CHAPTER- VII

SINO-INDIAN WAR AND THE NEW PHASE

Within the spell of fifteen years of independence India engaged in two wars with its neighbours- one was fought for Kashmir with Pakistan and other for 'border disputes' (1962) with China. While the first was the episode of unending tag of sentiment that seems to have been chronic between India and Pakistan since 1948; later was the naked example of Chinese aggression to Indian territory. Though India under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru always stood for mutual coexistence and cooperation with China and it was one of the first countries which recognized (7th December, 1949) the People's Republic of China set up by the Chinese Revolution in October, 1949; pressed for Communist China's representation in UN Security Council and encouraged China's endeavour to support North Korea during 'Korean Crisis' in 1950; China in return thought aggressively.[1] It was the 'Chinese betrayal' or more precisely according to Rana Satya Paul, "Chinese militarism and its policy of expansionism was again out for a hunt…what other countries in Asia had witnessed from China during the long course of history…and this time China's vicious eyes fell on India".[2]

Researches since the beginning of the Sino-Indian War on 20th October, 1962; have been made by the scholars on the probable causes for Chinese invasion in India. The Chinese version regarding this war always has accused Nehru responsible for the war.[3] Even, Neville Maxwell, reputed Australian journalist in his famous book 'India's China War' and in his interview to The Times Of India holds Nehru and the 'Indian Forward Policy' responsible for the Chinese attack as an act of self-defence.[4] However, the Indian official commentary and most of the Indian scholars do not support this view.[5] India regarded that invasion as a neo-imperialist aggression. Most of the reasons provided

explaining China's attack on Indian soil, may be briefed as China's diplomatic strategy for emerging herself as the leader of Asia.[6] In fact, China was jealous to follow her traditional expansion policy in a new frame after the advent of People's Republic of China or 'Red China' under the leadership of Mao Zedong. But its physical boundary surrounded by ocean, barren land and Soviet Russia hindered her to follow the same.[7] It was only the south i.e. the South-East Asia which could satisfy her ambition. But China perceived as Rana Satya Paul might has been rightly thought that 'amongst all the non-communist countries in Asia, where India alone has some strength to cross swords with the mighty dragon to contain…China within her present frontiers vis-à-vis India and defend the non-communist world from further Chinese encroachment'.[8] For achieving its desire to dominate the whole of South-East Asia and to browbeat India, China had been working on pronged strategy against India and the Sino-Indian War of 1962 was a part of this.

The question of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet seems to be the basic cause for the Sino-Indian border disputes. China since the early days of the British regime in India had been claiming over Tibet, which had been claimed as the integral part of China for the Tibetans having been regarded by the Chinese as one of principal five clans of the Chinese empire.[9] On the other hand, the Tibetans ruled under the sovereignty of Dalai Lamas were reluctant to accept the Chinese sovereignty. Similarly, due to strategic consideration the British Indian Government wished to maintain Tibet's existence as a buffer state between two empires.[10] Consequently, at Simla Convention in 1913-14, a treaty was signed between British India and Tibet where representatives of both the Government mutually acknowledged the McMahon Line, a boundary line between 'inner and outer Tibet', that is supposed to be extended for 550 miles from Bhutan in the west to 160 miles east of the great bend of the Brahmaputra river in the East mostly

along the crest of the Himalayas. However, since the day the treaty was signed, China did not recognize the line.[11]

India since independence made it clear that Tibet was an independent country and also recognized China's suzerainty over it. But China as stated earlier intended to annex Tibet. In the beginning of 1950, as stated by Shiv Kunal Verma, "in a meeting held in Kalimpong, West Bengal, between the Tibetans and the Chinese, General Yuan Zhongxian, PRC's ambassador to India, had submitted a three-point proposal that clearly said Tibet could either accept Chinese sovereignty peacefully or face the military might of the Peoples' Liberation Army".[12] Consequently, a meeting was held at the Foreign Secretary Office of Krishna Menon, in New Delhi to decide the stand of India in the forthcoming situation along with Baldev Singh, Defence Minister and General K.M. Cariappa, Commander-in-chief of the Indian Army and off course Sardar K.M. Panikkar, India's first ambassador to China; but no decision for adapting any 'hard line' was made though there was a proposal from B.N. Mullik, head of India's Intelligence Bureau at that time and author of famous book 'The Chinese Betrayal', for military intervention to save Tibet from Chinese invasion and safeguarding India's boundary from future Chinese attack.[13] It is more interesting to say that it was not only B.N. Mullik but also some parliamentary members most notable amongst them Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Home Minister to the Government of India and Sri Shyama Prosad Mukherjee, Minister for Industry and Supply, who advocated to follow hard line of military intervention in Tibet.[14] But Nehru convinced by Krishna Menon, Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, was reluctant to engage any confrontation with China at that time.[15] Consequently, on 7th October 1950 when the Chinese troops invaded Tibet for its declared mission to 'liberate Tibet', India maintained a status quo with China and a treaty was concluded between two nations in 1951 where India accepted Chinese sovereignty

