

Cross-Border Co-operation: Answer to Border Stability and Security

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Abstract: Borders constitute the global system of states. It demarcates clearly the jurisdictional responsibilities of states. However, management of borders remain highly important task of the state. Thus, any state from time to time will take various measures to secure its border. Similar measures have been taken by India as well to secure its territory. But significant security issues in the region like like trafficking, smuggling etc makes border management difficult. And these have a substantial and significant impact on the nations' security and nation-building process. This paper tries to understand the case of India-Myanmar borderland within this framework of analysis. It tries to justify the hypothesis that an alternative for maintaining stability in the border region and managing border security can be cross-border co-operation. Cross-border co-operation may also be an answer to not only development of the economy of this region; but also an answer to various social issues. This paper also tries to articulate that this can also be an alternative to aggressive measures of securing border like building of walls or setting of fences.

Keywords: Borders, Stability, Security, Cross-Border Co-operation, Border Walls

1. Introduction:

Borders, boundaries, frontiers and borderlands are human creations. The Treaty of Westphalia, which led to the formation of modern day nation-states also led the geographers to mark the boundaries of sovereign and territorially demarcated states. Borders have acquired a central position in the social and political transformation of the world, having a substantial impact on the daily lives of many people.(Laine,2021) Borders are not mere lines, but they emerge from various social-political processes that take place within the society.(Scott,2020) Originally, borders were used to delimit the territorial possessions of sovereign states as Paasi considered them to be institutional constructs. And at the core of such constructs is the fact that boundaries result from international agreements that are established by mutual understandings between states. These create complex, intermeshed networks of government policies and functions that interact to form international boundaries delineating sovereign spaces. Borders today have disappeared, moved, have been re-

articulated and re-defined, due to the influence of globalisation. With globalisation, communication and transportation conditions became more widespread compared to the past. Transnational relations are intensified. And the people living in the borderlands are significantly impacted upon. While traditional security issues greatly dealt with external threats, security issues have increasingly become transnational, sub-national and multi-dimensional. Issues of immigration, organised crimes, insurgency, terrorism, human rights, epidemics, environment, drug trafficking etc have become the new transnational security threats. Also these concerns have given rise to economic issues as well. However, borders as it demarcates the jurisdictions of the states, it becomes the duty of the state to protect these boundaries, i.e to secure its territory and borders. Policing and patrolling at the borders, check-posts, fences, walls etc are some of the means of securing the borders.

2. Objectives:

1. To understand the social setting of India-Myanmar borderland.
2. To highlight the various problems persisting in the region.
3. To understand the elements of cross-border co-operation.
4. To explore the prospects of cross-border co-operation in the development of India-Myanmar borderland.

3. Review of Literature:

Jonathan Grix in his article 'Towards a theoretical approach to the study of cross-border co-operation', tries to describe the complexities of trans-boundary exchange and develop a general approach to the study of borders and cross-border co-operation. *Thomas Hardi and Andrea Uszkai* in their work 'Theoretical Models of Cross-Border Integration' tries to understand the main factors and elements influencing cross-border integration through various explanatory theoretical models. *Dominic J Nardi*, in the article 'Cross-Border Chaos: A critique of India's attempts to secure its North East tribal areas through co-operation with Myanmar' discusses how the Indian government should expand its co-operation with Myanmar in anti-corruption, political reforms, trade, infrastructure and cultural initiatives.

4. Discussion:

India has extremely complex borders. It has 14818 kms of land borders and a coast line of 7516.6 kms. Indian borders run through plains, hills and mountains, deserts, riverine territories and marshes. Managing such a diverse border is a complex task but vital from the

point of view of national security. Also management of such borders are difficult for various reasons. Some of the maritime boundaries are still unsettled while some of the land borders are not demarcated. Border guards are often under resourced and ill equipped. India's some of the neighbourhood countries are in turmoil. And several of them are undergoing political and economic instability. Now, these uncertain borders not only raise bilateral tensions but also facilitate cross border infiltration, illegal migration, smuggling etc which emerges as some major national security challenges. In the last few years, India has built several thousand kilometres of fences, like that of India-Bangladesh and India-Pakistan borders; yet management of borders in the rough geographical terrain like of India-Myanmar is a long and complex task.

