannot be ignored as it plays a central hub for shopping destinations.<sup>229</sup> Bagdogra also hosts a weekly market twice on Thursday and Sunday, where fresh vegetables and fruit along with other household items are sold.. The impact of urbanisation can be also seen in establishment of banks like ICICI, Indian Overseas Bank, Bank of India, State Bank of India, central Bank, syndicate bank, and insurance companies like life insurance company limited etc. have branches in and around the market of Bagdogra. We also have schools like Air Force School Bagdogra, Army Public School Bengdubi, Bagdogra Public School, Kendriya Vidyalaya, Bagdogra, Kendriya Vidyalaya, Bengdubi, Good Shepherd School, and Hebron School etc. These schools are affiliated to CBSE Board or ICSE Board. We also have schools which are affiliated to the West Bengal State Board like Shubham Aaya Suryanarayan Hindi high school, Chittaranjan High School Bengali medium, Balika Vidyalaya and Sister Nivedita English School. The overall Urbanisation of Bagdogra was the outcome of the establishment of military stations and airfields. Other than

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<sup>229</sup> "Best Shopping Markets in Siliguri - Nativeplanet." 6 Feb. 2019, <https://www.nativeplanet.com/travel-guide/best-shopping-markets-in-siliguri-005405.html>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.



Bagdogra Military Station we also have Sevoke military station. Sevoke military station is famous for Baikunthapur army ground where the Indian Army conducts its military recruitment process.<sup>230</sup> It is not very far from Siliguri approx 10 km and it gives passages to National Highway 31 and the NH31 A connects the town of Gangtok. It is just 23 km away from Bagdogra airfield and has its own railway station on the New Jalpaiguri Alipurduar Samathala Road line but there is no commercial stoppage for trains and it is purely used for military purposes. It is essentially constructed to connect Sevoke military station with other military stations like Alipurduar Samuktala Military station and Cooch Behar army stations et cetera.

However in 2008 the Government of India took a major step in connecting the region with Gangtok, Sikkim with rail routes. Sikkim, a strategic part of India, is connected with only a single roadway and the military has to use this only route along with civilians. The North East Frontier Railway took the construction of North Bengal Sikkim Railway link of approx. 52.7 km.<sup>231</sup> The aim of the project is to connect Sikkim with Siliguri and with the rest of India through a rail route. The rail link of the 52.7 kilometre stretch will be broad gauge (5 feet 6 inch) and the proposed speed limit will be 65 km per hour. This project was approved in 2008<sup>232</sup> and once completed, will connect Sikkim to the main Indian rail network. It will also boost tourism and the regional economy besides revamping the military needs of the region. About 70% of the rail route will be passing through the tunnels as per the proposal this route will have 13 tunnels and the longest being 1800 m, 100 bridges and 4 manned level crossing.<sup>233</sup> This

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<sup>230</sup> "ARMY RECRUITING OFFICE, SILIGURI (WB) - Join Indian Army.." [http://joinindianarmy.nic.in/writereaddata/Portal/BRAVO\\_NotificationPDF/Baikunthpur\\_Rect\\_Rally\\_notification\\_wef\\_26\\_Oct\\_to\\_03\\_Nov\\_18\\_for\\_PDF\\_file.pdf](http://joinindianarmy.nic.in/writereaddata/Portal/BRAVO_NotificationPDF/Baikunthpur_Rect_Rally_notification_wef_26_Oct_to_03_Nov_18_for_PDF_file.pdf). Accessed 2 Jun. 2020.

<sup>231</sup> "North Bengal-Sikkim Railway Link - Railway Technology." <https://www.railway-technology.com/projects/northbengalsikkimrai/>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.

<sup>232</sup> "West Bengal-Sikkim rail route tunnels near completion | Kolkata ...." 2 Sep. 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/bengal-sikkim-rail-route-tunnels-near-completion/articleshow/77880815.cms>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2020.

<sup>233</sup>"Indian Railways new Sivok-Rangpo rail project: Travel from West ...." 30 Aug. 2019, <https://www.financialexpress.com/infrastructure/railways/indian-railways-new-sivok-rangpo-rail-project-travel-from-west-bengal-to-sikkim-in-just-2-hours-watch-video/1691100/>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2020.

project was undertaken to improve connection between Sikkim North East cities which mostly lie on the Chinese border and to the rest of India. This line is of national importance and it will make it convenient for the Indian Army to deploy military and logistics along the Indo Chinese border.

