Brahmaputra - Ayeyarwady Dialogue: India-Myanmar Cooperation for Vibrant and Prosperous Border Zones

4 September 2020

Inaugural Session
2:00 PM to 3:15 PM India
3:00 PM to 4:15 PM Myanmar

Panel Discussion
3:30 PM to 5:00 PM India
4:30 PM to 6:00 PM Myanmar

WEBINAR REPORT
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Background

Myanmar and India share a long geographical border and a shared heritage. Connected through land, the North Eastern states of India and the North Western states of Myanmar are the global hotspot in terms of natural resources and strategic relevance. The 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 biodiversity, natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and ample water resources. Connectivity projects are also being implemented such as India-Myanmar Thailand Trilateral Highway, Kaladan multimodal transit transport project, irrigation, electricity development, health, education, and many other socio-economic projects. While Myanmar acts as a land bridge between India and Southeast and East Asia, we often miss the people living below the bridges, particularly in the border areas.

In view of the above, the Asian Confluence (ASCON) in collaboration with the ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS and Mandalay Forum for East Asian Studies organised the first ever Brahmaputra-Ayeyarwady Dialogue on 4 September 2020 through video-conference. This Dialogue has reviewed the current phase of the bilateral relations in general and relations between India’s North Eastern states and Myanmar in particular. The Dialogue has covered many cross-cutting issues in order to realize the true potential of bilateral cooperation in engendering and generating livelihood, promoting social development, improving agriculture and the farm sector, boosting tourism, health and educational exchanges, and developing better policies for water management, with a vision of prosperity and livelihood of communities at the border zones. This Dialogue has attempted to make an assessment of opportunities and challenges on current agenda of collaboration, bring together a renewed narrative of cooperation post-COVID era, connect academics and policy makers and to brainstorm and ideate on the different institutional mechanisms required.
Conference Agenda

SESSION 1: Inaugural
2:00 pm – 3:15 pm IST

Chair
• Mr. M.P. Bezbaruah, Chairman, Governing Council, Asian Confluence and Former Member North Eastern Council (NEC)

Welcome
• Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta, ED, Asian Confluence, India East Asia Center, Shillong

Inaugural Address
• 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

Special Address
• Mr. R.K. Ranjan, Member of Parliament, Manipur

Keynote Address
• H.E. Dr. Najma Heptulla, Governor of Manipur

Vote of Thanks
• Prof. Thuta Aung, Mandalay Forum for East Asian Studies, Mandalay
SESSION 2: Panel Discussion
3:30 pm – 5:00 pm IST

Chair:
- Amb. Gautam Mukhopadhyay, Former Indian Ambassador to Myanmar

Special Remarks
- Mr. Keiichi Onozawa, South Asia Regional Representative for METI, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), Japan

Presentation
- Dr. Prabir De, Head, AIC, RIS, New Delhi

Panellists:

India
- Dr. Ch Ibohal Meitei, Director, Centre for Entrepreneurship and Skill Development, Manipur University, Imphal
- Prof. Priyoranjan Singh, Manipur University, Imphal
- Dr. Palin Khundongbam, Chairman and managing Director, Shija Hospital and Research Institute, Imphal, Manipur
- Dr. R.K. Shivachandra, Convener, CM’s Special Task Force on Myanmar

Myanmar
- Dr Myo Thant, Founder and Chief Economist, Parami Roundtable Thinktank and Senior Advisor, MISIS, Yangon
- Dr. Zaw Oo, Executive Director, CESD Myanmar
- Dr Myo Myo Myint, Director, CEES, Yangon
- Prof. Thuta Aung, Mandalay Forum for East Asian Studies (MFEAS), Mandalay

Closing Remarks
- Prof. Thuta Aung, Mandalay Forum for East Asian Studies (MFEAS) (Cultural relations)
Key Takeaways

This dialogue had special focus on the following areas:

- Connectivity
- Border development
- Border ports and customs points infrastructure
- People-to-people relations
- Cross-border trade
- Agri-based industries
- Border Haats
- Supply chains

1. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the border people on both sides and governments should work towards enhancing this sector as it will lead to boosting of people-to-people contacts and livelihood. He also pointed out that we often mix the natural resources (which is extracted) and primary (agri) products.

2. Enhancing cross-border trade of agriculture products and setting up food processing industry can be way forward to enhance trade and boosting socio-economic conditions of border areas. India with support of JICA can invest in these industries.

3. Overall trade is declining due to rise in informal/illegal trade. Various factors for such fall are rise in tariff in some items, high cost of formal trade, complex operational procedures and lack of information about the permissible products.
4. Although border trade has grown, compared to other neighbours, India’s share in Myanmar’s border trade is just 1.8 percent in exports (China - 95 percent) and 0.81 percent in imports (China - 66.16 percent).

5. Trade is dependent on investment and India should invest in agri and horticultural areas. Amidst COVID-19, developing agri-based value chain through land base is advantageous.

6. Countries should ease the burden of trade procedures and conduct trade reforms to formalize border trade on product by product basis. Easing the tariff burden on imports of betel nuts and pulses will build and benefit relationship between farmers and local businessmen.

7. Productivity of people important, skill development of people in border areas in agriculture, food processing, pharmaceuticals and healthcare should be worked upon along with developing entrepreneurial environment.

8. There are four small industrial zones in Sagaing region (bordering Manipur). Development of special border zones in Manipur and integrating it with the industrial zones can boost trade.

9. All weather road between India and Myanmar is must to improve trade relations.

10. Border Haats can play a major role in improving border trade, and border market should also be integrated to larger domestic market. Border Haats have tremendous potential to impact positively on the borderland areas. The production of local agro and horticultural items and similar cottage industry
can get a boost along with the people to people connect through periodic interactions.