and suzerainty over Tibet in return of Chinese promise not to overrun Tibetan freedom.[16] But China in return, occupied Tibet on 17th March, 1959 in the name of restoring peace by putting down the Khampa Rebellion, a violent uprising since 1957 of the Khampa tribesmen in South-East Tibet who always proved to be a hurdle for establishing Chinese supremacy over Tibet and wished to restore Dalai Lama's sovereignty over Tibet.

After the fall of Lhasa into the hands of the Chinese, Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), a reputed Indian politician might have been rightly observed the Chinese attitude towards India and perhaps one of the probable cause for the Sino-Indian border conflict. He says, "Tibet is the palm of the hand and now that the Chinese have it, they want the five fingers without which the palm is useless. The five fingers are Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and the North-East Frontier Agency".[17]

Sino-Indian Border issue came to the light since China had conquered Tibet in 1950. The question was acute in Eastern and Western sectors where the borders between India and Tibet were undefined but mutually recognised long before the problem arose. Though, a treaty of friendship popularly known as 'Panchsheel' or following five principles between India and China was signed in 1954, it was found that there were several instances of provocations from the Chinese side for arising border issues. Even, the maps published by the Chinese Government of that time showed 50,000 square miles of Indian territory as Chinese territory and the Chinese troops in several times intruded into the Indian territory to hold their demand without facing any serious protest and resistance from its Indian counterpart.[18] Side by side, the Chinese official version always complained the opposite or claimed the territories where they had intruded as their own land.[19] In fact, China intended to have Western sector chiefly named as Aksai Chin of Ladakh for strategic purpose. There was no way for China to communicate and control

over Tibet without having Aksai Chin which was a foreign land. Therefore, the Chinese Government constructed a national highway (G219) from Sinkiang to Lhasa through Aksai Chin in 1956-57.[20] It was published in the Chinese maps in 1958 and interestingly when India protested against this activity China replied for having Aksai Chin of its own region.[21] On the other hand, being the birth place of Sixth Dalai Lama, China claimed NEFA as the part of Tibetan empire. She even protested against posting of Indian guards at the trading town of Tawang.

War clouds between India and China began to gather since the beginning of 1959. In this year pro Tibetan Khampa Rebellion was subdued such a manner that Tibetan religious leader Fourteenth Dalai Lama with his followers sought political asylum to India. He as stated by Mridula Mukherjee, "was given asylum in India but not allowed to set up a government-in-exile and dissuaded from carrying on political activities".[22] But this act by the Indian Government with massive support and sympathy of Indians as well as most of the political parties of India including some prominent leaders within the Congress towards the Dalai Lama and off course Tibet against the Chinese hostility and aggression; deeply resented Communist China.[23] She even exaggeratedly protested against the Dalai Lama's political activities in Kalimpong, Indian army's provocation and assistance to the Khampa rebels; and warned that the role of India Government to that matter was not beyond suspicion that might hamper the Sino-Indian friendship.[24] These allegations were however refuted by the Indian Government.

A series of talks between the Government of India and its Chinese counterpart or Jawaharlal Nehru and Chou En-Lai had been conducted to settle the disputes amicably in the amidst of series of border fighting between two forces since 1958.[25] In 1960, Chou En-Lai visited India and proposed to settle the border disputes amicably by withdrawing

Chinese claim over NEFA in return of Indian claim over Aksai Chin. But, Nehru being the prime minister of India, a sovereign nation was unwilling to concede these which has been regarded by Neville Maxwell (Neville Maxwell, India's China War, First Jaico impression, Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, 1970) as an act of stupidity that stimulated to increase Chinese hostility.[26] Moreover, a joint committee was set up to submit a report by September, 1960 on disputed border issues. But all the official and unofficial efforts proved to be futile.[27]

