

'SOUTH TIBET' AND THE LONG WATCH ON THE EASTERN FRONT

The India-China thaw is real. So is the airbase rising 70 miles from Tawang.

By Sanjay Aditya Singh

Of all the North East's frontiers, the one with China is the least populated and the most consequential. China claims the whole of Arunachal Pradesh as "Zangnan," or South Tibet, and has spent the past year making that claim louder — even as the broader relationship has, on the surface, thawed. The thaw is genuine but shallow. Following the 2024 patrolling agreement and disengagement in eastern Ladakh, and the first Special Representatives' talks in years, 2025 brought a measured normalisation: reduced economic restrictions, resumed dialogue, a posture officials describe as "stable but vigilant." Verification patrols resumed in early 2026. Yet the core dispute over the Line of Actual Control is no closer to resolution, and the de-escalation India demands — a full pullback of the tens of thousands of troops massed since 2020 — has stalled.

On the eastern sector specifically, the signals run the other way. In 2025, China renamed dozens of places across Arunachal, an assertion of cartographic ownership Delhi dismissed as preposterous. Satellite analysis revealed China constructing hardened aircraft shelters roughly 40 kilometres from the Arunachal border, and continuing to build up an airbase at Lhunze, only about 70 miles from Tawang — a site of immense significance to Tibetan Buddhism and a flashpoint since the December 2022 clash there. Across the Tibetan plateau, Beijing has raised an estimated 628 "border defence villages," some on disputed



ground, and upgraded scores of airfields, extending the reach of its air power along the frontier.

India is racing to match the infrastructure. The Sela Tunnel, opened in 2024, gives all-weather access toward the Tawang sector. The far more ambitious Arunachal Frontier Highway — some 1,840 kilometres running within about 20 kilometres of the LAC — broke ground with the Prime Minister's presence in 2025, intended to speed troop movement and surveillance along the world's longest disputed boundary. To counter Chinese settlement and depopulation on the Indian side, the Vibrant Villages Programme is channelling investment into hundreds of border villages across Arunachal, Sikkim and beyond, on the logic that a populated frontier is a defended one. The Tawang factor adds a dimension that ordinary boundary disputes lack. The question of the Dalai Lama's eventual succession sits squarely on this frontier. Beijing worries that the exiled spiritual leadership could use Tawang as leverage to galvanise Tibetans; Delhi treats the matter as one of religious freedom. Either way, Tawang is now a node where, military and spiritual contests intersect.

CONTENTS

Topics	PAGE
Cover Story - Shadowed Governance	1
Feature Story - "Zangnan" Rejected	2
Continental Axis - Old Guns, New Maps	3
Geopolitical Frontier - The Other Invasion	4
Ground Zero Report - Kaladan's Long Road	5
Strategic Watch- Nightfall at the Riverine Border	6
Frontier Heroes - Feet & Grit	7
A New Narrative - Guarding the Idea	9
National Axis - Restoring the Republic's Writ	10
Editorial -	

Small incidents keep puncturing the diplomatic calm. In late 2025, an Indian national was detained at a Chinese airport because she had been born in Arunachal — Beijing's way of pressing its claim through bureaucracy. Each such episode reminds Delhi that the thaw has limits, and that the limits run through the North East. For the frontier reader, the eastern sector is a study in patience. There is no firing across this stretch of the LAC; there has been no fatal clash in Arunachal in years. What there is, instead, is a slow, grinding competition in roads, runways, villages and maps — "salami slicing," as Indian planners call China's incremental method.

It is a contest measured not in battles but in concrete poured and villages settled, conducted over decades. The danger is complacency. A thawed relationship is harder to advance than a frozen one, because the easy gestures are exhausted and only the hard questions remain. On the eastern front, the watchword is the one India's own commanders repeat: vigilance. The North East's quietest frontier is also the one where the long game is most relentlessly being played.



FEATURE STORY

“ZANGNAN” REJECTED: ARUNACHAL IS NOT FOR RENAMING

By Editorial Team

China maps a fantasy called “South Tibet.” India answers with roads, villages and an unbending word: inalienable.

阿魯納恰爾邦位於印度。

(“Arunachal Pradesh is in India”)

Every so often, Beijing publishes a fresh list of invented names for the towns, rivers and peaks of Arunachal Pradesh, styling the state “Zangnan,” or South Tibet. Every time, New Delhi returns the same firm reply, most recently through the Ministry of External Affairs: such renaming is unfounded and absurd, and no amount of cartographic invention can alter the reality that Arunachal was, is, and always will be an integral and inalienable part of India. On this, the frontier's position and the nation's are one.