5. Myanmar-India Borderland: A Social Setting:

Myanmar is one of the important countries of South East Asia to India's political, economic and strategic interest. Due to geographical proximity and cultural resemblance with the India's North East Region(NER), the location of Myanmar is very important for India not only for its economic growth and development but also for the social and economic emancipation of the region. Myanmar shares 1643 kms of land border with the North Eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. Many ethnic tribes of NER shares similar culture and genealogical background with people of Myanmar. For instance, Nagas of Nagaland have ethnic connection and social interaction with their counterparts in Myanmar. T.Aliba, the former Chairman of Nagaland United Democratic Front, have stated that there are as many as 600 Naga villages in Myanmar bordering Nagaland. He also stated that the people living across the border were socially, culturally and ethnically akin to various tribes in Nagaland. (Pattnaik,2014) Even Chins and Mizos, Khamtis, Singhphos, Tangsas also have their counterparts in various parts of Myanmar. Moreover, most of them are Buddhists and have similar customs and traditions. Moreover Myanmar's also have shared history with India because of same colonial rule under British. The international border between India and Myanmar was formalised in 1967 but till today, there has been no aggressive measures like fences or building of walls to secure its boundaries. Many scholars have discussed upon the unique nature of India-Myanmar border. It is unique due to its porosity and rough geographical terrain. While some sociologists too point out that the close knit relations between the ethnic groups, makes the governance system at this borderland very complex. This paper thus, tries to make an argument that cross border co-operation measures can not

only develop the region economically but also protect the social fabric of the ethnic groups present in the region.

6. Border Management of India-Myanmar Border:

Border management is an approach that encounters the issue of security and also aims to increase commerce, movements and an effort to work towards reducing trans-national issues. Before independence, people moved freely across the borders for work, family and social functions. But with independence and internal political dynamics of North East Region of India, borders between India and Myanmar have been expressed and re-expressed through different material and social mechanisms. Moreover, the end of Cold War, the impact of globalisation and the development of supra-national organisations have all challenged the state-economy dichotomy. India's policies of developing economy of North East India like the Look East Policy, Act East Policy, North East Vision 2020 etc requires maintaining relations with its neighbouring countries and transcending its developmental agenda beyond boundaries. Although such policies are an attempt to search for new markets that would lie outside the stranglehold of hostile neighbouring states, India has not been able to match grandiose rhetoric with action on the ground in the subsequent decades. While recently, India has been looking at a more proactive approach to engage with South Eastern neighbours. Even so, there remains a serious obstacle to realizing this vision. A dichotomy exists between boosting cross-border trade with Myanmar and not destabilizing the informal economy on which parts of the Northeast have come to depend. Organized crime in these regions has become a source of livelihood in a region that has long been economically underdeveloped, with a negligible industrial base and expanses of hilly and densely forested terrain. Various mutations of criminality, from systemic corruption to armed extortion, make the region developmentally backward. Moreover, Myanmar's unstable political regime as well as its economy, many people living alongside the border survives on basic day to day trade with Indian counterparts. Thus in short, border management between the two sides has been framed around a range of concerns, from the security threat India perceives from insurgent groups in India's northeast to the regulation of local economic activity between people on both sides of the border, which is of interest from both sides to unlock the opportunities of cross-border connectivity while managing the challenges it poses. (Parameswaran,2018)

7. Cross-Border Co-operation- Prospects at India-Myanmar border:

Using R.J Sampson's (2004) 'Collective Efficacy Model'(CEM), the paper tries to understand if Cross Border Co-operation can be a possibility in the India-Myanmar border stability. The CEM actually gives an overview to understand two dimensions of border co-operation. Firstly, it gives an idea to what extent there is a cross border engagement; how that engagement is manifested, why engagement is taking place and who all are involved. In brief, this shows whether and why communities are engaging across international borders. Secondly, it also illustrates the security and stability of communities. Through this model, it gives a chance to identify the various opportunities that motivate engagement across international borders and community engagement in the re-bordering process.