Ramachandra Guha perhaps has rightly observed, "while the end of the war can be thus explained, its origins are harder to understand".[28] Though a series of recorded and unrecorded border skirmishes between border forces of conflicting nations were going on since the occupation of Tibet by China, it was not since 1961 when the possibility of large scale border conflict arose by the order from the India Government to its army to counter possible Chinese attack.[29] From April to August, 1961, and followed by January, April, May, June and July, 1962; the Chinese forces intruded into Sikkim, Ladakh and NEFA. However, the Chinese were unable to penetrate deep into Indian interior due to 'Forward Policy' of the Indian forces.[30] The Chinese attacked the Indian border posts again in September and first of October. The strength of the Chinese attack was increasing day by day. It proves the notion that the Chinese had gathered the military and non-military resources in Tibet needed for war through six to eight months before the starting of full-fledged war and even the port of Calcutta was utilised for sending non-military articles without having any information to the Government of India.[31]

On 20th October, 1962, the Chinese started their massive attack on Indian soil in NEFA from the direction of Tawang and Kibithoo; in the Chip Chap Valley and the Pangong Lake areas of Ladakh. By 24th October, as stated by V.D.Mahajan, "the Chinese

were well across the McMahon Line through a 25 –mile wide sector to a depth of 8 miles into the Indian territory".[32] On that day, the Chinese premier Chou En-Lai approached Nehru to come to an negotiation which was refuted by India.[33] At the same time Nehru also approached to the Western powers for aid and it was followed by sending reinforcement by the USA and Britain and an oral support for the same from Canada and France.[34] China again started a massive attack across most of NEFA on 15th November, but except taking the advantageous situation to intrude into the plains of Assam, it declared a unilateral ceasefire to be effective from the midnight of 21st and 22nd November, 1962; withdrawing its frontier guards behind 12.5 miles of line of actual control in NEFA and on Ladakh front existed between India and China.[35]

The Sino-Indian Border conflict left deep consequences on India. In the eve of declaring cease fire, the Chinese forces had possessed the mountain gateways and key passes in the plains of Assam and threatened the whole of Assam and its oil fields. All the nook and corner of NEFA was under direct threat of Chinese subjugation. In the extreme part of war an 'Emergency' was declared in India.

The Central Government faced a nation-wide criticism and the non-alignment policy of Nehru was highly condemned by the opposition.[36] The dismissal of K.P.S. Menon from the Cabinet and immediate election result of losing some prominent Congress won seats to the opponent stalwarts like J.B. Kripalini, Minu Masani, Rammonohar Lohia were the immediate internal political consequences of the China War. Moreover, the strategic policy of India towards its neighbouring countries had also been changed due to Chinese Border Conflict. India since then came to be closer to the 'Western Block' for having military aid, even India's relation with Soviet Russia remained same as it before.

The war strategy between two states appeared to be separate since the beginning of the border conflict. It is clear that China prepared herself to win over by adopting war preparations long before arising the issue. A road throughout northern border was constructed by Red China from its southern province to Eastern Tibet. This road assisted the Peoples Republic of China to control over Tibet. Moreover, China engaged herself throughout several months before the war for infrastructural development in border areas of NEFA for smoothening the movement of its heavy artillery.

In previous chapter it has been found that the Government of West Bengal from its own earnings and with the help of Central Government tried its best to restore the communication system of West Bengal which was collapsed due to the Partition of Bengal in 1947. The objective of road development programme in West Bengal was to 'lay a network of road connecting every village, every industrial centre and every market of the state'.[37]

A new organization was set up exclusively in the First Plan period, for constructing and improving roads.[38] At that phase importance was given to connect every district headquarter with Calcutta and every subdivisional town with the district headquarter by road.[39] However, the Government of West Bengal could not achieve its goal in any district of North Bengal till the beginning of 1960's.[40] Rather, the district communication system of that time mostly depended upon the pre-independent road networks with a minimum channelized modification due to partition. The following figure indicates the poor progress in road mileage under the administration of PWD in North Bengal till 31st March, 1955.