11. India and Myanmar should work together for the revision of Free Trade Agreement and border trade agreement.

12. India and Japan collaboration in investments will pave the way for local development and foster regional integration.

13. Developing cultural links and people to people relations should be done at priority basis. Post-COVID tourism, especially Buddhist tourism potential should be tapped along with the enhancing spiritual relations (through yoga) and Bollywood.

14. Myanmar has made great strides forward with regards to tourism development. With regularization of bus services between Mandalay and Imphal, regional tourism circuits featuring Inle Lake, Mandalay, Bagan, Loktak Lake, Imphal and the North Eastern states can be made. Tourism packages may be designed accordingly.

15. India and Myanmar should enhance the skill development and capacity building programs between institutions in North eastern states and Myanmar in the fields of agri-entrepreneurship, tourism, crafts.

16. The best practices and challenges in water management in the respective border regions can be shared.

17. The local population needs to be convinced that a functional connectivity project will serve their interests and they are one of the key stakeholders too.
The ground support is imperative to the successful implementation of the Kaladan project that ensures Indian presence in the region.

18. Use of ICT may facilitate the transition from border trade regime to formal trade regime. Local people in border areas should be trained to engage in the formal trade.

19. Can we move from top-down development approach to bottom-up approach in this region? Can the Amul cooperative model, where the ownership is with the people, be applied with technical and technological inputs in the region?

20. In what ways Japan can contribute to enhance productivity in NER and Myanmar and aid in greater NER-Myanmar development?
Session 1: Inaugural Session

In the first session, the inaugural address were given by H.E Saurabh Kumar (India’s Ambassador to Myanmar) and H.E Moe Kyaw Aung (Myanmar’s Ambassador to India).

Mr. M.P Bezbaruah in his address highlighted:

- Both countries are looking for a prosperous and vibrant border relationship between the border states of North-East Region (NER) and Myanmar.
- NER has lots of hope form the Government of India (GOI) and its ‘Act East’ policy. He also quoted former Chief Minister of Manipur who had said in a meeting that, “We want border of peace and prosperity and not of drugs”.
- Over the years, the communication corridors have been going out smoothly, opening up great opportunities for both the countries particularly for NER and Myanmar. These now should be transformed into economic corridor with flow of trade, tourism, people, ideas and innovation.
- Vast untapped Buddhist tourism, which, if exploited, can change the tourism of both the countries and aid in economic development.
- Healthcare and pharmaceuticals are the prime needs of the border towns on both the sides and so many opportunities of collaboration in these areas can be developed.

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

- The ambassador shared his experience of travelling in the Indo-Myanmar border areas which helped him in understanding the needs of the people in the area, particularly border areas of Chin state.
India is carrying out the ‘Border Area Development Programme (BADP)’. Under this programme, India gives US$ 5 million per year, per cycle and the money is used for socio-economic development programmes, primarily in the Chin State and the Naga Self-Administered Area of Myanmar. Under BADP, India has built schools, roads, bridges, clinics and other infrastructures, and currently the fourth cycle of this programme is being implemented.

Ambassador Kumar during his visit inaugurated a bridge and that bridge had led to reduction of price of rice by almost half than what it was before and made it more affordable for the people in the region. This story shows the great impact of small development project on the lives of the common people.

One of the ministers of Myanmar has expressed BADP as the best thing which India has done in Myanmar and during President Xi Jinping’s visit to Myanmar a similar programme was put in place on China-Myanmar border.

India has a ‘Free Movement Regime’ with Myanmar, which contributes to the movement of people and eases livelihoods between border states of both sides. India has a proposal of building local connectivity between Chin State and Mizoram on the Indian Side, and to have ‘Border Haats’ on both the sides so that the people can benefit built from border haats and it should get going in not too distant a future. Final review of the Mode of Operation is presently being undertaken by the Indian Side.

The energy infrastructure at the border is limited and, there is one connection at Tamu-Moreh, under which there is a 11-KV line, and electricity is being supplied to Myanmar. A Joint Working Group and Joint Steering Committee met recently to have a Radial connection and these connections would be in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram.

There is also proposal for Nagaland so that electricity from India can be provided to villages on the Myanmar side. These are areas which are too distant from the National Grid on the Myanmar side, and even when the grid expands it would not be easier to provide electricity from the Indian side, and this is being seriously looked at. Even the Tamu-Moreh link will be upgraded so that more electricity can be sold there.

Under GOI’s Grant Assistance, hospitals have been built and more can be done in this area in Myanmar.
• IT Centers and contribution to agricultural machinery etc., are activities which have been undertaken and contribute to the overall betterment of livelihood and generate opportunities for people who live in the border areas. Infrastructure in general, is very important, and the government on both the sides are working to see that it is enhanced and upgraded so that movement of people and trade can take place in an easier manner.

• The Kalewa-Yargi section of the Trilateral Highway will be completed in another one and a half to two years. The bridges construction work will start as soon as the contract is given as legal issue and other impediments have been resolved.

• The discussion is being carried out with Myanmar side for starting bus connectivity. Coordinated bus services were to start but because of COVID-19 conditions it could not. As so as soon the conditions permit, this would start.

• Ambassador Kumar believed that it will be a big game changer in terms of movement of people who otherwise cannot afford travelling by air to move between the two counties.

• The Sittwe port should be operational soon and they are hoping that it will start by the first quarter of next year. The operation of the port would help people of the coastal areas and along the Kaladan multimodal project.

• The slow progress of road connectivity in the region due to security challenges but people engaged in trade and commerce, are eagerly waiting for it as they want to access the market on the Indian side and vice-versa. The people of Mizoram are also excited about the road connectivity.