Other military bases include the Central Reserve Police. The CRPF is considered as one of the largest Paramilitary forces with 39 battalions.<sup>234</sup> The main role of CRPF is to maintain law and order and also look to counter insurgency in the areas where it is deployed. The Eastern sector of CRPF has three ranges Bhubaneswar, Durgapur and Siliguri.<sup>235</sup> The present construction of the area around Nougkhat took place after the year 2010. The area is also home to 38 ADM Ranges headquarter and the central weapon store is also located here. Siliguri also has SSB camps called Sashastra Seema Bal, Siliguri Frontier.<sup>236</sup> The Sashastra Seema Bal is also called Armed Border Force India or Central Armed police forces under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Before 2001 it was called the Special Service Bureau but later on changed to Sashastra Seema Bal. As per record it has 67 battalions and 76337 active personnel.<sup>237</sup>

The SSB has very interesting history in the wake of Chinese conflict of 1962 when the Government of India realised that the borders do not only need Rifles but also support from local populations. The Special Service Bureau was thus conceived in November 1962 and eventually formed in March 1963. The sole objective was "Total Security prepared in the remote border areas for performing 'stay behind' roles during war."<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> "History of CRPF | About Us | Central Reserve Police Force ...." 25 Feb. 2021, <https://crpf.gov.in/history-crpf.htm>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.

<sup>235</sup> "Knowing Central Armed Police Forces - The Tribune India." <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/jobs-careers/knowing-central-armed-police-forces-847951>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.

<sup>236</sup> "Siliguri Frontier - Sashastra Seema Bal." <https://ssb.nic.in/index.aspx?cid=4>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.

<sup>237</sup> "IG's Profile- SSB Ministry Of Home Affairs, Govt. Of India - Sashastra ...." <https://ssb.nic.in/index1.aspx?lsid=757&lev=1&lid=686&langid=1&Cid=4>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.

<sup>238</sup> "Border Security: The Role of the US Border Patrol - Federation of ...." 11 Aug. 2010, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homsec/RL32562.pdf>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2020.

The Siliguri Frontier was raised on 1st April 2011 and its main headquarters is at Kolkata. The Siliguri Frontier was created out of the North Bengal part, East District of Sikkim of Guwahati Frontier and Kishanganj-Thakurganj part of Bihar. It consists of 3 SHQ, 10 BNS including one reserve 63 Battalion, 03 TCS for recruits (FTC Ranidanga, STC Falakata, ATC Barasat, TTS Kolkata and 04 AO offices. The Ranidanga sector of SSB has 41 battalions and the 8th battalion is placed at Khaprail. The SSB has a much greater role to play in this region as it covers 530 km of International border which includes 350 km of Indo Nepal and 215 km of Indo Bhutan borders.

Thus we see that the corridor is of immense importance for the security and the unity of the nation. The Corridor is the hub of road, railway and air networks connecting West Bengal to other North Eastern states of India. Geo Strategically it is also the nucleus of existence of Seema Suraksha Bal, Indian Army, and Border Security Force and is a spot to receive all the information related to Line of Actual Control with China. New Jalpaiguri is the most important railway station strategically, from where three rail networks emerge to connect the three military formation centres located right opposite to China. The most strategic road towards Tawang, a town in Arunachal Pradesh runs through here only. The road to Tawang is only 25kms away from the Line of Actual Control border with China.<sup>239</sup> This road provides essential supplies to the 60000 troops that come under 4 corps of Army who are responsible to maintain peace and unity of the area. The road and rail network towards Dibrugarh also runs through the corridor. From the station of NJP railway link reaches till Dibrugarh a district in Upper Assam from where all the supplies are sent to different bordering check posts to China, Myanmar and Bangladesh in Nagaland and Western Arunachal Pradesh. Armies stationed in these regions are also fed by this network. The armies located in Sikkim are also fed by the supply line of the railway network of Siliguri Corridor which has 33corps. Being located as the only connecting line of North Eastern India the defence of the corridor cannot be denied or taken for granted.

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<sup>239</sup> "India wants to build a road through Bhutan's 'Yeti Territory' to counter ...." 8 Jul. 2020, <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/india-wants-to-build-a-road-through-bhutans-yeti-territory-to-counter-chinas-expansionist-moves-858681.html>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2020.

