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Chicken's Neck (Siliguri Corridor) of West Bengal, India: An Analytical Study on Strategic and Economic Viewpoint

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Abstract: *Chicken's Neck (Siliguri Corridor) lies at the eastern foothills of the Himalayas in North Bengal connecting India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangaladesh and also the northeastern states of India. The width of the corridor is approximately 20 to 25 kilometers at its narrowest point between Siliguri and Phulbari.* ***Objectives:*** *The study examines to find out its historical background, its strategic significance, its economic challenges, its future roles of other nations, and to predict how it is going to progress in the future. Materials and Methodology: This study employs descriptive, analytical and exploratory study designs to explore the Chicken's Neck from a strategic, economic and geopolitical perspective. It is qualitatively descriptive in nature and integrates political geography, strategic studies, regional economics and international relations as it affects the corridor's multiple dimensions as a geopolitical and economic entity.* ***Results and Discussion:*** *Chicken's neck is more of a colonial project that was formulated to control territory, however, chicken's neck developed unintentionally due to the altered shape of political boundaries established long after the colonial era.* ***Conclusion:*** *Chicken's Neck is a vital part of India from a geo-strategic perspective, and other countries (such as China and Bangladesh) could destabilise this area by using it to build political instability within India.*

Keywords: Eastern foothills, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Northeastern States, strategic significance, economic challenges

INTRODUCTION

Located in Northern India, the area known as the Siliguri Corridor (sometimes it is called "Chicken's Neck") lies at the eastern foothills of the Himalayas in North Bengal. It connects India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh and also the northeastern states of India with other Indian territories while lying approximately east-west across the southern region of Terranean Isolation (Tayler & Ghosh 2016). The width of the corridor is approximately 20 to 25 kilometers (or 13 to 15 miles) at its narrowest point between Siliguri and Phulbari (Baruah 2005).

The coordinates of the Siliguri Corridor are approximately between longitude 88 degrees to 88 degrees 30 minutes, and latitude 26 degrees 30 minutes to 26 degrees 55 minutes (Ghosh 2016). To the west, the corridor lies next to Nepal; to the north, it lies next to Bhutan, and to the south-east next to Bangladesh. The corridor is relatively close to Sikkim (which lies immediately to the north) and China (Datta 2010). Its geographic location is at a junction where four territorial boundaries of four nations intersect, and therefore it is of great geopolitical sensitivity. It also serves as the only overland connection from mainland India to the eight northeastern states of India through National Highways, Railways, Oil Pipelines, and Telecommunications located in and through a geographical area (i.e. Siliguri) of India. Consequently, the Siliguri Corridor is significant for both the Indian strategic placement of forces within its borders, and, therefore, the overall layout and configuration of India's land mass. Therefore, the geographic location of the Siliguri Corridor will greatly influence the value of this corridor and thus it is an area wherein geography and international boundaries coincide (Talbot & Singh, 2009).



Why the region is called the *"Chicken's Neck"*

The "Chicken's Neck" refers to a narrow land corridor that connects India's northwestern/northern mainland to its northeastern states. It is about twenty-two kilometers at its narrowest point, so looks like a chicken when viewed on a map, which is one reason why the term "Chicken's Neck" has been adopted to refer to this area in an academic/strategic context. The term "Chicken's Neck" also appropriately describes the area in conjunction with other nations by illustrating the vulnerability and significance of the corridor in connecting India's economy to and through India's Transport Systems, Logistics Networks, Trade, and Security among the states of India and between India and other countries (newindianexpress.com).

OBJECTIVES

The research has tried:

1. To explore the historical background of "Chicken's Neck".
2. To examine its strategic and economic viewpoints.
3. To assess its role for other countries in future (may be) and its future importance of Southeast Asian nations.
4. To predict how it is going to progress in future and its future plan (may be).
5. To make plan for cautiousness and policy implications.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Study Design: This study employs descriptive, analytical and exploratory study designs to explore the Siliguri Corridor (Chicken's Neck) from a strategic, economic and geopolitical perspective. The study is qualitatively descriptive in nature and integrates political geography, strategic studies,

regional economics and international relations as it affects the corridor's multiple dimensions as a geopolitical and economic entity. The study provides historical context, explore strategic vulnerabilities, assess the corridor's economic potential, provide an overview of regional connectivity, and evaluate future prospects of the Siliguri Corridor as a component of India's national and regional security consideration.

Data & Sources: Secondary data is the primary source for the analysis of the Siliguri Corridor. A variety of academic, policy and institutional documents (i.e., books, peer-reviewed journals, government documents, defence assessments, World Bank reports, newspaper archives, policies, online databases) are used to collect the data for this study. The study combines classical literature on partition and geopolitics/regional security with contemporary policy literature regarding connectivity and infrastructure and economic integration of Northeast India. The study also includes primary documents of the Government of India as released by Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Railways, World Bank, BBIN documents, and other development agencies for data demonstrating connectivity, logistics and economic linkages associated with the corridor.