• There is a lot of informal trade which happens at present, which needs to be moved at the formal side, it is something which is again being looked at. The India-Myanmar Industrial Training Centers have been developed in Myanmar. There has been a proposal to have one in Rakhine state in consultation with Myanmar government. This would help people in the area, giving them capabilities so as to get employment in industries which are coming up in Myanmar.

• At a larger macro level, there is a need for a plan to be put in place as to what we would be doing and what plans we have to develop the border areas.
• Ambassador Kumar said that during his interaction with the trade minister of Myanmar, the minister informed him that he had been tasked by the government to visit the Tamu because the government wants to work out a plan to develop the Tamu area and to put in place infrastructure for a long term period and desired to have a talk with the ambassador post the pandemic, so that matching initiatives for the same are also taken on the Indian side.
• The available resources at the border areas need to be exploited. Greater thoughts must be given as to what we can do in the border areas, keeping in mind the opportunities and the resources available, so that not only the two countries but also the population living in the border areas benefit from it.

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

• In his address, Ambassador Moe Kyaw Aung talked about the age-old cultural linkages between India and Myanmar. In terms of culture, both the countries share many commonalities such as in heritage, religion and language.
• Myanmar’s policy of maintaining good relations with its neighbours and growing personal friendship among the leaders and India’s ‘Act East’ policy and ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy have significantly generated much closer ties and cooperation in the recent years.
• There has been a decline in India-Myanmar trade over the years. India ranked fifth in terms of trading partner in the year 2017-18. The total bilateral trade volume declined by 17.18 percent with US$ 1423 million. Myanmar’s export to India declined by 44.01 percent, compared to previous year, amounting to US$ 441.98 million, whereas import from India increased by 5.6 percent amounting to US$ 981 million. From October 2018 to August 2019, Myanmar’s export increased by 59.95 percent from previous year. However, import from India declined by 19.75 percent and total volume of trade fell by 2.77 percent.
• Kaladan multi-modal transport is the major project and the framework agreement between India and Myanmar for the construction and operation of the multi-modal transit facility on the Kaladan connecting Sittwe port was signed in 2008. Upon its completion the project will
provide access to Bay of Bengal region for North-Eastern states and provide a new route connecting the economically isolated North-East Region (NER) to Sittwe port and help in economic development of the region.

- India-Myanmar Trilateral Highway under the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Initiative was started in 2005. For India, Myanmar is its gateway to the South-East Asia. The project is largely funded by Government of India under its ‘Act East’ policy.

- On border cooperation, both countries are on the same page as both agree that terrorism is a threat to peace and stability of the region and should be confronted in all its forms and manifestations. Myanmar condemns terrorism in all its forms.

- Both countries share the view that it is important to maintain stability and security in the border areas for socio-economic development of the population living in the border areas. Myanmar fully supports India’s security and will never allow any insurgent group to use its soil against India and appreciated that India also uphold the same principles.

- Border trade will play a significant role in the socio-economic development from micro-economic perspective and for the regional integration of South Asia and South-East Asia. Myanmar’s combined border trade with China, Bangladesh, Thailand and India in the year 2018-19 was US$ 9.6 billion (US$ 6.76 billion export and US$ 2.9 billion import).

- The border trade with India is not in good shape and is constrained due to various reasons such as lack of information on number of goods which could be traded and only 62 items are permitted for border trade.

- Myanmar mainly exports fruits, vegetables, fisheries and forestry product to India and imports medicine, electronics, cotton yarns, non-alloy steel and other construction materials.

- Border Haats are important for the well-being of the people living in the remote areas across the border of both sides. Both the countries have agreed to commence the establishment of the haats with priority.

- COVID-19 has impacted the economies of both the countries and economic recovery will take time. But, Amb. Aung said that this situation will open up new economic opportunities and will result in systematic implementation of existing relief plans. Cooperation is the new way forward. In conclusion Amb. Aung said that:
• India-Myanmar should leverage physical connectivity
• Integrate and promote socio-economic interaction between NER of India and Myanmar
• Prioritise connectivity
• Border trade promotion
• Improve agriculture sector, boost tourism and education and generate livelihood opportunities in border areas.

Dr. R.K Ranjan, Member of Parliament, Manipur

• After years of isolation, Myanmar has developed as a centre for trade and commerce for India. Transformation from ‘Look East’ to ‘Act East’ has added to significance of Myanmar in Indian foreign policy.
• India and Myanmar agreed to start a Cultural Exchange Program (CEP) with wide range of activities such as dance, music, yoga martial arts, etc. to deepen the people to people contacts, and to foster cultural relations and mutual understandings.
• Along with sheer cultural and historical linkages, India has great deal to offer in the areas of religion, spiritualism and film in terms of Buddhism, Yoga and Bollywood as these have been the strength of India’s soft power diplomacy and it has been connecting ground for years.
• The ‘high impact’ community development projects and BADP have been crucial to reaching out to the border areas of Myanmar and aided in boosting people-to-people connection. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on India-Myanmar relations has said that, “The extent and depth of the India-Myanmar relations is visible in the robust development cooperation, partnership which has a strong people first philosophy. India stands ready to enhance our development cooperation with Myanmar and do so as per the priorities of the Myanmar government”.
• To boost its engagement, India has focussed on giving development assistance, supporting grant and aid, line of credit, training for expert knowledge and capacity building initiatives. Therefore, India is a neighbour which Myanmar cannot afford to ignore.
• In recent times, the trade between them has not been satisfactory. As of April 2019, Indian investment in Myanmar was US$ 767 million (India ranked 11th overall in terms of investment in Myanmar) with 30 permitted Indian enterprises in Myanmar.
• Some of the Indian enterprises working in Myanmar are ONGC Videsh, Reliance Energy, Tata Motors, Escott, Cipla, Ranbaxy Apollo etc. The range of areas covered by the Indian projects are railway, telecommunications, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, hydro-carbon, IT, food processing, agriculture, remote sensing, education etc.