The question of China's presence along the corridor is evidenced by the standoff at Doklam Plateau in the month of June 2017.<sup>240</sup> On January 13, 2010, China and Bhutan completed the nineteenth round of the joint survey related to the diplomatic talks of borders of two countries in reference of the Chinese claims of the western border near Chumbi Valley (which is just 50 kilometre away from SC) and the pastoral lands of Doklam, Charithang, Sinchulumpa and Dramana. Chumbi Valley due to its geostrategic presence plays an important role in deciding the geo political role of the country for the entire north eastern region of India. Chumbi Valley has its proximity with Sikkim and Tibet as well.

In case of decreasing bilateral relations with China and quest for 'Regional Supremacy', India should be always on her toes to overcome any forced war like situation for protection of her sovereignty. She already has experiences of wars with China and Pakistan. The 'dragon' seems more volatile than Islamabad in provoking the existing border demarcation issues. The Eastern war front, encompassing the International boundaries of Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet through various mountain-passes is conducive for the Red army to launch any military assault in case of war. The Sino India war and the border tension of 1967 bear testimony to these facts.

*"India and Chinese troops along the Sikkim-Tibet Border were reported still shooting at each other early this morning. Fighting however; apparently is not on the scale of yesterday's clash, the most serious in several years.*

*These skirmishes stem from aggressive forward patrolling by both sides. While we have seen no major troop deployment in the area by either side, we may be in for a period of somewhat greater tension. New Delhi and Peking have exchanged diplomatic protests."*<sup>241</sup>

----- The President's Daily Briefs, 12<sup>th</sup> Sept 1967, CIA Declassified in Part sanitised copy: CIA- RDP 79T00936A005400230001-2

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<sup>240</sup> "Sino-Bhutan Boundary Negotiations: Complexities of the 'Package ...." 19 Jan. 2010, [https://idsa.in/idsacomments/Sino-BhutanBoundaryNegotiations\\_mbisht\\_190110](https://idsa.in/idsacomments/Sino-BhutanBoundaryNegotiations_mbisht_190110).

Accessed 2 Jun. 2020.

<sup>241</sup> Daily Briefs, 12<sup>th</sup> Sept 1967, CIA Declassified in Part sanitised copy: CIA- RDP 79T00936A005400230001-2

Any military envelopment in the Eastern Front from the Chinese would be carried out through three accessible routes.<sup>242</sup> Firstly, through the five passes into Nepal and from Nepal to India with an eye on incarcerating the Siliguri Corridor to cut off Northeast India from her mainland. Secondly, through the passes south of Ladakh and North-Western Nepal and finally through Chumbi Valley towards Siliguri. However passes through Arunachal Pradesh cannot be ignored which can be direct access to the lower valley of Assam. Bhutan is also seen from a positive viewpoint to make successful inroads into India to Paro Dzong, Lhuntse Dzong. The Eastern front hallmarked through Chumbi Valley Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan can serve as easy routes for communist military and logistics capabilities. Any military movement of the Red army would meet on the plains transforming Siliguri into battlegrounds .Other than Arunachal Pradesh any advancement through the Chumbi Valley or Eastern Nepal or Bhutan would culminate at Siliguri.<sup>243</sup>

The announcement of Mao Ze Dong that “Tibet as the palm having five fingers of Ladakh, Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh”<sup>244</sup> clearly expresses the Chinese outlook towards its immediate neighbour. The Siliguri Corridor is as important for China as it is for India. Given the strategic importance of the corridor it is heavily patrolled by India troops with different state and central border forces separately. The Indian government needs to look inwards to strengthen its military defence and infrastructure near Siliguri Corridor in order to counter a plausible Chinese military in future. The strategic location of the Town and the subsequent setting up of the military bases all over the region has certainly accelerated the pace of urbanisation and overall development of the region.

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<sup>242</sup> "Siliguri corridor: Behind China's Sikkim aggression, a plan to isolate ...." 3 Jul. 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/border-face-off-why-china-tries-to-break-chickens-neck-to-isolate-northeast/articleshow/59420472.cms>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2020.

<sup>243</sup> "Twisting India's Chicken's Neck | The Interpreter - Lowy Institute." 15 Jul. 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/twisting-india-s-chicken-s-neck>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2020.

<sup>244</sup> <http://morungexpress.com/five-fingers-of-tibet/>