Data Collection Method: Data is obtained from rigorous document analysis. Relevant documents are found using search terms relating to the Siliguri Corridor, its geographic, economic and strategic significance, as well as other issues affecting the corridor (e.g., The Siliguri Corridor or Chicken's Neck, the Northeast Region's connectivity with India and China, logistics and trade routes as described by the Act East Policy, The BBIN Corridor and the geostrategic checkpoints of the region). Each of the documents retrieved is screened for relevance, authenticity and academic credibility. The analyst uses archival sources to explore the history of this corridor, while using current policy and defence documents to examine the current realities and future directions of this overwhelmingly strategic location in India.

Framework for Analysis: This study employs a conceptual-analytical framework of analysis through the application of four interrelated notions/models: 1. Strategic significance; 2. Economic Integration; 3. Role of regional neighbouring nation's; and 4. Future planning of the Siliguri Corridor. By establishing a strategic understanding of each of the models, the study is able to go beyond simple narration and can analyse the causal linkage (geographically, in terms of security, in terms of infrastructure, and in terms of diplomacy/economic growth) of these four elements in relation to their contribution to the overall performance of the Siliguri Corridor. The analytical approach in this study is interpretative; by using a combination of geopolitical and regional economic reasoning, vulnerability, opportunity and resiliency of the Siliguri Corridor are evaluated.

Procedure for Evaluation: The researcher utilised a qualitative approach and created a content analysis to evaluate the collected data. The key information is compared with historical and present references over time, while also reviewing the geopolitical concerns to understand the security

issues of India regarding China, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and South East Asia. The researcher has analysed the economies of the data, such as the commercial and logistics costs, the capital expended on the infrastructure and the consequences on regional integration. The study also applies policies to connect the subject of the study into practical examples of governance, preparedness for defence, enhancing connectivity and cooperating in regional matters, etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

HISTORY BEHIND CHICKEN'S NECK (SILIGURI CORRIDOR)

Siliguri Corridor (Chicken's Neck) was more effective of a colonial project that was formulated to control territory. However, chicken's neck was developed unintentionally due to the altered shape of political boundaries established long before after the colonial era. The name Chickens Neck, or Siliguri Corridor, refers not only to the narrow land access from mainland India to the Northeast States, but also to the fact that prior to the British colonization of India, the entire area of Bengal was just one continuous strip of land. There was no politically vulnerable geography at all or any significant geographical feature separating the two or three regions (O'Malley, 1907). Therefore, prior to the partition of India in 1947 and the establishment of Pakistan, there was a strong connection of all of the northeastern states to the rest of India through Bengal. However, because of the establishment of East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh), there was a political change in the boundaries of Bengal and the northeast portion of India, which was completely separated from the mainland and connected only through a very narrow strip of land that is now called Chicken's Neck (Ghising, 2026).

Therefore, when the outstanding political change occurred on the 15 August 1947 when Bengal was split into Bengal in West Bengal and Bengal in East Pakistan, the north eastern states of India lost all direct accesses to the rest of India and were only connected to the mainland only by Chicken's neck situated at the northern part of the West Bengal (Chatterji, 2007; Talbot & Singh, 2009).

The corridor is referred to as the "chicken's neck", since it represents the only land connection between northeastern India and mainland India (Baruah 2005). The Radcliffe line established borders for East Pakistan and Nepal to the east, of what today are Indian states and established them as sovereign territories. Until after independence from Britain in 1947, this corridor was used primarily as an Administrative corridor for India (to administer Indian states) and a logistical corridor for getting goods into India.

Since Tibet was annexed by china in 1950, the corridor has become geopolitically important to India as China becomes increasingly powerful and has large territory bordering India's north. A key focus of Indian defense policy in 1962 was to draw attention to the geography of India's

northeastern states and how to defend against attack of China due to limited access. Since it has become a protectorate of India and has become fully integrated into India by 1975, the corridor will continue to be important due to increasing requirements for connectivity for the reasons outlined above. All countries surrounding the corridor are militarily advantaged and there is significant potential for military conflict to occur from the use of this corridor since Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and China are all bordering countries. The corridor is highly sensitive to conflict among South Asian nations. The economic and infrastructural importance of the chicken neck corridor has evolved over the years to become the primary means connecting the Northeastern states of India to the rest of India for socio-economic integration, as it serves today as one of the primary routes for major road, rail, oil pipeline and communication corridors.

The creation of the chicken neck corridor was not an intention when originally established as a historical corridor, but rather it is an outcome of certain conditions, settling of the British colonial legacy, 1947 partition and additionally, geographical and political changes in South Asia since the partition. Initially the chicken neck corridor served the same function as it did throughout the colonial era, as an unimportant way to transport goods, but afterwards, because of (1) the colonial administrative boundaries (Baruah 2005), (2) the partition of Bengal (Chatterji 2007) and (3) subsequent geopolitical changes that occurred in South Asia after the partition to get the route to its current form (Talbot & Singh 2009; Ghosh 2016). After independence in India, the chicken neck was very important for (1) administrative governance, (2) transportation and (3) communication with the North Eastern states, which were under British administration (Chatterji 2007). The chicken neck currently lies at the intersection of the colonial administrative boundaries of the time, and the adjustment to those boundaries as a result of the partition of Bengal, which continues to make the chicken neck corridor (1) a major geographical area for use by India, and, (2) a critical lifeline from a strategic standpoint (Baruah 2005).

