

KEY NOTE ADDRESS OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE FIRST BRAHMAPUTRA AYEYARWADY CONVERSATION HELD ON 4<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2020.

Mr. M.P. Bezbaruah, Chairman, Governing Council, Asian Confluence and Former Member, North Eastern Council,

H.E. Mr. Saurabh Kumar, Ambassador of India to Myanmar,

H.E. Mr. Moe Kyaw Aung, Ambassador of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to India,

Mr. R.K. Ranjan Singh, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha,

I am indeed delighted to deliver key note address at this Brahmaputra Ayeyarwady Conversation, organized by the Asian Confluence in collaboration with the ASEAN India Centre, New Delhi, the Mandalay Forum for East Asian Students, Myanmar and Manipur University under the title: **“Indo-Myanmar Cooperation for Vibrant and Prosperous Border Zones”**.

Myanmar and India share a long geographical border and a shared heritage. In addition, Brahmaputra river is the symbol of the lives and people of the North Eastern States of India and the Ayeyarwady river largely shapes the culture and livelihood for the people of Myanmar. Both regions are primarily agrarian economies, having immense bio-diversity, natural beauty, rich cultural heritage and ample water resources. Connectivity projects are also being implemented such as India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project, irrigation, electricity development, health, education and many other socio-economic projects.

Overland Connectivity between India and Myanmar and between India and the rest of ASEAN countries through Myanmar has been discussed for over two decades now. Action on the ground has, however, been delayed due

to various factors including difficult terrain, lack of adequate commercial interest, need for large financial resources and an adverse security situation, with attendant risks. Recent years have seen fresh initiatives being taken by India in close cooperation with Myanmar. The Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport project, whose implementation began in 2010, is making progress. The Tamu-Kalay-Kalewa road in Myanmar built by India in 2001 is now in the process of becoming a part of the Trilateral Highway between India, Myanmar and Thailand after the remaining sections under construction or upgradation get completed. Connectivity between Mizoram State and Myanmar will get a boost after the construction of the Rhi-Tiddim Road in Myanmar which India has agreed to undertake. Prospects also appear better for railway connectivity between the two countries once the railway on the Indian side gets extended to India-Myanmar border on which work is underway. Several inter-related aspects assume importance now. First is the timely completion of all these projects. Second is the need for transforming these connectivity corridors into development corridors with thriving trade, investment and other commercial activities for mutual benefit. Supportive infrastructure for supply of power, communication and IT links and creation of capacities for skill development and training are essential. Putting in place efficient border trade and transaction arrangements would also be very important. Additionally, further strengthening of inland connectivity within India and within Myanmar would help widen the benefits and participation.

India's **Look East policy** represents its efforts to cultivate extensive economic and strategic relations with the Nations of Southeast Asia in order to bolster its standing as a regional power and a counterweight to the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China. Initiated in 1991, it marked a strategic shift in India's perspective of the world. It was developed and enacted during the Government of Prime Minister Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao and rigorously pursued by the successive administrations of Shri Atal

Bihari Vajpayee and Dr. Manmohan Singh. Shri Narendra Modi ji, Hon'ble Prime Minister accorded high priority to turn India's erstwhile "Look East" policy into an "Act East" policy. However, during the 11th Plan period, Manipur has not been benefitted. Nevertheless, some important initiatives made by Government of Manipur and Central Government/Ministry of DoNER are highlighted in short.

1. Introduction of bus service between Imphal and Mandalay (Myanmar) at least once a week during winter and non-rainy season. Concerned Ministries already conveyed "in-principle approval".
2. At the instance of Ministry of DoNER, it is proposed to revive border trades along Indo-Myanmar border in three locations, one in each border districts (Chandel, Ukhrul and Churachandpur) have been identified by State Government for establishment of border haats in Manipur.
3. Forty items are permitted for border trade between India and Myanmar. In addition, Government of Manipur had already submitted proposal for increasing another 15 more items under border trade for consideration in India-Myanmar JTC meeting.
4. Introduction of Rupee-Kyat Trade as permitted on the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan borders in order to facilitate formal Border Trade between India and Myanmar.
5. Land Custom Station already exists at Moreh. Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Moreh is being developed under Phase-I programmed of Deptt of Border Management of MHA and has to be expedited completion.
6. IT & Tele-communication. Improving tele-communication network by installing optical fibre link for 6 Kms between Moreh and Tamu (Myanmar).

7. As far as education sector is concerned, Manipur University is teaching Burmese and Japanese languages in its language School. Such a programme of teaching and learning of languages of South-East Asia and other neighbouring countries among our youths, professionals and businessmen is perhaps one of the programmes/action plans to be implemented under India's Look East Policy. Manipur University has even opened a Centre for Myanmar Studies (CMS) in the year 2005. Higher Education Department is making a humble attempt to introduce Myanmarese Language as an elective subject in Moreh College, border town of Manipur near Myanmar.

Apart from the points stated above, I would like to make a mention about the tourism for North-East Region. Tourism is the fastest track for socio-economic development the world over. Its multiplier effect in employment generation is unmatched. Its vital role in poverty alleviation and economic growth is well-recognized. The States of North East Region are blessed with nature's bounty. Their wooded mountains, deep gorges with winding rivers, rolling hills and lush green valleys are an exquisite picture of scenic beauty. The region is the treasure house of bio-diversity, flora and fauna. The colourful and rich heritage add to the beauty of the picturesque surroundings. In other words, it is "Paradise Unexplored" and ideal destination for the tourists, both domestic and international. The tremendous potential for tourism in the region needs to be exploited for the economic growth and prosperity of its people.

I wish the Asian Confluence all success in your future endeavour.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.