

Open Stillwell Road, push NE-Kunming trade corridor: Pradyut



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Syed Miraz Ahmed 13 November 2013 Updated 14 Nov 12240 views

The Assam Government Tuesday made a forceful plea for reopening the Stilwell Road which is capable of handling 20-25 per cent of Sino-Indian bilateral trade. It said there is need to push for a Northeast-Kunming Trade Corridor to strengthen economies. Stilwell Road, formerly called the Ledo Road is a 769 kilometer long route that links Northeastern India with the Burma Road, which runs from Burma to China. During World War II the Stilwell Road was used as a strategic military route. The Ledo Road was intended to be the primary supply route to China and was built under the direction of General Stilwell from the railhead at Ledo in the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

Inaugurating a national dialogue titled “Guwahati Initiative: Northeast as the Centre of a Regional Universe”, the Assam Power, Industry, Commerce and Public Enterprises Minister Pradyut Bordoloi said: “The recent communiqué in the aftermath of the visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to China only talks about the Kolkata-Kunming Economic Corridor, which is a little disappointing to us in the northeastern region. Not that we do not want Kolkata to be an economic corridor to Kunming but then, is it an exercise to bypass the northeastern region?” The dialogue is jointly organized by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi and the Centre for Development and Peace Studies (CDPS), Guwahati.

Mr Bordoloi called for reopening of the Stilwell Road. He said, “It is almost despicable and laughable argument one hears among the babus of North and South Block that if you open the Stilwell Road, the Chinese will swamp the markets with their cheap goods. That the road will bring in AIDS, narco-terrorism and AK 47s for our rebel outfits, as if they are preventing all these by not opening the road”. Mr Bordoloi added: “For us, development is a pre-condition for peace – it is the key requirement. Today we are all honestly hoping that the government of India will take notice of the combined view emanating from the northeastern region and we must be pragmatic about it.”

Presenting his inputs Jishnu Baruah, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, Assam, said, “India may exploit the existing deep civilizational and spiritual ties with Myanmar by greater and closer people to people contact as well as strengthening of cultural bonds.” He stressed on the need to hasten the connectivity between the Northeast and the neighborhood to break the impasse and rid the isolation of the region.

M. P. Bezbaruah, Member, North Eastern Council (NEC), said that it is necessary for stakeholders from the Northeast to be part of the decision-making process on the Look East Policy. He said that tourism can turn around the economy in the Northeast and suggested three transit circuits: Northeast Circuit, a Combined Circuit with Myanmar and then a Southeast Asian Circuit.

R S Joshi, Chairman, Federation of Industry and Commerce of the North Eastern Region (FINER) in his speech maintained that it is required to be comfortable domestically, before one thinks about cross-border trade. There is an urging need for a Northeast Banking Policy on the lines of the Northeast Investment Promotion Policy (NEIPP 2007). The Foreign Direct Investment Policy (FDI) must be made attractive by introducing extra concession on taxes for the NE region, he added.

While Ambassador Ambe Ranjit Gupta, Distinguished Fellow, IPCS opined that the Northeast will be the biggest beneficiary if the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) initiative is moved forward, it was unanimously agreed upon by all the participants present that a study of comparative advantage for the Northeast states from the Look East Policy is pertinent. The seminar saw the participation of academics, senior government officials, retired army chiefs, students, business heads, and journalists.

It is to be noted that in May during the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's India visit, India agreed to explore the possibilities of the proposed Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor with China.

Syed Miraz Ahmed

Writes, edits and researches. In 2013 he was conferred the Rotary International District 3240 Young Achiever Award for his work in the area of environment and digital journalism. In 2006 he was awarded first in the category of Wildlife Photography by the Department of Environment & Forests and Tourism, Government of Assam.

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