STRATEGIC VIEWPOINT OF THE CHICKEN'S NECK

The Chicken's Neck is an important region for India strategically because it is the only connection between the rest of India and the northeast region. This corridor acts as both a benefit and a risk for India because its narrow width attracts a lot of competition from its border nations as there are many border countries surrounding it (Bhattacharya & Khawas, 2025).

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Model-I: Conceptual Framework for Strategic Viewpoint



Interpretation of Model-I: The conceptual framework (Model-I) analyses the Siliguri Corridor as the most important strategic link for India, as it connects the rest of India with all of Northeast India. In addition, the very narrowness of the corridor makes it a strategic resource as well as a huge security risk for India. The fact that there are so many international borders surrounding the region creates constant geopolitical pressure and competition from the bordering nations. As such, it can be seen that infrastructure development, military preparedness, diplomacy and economic cooperation must all work together to secure the Siliguri Corridor. Overall, this research analyses it not only as a passageway, but also as a critical element in determining both India's national security and political stability as explained below:

Strategic Development

National Development and Connecting the Siliguri Corridor: National Development and Connecting the Siliguri Corridor is an essential connection between the North East states and the rest of India. The North East states consists of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya and Sikkim. All transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, including roadways, railways, pipelines for petrol and diesel, as well as all power transmission infrastructures, relies on the Siliguri Corridor. Any interruption to one of these vital links to and from the North East could be detrimental to civilians, governance and/or the future of economic growth in the North East of India (Vajiram and Ravi, 2026).

Military and Defence Aspects: From a military standpoint, the Siliguri Corridor serves as a critically important choke point. Because of its limited width, the corridor could potentially be interdicted by military forces creating the potential for isolation of all of North East India in the event of hostilities (Bhattacharya & Khawas, 2025). In order to counter this potential threat to the integrity of India's territory from a military perspective, the Government of India has fortified the Siliguri Corridor to a significant degree and continues to support this fortification with the presence of the Tri-Shakti Corps, forward air bases, high-tech weapons systems, such as Brah Mos cruise missiles, Rafale fighter jets and integrated air defence systems (India Today, 2025).

Chinese Chumbi Valley: China has control over the area known as the Chumbi Valley, which sits in a narrow space between both India and Bhutan adjacent to the Siliguri corridor area. In 2017, during a conflict known as the Doklam Standoff between China and India, it became apparent how critical this area would be for military advantages over India due to both the location of the Chumbi Valley and its closeness to the Siligori corridor as well as China's continuing efforts to develop infrastructure at this tri-junction, thus enhancing China's ability to apply military pressure on the Siliguri corridor; therefore, China has established this corridor as another goal of bilateral competition between itself and India (Race IAS).

Siliguri Corridor as a Trade Corridor: The Siliguri corridor provides a point of trade between India and neighboring countries, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. Routes used to transport goods through this corridor are integral to the development of regional connectivity via Economic Corridors (Geographic Book, 2025). The development of these trade routes between India and Bhutan, and India and Bangladesh, also contribute to the overall creation of an environment characterized by cooperation and stability both in and around the Siliguri corridor (Vajiram and Ravi).

Security Issues and Weaknesses

Environmental and Geographic Security Challenges: The geography of the corridor renders it more susceptible to flooding, landslides and damage to infrastructure as a result of bad weather during the monsoon season than other areas within the country. The interruption of transportation due to these occurrences will create an environment of logistical failure and expose the extent of fragility that exists in the corridor (New Indian Express).

2.2 Internal and External Security Issues: Historically, the location of the corridor has made it an area where some individuals use this area for illegal actions such as smuggling, human trafficking and supporting the movement of insurgent groups. The internal security challenges within the corridor have compounded the problems posed by the external threats occurring within the area (Indian Express).

External Strategic Pressures: The activities of China with regard to Bangladesh and Nepal, especially with respect to infrastructure projects and connectivity community projects that are within very close proximity to the northeastern border of India, are of great concern to Indian observers and raise the possibility that China will continue to military activities surrounding India and continue to put strategic pressure on the Siliguri corridor (Economic Times, 2025).

Strategic Responses by the Government of India: India has taken a number of strategic measures to protect the Siliguri Corridor such as (1) increasing alternate road/Rail/Bridge connectivity as a means to provide redundancy to the corridor (Vajiram & Ravi, 2026);
(ii) developing and modernizing military capabilities and systems to allow for rapid deployment in case of an attack (India Today, 2025); and
(iii) to maintain a favourable balance of power in the region through diplomatic engagement with its neighbours (Ghising, 2026). India's objective is to convert the Siliguri Corridor from vulnerability into strength.

Geographical Route
The Siliguri Corridor represents not only a geographical route but also a strategic asset for national integrity, military security, but also the capability of the economy to connect to each other as well as provide a diplomatic link to other countries within the region. Its geographically confined area and many complex geopolitical variables will perpetuate its critical role within India’s overall national strategy for South Asia (Bhattacharya & Khawas, 2025).

