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### Concept Note

#### **International Seminar on North-East Indian in Transition: Tripura— the Commerce and Connectivity Corridor between India & Bangladesh**

##### **Glimpses of changing development perspectives:**

Lack of economic development in North-East India is aggravated by its landlocked geography, poor infrastructure, nearly absent connectivity and truncated natural trade routes — a legacy of the postcolonial India. Just after the independence, the concerns for security and the subsequent political developments in this region and its close neighbourhood turned the development process of this region into an endogenous phenomenon.

However, the development perspective for North-East India has changed over a period of time. This was initiated since the early nineteen nineties with adoption of trade liberalization policy of Government of India and also incorporation of Look East Policy which has a greater bearing on the reconfiguration of economic space of the whole North-East region of India. The declaration of *North-East Vision Plan-2020* in 2008 at Agartala, Tripura and the flagship programs for better connectivity of North-East India and beyond – the progress in BIMSTEC initiatives, Indo-ASEAN business engagements and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and the renewed thoughts about the speedy progress in Road and Railway connectivity to reconnect the region with International economic spaces and the K2K initiative reassure us about the prospect of creation of an integrated economic space.

It is asserted by the scholars and the experts of economic development of the region that with better connectivity between India and Bangladesh, particularly with the north-eastern states including Tripura would be generating tremendous economic vibrancy, leading to peoples' empowerment and overall development of the North-East region. There has been significant progress in the proposed Akhaurah-Agartala railway link. India and Bangladesh have finalised the alignment for a rail link of 11.5 kms gap between Agartala and Akhaura, which will also reduce the distance to Kolkata by nearly one-third. Indeed, lots of efforts have been focused and remarkable progress has been achieved towards making Ashuganj river port operational as a multimodal trans-shipment point under the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade for transportation of Indian goods to Agartala; transportation of Over Dimensional Cargo for the Palatana Power Project and the proposed construction of a bridge over Feni river at Subroom, Tripura for better surface connectivity and use of Chittagong port, early operationalising of the Ramgarh-Sabroom Land Custom Station and the new border *haats* (markets), etc.

It is pertinent to mention here that, the recent visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Bangladesh followed by the joint statement of India and Bangladesh on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2011 and the first visit of a Bangladeshi Prime Minister to Tripura on 11- 12 January, 2012 confirm us about the greater significance and as well as deeper intentions of this new policy orientation. Undoubtedly, such policy shift provides significant exogenous dimensions to our North-East development plans and projects a long term initiative for the whole region.

Further, such policy measures are also appended with vigorous peace building efforts with a view to reinforcing the development process. The Chakma refugees were repatriated from Tripura to their homeland of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh in 1997-98. Some new development initiatives have been undertaken for the indigenous tribal communities of Tripura by further strengthening the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council (TTADC) under the Sixth Schedule. The peace initiatives with major armed insurgency groups in Northeast are now an ongoing process with significant development.

Tripura is one of the most successful states in reshaping its economic structure. The state has marched ahead and is now one of the most progressive states in the cluster of eight, which has become possible with good governance and political vision. Insurgency here has turned out to be a thing of the past and has been replaced by development and economic resurgence.

### **Task ahead**

However, such policy changes and new orientation of our development strategies for Tripura definitely invite further discussions, debates and introspections about future opportunities and possible challenges that are lying ahead. As we are aware of the fact that, no policy measure can be declared as panacea for all problems, equally, every well conceived and adopted policy has its own strengths and weaknesses.

Hence, the proposed international seminar on *Northeast India in Transition: Tripura— the Commerce and Connectivity Corridor between India and Bangladesh* organised by **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies** (MAKAIAS), Kolkata in collaboration with **Tripura University**, Agartala, is looking forward to a meaningful engagement with the academics, development practitioners, policy makers and also opinion makers to examine the problems and prospects associated with such new orientation of development policy for Tripura with reference to North-East India and beyond under the following sub-themes:

### **Sub-themes:**

- ❖ *Inclusive Development & Ensuring a Sustainable Peace*
- ❖ *Connectivity and Commerce: Border Trade, Trade Compatibility and Market Dynamics & Investment Prospect*
- ❖ *Governance & Development: Evaluation of Development Programmes*
- ❖ *Cross Border Cultural Exchanges*
- ❖ *Sub-regional Economic Integration: Northeast India in Transition*