The renaming is not idle mischief; it is one instrument of a patient strategy the frontier must name clearly. China builds hardened aircraft shelters some forty kilometres from the Arunachal border, expands an airbase at Lhunze within seventy miles of Tawang, and raises hundreds of “border defence villages” along the frontier, some on disputed ground. Indian planners call it “salami-slicing” — the incremental redrawing of maps through concrete poured and settlements planted. The map games and the military build-up are two faces of one coin.

India's answer, encouragingly, is no longer merely diplomatic; it is being written into the land itself. The Sela Tunnel, opened in 2024, gives all-weather access toward the Tawang sector. The ambitious Arunachal Frontier Highway — some 1,840 kilometres running close to the Line of Actual Control — will speed troop movement and surveillance along the world's longest disputed boundary. And the Vibrant Villages Programme is channelling investment into hundreds of border hamlets, on the sound logic that a populated, prosperous frontier is a defended one.

Here lies the deepest truth of the eastern sector. The border villager who chooses to stay, to farm his terraced slope and raise his family within sight of the LAC, is not a bystander to national defence — he is its first line, and the most patient. Against China's strategy of settling its side of the frontier, India's surest reply is to ensure that its own border villages thrive: with roads and clinics, schools and mobile signal, markets and dignity. Every home that stays lit on our side of the line is a claim staked more firmly than any protest note.

The broader relationship with China may pass through phases of thaw, and disengagement in Ladakh and resumed dialogue are welcome where they reduce the risk of clashes. But the frontier keeps a steady eye on the eastern sector, where the contest is measured not in headlines but in the slow accretion of Chinese infrastructure and the occasional calculated provocation — a fresh list of fantasy names, the detention of an Arunachal-born traveller at a Chinese airport, a pinprick meant to test our resolve.

Let Beijing print its lists. The people of Arunachal answer them every day, simply by living as proud citizens of Bharat on land that is theirs and the nation's. The task before us is to stand with them — to match China's concrete with our own, its villages with thriving villages, its patience with a longer patience still. No map drawn in a distant capital can unmake the truth that the sun of India rises first over Arunachal, and sets there last upon a border held.



OLD GUNS, NEW MAPS

*Insurgency in the Age of Myanmar's Collapse
The North East's insurgencies were fading.
The chaos across the border is giving some
of them a second wind.*

By Editorial Team

For a decade, the story of insurgency in the North East was one of decline — ceasefires, surrenders, framework agreements, and a generation of cadres ageing out of the jungle. Myanmar's civil war is complicating that arc. The collapse of state authority across the Sagaing Region and Chin State has created exactly the kind of ungoverned space in which armed groups thrive, and Indian outfits have not been slow to use it.

The most established presence is ULFA(I), the intransigent faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom, which maintains camps in northern Sagaing. In July 2025, the group claimed that Indian forces had launched drone strikes on bases it shared with an NSCN faction across the border — an allegation Indian officials denied. Whatever happened, the episode signalled how far the frontier conflict has evolved: drones, cross-border camps and deniable strikes are now part of the vocabulary, on a border where neither government fully controls its own side.