ECONOMIC VIEWPOINT OF THE CHICKEN’S NECK

The Siliguri Corridor, the only land link between all of India and the entire northeastern region of the country, is Northeast India’s only economic lifeline and is thus a vital link within the two economies' integration for the benefit of businesses that accesses a larger market place (Grokipedia, 2025). The vast majority of products that are either made or imported into this part of India will travel through this corridor, creating a very close economic relationship but with a very narrow option for transportation (Vajiram & Ravi, 2025). Approximately 90–95 percent of the total trade volume that is conducted between the northeastern region and other areas of India will be transported via Indian roads and rail networks, through the Siliguri Corridor (Grokipedia, 2025).

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Model-II: Conceptual Framework for Economic Viewpoint



Interpretation of Model-II: The conception model (Model-II) views the Siliguri Corridor (Chicken's Neck) as the main economic route for trade and production between the Northeast Indian Region and the South-East Asian Region plus the rest of the country. As there is only one land link available, virtually all production and trade in and from the Northeast Indian region depends on this narrow corridor. The document goes on to say that regional trade flows towards and through this corridor, resulting in a highly concentrated flow of economic activity. This high degree of dependency creates both a location for facilitating integrated economic activity and a place where economic vulnerability exists. The model suggests that improving the infrastructure and level of regional economic connectivity in the Chicken's Neck is vital to maintain the region's economic stability and future growth for the following reasons:

Backbone of Trade and Freight Movement

a. This transport corridor is used to ship large amounts of goods (products) that come from several major sources of Northeastern states, North Bengal and other areas in northeastern India (Drishti IAS, 2025). Examples of the goods being transported via this corridor are tea, oil, cement, coal, grains, horticulture and manufactured items.

b. Assam's tea industry is the largest economic contributor in northeastern India, so any and all trade going to or from Assam will rely heavily on the Siliguri Corridor (Grokipedia, 2025). Together, Assam and North Bengal produced almost 640 million kg of tea during 2023, and most (90-95%) of that tea moved through the Siliguri Corridor.

c. Along with transporting goods from northeastern India, the corridor is expected to continue to be a critical massive supply chain of the goods needed by northeastern India (for example: fuel, pharmaceuticals, fertilizer, and building materials). If the markets in the northeastern region are not able to obtain adequate supplies of these goods, they would experience substantial shortages and/or excessive price increases due to inflation (New Indian Express, 2025).

Correlate with Economic Output

a. The Northeastern Region contributes about 2.8-3% of the total National GDP through Economic Output that is ultimately dependent on the Siliguri Corridor being able to consistently deliver the connection to enable Commercial and Industrial Growth Potential in India (Country and Politics).

b. Due to a lack of connection and heavy traffic through the Siliguri Corridor, the rise in transportation and logistics costs will constrain industrial growth and private investment for the Northeastern India Region (World Bank).

c. Poor transportation connectivity causes as much as a 30% higher overall Consumer Price Index in the Northeastern India market place than in the respective urban and rural areas due to excessive transportation costs resulting from deficiencies in the Siliguri Corridor linking the rest of India to the Northeastern Region, and from opportunity costs associated with these deficiencies (World Bank).

Transportation costs and inefficiencies in trade

a. The distance from Agartala to Kolkata through the Siliguri Corridor route for freight movement is approximately 1600 kilometers. Transporting cost via Agartala into and through Bangladesh would reduce the total freight movement distance to 400 kilometers and potentially one fourth the cost of moving goods between the two places.

b. The high freight logistics costs in this area have resulted in a potential annual loss of exported products from the Northeastern Region of India in unrealized revenues resulting low commercial and industrial growth, because the World Bank predicted commercial and industrial growth will necessarily rely on reduced transportation costs.

c. Congestion and delays on the Siliguri Corridor will continue to create opportunity costs for measurable limits on economic growth in the Northeastern Region of India, as there is a significant relationship between reliance on the corridor and the commercial and industrial growth and development of the region.

Regional and Cross-border Trade

a. The Economic Corridor is a gateway for international trade between India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh and is facilitating Agri-Products, Hydro Power, Honey and other goods traded in the import-export sector.

b. The Economic Corridor is part of the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) initiative, linking the Eastern and North-Eastern Regions of India to adjacent countries (World Bank, 2021).

c. According to estimates provided by the World Bank, an estimated 80% drop in costs for select routes due to enhancement of transportation integration can result in increased trade volumes and regional incomes (World Bank, 2021).

Infrastructure Investment and Economic Multiplier Effect

i. The Kharagpur-Siliguri Economic Corridor, part of the Bharatmala Pariyojana and with a cost estimate of approximately ₹5,600 crores, will help reduce both transit time and logistics costs for the region's trade and industrial base (Grokipedai, 2025).
ii. By enhancing its current track infrastructure between Aluabari Road (ALU) and New Jalpaiguri (NJP), railways will expand capacity in the Corridor-based logistics system and subsequently remove some of the existing bottlenecks that currently inhibit the movement of goods through this corridor (Grokipedia, 2025).
iii. The expansion of Bagdogra Airport, with an estimated investment of over ₹1,500 crores, is helping to create additional air cargo and passenger connectivity in a multimodal economic hub within Siliguri (Grokipedia, 2025).