Table No-7.1

Mileage of roads (in miles) maintained by Works and Buildings Department in West Bengal during First Plan Period

District	Mileage of roads (in miles) maintained as on														
	31st March 1951			31st March 1952			31st March 1953			31st March 1954			31st March 1955		
	Total	Metalled	Unmetalled	Total	Metalled	Unmetalled	Total	Metalled	Unmetalled	Total	Metalled	Unmetalled	Total	Metalled	Unmetalled
West Dinajpur	26.2	18.2	8	18.2	18.2	-	18.2	18.2	-	18.2	18.2	-	18	18	-
Malda	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Jalpaiguri	252.2	209.8	42.4	251.6	209.2	42.4	251.6	209.2	42.4	250.2	207.8	42.4	238.5	214.1	24.4
Darjeeling	333.4	245.7	87.7	329.9	255.1	74.8	329.9	251.6	78.3	329.9	249.6	80.3	356	268	88
Cooch Behar	661.6	57.5	604.1	661.6	57.5	604.1	661.6	57.5	604.1	661.1	57.8	603.3	661.1	57.5	603.6

Source- Government of West Bengal: State Statistical Bureau, Statistical Abstract: West Bengal 1954 & 1956, Superintendent, Government Printing, West Bengal Government Press, Alipore, West Bengal.

Note- data not found for the district of Malda.

Works were taken up for development of National Highways directly financed from the Central Government and a large number of other roads from Cooch Behar Development Fund, from state's share of allocation from the Central Road Fund and from other allotments made from the state's own revenue resources.[41] During the First Plan period progress in the mileage as well as developmental works of National Highways in North Bengal except the district of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri was very marginal in comparison to the southern part of West Bengal.

It was the Government idea that there should not be any village in West Bengal that would be beyond two miles from a metalled road.[42] Though the expectation was far from the reality, it was true that the Government had tried its best to develop the communication system of the villages and suburbs through the local bodies. In spite of non-availability of year wise data for all the years of First Five Year Plan period, the following table on degree of accessibility by roads in the districts of North Bengal as on 31st March 1956 gives an idea about the road development in rural and suburban areas till the beginning of Second Plan period.

Table No-7.2

Degree of Accessibility by Roads as on 31st March, 1956

Name of District	Total area in sq.km.	% of total area within / beyond			
		5 km.	5 to 10 km.	10 to 15 km.	15 km.
West Dinajpur	3586.63	48	36	14	2
Malda	3646.46	36	37	13	14
Jalpaiguri	6159.8	59	28	10	3
Darjeeling	3003.6	49	34	14	5
Cooch Behar	3455.32	37	22	19	21

Source- Sukla Bhaduri. *Transport and Regional Development: A Case Study of Road Transport of West Bengal*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, First Publication, 1992 p. 125.

A new scheme for construction of village roads by *shramdan* was started in West Bengal in 1952.[43] Though no specific record was found on specific road related to that scheme, the available record provides that hundreds of roads were constructed in that scheme till 1955-56 and that mileage per 100 sq. km. had been increased to more than double or thrice till 1960-61 in all the districts of North Bengal.[44]

Table No -7.3

Comparative table on Mileage of roads maintained by local bodies in North Bengal as on 31st March 1956 & 1961

Mileage of roads (in miles) maintained by												
District & Year	District Board						Municipalities					
	March, 1956			March, 1961			March, 1956			March, 1961		
	Total	**Metalled**	**Un-metalled**	**Total**	**Metalled**	**Un-metalled**	**Total**	**Metalled**	**Un-metalled**	**Total**	**Metalled**	**Un-metalled**
West Dinajpur	441	2	439	809	3	806	44	7	37	43	20	23
Malda	93* **(493)**	17	76* **(476)**	465	9	456	42	20	22	45	25	20
Jalpaiguri	401	157	244	343	113	330	17	9	8	27	13	14
Darjeeling	324	14	310	303	3	300	114	45	69	117	63	54
Cooch Behar	…	…	…	…	…	…	29	16	13	30	17	13

Source- Government of West Bengal: State Statistical Bureau, Statistical Abstract: West Bengal 1953 & 1962, Superintendent, Government Printing, West Bengal Government Press, Alipore, West Bengal, 1957 & 1964 respectively.

…= There was no District Board in Cooch Behar.

*- Data inputted in these fields might have printing errors. The probable figures for the same have been shown in the brackets.