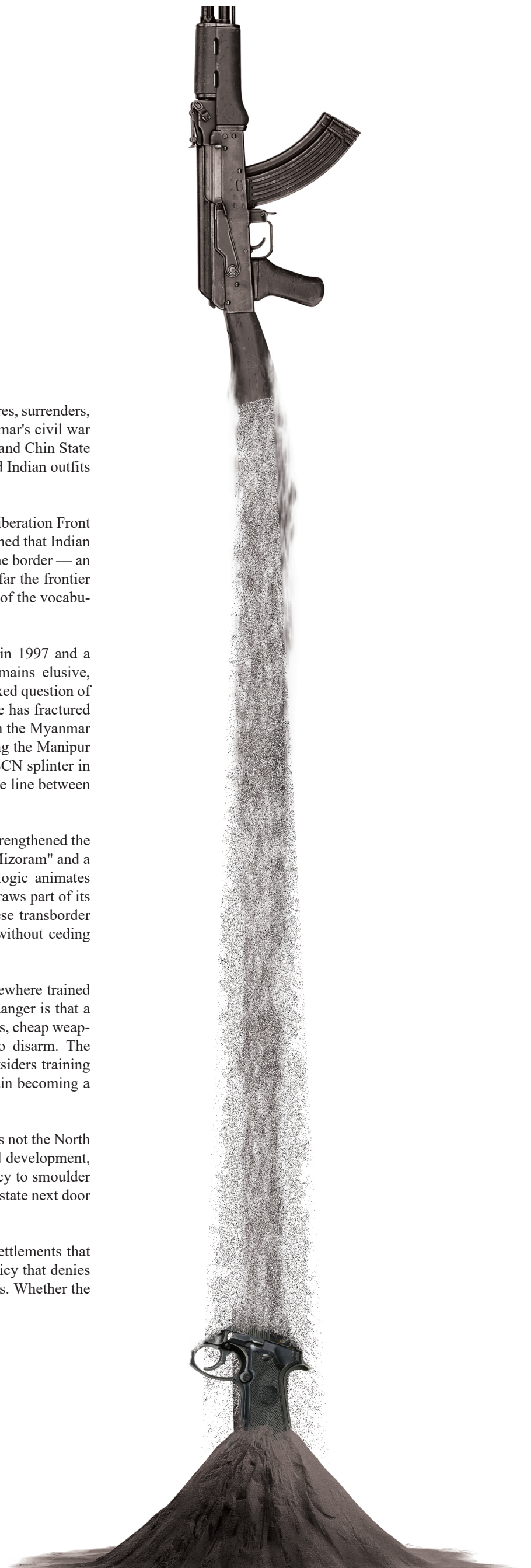
The Naga theatre is the most consequential. The NSCN(IM) signed a ceasefire in 1997 and a "framework agreement" with Delhi in 2015, but a final political settlement remains elusive, snagged on the old demands for a separate Naga flag and constitution and on the vexed question of Naga-inhabited areas across state lines. In the meantime the Naga armed landscape has fractured and turned partly inward. Reports suggest some factions have begun colluding with the Myanmar military against the resistance, even as splinter groups clash with Kuki armies along the Manipur frontier, producing heavy casualties. The execution of supposed captives by an NSCN splinter in April 2026 — men later identified as Burmese deserters — showed how blurred the line between Indian insurgency and Myanmar's war has become.

Underlying all of this is a deeper realignment of identity. Myanmar's collapse has strengthened the bonds between Mizoram and Chin State, breathing life into the idea of a "Greater Mizoram" and a shared "Zo" nationhood spanning India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The same logic animates Kuki-Zo aspirations in Manipur, where the demand for a separate administration draws part of its emotional force from kinship that ignores the international border. For Delhi, these transborder identities pose a delicate problem: how to honour legitimate regional aspiration without ceding ground to separatism or allowing external actors to exploit it.

The historical memory matters here. For decades, ethnic armies in Kachin and elsewhere trained Indian insurgents, and the skills and weapons flowed across the hills. Today the danger is that a protracted Myanmar war re-opens that pipeline in reverse — battle-hardened fighters, cheap weapons and drone expertise filtering back into a region that had begun, slowly, to disarm. The foreign-nationals case investigated by the NIA in 2026, with its allegations of outsiders training armed groups in Chin State, only deepened the worry that the borderlands are again becoming a marketplace for militancy.

None of this means a return to the high tide of insurgency. The North East of 2026 is not the North East of the 1990s; the appetite for armed struggle among the young is thinner, and development, however uneven, has changed the calculus. But the conditions that allow insurgency to smoulder — porous borders, ethnic grievance, an arms-and-drugs economy, and now a failed state next door — are all present at once.

The frontier's hard-won, partial peace is not self-sustaining. It rests on political settlements that must finally be concluded — the Naga accord above all — and on a Myanmar policy that denies Indian groups the sanctuary the war provides. Old guns are being handed new maps. Whether the North East lets them be redrawn is, this year more than most, an open question.



THE OTHER INVASION

By Editorial Team

Drugs, Guns and the Golden Triangle. The frontier's deadliest cross-border traffic is not soldiers. It is heroin, methamphetamine and the weapons that travel with them.