Developing Communities and Urban Economic Growth

i. Siliguri has been developed into a centre of logistics, warehousing and services, creating both transport-related and retail tourism and hospitality, as well as employment in other support sectors (Grokipedia, 2025).
ii. Over 40 million people in the northeastern region of India have been enabled to connect to markets, jobs and basic needs through the corridor (Times of India, 2025).

Economic Threats and Vulnerability

i. The high reliance on just one small area to connect this area’s economy to everything else creates an environment that allows systemic risk to occur. A natural disaster, breakdown of physical infrastructure, or external geopolitical conditions could result in trade losses of several billion rupees annually in this area (New Indian Express, 2025).

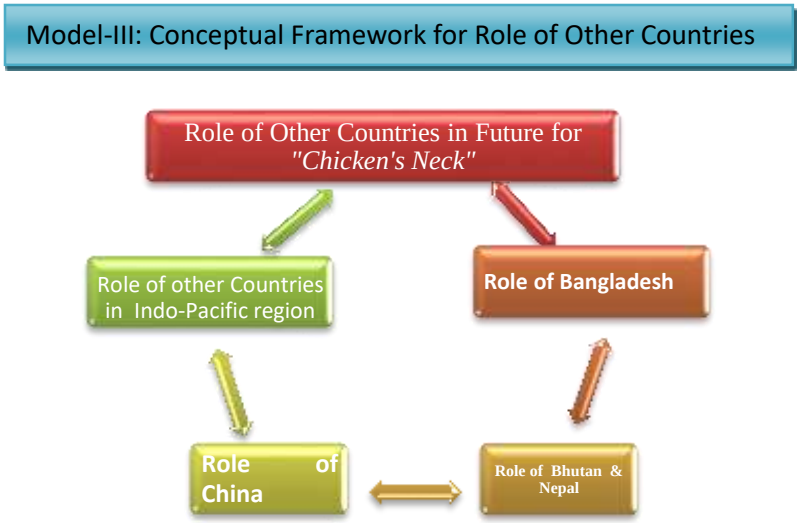
ii. Therefore, many economists believe that there must be diversification of transportation routes and the development of other forms of infrastructure beyond the existing corridor in order to create

a region that can withstand economic shocks and sustainably develop in the future (Vajiram & Ravi, 2025).

Overall, the Siliguri Corridor represents one of the main conduits for Northeast India to access national and global supply chains and supports trade, increasing GDP, employment opportunities, and international business relationships. As the corridor runs through a limited geographical area, logistics issues are significant and increase the Northeast economy's vulnerability to economic shocks. Therefore, India should invest heavily in the development of infrastructure in this area to facilitate additional connectivity opportunities (World Bank, 2021; Vajiram & Ravi, 2025).

ROLE OF OTHER COUNTRIES FOR CHICKEN'S NECK IN FUTURE (MAY BE)

The other countries around it will influence how the Chicken's Neck will evolve in the future. Nepal will play a key role in this process since it is located to the west of the Chicken's Neck. In addition, as India and Nepal continue to develop road, rail and energy infrastructure projects to connect both countries, it can help both countries foster economic development in their border regions, which will contribute to creating a more secure environment for both countries (Baruah, 2020; Garver, 2016).



Interpretation of Model-III: The conceptual framework (Model III) provides an interpretation of the role of the Chicken's Neck for the other countries in future that is being increasingly shaped by the roles of neighbouring and strategic partner countries. The argument posits that in addition to India, China and Bangladesh; countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Indo-Pacific partners will significantly determine the stability and development of the corridor. Nepal's geographic proximity to the western edge of the corridor lends it to having significance for shaping

connectivity and security outcomes. The document indicates that cross-border road, rail and energy infrastructure between India and Nepal can help support the economic development of the region as well as its strategic development. The framework proposes that cooperative regional engagement will be critical to transforming the Chicken's Neck from a vulnerable area into a highly secure, strategic and economically integrated region based on the following reasons:

ROLE OF BANGLADESH IN THE FUTURE

Bangladesh is likely to take on a constructive role in the future. There is potential for Bangladesh to assist India in developing new means of transporting goods to help relieve India's dependence on the narrow corridor that connects India and Bangladesh. Due to Bangladesh's location south and southeast of the Chicken's Neck, it provides the best alternative route by which India can connect the mainland of India to the northeastern states of India, changing its status from being a silent neighbour of India to becoming an active partner with India (Baruah, 2005). Since the border agreement was signed in the 2010s, the relationship between Bangladesh and India has improved substantially, laying the ground work for this to occur (Talukdar, 2019).

Future development and expansion of multimodal transport access to Bangladesh will result in a more efficient means of accessing chemicals that will increase the ease of access to Bangladesh in the event of emergency, i.e., at times of increased need to transport goods using various methods of transportation through alternative means to the Siliguri Corridor (Ghosh, 2016). Rail connections to Bangladesh have been directly connected to India through the Haldibari-Chilahati rail link and ships providing transportation through the Protocol for Inland Water Transit and Trade, which will provide a much cheaper, safer, and faster means of transporting goods to Assam, Tripura and the northeastern states of India (Talukdar, 2019). The provision of new routes providing additional access to the Chicken's Neck will increase the strategic depth of India in terms of being able to transport good to northeastern India due to the multitude of routes available (Baruah, 2020).