Now, let's have a look to the road development programme in North Bengal during the Second Plan period. In that phase trace was given upon setting up direct road communication between police stations within the districts in the Second Plan period and that was restored almost all the all the districts of North Bengal accordingly.[45] Annual Administrative Report of Public Works Department for the year 1958-59, Government of West Bengal clearly indicates that the Department had almost completed the original road construction works in terms of the 5 year Road Development plans which were administered by the Development (Road) Department.[46] However, the Public Works Department used to devote a considerable portion of its time in constructing important roads and bridges, which were left out of consideration in the development plans. Names of some such works were-

a) Widening narrow section of Peshoke Road under Kalimpong Subdivision.
b) Bringing Lava Cart Road (Forest Department) to the standard of PWD at Kalimpong.
c) Construction of a new R.C. Bridge over the river Sukhajhora on Chalsa-Bagrakote Section of N.H.-31.
d) Construction of wooden bridge over the river Baniadah at the 3rd mile of Purbabhag Road in Cooch Behar.

In addition to these, the PWD took initiative to construct new roads and bridges or improvement of old ones under the Central Road Fund (CRF) Works scheme. The names of some important projects under that scheme were[47]-

a) Improvement of the road from Islampur to Patagore.
b) Improvement of Jalpaiguri Rangdhamali Road (portion from Patkata Colony to Rangdhamali).
c) Improvement of Jalpaiguri-Rangdhamali Road (portion from Raikatpara to Patkata Colony) and the link road connecting Jalpaiguri-Rangdhamali Road and Jalpaiguri-Siliguri Road including strengthening of bridges thereon.

The PWD had taken in hand a comprehensive programme of important road and bridge projects in 1959-60. Among these projects more important schemes were[48] -

a) Improvement of Haldibari-Manikganj Road.
b) Improvement of Odlabari-Khairantirhat Road.
c) Diversion of N.H.-31 near the railway crossing at Siliguri.
d) Widening narrow section of Peshoke Road.
e) Construction of an approach road in the new sub-jail at Raiganj.
f) Construction of an approach road to the agricultural farm at Malda.
g) Protective works of Kaljani bridge on the 9th mile of Cooch Behar-Baxirhat section of N.H.-31.
h) Construction of a guide bank for protection of Raidak bridge on Cooch Behar-Baxirhat section (15th mile) of N.H.-31.
i) Metalling of roads and paths within the parks and gardens at Cooch Behar.
j) Widening the existing irrigation and waterways Bund for use as P.W. Diversion road from Mathabhanga to Moranga for the portion damaged by the river Mansai.

Side by side schemes under CRF Works projects were also taken up by the PWD for execution. The major projects which were in progress in 1959-60 under that scheme in North Bengal were the following[49] -

a) Construction of a 380 feet long bridge over the river Kaljani, including approach roads of necessary protective works.
b) Improvement of Maynaguri-Ramsai Road (12 miles).
c) Construction of a road from Rangdhamali to Fatapukur via Belacoba railway station.
d) Improvement of Jalpaiguri-Rangdhamali Road (portion from Patakata Colony to Rangdhamali).
e) Improvement of Jalpaiguri-Rangdhamali Road.
f) Widening of Buxa Forest Road from 1st mile to 5th furlong of 3rd mile.

The Government of India as well as the state government of West Bengal had Introduced two schemes known as Contributory Village Road Scheme (CVR) and Model Village Road Development Scheme (MVR) in order to induce the people to take active interest in the development of village roads. In both projects the local people had to contribute one third or one fourth of the total expenses and the PWD was responsible for implementation of these two schemes.[50] But, no data has been found regarding the works of these specific schemes in North Bengal.

The following table shows the mileage of roads (in miles) of various categories e.g. National Highways, State Highways, Major District Roads and other metalled and unmetalled roads in North Bengal under the maintenance of Public Works Department as on 31st March, 1961.

Table-7.4

Mileage of roads (in km.) maintained by Works and Buildings Department in North Bengal during different Plan period (1951-1961)

Mileage of roads (in km.) maintained by P.W.D. in different districts of North Bengal as on															
District	31st March 1951					31st March 1956					31st March 1961				
	NH	**SH**	**MDR**	**ODR**	**VR**	**NH**	**SH**	**MDR**	**ODR**	**VR**	**NH**	**SH**	**MDR**	**ODR**	**VR**
West Dinajpur	-	-	-	50	-	45	-	-	50	-	141	128	13	83	35
Malda	-	-	-	-	-	58	-	56	2	-	58	18	149	24	2
Jalpaiguri	139	80	-	155	-	139	69	18	155	-	139	86	64	280	-
Darjeeling	83	80	-	368	-	99	80	14	368	-	99	80	37	389	-
Cooch Behar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source- Sukla Bhaduri, Transport and Regional Development, A Case Study of Road Transport of West Bengal, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, First Publication, 1992, pp-248-50.