• Dr Ranjan concluded that engagement between Tatmadaw and New Delhi can happen in an inclusive manner by engaging all relevant actors. In light of this, the civil societies, NGOs and local ethnic groups shall play a major role in strengthening the engagement between India and Myanmar.

• In the post-COVID era, trade relationship can grow in areas such as pharmacy, healthcare, food processing, energy, communication, etc. He also said that we need to focus on 3Cs, namely, culture, commerce and connectivity in Indo-Myanmar relations.

Dr. Najma Heptulla, Governor of Manipur

• In her address Dr. Heptulla said that 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 biodiversity, 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, etc. In recent years, fresh initiatives are being taken by India in close cooperation with Myanmar.

• At present, the 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 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 Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao and thereafter rigorously pursued by the successive administrations of Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Dr. Manmohan Singh.

- Hon’ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi 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 being undertaken by the Government of Manipur and Central Government/Ministry of DoNER are as follows:
  - Introduction of bus service between Imphal and Mandalay (Myanmar) at least once a week during winter and non-rainy season. Concerned Ministries have already conveyed “in-principle” approval.
  - At the instance of Ministry of DoNER, it is proposed to revive border trade 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.
  - 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.

- Government should allow Rupee-Kyat trade following the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan trade in order to facilitate formal trade at border between India and Myanmar.
- Land Custom Station already exists at Moreh. Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Moreh is being developed. The Dept of Border Management of MHA must expedite the completion of the project.
- Improving telecommunication network by installing optical fibre link for 6 kms between Moreh and Tamu (Myanmar).
- In education sector, Manipur University is teaching Burmese and Japanese languages in its language school. Teaching and learning of languages of South-East Asia and other neighbouring countries among youths, professionals and businessmen is one of the programmes/action plans to be implemented. 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.

- In conclusion Dr. Heptulla highlighted the potential of NER tourism sector and its multiplier effect in employment generation, which according to her, is unmatched.
- NER states are blessed with nature’s bounty and the region is the treasure house of bio-diversity, flora and fauna. 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.

**Session 2: Technical Session**

**Amb. Gautam Mukhopadhyay, Senior Visiting Fellow, Centre for Policy Research (CPR), New Delhi**

- The session was chaired by Amb.(Retd.) Gautam Mukhopadhyay. In his address Amb. Mukhopadhyay said that one needs to see how the big projects and infrastructure development will help and impact the lives of the local people. He said a lot has been happening at the level of states
and governments but the same is not happening at the local level. He asked the panellists to look for solutions to connect these to the big projects. He also raised the question to the panellists that what will be the role of this region.

- Amb. Mukhopadhyay highlighted that agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the people living in the border areas on both sides, and governments should work towards enhancing this sector as it will lead to boost people-to people contacts and livelihood. He also pointed out that we often mix the natural resources (which are extracted) with primary (agri) products. Agri products need to be amplified so as volume can be added and employment can be generated.

- Amb. Mukhopadhyay has also brought out that DFTP is a potentially game changer initiative for India as it allows international and especially India’s trade and investment in least developed countries of South-East Asia, our most important neighbour, especially Myanmar and border region can benefit from it. He also said that NER and western part of Myanmar are not adequately developed to have large exportable products. According to him 90 percent of the problem is not related to connectivity, but it is due to lack of local productivity and low investments in local economies. Easing of trade procedures and bring trade reforms to formalize border trade on product by product basis. Betel nuts and pluses as the value of their trade was high earlier and it will build and benefit relationship between farmers and local businessmen.

Mr. Keiichi Onozawa, South Asia Regional Representative, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), Japan

- In his address Mr. Onozawa taled about Japan’s investments in NER and Myanmar, and JICA projects. He also presented how connectivity played a crucial role in Japan’s growth in 1960s (average growth rate was 10 percent), 1970s and 1980s.
- Japan has several big cities which are connected by highway, roadways, freight trains and high speed railways.
- The project connecting the big cities of Japan was called the Taiheiyo Belt. This project not only connected big cities but also connected small cities to big cities and made small cities prosperous and aided in development of industries in small cities. Connectivity facilitated the
integration (economic and physical) between cities. rail, road and airways.

- Bangladesh which is growing rapidly due to its labour reforms and efficient Free Trade (FTA). India can learn from Bangladesh if India wants to accelerate its growth in the post-COVID era. India needs to undertake reforms in labour policy to take advantage of its unskilled labour and improve its FTA regime.

- Connectivity is not limited to physical infrastructure, and trade facilitation is also important. So, BBIN-MVA signed in 2015 is important for harmonisation. ASEAN has been working to harmonise quality standards in several sectors, which offer important lessons for this region.

- Prime Minister Modi has stressed about the importance of being part of global value chain. To gain in GVC, quality standard harmonisation will be the key to facilitate India’s engagement in global value chain.

- The achievement of India in Direct to Bank Transfer during lockdown can be termed as one of the best initiatives for inclusive growth. Myanmar and Japan can learn from India. The initiative is one of the successful cases of inclusive growth. Japan is also looking to link national IDs to bank accounts. The large number of cash transfer done by the Government of India during COVID-19 with such speed deserves appreciation.

- Now even the Philippines has been trying to develop national ID project and Mr Onozawa has suggested that Myanmar should think about the similar path.

- Introduction of B2B platform to facilitate collaboration in Africa and Asia by India and Japan can accelerate industrial development.