While maps mark the Indo-Myanmar boundary as a single line, the contraband that crosses it moves along many. The North East abuts the Golden Triangle, one of the world's great narcotics-producing zones, and Myanmar's collapse has turned the smuggling economy from a chronic nuisance into an acute security threat. Heroin, methamphetamine tablets and precursor chemicals flow westward; cash, weapons and demand flow back. In a civil war with no functioning central authority, the drug trade is no longer a side-effect of the conflict — for many armed groups, it is the conflict's economic engine.

The mechanics have grown more sophisticated. The same drones that have appeared over Manipur's battle lines are used to ferry contraband across the fence in places where the terrain defeats patrols. Arms seizures tell the story of a militarised border economy: in mid-2025, a joint Assam Rifles-police operation in Mizoram arrested members of a Chin armed faction and seized body armour, helmets and rifle ammunition. The porous frontier that once carried betel and textiles now carries assault weapons and yaba.

The drug crisis is not only an import problem; it is increasingly home-grown. In the hills of Manipur and along the Myanmar frontier, illicit poppy cultivation has spread, drawing in farmers with few alternatives and feeding a war economy that crosses the border in both directions. The state's "war on drugs" has become entangled, fairly or not, with the ethnic conflict itself — fuelling accusations and counter-accusations about who profits and who is targeted, and sharpening the very fault lines the campaign was meant to transcend.

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The transnational dimension surfaced dramatically in early 2026, when the National Investigation Agency arrested the founder of a foreign "volunteer" outfit along with several Ukrainian nationals, accusing them of smuggling drones and training armed groups in Chin State. A section of Indian officials suspected the foreign nationals included intelligence and special-forces operatives who had slipped into prohibited zones without permission. Whatever the truth of the allegations, the episode underscored how the frontier's grey economy now attracts actors from far beyond the region, layering espionage anxieties on top of narcotics and arms.

The human cost lands hardest on the young. Across Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and the urban pockets of the wider North East, addiction has hollowed out a generation, strained public health systems and deepened the despair on which insurgency and crime both feed. The intravenous drug trade has carried its own epidemics in its wake. For frontier families, the narcotics flow is not a geopolitical abstraction; it is a son lost, a village corroded, a future foreclosed.



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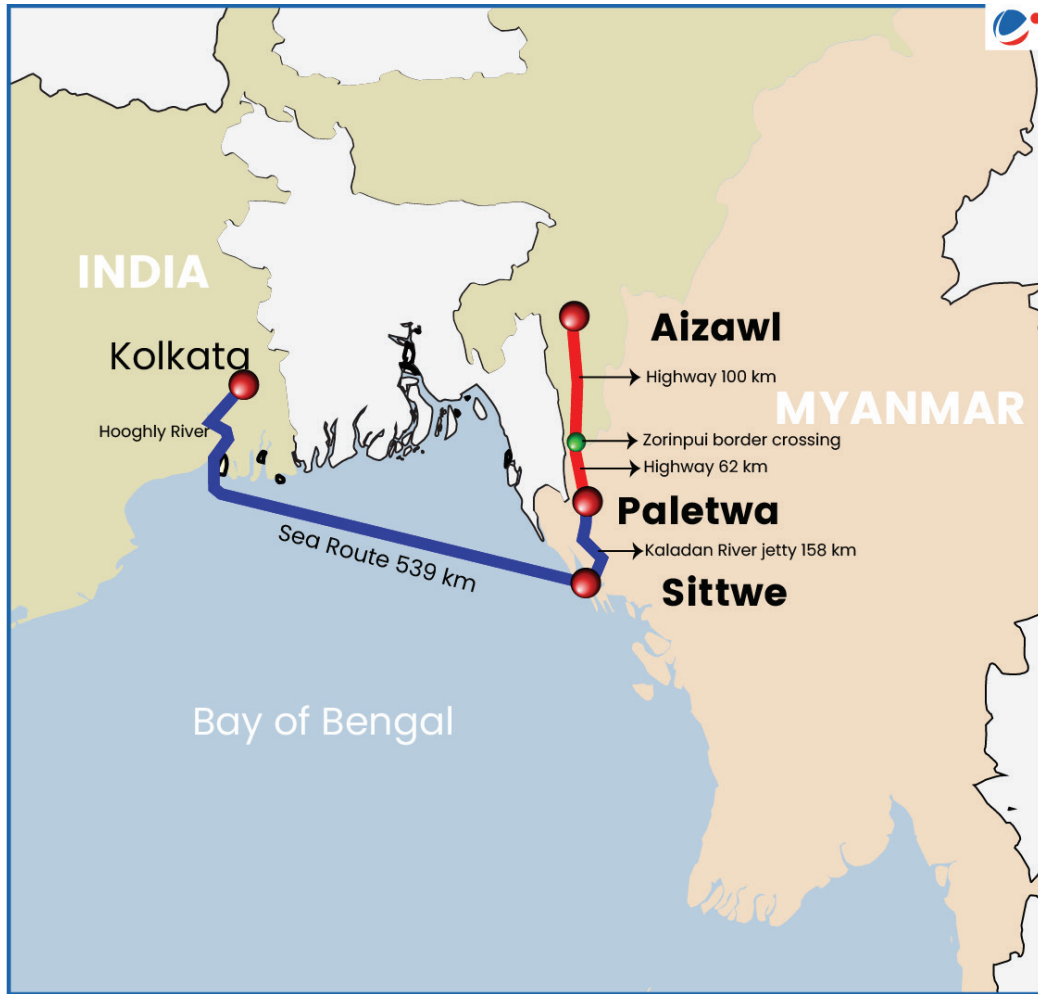
This is why security planners speak of a narco-demographic nexus. The Union Home Minister has linked the influx across the Myanmar border to fears of demographic change and to the financing of armed groups — drawing a direct line from the smuggling economy to the region's larger instability. Fencing and border passes are, in part, an attempt to choke these routes. But a barrier that is only two percent built, along a boundary that ethnic armies control on the far side, offers limited protection against a trade that adapts faster than the wire goes up.