NH- National Highways, SH- State Highways, MDR- Major District Road, ODR- Other District Road, VR-Village Road.

- denotes data not found.

The communication system of Cooch Behar State seems to have been suffered most by the Partition of the province in 1947. That is why Durgadas Majumdar seems to have rightly argued that, "after the partition of India and till the Assam Link portion of the Railways was constructed, the only means of egress from Koch Bihar was the air transport".[51] Some private operators started cargo and passenger air transport to Cooch Behar, Tufanganj, Dinhata, Mathabhanga and Mekhliganj most of which were alive before 1950. In fact it was the largest airstrip owned districts in North Bengal till 1950. Due to policy of the Government airstrips were constructed and developed in all the district towns of North Bengal e.g. at Balurghat, Malda, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar for providing cargo and passenger transportation; Bagdogra in Darjeeling district was largest and best amongst all. This not only responsible for air transport of Darjeeling district but responsible to provide the same facilities to all the neighbouring districts and major parts of North East India.

There were a few bridges on the rivers of throughout West Bengal in pre-independence days. The only bridge of importance in North Bengal of that time is the Coronation bridge or *Bagh Pull* on river Tista at Sevoke. Before the beginning of First Plan period not even a single reference of important bridge which was started to be constructed has been found in available records.[52] In fact, it was mostly a common scenario of all-over West Bengal. Travellers, vehicles with commodities and passengers had to cross all of these by regular ferries.[53] The Government of West Bengal through its official agency i.e. the PWD since its endeavour towards the road development programme in the state adopted schemes during the First Plan period for the construction and maintenance of bridges on important rivers on National Highways, State Highways, Major District Roads and on other roads important for various purpose.[54] Major bridges on Pagla, Mahananda, Behula, Kulik on NH34 and another bridge on Mahananda at

Sonapur and on the Leesh, Gheesh, Kaljani, Raidak, Gadadhar on NH31 had been included in the National Highway works.[55] Out of these bridges on Leesh, on NH31 had been completed and made open for traffic within 1956.[56]

Among the bridges on State Highways in North Bengal, works of iron pillar and wooden bridges on Atrai (131 metre), Punarbhava (134.11 metre), Tangon (73.15 metre), Sreemati on Gazol-Bansihari-Balurghat with branch from Bansihari-Kaliaganj-Raiganj State Highway had been started in 1952 and opened for traffic after completion with a toll at Patiram in 1954.[57] A bridge (128 metre) on Alipurduar-Patlakhawa road over Kaljani beneath the Alipurduar town was started and opened for traffic in 1956.[58] The Kaljani bridge having damaged by a devastating flood the project was adopted again and the bridge was completed before the completion of Second Plan period. During the Second Plan period Gheesh bridge was constructed on NH31[59] and on Buri Tista on Haldibari-Jalpaiguri-Siliguri-Darjeeling State Highway had been completed and opened for traffic.[60]

The journey to the road development programme in West Bengal till the beginning of 1960's had not gone always smoothly. Khagendra Nath Dasgupta, Minister, Public Works and Housing Department, Government of West Bengal comments, 'every river has not been bridged, every part has not been connected. We are far away from our mission, but we are on the right tract'.[61] Side by side, progress of works were also greatly hampered by the unprecedented floods of every year which were very common to North Bengal.[62] In spite of increasing demands from the public for more roads and Governmental efforts to meet up the same, the progress of works was consistent with the availability of funds from year to year.[63]

Map No- 7.1

Road map of North Bengal, 1961

Source: *Annual Administrative Report of the Public Works Department for the year 1960-61.* Alipur: Superintendent of Government Printing. 1963.