- At the end, he talked about introduction of B2B platform to facilitate collaboration in Asia and Africa and India and Japan. CII and JETRO will be working towards business matching and they aim to achieve this in four categories:
  - Export to Asia and Africa by Japanese companies
  - Infrastructure projects in Asia and Africa
  - Joint investment in Asia and Africa
  - India digital project expansion to Asia and Africa
Dr. Prabir De, Head, AIC, RIS, New Delhi

- In his presentation Dr. De highlighted about the strong connections between India and Myanmar. He pointed out the declining overall trade but growth of border trade from 2017 between India and Myanmar. In 2015-16, India allowed MFN trade at border and total trade was US$ 2 billion which declined to US$ 1.5 billion in 2017-18. In border areas, Myanmar’s export to India was US$ 53.03 million in 2015-16 and it grew to US$ 149.77 in 2018-19 and in terms of imports from India, it increased from US$ 18.6 million to US$ 20.52 during the same time. Nevertheless, the share of India in Myanmar’s total border trade is minuscule.
- Maritime connectivity and physical infrastructure along with linking business and entrepreneurs in the border region of NER and Myanmar is important. He highlighted that passenger movement through border has been rising because India has allowed E-visa.
- Challenges are in the areas of informal trade and third country trade, which can be worked by encouraging local industrialisation in NER and bordering states. Dr De recommended for connectivity improvements, direct flights, bus service, greater investment in agriculture, tourism, health and education, and large number of schools and visiting fellowship.
- Talking about the views from Myanmar on India, he said that Myanmar wants timely delivery of projects, greater market access for its goods, promotion of agriculture and horticulture supply chains, and greater cooperation in Energy sector.
- At the end, Dr De suggested that India should promote shared cultural relations, strengthen infrastructure linkages, facilitate trade, development of human resources and protect environment and sustainable growth and development.

Dr. Myo Thant, Former Principal Economist, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Manila

- Dr. Myo Thant discussed about India’s vision of Look East, which started in 1991 and concrete proposal started in 2005. The Act East cooperation is recent but it has benefitted mutually. Although he
cautioned about that Asia and Africa is littered with regional cooperation experiments and very few have been successful with huge efforts both physical and financial and determination. He highlighted the four areas which need to be worked apart from law and order and security. These are as follows: Physical Connectivity; Soft Infrastructure (Institutions, Policies, Regional Cooperation); Actual realisation of net economic benefit and distribution of these benefits between different actors and states; and People-to-people cooperation.

• Dr Myo Thant suggested six short term actions:
  • Complete remaining infrastructure required for physical connectivity by 2012-2022 as ‘No Transport, No Trade’ is the reality.
  • Improve physical facilities at major border crossing to enable year-long economic activities. At present, the infrastructure is rudimentary.
  • Improve and streamline border crossing procedure. Adopt single window clearing system.
  • Improve labs facilities since much of the trade will be related to food processing industries.
  • Implement efficient cross-border labour and population movement while addressing the cause of illegal migration.
  • Effective and efficient dealing with smuggling, as it is needed for fiscal reason and for development of the region.
  • Both countries should prepare ‘Ease of Doing Business Report’ to provide common basis for moving ahead.
  • The transit agreement should be prepared with IMT-TH and Kaladan.
  • To establish people to people contact, regular meeting is needed and for this annual trade fair and student exchanges should be carried out.
  • The interaction between Imphal and Dimapur and between Saigaing, Mandalay and Chin region is necessary.

Dr. Zaw Oo, Executive Director, CESD Myanmar

• In his address, Dr Zaw Oo stressed that both countries should work upon the previous works in all areas from trade, connectivity to investment and infrastructures. Trade facilitation should be the key task for the two governments to enhance border trade.
• From 2017 onwards sudden drop in bilateral trade is caused due to Government of India’s notification on new regulatory system related to quantitative restriction on pulses and lentils from Myanmar to India, which usually occupied about US$ 800 to US$ 1 billion bilateral trade. Now, it has dropped down to US$ 300 million. The bilateral trade can only pick up momentum if these quantitative restrictions are reconsidered.

• Dr Zaw Oo advocated that reconsideration should be done in light of the present COVID-19 outbreak as countries are looking to mitigate any sort of supply chain disruption. He suggested that India should invest more in Myanmar as trade is dependent on investment. Trade is dependent on investment and India should invest in agricultural plantation (like Africa) as Myanmar is closer to India and provides shorter supply chain. Amidst COVID-19, developing agri value chain through land is advantageous.

• On border trade, Dr Oo said that one product that stands out is betel nut which has seen facing tariff restriction. It has seen a huge drop, and he suggested that to improve border as well as bilateral trade countries should move on product by product basis staring from betel nuts and pulses.

Dr. Myo Myo Myint, Director, CEES Myanmar, Yangon

• Dr Myo Myo started by listing about border posts of Myanmar with its neighbours. Myanmar has 4 border posts with China, 7 with Thailand, 3 with India and 1 with Bangladesh. To improve trade, she suggested that constraints to formal trade should be looked into; cost of formal trade should be decreased along with complex and time consuming procedures added with regulations; and simplifying operational procedures.

• A lot of traders in Myanmar and NER border areas want to be part of formal trade, but they really do not know how to do it and that’s why they chose informal trade. Initially specific products which are traded most bilaterally can be looked into and countries must reform trade policies and formalise informal trade.

• Today, large domestic markets in Myanmar are not well connected with border markets. In conclusion, Dr Myo Myo Myint suggested that border markets should be connected to their domestic markets.
Dr. Ch Ibohal Meitei, Director, Centre for Entrepreneurship and Skill Development, Manipur University, Imphal

- Dr. Ibohal Meitei highlighted Indian foreign policy priorities. India is looking to build relationship with Myanmar and beyond and engaging with it bilaterally and multilaterally in BIMSTEC, ASEAN, etc.
- Trade at Moreh-Tamu sector has been reduced to zero due to dramatic change in tariff structures but still high tariff in some products such as betel nut.
- The poor state of infrastructure and connectivity in the border areas of NER, which act as another constraint to formal trade.
- Prospective areas of collaboration at university levels and in areas of skill development will aid in strengthening relationship.
- The strategic agenda needs to look at the development of industrial zones. There are four small industrial zones in Sagaing region (bordering Manipur). Development of special border zones in Manipur and integrating it with the industrial zone can be looked into in order to boost trade.
- Japan and India should invest in local industries such as healthcare, IT, food processing, etc. Productivity of people is very important and skill development is an area, which should be looked into and entrepreneurial eco-system needs to be created keeping in view with the available resources.