The frontier's drug war cannot be won by interdiction alone. It demands livelihood alternatives for poppy-growing communities, treatment rather than only punishment for the addicted, and cross-border intelligence cooperation with whoever actually governs Myanmar's borderlands. Until then, the Golden Triangle's quiet invasion will continue — not in columns of troops, but in the steady, corrosive trickle of powder and pills that has already done more damage to the North East than most of its declared enemies.

KALADAN'S LONG ROAD

Act East Meets a War Zone. India built a port in Myanmar to free the North East from the Chicken's Neck. The last 109 kilometres run through a civil war.

By Editorial Team



The idea behind the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project is elegant. Ship cargo from Kolkata to the Sittwe port in Myanmar's Rakhine State; carry it up the Kaladan river to Paletwa; then truck it overland to Zorinpui on the Mizoram border. The route would give the landlocked North East its own access to the Bay of Bengal, cut the Kolkata-Aizawl distance by hundreds of kilometres, slash logistics costs, and — crucially — bypass the Siliguri Corridor entirely. Conceived in 2008 as an answer to that bottleneck, it is a cornerstone of the Act East Policy.

The trouble is the timing. Most of the project is, in fact, finished: the Sittwe port is operational and under Indian operational control, the inland waterway is structurally complete, and the first cargo arrived at Sittwe back in 2023. What remains is the final 109-kilometre road from Paletwa to Zorinpui — the single missing link — and it runs through the most contested terrain imaginable.

Western Myanmar is no longer governed from Naypyitaw. The Arakan Army now controls the overwhelming majority of Rakhine, by some counts around 80 percent of the state and most of its townships, while the junta blockades trade routes it can no longer hold. Chin State, through which the road passes, is split between rival resistance formations — the Chinland Council and the Chin Brotherhood — whose clashes over administrative control put any labour force at risk. Paletwa itself sits at the sensitive India-Myanmar-Bangladesh trijunction, a node for trade, migration, drugs and arms over which multiple actors are fighting.