There were also other factors for which the progress of road works were undoubtedly retarded or even halted temporarily. Amongst these mention may be made of difficulty in fixing road alignments and consequent acquisition of lands. On account

of high density of population, acquisition of homestead lands and structures were not only very costly but also a lengthy process. In many cases, observance of proper geometrics in fixing alignments had been rendered difficult owing to presence of many non-acquirable plots of lands in the route, viz. cremation, burial grounds, temples and mosques etc. Moreover, objections through legal procedure sometimes came on as injunctions on the department that resulted the holding up the total project.[64] Side by side, progress of works were also greatly hampered by the unprecedented floods of every year which were very common to North Bengal.[65]

Let us have a look to the road transport system of North Bengal of that time. The common means of transportation of that time were carts pulled by bullocks or ponies. In some areas of Malda district two wheeled *tangas* also transported the passengers as well as commodities. The well to do people used to have hoses, bicycles and even motor bikes for daily convenience. Government officers were provided jeeps for daily uses. In the Duars region and Cooch Behar higher level Government officers were provided elephants for the same.[66]

Inter district and intra district passenger as well as some amount of commodity transport system was provided chiefly in all the districts of North Bengal by North Bengal States Transport Corporation. Though the Corporation was established in 15th April, 1960,[67] it started its service in princely state Cooch Behar in April, 1945 'with a fleet of 3 buses and 3 trucks under its Second World War Reconstruction Scheme.[68] Before the merger of the Cooch Behar state with West Bengal, the state as noted by Durgadas Majumdar, "had procured a few buses which were mainly plied outside the State, that is, for trips to Bagdogra and Siliguri and also up to Purnea in Bihar".[69] The Government of West Bengal took over the control of the States Transport Service of

Koch Behar under the Home Transport Department after the merger of Cooch Behar State into West Bengal since 1st January, 1950.[70] The scheme in the Second Five year Plan provides for extension of bus services to different parts of Cooch Behar and its neighbouring districts which were not well served by railways.[71] For that purpose new buses and old bus chassis including trucks and jeeps were purchased. With the partial improvement of roads regular passenger bus services on more than 31 routes including two express services connecting Jalpaiguri with Balurghat and Balurghat with Khejuria in Malda district along with many special and daily services had been opened to provide cheap transport facility in the districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and Malda. Interestingly, in 1956, a trunk bus service connecting a distance of more than 360 miles from Manikchak Ghat on the Ganges to Baxirhat on the Assam border had been started to operate.[72] Sub-depots at Falakata, Alipurduar, Siliguri and Raiganj with an up-to-date workshop at Cooch Behar were set up within 1960 for the maintenance of services and also to provide maintenance services to other vehicles of State or Central Governmental agencies.[73] Available statistics shows that in 1961-62 daily averagely 110 nos. of vehicles put on road while its length of operation was 5,050 kms.[74] The operational Statistics of NBSTC indicates that while the vehicles of initial Company ran 8.16 lakhs Kilometerage, the figure increased to 21.79 lakhs Kilometerage in 1955-56 and till the last of Second Five Year Plan period i.e. in 1960-61 it reached to 47.98 lakhs Kilometerage.[75]

The China War had left deep consequences to the communication system of the country. Getting lessons from Chinese war strategy, India also followed the same by improving its road communication system in the borders for supplying heavy artillery and troops to the borders urgently. Thus, ‘following the invasion of India by her neighbour China’, as ‘West Bengal- 1964’, official publication of Government of West

Bengal cites, '223 miles of National Highways have been widened to 7 metres (23 ft.) pavement width including improvement of hard crust twenty miles of new construction are in progress with another 4 miles already completed. This is in addition to construction and reconstruction of 27 major bridges on the National Highways'.[76] In 1963, thirteen bridges 14 to 90 metres in length in Gazol-Raiganj Division of NH34 had been constructed expediently.[77] In 1964 one of the most important bridge on Tista near Jalpaiguri town was completed and opened for traffic. It can be assumed that the Government policy after the China War was to bridging the NH 34 and NH31 all through for smoothening prompt military movements. Thus, Jaldhaka, Torsha, Dayna, Sankosh and Raidak – the most prominent rivers of North Bengal were bridged all along within 1960's.[78] A bridge (52.46 metre) on Little Rangeet on Pulbazar-Darjeeling-Bajanbari road was also completed in 1964. Though, the Farakka Barrage was not the by-product of the Sino-Indian War, its pace of development of construction was fastened by this war heavily.