Prof. Ch Priyoranjan Singh, Manipur University, Imphal

- Prof. Priyoranjan Singh discussed about the Indian foreign policy such as India’s withdrawal from RCEP and the reason behind it. India wants to reduce its US$ 109 billion trade deficits with RCEP countries and protect its manufacturing sectors, and this was the reason India pulled out of RCEP. Due to this protectionist measures, the bilateral trade between India and Myanmar has also suffered.
- NITI Aayog is of the view that India has not fared any well with the countries with which it has signed FTA compared to non-FTA countries. India’s exports are determined by incomes and not demands, tariffs or prices. In Delhi Declaration in 2018, India emphasised on other areas
such as maritime, terrorism, connectivity, among others, and merchandise trade was sidelined.

- In conclusion, Prof. Singh suggested that India and Myanmar should develop a micro plan for trade between NER and border areas of Myanmar. Talking about Duty Free Tariff Performance scheme, he said that it has been operational but in reality, people from India or Myanmar have to pay 35 percent in duties due to this scheme. He suggested that:
  - Border trade agreement should be redesigned as it was designed unilaterally by India and should incorporate Myanmar’s concern.
  - India should negotiate FTA on bilateral level.
  - NITI Aayog wants India to revise all its FTAs and it is opportune time for NER and Myanmar to have a new border trade and FTA.
  - New economic and trade narrative is needed.

- **Dr. Palin Khundongbam** talked about that medical tourism is an emerging sector with great potential between two nations. He highlighted that the abundance of cataract surgeons in Manipur is an example of successful collaboration. In health sector, various low cost investments are required and it is going to happen. However, due to Covid, it has been delayed. Dr Palin called for greater cooperation between India and Myanmar in public health, and need for a consul office in Imphal.

- **Dr. R K Shivchandra Singh** in his presentation highlighted that there is limited border opening and limited implementation of Act East policy. Many series of dialogues have been taking place for past two decades but much needs to be done on ground as many bridges, projects and initiatives which are part of Act East policy are not been materialized.

- **Mr. Thuta Aung** in his concluding address said that we need to move from romanticised version to reality about India-Myanmar relations. He emphasized that immediate actionable points should be formulated immediately and work should start in collaboration at various levels. He said that the techies from India can play a crucial in enhancing trade and development between India and Myanmar.
Dr. Najma Heptulla, Governor of Manipur

Dr. Najma Heptulla had an outstanding academic career. She received her Doctorate in Zoology (Avian Hearts) at the young age of 22. By training, she is a scientist and also taught at the university level. She also worked in the scientists’ pool of the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), Government of India.

Dr. Heptulla was elected to the Rajya Sabha (The Upper House of Parliament) in July 1980. This is her 6th term and 34th year in the Parliament. Widely travelled, Dr. Heptulla is closely in touch with a number of prominent world leaders, diplomatic community, social activists in the developing and the developed countries. As Special Envoy of the Prime Minister, she has led numerous Parliamentary delegations negotiating on the issues of vital importance.

During her stint as the Union Minister of Minority Affairs from 26th May 2014 to 12th July 2016, Dr. Heptulla, taking into account the promises made by the Party in its Election Manifesto in 2014 for the minorities, took numerous initiatives such as USTAAD (Upgrading the Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development); Nai Manzil, for empowering; the skills of school-dropouts, skilling of Madarsa-children under Maulana Azad National Academy for Skills (MANAS) and ‘Hamari Dharohar’, to help preserve the rich culture and heritage of the minorities under the overall concept of Indian culture.

Dr. Heptulla hails from the prominent family of freedom fighters. She is the grandniece of the renowned scholar and eminent freedom fighter Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first Education Minister of Independent India.
Mr. M.P. Bezbaruah, Chairman, Governing Council, Asian Confluence and Former Member North Eastern Council (NEC)

Madan Prasad Bezbaruah belongs to an illustrious family with a civil service background. He has held important government positions in the North Eastern Council – Assam and Meghalaya and in the Government of India. He was Secretary to the Government of Assam in the Departments of Education, Health, Industries and Finance, Chairman of the Assam State Electricity Board and the Home Secretary of Assam from January 1986 to August 1990. During 1990 to 1994, he was Minister (Economic) in the High Commission of India, London. From 1997 to 2001, he served as the Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, and Government of India. He also served as the Principal Adviser in the Planning Commission of India and was Banking Ombudsman for the Reserve Bank of India. After retirement, he was conferred the Honorary Permanent Representative of World Tourism Organisation (WTO).

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

Ambassador Saurabh Kumar joined the service in the year 1989 after completing his M.Tech from IIT, Delhi. He has served in various capacity as an IFS, officer. His previous diplomatic assignments include postings in Hong Kong, Indonesia, China, Italy. He has also served as India’s Ambassador to Iran from August 2015 to December 2018. He has also served as Under-Secretary for China and Pakistan Desk and Director, China Desk and as Joint-Secretary - Counter-Terrorism, Policy Planning & Research at MEA, New Delhi. He was also the Joint-Secretary at National Security Council Secretariat, New Delhi.