The elements of collective efficacy theory in brief are:

- *Networks*: Networks that are formal or informal and that crosses international borders. Formal networks include civic or business groups, religious organisations or community groups. While informal networks includes family, clan, social or supporting groups.
- *Supportive institutions*: Institutions that exist at any level of government or outside government with institutions such as the church, trade agreements, resource of infrastructure sharing agreements. These supportive institutions may provide money, resources and expertises.
- *A spatial dynamic*: A spatial dynamic captures the nature of a community's separation. In case of India-Myanmar borderland most of the communities is divided by an international border. But the question remains how the border is enforced. Not only can borders be enforced materially with equipment and manpower, but also at the level of ideology and ideas, separating communities by differences in culture, language, political structure or religion.
- *Leadership*: It means identifying individuals or organisations that engage across the border. Leadership can be provided either by individuals or groups.
- *Rapid Change*: It refers to the time frame over which change in the border elapsed, including perception of the rate of change and an understanding of the consequences of change.
- *Economic cost*: It refers to how a change in border policy and engagement affect the local economy. Border communities frequently benefit economically from the

existence of the border infrastructures, trade zones etc. At the same time, the border many incur economic costs in the form of increased security and social costs.

- **Organisational capacity:** It refers to the ability of communities and other border stakeholders to organise themselves. It tries to look into what incentives (eg money, family, culture) and what disincentives (eg taxation, fear, culture) are in place either to encourage or deter the organisation of groups to engage across the border.

The India-Myanmar border is a porous one and as mentioned above the people who live alongside of the border have shared traditions and ethnicity. And strong brotherhood sentiments were reflected in the recent Myanmar coup, where Mizoram's Chief Minister Zoramthanga emphasised that they accept all the Chin people who have fled Myanmar because 'the Chin communities are ethnically our brethren' with whom the Mizos had close contact even before India became independent (The Hindu,2021) The Konyaks of Nagaland too have their cousins in northern Myanmar, where many cross the border regularly to attend school, sell vegetables or visit hospitals.(Aljazeera,2020) There are several supportive institutions in the form of religious organisations as well as student unions who help in various resource sharing arrangements. In 2013, several civil society organisations in Manipur threatened to launch an agitation if the government went ahead with the fencing project, which was an outburst because the villagers constantly move between borders for their daily market needs. The government too have established border haats and given a boost to border trade, but in reality that hasn't been fully materialised. The Free Movement Regime too had allowed the tribes to cross the borders on daily basis, but with the pandemic and coup, this has also been lapsed. Many Myanmar citizens also often visit the nearby Indian towns for medical treatments. (Sharma,2012). Also in many villages, Myanmar kids come to India for their education.(Bhattacharya,2020)

8. Conclusion:

Cross-border co-operation should focus on a certain roadmap which should be fully committed to the all-round development and give maximum benefits to people. Border regions cannot ever be stable and secure, until people at the borderlands cooperate. Given India-Myanmar's unique border experience such as Free Movement Regime, close knit relations between ethnic tribes and shared history, cross border co-operation like sharing resources, joint ventures for trade, routes for communication,

capacity building measures to be self-sufficient in small scale industries etc will definitely be a successful initiative. Moreover, an initiative of cross-border co-operation too falls in line with India's Act East Policy and its broader agenda to enhance trade relations with South East Asian countries. Myanmar is not only India's neighbour, but also is a strategically important and resourceful one. Thus, cross border co-operation initiative can also be an answer to protecting ethnic relations as well as an alternative to border fences, thus paving the road to economic development of this region as a whole.

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