What will/does India get from Bangladesh?

From a geopolitical perspective, Bangladesh's relationship with India plays an important role in mitigating Siliguri Corridor vulnerabilities when viewed through the lens of both India and China (Ganguly, 1989). As a conduit for trade, travel, and military logistics between India and her northern neighbours, Bangladesh will contribute heavily toward improving India's deterrent force as it would make isolating Northeast India via disrupting the Siliguri Corridor much more challenging. During the conflict of India with Chian, India can get transit facility from Bangladesh linking the northeastern states with the main land of India through Bangladesh.

What will/does Bangladesh gain from India?

In addition to the transit fees, Bangladesh will be benefited economically from improved infrastructure and enhancements to insufficient trade by developing more efficient ways of trading in the region, which will create an ongoing connection between security and growth in the area (Haokip, 2011). In addition, Bangladesh will have an opportunity to take a greater role at the regional level by supporting sub-regional initiatives through the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) framework, which will facilitate greater connectivity and the integration of economies throughout eastern South Asia (Baruah, 2005). Consequently, through collaborative efforts, the Siliguri Corridor will be transformed from being a geopolitical bottleneck into a conduit for the development of a network of cross-border corridors thus diminishing its standing as a purely strategic vulnerability. Therefore, in the future, the role of Bangladesh will be transformed from relieving strategic pressures on the “Chicken’s Neck” corridor to fostering a node of regional cooperation, economic integration and collective security within eastern South Asia (Talukdar, 2019) while creating more jobs and income for her people.

ROLE OF BHUTAN AND NEPAL IN THE FUTURE

The present and future strategic landscape of the Siliguri Corridor could be highly impacted by Bhutan and Nepal's continuing strategic involvement and relationship with each other through India's Tri-junction with China and Bhutan. As adjacent neighbours, Bhutan and Nepal are critical to India's northern buffer state strategy, while protecting India’s strategic depth in Eastern Himalayas, Bhutan and Nepal will also be at increased risk to reduce the vulnerabilities of the Siliguri Corridor.

Strategically, India must align both Bhutan and Nepal's defence and foreign policies to reduce the vulnerabilities and protect India's strategic depth in the Eastern Himalayas beyond those geographic borders, Bhutan's strategic alignment with India during the 2017 Doklam Standoff (Ghosh, 2016; Baruah, 2020).

In the future, Bhutan or Nepal may change their existing strategic alignment with India, and they can support to China with respect to the "Chicken's Neck," then these future changes may dramatically impact the security calculations of the "Chicken's Neck" (Baruah, 2020). Further, if China may convince Nepal and Bhutan against India’s strategic alignment with them to pursue its own so-called interest, the political balance of power will be negatively impacted and then India may take economic steps against Nepal and Bhutan, if necessary.

ROLE OF CHINA IN FUTURE

China’s future role in the Siliguri Corridor is critical to its larger strategy for South Asia and will affect its relationship with India, as well as its growing influences in the entire Himalayan region

and the Bay of Bengal alert us. From a military and geopolitical perspective, the Siliguri Corridor is very important to China, as it is the only land link between India and northeast India, and thus represents a significant vulnerability to India's sovereignty over its entire territory. The vulnerability of the corridor is exacerbated by the increased amount of infrastructure and military development occurring in Tibet as a result of Chinese infrastructure and military activities and the establishment of significant roads, railways and logistics networks near the tri-point between India, Bhutan and China, as well as near Doklam. As a result of these realities, India will likely view the Siliguri Corridor through the lens of any potential threat posed by Chinese activities (Baruah, 2020; Ghosh, 2016; Garver, 2016).

In the future, China can also seek to use indirect strategic pressure on the Siliguri Corridor as a way to avoid direct confrontation with India. Other forms of indirect pressure could include China's strengthening of diplomatic and military relations with its neighbours such as Nepal and Bangladesh, and entrenching Chinese infrastructure investments throughout the surrounding areas through the BRI (Baruah, 2020), which could potentially lead to a change in the regional balance of power surrounding the corridor, while also providing China with additional diplomatic leverage over India in the eastern South Asia region (Garver, 2016). Strategic competition will likely inform China's future interactions with the region due to the unresolved boundary issues and continuing standoffs along China's line of actual control, such as the 2017 Doklam incident (Maxwell, 1970; Baruah, 2020). China's actions in Bhutan concerning border negotiations and infrastructure development/placement at the Siliguri Corridor will create long-term effects on the overall security of this strategic corridor. Changes in Bhutan's strategic alignment will have a direct bearing on the depth of India's defense in the eastern Himalayas, and as a consequence, it will enhance the vulnerability of the corridor to being attacked (Ghosh, 2016).