Respecting the patriotic sentiment of the people, the Government of West Bengal introduced a scheme for village uplifts for immediate execution by the Village Volunteer Forces where schemes were adopted for construction and repair of village roads with many other village improvement works. Though detail statistics of that scheme have not been found, the available data shows that Fifty-two thousand man-days' labour had been contributed to the Defence Labour Banks by members of 60 Village Volunteer Force units in Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling district and the Gram Panchayats in Kalimpong subdivision had drawn up 141 schemes for village uplifts till the beginning of 1963.[79]

In this connection, it is important to mention that the direct result of the China War was to introduce a new road project termed as 'lateral Road Project' by the Government to connect East Assam and New Delhi directly through roads. A series of roads through that project was constructed in North Bengal specially in the Jalpaiguri Duars. One example of that road is the road from Telipara more-Banarhat- Chalsa which connected NH31 towards Assam through the points of Gairkata and Chalsa.[80]

The railway communication of North Bengal was greatly influenced by the Sino-Indian War. It was found earlier that the railway communication was restored in North Bengal by the successful completion of Assam Railway Link Project in 1950. But that new communication was carried on mostly through meter gauge lines. But the meter gauge railway is a weaker railway than broad gauge in terms of its loading capacity and speed. This weakness was greatly felt at the time of war. Hence, the broad gauge project was taken in hand by the Government. The first station of this new line in North Bengal was at Khejuria, opposite Farakka. It reaches Barsoi Jn. Through Malda and Kumedpur, thence to NJP through Kishenganj. From NJP the line enters the district of Coochbehar through Belakoba, Raninagar, Mainaguri, Dhupguri and Falakata. From thence through New Coochbehar, New Alipurduar from where it enters to Assam. The whole line was opened for traffic on 1st January, 1964.[81]

The strategic importance of North Bengal had increased to several times more after the China War in 1962. A series of military cantonments were set up in the Doors and hills with their official headquarters for providing prompt access to the borders of Bhutan, Sikkim and Darjeeling. In Duars most important amongst these was Binnaguri military cantonment which seemed to be the direct consequence of the China War. Moreover, strength of Bagdogra airbase had been increased. A new air base was set up

at Hasimara in 1963. Both the bases were developed to combat air operations over a large area including North Bengal and for providing air support to Sikkim and Bhutan due to Indian Governmental ties with these foreign countries. Again a helicopter unit at Sevoke had been attached to Indian Army's XXXIII Corps based at Sukna in Darjeeling district. All these units also provide military air services to adjacent military units. During Bangladesh Liberation War all of these air bases with their units provided all kinds of military assistance and services to help the Indian Army and *Mukti Bahini* as they could.[82]

Needless to say that issue of road development in North Bengal during and after the Sino-Indian War of 1962, seems to be a demand for time for overcoming the situation. Therefore, most of the road development projects of North Bengal were abandoned when the war clouds between India and China have been disappeared. The following table (Table No.) proves the notion. It is not clearly known while perceiving the strategic importance of North Bengal for situating common boundaries with four foreign nations and the North Bengal Corridor- a passage for entering Northeast India, the Government of India has been tightening the military strength of the region from strategic point of view, the Government at the same time ignored the infrastructural development of roadways for achieving its required level in this region. Thus, while the Sino-Indian border issue was raised again in 2017 (Dokalam case), the Government of India highly realised the paucity of roads for military transportation.

Table- 7.5

Mileage of roads (in km.) maintained by Works and Buildings Department in North Bengal during different Plan period (1961-1969)

Mileage of roads (in km.) maintained by P.W.D. in different districts of North Bengal as on															
District	31st March 1961					31st March 1966					31st March 1969				
	NH	**SH**	**MDR**	**ODR**	**VR**	**NH**	**SH**	**MDR**	**ODR**	**VR**	**NH**	**SH**	**MDR**	**ODR**	**VR**
West Dinajpur	141	128	13	83	35	141	122	13	187	101	165	128	59	257	114
Malda	58	18	149	24	2	58	18	149	122	24	76	130	34	150	44
Jalpaiguri	139	86	64	280	-	139	86	64	384	29	207	67	156	300	29
Darjeeling	99	80	37	389	-	99	80	37	514	-	102	264	19	345	-
Cooch Behar	-	-	-	-	-	55	5	107	226	-	61	43	161	167	-

Source- Sukla Bhaduri, Transport and Regional Development, A Case Study of Road Transport of West Bengal, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, First Publication, 1992, pp-248-50.

NH- National Highways, SH- State Highways, MDR- Major District Road, ODR- Other District Road, VR-Village Road.

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