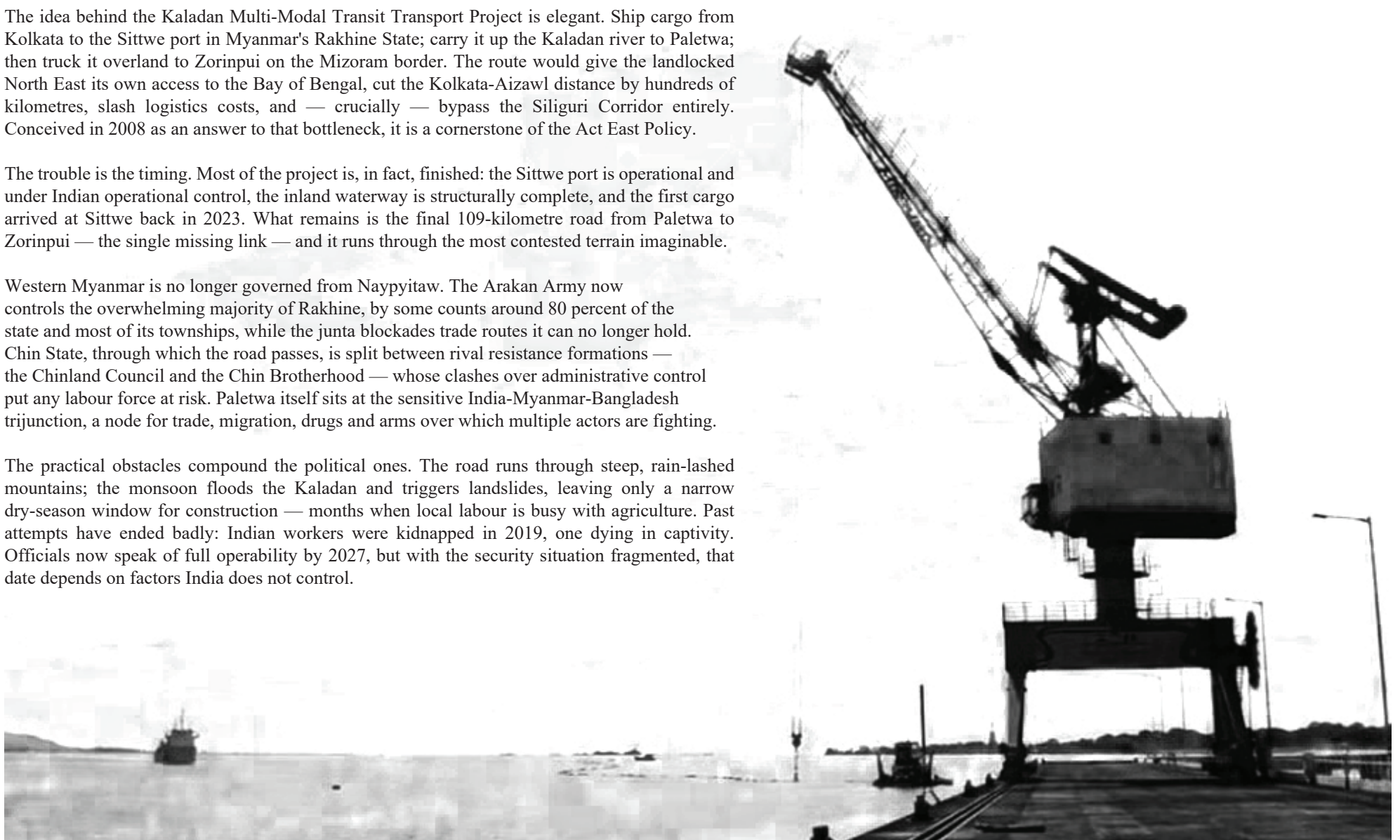
The practical obstacles compound the political ones. The road runs through steep, rain-lashed mountains; the monsoon floods the Kaladan and triggers landslides, leaving only a narrow dry-season window for construction — months when local labour is busy with agriculture. Past attempts have ended badly: Indian workers were kidnapped in 2019, one dying in captivity. Officials now speak of full operability by 2027, but with the security situation fragmented, that date depends on factors India does not control.

The strategic stakes explain why Delhi persists. A functioning Sittwe loses much of its value if the road never connects it to Mizoram. And China is never far away: its deep-water port and special economic zone at Kyaukphyu, with pipelines running to Yunnan, sit on the same Rakhine coast, a reminder of what Indian absence would cede.

The most interesting response has come not from Delhi but from Aizawl. Mizoram, a direct stakeholder, has quietly practised a kind of grassroots diplomacy — hosting peace dialogues between Chin factions, and sending an MP to meet the Arakan Army's leadership to discuss the project's future. Because the Mizo and Chin share deep kinship, the state government can reach actors the Ministry of External Affairs cannot. Analysts increasingly argue that India's smartest move is to embrace this "paradiplomacy," empowering border states to engage the ethnic armed organisations who actually control the ground, and to support locally-run road and river works rather than relying on a distant security guarantee that does not exist.