ROLE OF OTHER COUNTRIES OF INDO-PACIFIC REGION

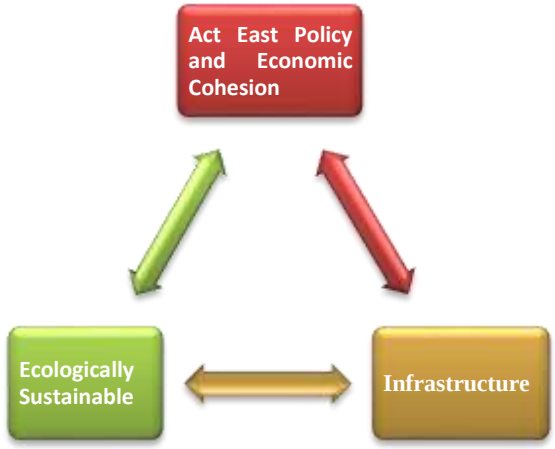
Myanmar is increasingly important to India as India seeks alternatives to the Siliguri Corridor to connect Northeast India and to the rest of Southeast Asia through Myanmar (Haokip, 2011). The development of infrastructure for connecting Northeast India and Myanmar, and eventually beyond (e.g., India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway), is a part of India's Act East Policy. This, in turn, strengthens the connectivity and security for all of Northeast India and builds additional strategic redundancy (Haokip, 2011). While these routes do not eliminate the Siliguri Corridor, they enhance outward connectivity for Northeast India and would reduce the feeling of isolation in that area and reduce the burdens on the Siliguri Corridor (Haokip, 2011). In addition, countries that have interests in the Siliguri Corridor, such as Japan, the US and ASEAN members will support this corridor through their strategic partnerships, funding of infrastructure projects, and security cooperation within the Indo-Pacific Region.

As an illustration, the investment made by Japan into connectivity and infrastructure in India's northeastern region along with broader cooperative treaties that cover the entire Indo-Asian Pacific region will provide enhanced economic and security efficiencies through increased connectivity between Northeast India and the rest of Southeast Asia, which will continue to make Northeast India's Siliguri Corridor vulnerable owing to the fact that there is only one means (the Siliguri Corridor) of entering and exiting Northeast India (Baruah, 2020). Consequently, many regional states that act as "intermediaries" or "connectors" for Northeast India will play a role in determining the future of India's so-called Chicken Neck, while a number of factors outside India will also help to promote greater economic and security stability in South Asia's eastern region.

FUTURE PLAN OF CHICKEN'S NECK (MAY BE)

The report published by Baruah (2020) states that the three key aspects of an evolving security policy that impact the plans of India to close the Chicken's Neck area will be increasing regional diplomacy through better bilateral relationships with neighbouring countries; including Bhutan and China; and the continuing development of infrastructure/connectivity for the Northeastern part of India. This geographical location of the Chicken's Neck area is considered to be an important area of concern for India's national security. The assumptions underlying this assessment are based on the fact that this area acts as a choke point with regards to land access to the Northeastern part of India from the rest of India. With the current tensions between India and China due to their respective border disagreements (including the recent border stalemate in Eastern Ladakh) and the increase in Chinese activities near the Chicken Neck region, it is expected that military preparedness, redundant logistics, and enhanced surveillance will be critical to ensure seamless connectivity to the Northeast of India (Ghosh, 2016).

Model-IV: Conceptual Framework for Future Plan of Chicken's Neck



Interpretation of Model-IV: The Siliguri Corridor represents a central element within India's developing security and connectivity strategy, as outlined in the conceptual framework of (Model-IV). The conceptual framework advocates for strong regional diplomatic initiatives directed towards neighbouring countries like Bhutan and China in conjunction with significant acceleration in building infrastructure development in India's Northeast region. As a geographic choke point, the Siliguri Corridor creates a new long-term national security concern for India's future. Additionally, as China's geopolitical influence grows, it will need a strategy for an army, which will be capable of responding militarily if strategic competition increases further. Therefore, in order to have unimpeded access to the Northeast in the future, it will be critical for India to have comprehensive surveillance, defence capabilities, and multi-modal connectivity related to the following:

Act East Policy and Economic Cohesion: The "Chicken's Neck" area of corridor continues to play an increasingly vital role as a conduit of India's "Act East Policy" while serving as a bridge between North-Eastern States of India and South-Eastern Asia in terms of greater trade, investment, and cultural exchanges (Haokip, 2011). The level of connectivity that Siliguri has to possess that the other parts of North Bengal and North-Eastern India will have a substantial impact in bringing about much greater levels of overall regional development and reducing the long-standing economic and political disparity between North Bengal and the North-Eastern States (Baruah, 2020). The degree to which this economic integration can foster future internal stability, as well as reduce the security vulnerability associated with being isolated from neighbouring countries, is uncertain.

Infrastructure: In relation to infrastructure, the Siliguri Corridor is undergoing considerable change based on alternative routes of connectivity development in an attempt to reduce India's reliance on this one corridor (Talukdar, 2019). Growing numbers of improved road, rail, and inland waterway connections through Bangladesh, facilitated by strengthened bilateral agreements between these two countries, are increasingly recognised as creating new strategic alternative routes which could support the Chicken's Neck in times of emergency. Examples of strategic initiatives developed over the longer-term to create new multi-modal transport corridors that would provide India with long-term alternative routes to increase its resilience towards the Siliguri Corridor include the BBIN Initiative and new multimodal transport corridors (Baruah, 2005).