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

Mr. Moe Kyaw Aung joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1990 as the rank of Head of Branch-2/ Third Secretary. His previous diplomatic assignments include postings in Washington, Geneva, Jakarta, Bandarseri Begawan. He has also served as Head of Branch – 1 (International Organization and Economic Department), Deputy Director (ASEAN Department), Director (Protocol Department, President’s Office), Director (ASEAN Department) and Deputy Director General (Protocol Department) during his stints at the Headquarters of
the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He served as the Attachment Officer at the ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta in 2014 and Director (Protocol Department) of the President’s Office from 2009 to 2013. He was the Ambassador/Deputy Head of Mission in Myanmar Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from May 2016 to 11 November 2017. He had the several Delegation, Conference and Workshop experiences. H.E. Mr. Moe Kyaw Aung took over as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Myanmar to India on 23 November, 2017.

Dr. R.K. Ranjan, Member of Parliament, Manipur

Dr R.K. Ranjan Singh is politician from Manipur and belongs to Bhartiya Janata Party. He was elected as the Member of Parliament in 2019 from Inner Manipur. He is also a renowned environmentalist. He has also worked as Registrar at the Manipur University.

Amb. Gautam Mukhopadhya, Former Indian Ambassador to Myanmar

Ambassador Gautam Mukhopadhaya joined the Centre for Policy Research as a Senior Visiting Fellow in June 2019 after a career in the Indian Foreign Service during which he served in various capacities in Indian Embassies and Missions in Mexico, Cuba, France, and the United Nations; the Ministry of Defence of India (2002-05); and eventually as India's Ambassador to Syria (2006-08), Afghanistan (2010-13) and Myanmar (2013-16). He also re-opened the Indian Embassy in Kabul in November 2001 as Charge d’Affaires after the ouster of the Taliban in Afghanistan in November 2001. Ambassador Mukhopadhaya's current areas of interest at the Centre include Afghanistan and Myanmar, India's Act East policy, and regional cooperation involving South and South East Asia with a focus on the North East of India on which he hopes to stimulate some policy work at the Centre. His other current affiliations include an association with the NITI Aayog's 'NITI Forum for the North East' as an Advisor, and Chair of a CII Task Force on economic ties with Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV countries). His extra-curricular interests include Indian and world music, and travel, with a special interest in the North East of India and South East Asia.
Dr. Prabir De, Head, AIC, RIS, New Delhi

Dr. Prabir De is a Professor at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). He is also the Coordinator of ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS. De works in the field of international economics and has research interests in international trade and development. He was a visiting Fellow of the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), Tokyo; and visiting Senior Fellow of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), Bangkok. He has been conducting policy research for the Government of India and several international organisations. He has a Ph.D. in Economics from the Jadavpur University, Calcutta. He has contributed several research papers in international journals and written books on trade and development.

Mr. Keiichi Onozawa, South Asia Regional Representative, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), Japan

Mr. Keiichi Onozawa is the regional representative of Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japanese Government for South Asia. He was dispatched on July 2018 and is based in New Delhi. He focuses on variety of India-Japan economic issues including the digital partnership, startup ecosystems, and trilateral cooperations on the "Platform for Japan-India Business Cooperation in Asia-Africa Region”. Also, he is working hard on contributing to the expansion of the "India Stack" to Africa and other developing countries. He has a master degree from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA).

Dr. Ch Ibohal Meitei, Director, Centre for Entrepreneurship and Skill Development, Manipur University, Imphal

Dr. Ch. Ibohal Meitei is a Professor of Management and Director, Centre for Entrepreneurship and Skill Development (CESD), Manipur University (A Central University), Imphal, India, having more than 28 years of academic and industry experiences. At present, he is a member of the Advisory Committee for Industry and Social Development, Govt. of Manipur. He was also the Director, Manipur Institute of Management Studies, Manipur University for two terms of three years each. He had more than 40 publications in various journals of repute.
and also he had presented papers in International and National conferences and Seminars held at various premier institutions in India and abroad.

He conducts various MDPs and training programmes for working executives, teachers and budding entrepreneurs and Startups in and outside Manipur. He is actively involved in the Startups, entrepreneurship development and enterprise creation activities in the state of Manipur by organising various training and consultancy activities in collaboration with the industrial units, government agencies and financial institutions etc. He is also extending consulting services in his own capacities for the growth and development of many organisations engaging in entrepreneurial and industrial ventures.

**Prof. Priyoranjan Singh, Manipur University, Imphal**

Dr Ch. Priyoranjan Singh is Professor of Economics at the Department of Economics Manipur University. His areas of interest are Political Economy of Development, Agricultural Economics and Border Trade. Professor Ch. Priyoranjan has worked on various projects and studies for the Planning Commission of India, Planning and other departments of Government of Manipur and the North Eastern Council of India. Prof Priyoranjan is currently Coordinator of UGC-SAP-DRS-II on International Trade issues in NE India and Industrialization. He has been a member of various Expert Committees and Boards of the Government of Manipur. He was also an expert member of a Study Team of ASEAN on extending and converting the Trilateral Highway into an economic corridor, besides being a member of the State Level Expert Appraisal Committee, Directorate of Environment, Government of Manipur. He has recently conducted a study for the North East Council of India on India-ASEAN free trade agreement and Act East Policy for NE India, besides running a Research Program of ICSSR on ‘Agrarian Crisis in the Hill Regions of Manipur: Land Systems and Economic Change’. Prof Priyoranjan has published a book entitled ‘Tribalism and the Tragedy of the Commons.’
Dr. R.K. Shivachandra, Convenor, CM’s Special Task Force on Myanmar (State level cooperation)

Dr. Palin Khundongbam, Chairman and managing Director, Shija Hospital and Research Institute, Imphal, Manipur

Dr Palin, a specialist in General and Plastic surgery is the Managing Director cum Chairman of SHRI. A passionate entrepreneur, Dr. Palin constantly keeps himself abreast with the latest discoveries and innovations. His perseverance and hard work is what is behind the growth of SHRI as a hospital par excellence. He is constantly upgrading the hospital with the latest equipment and technology thus making medical facilities easily accessible to the common man.