Ecologically Sustainable: The future viability of the "Chicken's Neck" region, both from the environmental and social standpoint, depends upon balancing the pressures of regional economic growth and ecological sustainability. The Siliguri corridor is located within a fragile ecosystem of Himalaya Foothills that is highly susceptible to flooding, landslides, and biodiversity loss (Ghosh, 2016). It will be critical to establish a sustainable planning framework for those who develop precedent-setting, cross-border plans that incorporate environmental concerns to reduce the possibility of increasing ecological vulnerability and social friction due to the development of the

corridor. Therefore, the nature of the Siliguri Corridor will transform from a geopolitical choke point, as it now represents a narrow security corridor between North and North East India, to a single integrated multi-dimensional region for defence preparedness and military collaboration between India and South and South-East Asia as well as strengthened regional connectivity for trade, transport, and diplomatic relations (Baruah, 2005; Talukdar, 2019).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Strategic importance of the Siliguri Corridor is such that it requires ongoing policy attention for India regarding security, infrastructure, diplomacy, and regional development.

1. India should reduce dependency on single narrow transit route at Siliguri by creating redundancies in transport links using alternate route through Bangladesh; inland waterway routes; railway system; and multi-modal transportation/logistic hubs.

2. Regional infrastructure development should be prioritized, including upgrading existing roadways/bridges and expanding current rail capabilities and oil pipeline capacities; upgrading electrical power distribution systems and upgrading digital communications systems, and developing disaster safe transportation link, which will reduce congestion, vulnerability, and enhance economic efficiencies for Northeast India.

3. Increased border control/management and inner security mechanisms will help to resolve issues such as smuggling, human trafficking, illegal immigration, insurrectionist activity, and other non-traditional security threats. Integrated Cohesive surveillance utilizing satellite imagery, drone technology, and coordination through integrated intelligence sharing between law enforcement agencies will enhance the stability/operational efficiency of the corridor.

4. India should strengthen regional relations with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Myanmar through economic integrations via modes like BBIN and Act East Policy. Cooperative logistical support agreements, energy infrastructure development agreements, and trade agreements among regional states will transform the corridor from a geopolitical bottleneck to regional economic integration.

5. Sustainability should drive corridor improvements. Infrastructure improvement projects take place in one of the world's most vulnerable ecosystems (Himalayas). Therefore, environmentally sound planning of infrastructure developments will decrease risks of flooding, land/rockslides, and loss of biodiversity while also protecting the livelihoods of community members in the region.
6. To have a comprehensive governance system of the corridor, there should be coordination among the institutional governance of defence, transport, and trade via state and nationwide. The creation of a Siliguri Corridor Development & Security Authority could be established to facilitate

short and long-term planning, integrate infrastructure development (highways, railways, air) with long-term economic development (business, industry), and ensure security measures.

CAUTIOUSNESS

We have to remain in **cautiousness** always in regard to following at least three directions for maintaining political stability of India in the long run:
1) India should be cautious regarding the CHICKEN NECK; it is highly likely that both China and Bangladesh will not be our friends; we should never fully trust either of them. Regardless of how friend they are now, both countries will likely not always be considerate.

2) Both Nepal and Bhutan are considered very good friends of India; however, there is a high likelihood that the citizens of those countries have the potential to be persuaded by the Chinese into turning against India (we need to look for reasons that may cause this). India must maintain a high level of caution with respect to this matter.

3) The entire region of North Bengal should have been established as a Union Territory earlier by the previous government of India. The current government recognised this and has established policies to remedy this situation. For ensuring national security and long-term (10-20 year) economic development of this region, it is necessary to develop and implement plans to place North Bengal as a Union Territory as soon as possible. Why is this still not being implemented?

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Research is conducted using secondary data; therefore, it may not be 100% accurate regarding the current strategic, logistical, and security situation of the Siliguri Corridor.

1. There were no primary field surveys or interviews conducted within the fields of local community members, transport operators, defence personnel, and policymakers. Hence, ground-level validation of the data is limited.

2. There is little use of quantitative, econometric and other measurement methods. The study relies mainly upon qualitative and conceptual analysis.

3. There is no Geographic Information System (GIS), or any spatial or traffic-flow analysis to provide a precise measurement of infrastructure stress and connectivity efficiency.

4. The geopolitical context regarding the corridor's purpose is subject to fluctuation; hence interpretations may differ depending upon current and future India–China relations and other regional agreements.

5. The study covers mainly at the macro level; hence little attention is directed towards assessing the local district socio-economic or environmental impact at micro level.

6. Data concerning classified defence and security operations is not able to be included within the study as the information is submitted under confidentiality.

CONCLUSION

The Siliguri Corridor links the rest of India with many of the nations in its north eastern region. It is a vital part of India from a geo-strategic perspective, and other countries (such as China and Bangladesh) could destabilise this area by using it to build political instability within India. Furthermore, the Siliguri Corridor provides India's direct access to Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh; thus, it is also an important factor in India's unity, military mobilization, trade and regional stability and prosperity. Consequently, the Indian government has prioritised improving infrastructure located within and around the Siliguri Corridor and strengthening diplomatic relations and defense preparedness in order to promote stability and security. Therefore, the Siliguri Corridor is clearly not just a geographical barrier to India but provides additional reasons for strategic planning, as well as promoting cooperation and continued measures supporting India's long-term development and stability.

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