Dr. Palin has won many accolades in his long stint in the medical profession and has in his capacity as a doctor reached out to the masses through free surgeries and other medical facilities for the poor.

He has successfully re-implanted 7 amputated finger and forearm for the first time in north eastern India .Dr Kh Palin and his team have set a record in Guinness World Record in April 2004 for successful excision of largest neck tumour (40 % of total body weight) in the world.

He is awarded “NETV People’s Choice Award 2005” for his contribution in the field of healthcare business in the region. In his contribution towards the neighbouring country, he initiated the venture of Mission Myanmar in May 2013 with a firm belief to bring the two nations together. Three successful missions were conducted wherein 134 cleft lip and palate, 179 cataract blindness and 32 key hole surgeries were performed for free.
Dr. Zaw Oo, Executive Director, CESD Myanmar

Zaw Oo is Executive Director of the Centre for Economic and Social Development, an independent think-tank dedicated to inclusive development in Myanmar. Previously, he was the Presidential Economic Advisor from 2012-2016, serving as a principal advisor on finance, industry, commerce and labour issues. In 2012, Zaw Oo contributed to the Framework of Economic and Social Reform, a strategic policy framework that guided comprehensive reforms in Myanmar and he was subsequently assigned to negotiate a historic decision of Paris Club in cancelling US$ 6 billion or 60 percent of Myanmar’s debt.

He is presently a member of National Minimum Wage Setting Committee as well as an independent advisory member in several inter-ministerial committees such as pulses, rubber, fishery and a few other taskforces. He holds graduate degrees from Columbia University and American University in international development, finance and banking, and political economy and certificates from Harvard University and Turin University. He also taught at Chiang Mai University from 2006 to 2011.

Dr. Myo Thant, Former Principal Economist, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Manila

Dr. Myo Thant is a leading economist and former Principal Economist of Asian Development Bank, Manila. He has written numerous papers and book chapter. He also co-edited the book “The Environments of the Poor in Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Pacific” which focused on issues of poverty, environment protection and climate change which was published by ADB.

Dr. Myo Myo Myint, Director, CEES Myanmar, Yangon

Dr. Myo Myo Myint is a development professional and economist with 20 years of professional experience and ten years of programme management experience in Myanmar. Her areas of technical expertise include private sector development, international trade, policy formulation and reform, institutional development, and regional and local integration. She has worked on a diverse range of topics such as SMEs development, industry zone development, and feasibility studies for sectoral investments, social dialogue for workplace security and cooperation. Myo Myo is a Ph.D. Economics graduate of the
University of Malaya in Malaysia. She is a co-founder of Center of Economy, Environment and Society (CEEA Myanmar).

Prof. Thuta Aung, Mandalay Forum for East Asian Studies, Mandalay

Thuta Aung is one of the inaugural members of the Myanmar Competition Commission with a focus on economic affairs including merger review. Before joining the commission, he had a successful management and international development consultancy career with HamsaHub Consulting. Through HamsaHub’s selected projects, he has played an instrumental role in bringing international brands such as Marks & Spencer, H & M and other global brands to source from Myanmar and have initiated earliest CSR programmes in the country after the start of reforms of 2011.

Prior to founding of HamsaHub, Thuta has worked as an academician starting as an Enterprise Fellow at Oxford Brookes University, Lecturer and Visiting Associate Professor in Malaysia.

Non-teaching/consulting career includes working on microinsurance for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva, Switzerland.

For his efforts in development work, he was elected as a Fellow of the RSA (UK) and selected into Asia-New Zealand Foundation’s ASEAN Young Business Leaders Initiative in 2014. His book “The Bumblebee Takes Flight” was a best seller on Amazon.com in 2017.
Brahmaputra - Ayeyarwady Dialogue: India-Myanmar Cooperation for Vibrant and Prosperous Border Zones

4 September 2020

Inaugural Session
2:00 PM to 3:15 PM India
3:00 PM to 4:15 PM Myanmar

Panel Discussion
3:30 PM to 5:00 PM India
4:30 PM to 6:00 PM Myanmar

Inaugural Session
Keynote Address

Dr. Najma Heptulla, Hon’ble Governor of Manipur, India

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

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

Session Chair
Mr. R.K. Ranjan, Member of Parliament, Manipur

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

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Brahmaputra - Ayeyarwady Dialogue: India-Myanmar Cooperation for Vibrant and Prosperous Border Zones

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Session 2: Panel Discussion
Chair
Mr. Keltchi Onozawa, South Asia Regional Representative, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), Japan

Panelists
Dr. Zaw Do, Executive Director, CESD Myanmar, Yangon
Dr. Myo Than, Former Director, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Manila
Dr. Pallah Khandongbam, Chairman and Managing Director, Shiba Hospital and Research Institute, Imphal
R.K. Mr. Suvendrachandra Singh, Convenor Act & Policy Committee, Government of Manipur

Welcome Remarks
Mr. Sabysachi Dutta, ED, Asian Confluence, India East Asia Centre

Theme Presentation
Dr. Prabir De, Head, AIC, RIS, New Delhi
Dr. Tha Myo Myint, Director, CES Myanmar, Yangon

Special Remarks
Mr. Saba, Chairman, The Mandalay Forum For East Asian Studies, Mandalay

Concluding Remarks
Prof. Thuta Aung, Mandalay Forum for East Asian Studies, Mandalay
Prof. Priyamol Singh, Manipur University, Imphal
Dr. Ch Basak Mitra, Director, Centre for Entrepreneurship and Skill Development, Manipur University, Imphal

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