Some suggest scaling expectations down for now — keeping the Kolkata-Sittwe-Paletwa waterway minimally operational to ease the corridor's burden and generate local goodwill, while treating the Bangladesh route as a backup until conditions stabilise. For the North East, Kaladan remains a promise deferred: a sea gate built and waiting, blocked by a hundred kilometres of road that the war next door will not let India finish. Its completion would be transformative. Its delay is a lesson in how thoroughly the region's prospects are hostage to Myanmar's collapse.

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NIGHTFALL AT THE RIVERINE BORDER

Patrol Rhythms, Fluid Terrain, and the Politics of Visibility in the Brahmaputra Frontier

By Editorial Team

Borders are commonly perceived as fixed boundaries of territorial authority, but in the river landscapes of Northeast India, they function as flexible systems of visibility. This is particularly noticeable along the Indo-Bangladesh border in the Dhubri-South Salmara region, where the Brahmaputra River constantly alters the border line. As night falls, visibility doesn't just decrease—it transforms the very concept of control. The border stops being a static delineation and instead becomes a fragmented, fluctuating area where patrol patterns, environmental unpredictability, and local expertise dictate what is visible, what is hidden, and ultimately, how power is enforced.

The border between India and Bangladesh, spanning 4,096 kilometers, includes significant sections of riverine and char (sandbar) landscapes in Assam and Meghalaya where fencing is either unfinished or not feasible structurally. In the Brahmaputra valley, the ever-changing hydrology—characterized by erosion, sedimentation, and channel movement—makes fixed infrastructure inherently unreliable. Consequently, border control in this area differs from the straightforward, fence-focused approach seen along

Rather than conducting long continuous patrols, BSF units now opt for shorter, more frequent cycles, increasing from two or three rotations during the day to five or more during night-time. These patrols encompass reduced territories at varying times, emphasizing disruption over comprehensive coverage. This signifies a transition from deterrence based on visibility to interception based on probability, where control is dependent on foresight rather than continuous surveillance.

Changes in patrol schedules result in related alterations in border activities. Research indicates that illegal activities like smuggling and unofficial trade are synchronized with patrol rotations, frequently taking place during narrow time frames of 15–30 minutes between shifts. In areas with rivers, these actions are additionally influenced by elements like the velocity of the current, water levels, and the brightness of the moon. Small, discreet boats navigate through shallow and hidden pathways inaccessible to patrol ships, demonstrating a predictable movement strategy based on the familiarity with the river's changing terrain by locals.



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During the day, patrols in the Dhubri area include long boat-based monitoring over distances of 10–15 km, acting as noticeable symbols of governmental power. Yet, these strategies based on visibility have restrictions in environmentally intricate landscapes. During night-time, these limitations worsen due to poor lighting and seasonal fog, which can reduce visibility to less than 20–30 meters, making constant surveillance impractical. As one char resident in South Salmara noted, “After dark, the river changes. You cannot tell where India ends or Bangladesh begins—the channels shift, and even the patrol lights disappear in the fog.” Similarly, a local boatman observed that “at night, movement is less about crossing a border and more about knowing the river. Those who know the currents and sandbars can move where others cannot even see.” These stories highlight that reduced visibility influences not just technical limitations but also impacts surveillance methods and daily travel in the river border area. Consequently, there is a substantial change in patrol strategies.

Technology is a key element in managing India's borders. However, in river areas, it encounters limitations: floodlights provide uneven lighting, thermal cameras are affected by high moisture levels and water reflections, and drones are restricted by weather conditions such as fog, rain, and wind, leading to incomplete surveillance. To address this, the government has implemented programs like CIBMS, BOLD-QIT, and Hybrid Surveillance Systems (HSS), in addition to using UAVs for monitoring and enhancing collaboration among different agencies. This demonstrates a shift towards unified, intelligence-driven systems. Nevertheless, these actions result in a disparity in visibility: regions close to BSF outposts are closely watched, while islands and peripheral waterways in the middle of rivers remain intermittently visible, with movement inferred rather than directly observed, determining who is observed and who goes unnoticed.

In the border area between Dhubri and South Salmara, the surveillance boundaries are influenced by a complex political landscape affected by a changing river, flexible patrol schedules, and indigenous understanding. The boundary in this region is not a static border but a diverse area with varying levels of visibility, where authority is applied intermittently instead of consistently. Even with the use of advanced technology, navigation is still dependent on the landscape and time. Particularly during night-time, the Brahmaputra River not only conceals the border but transforms it into a fluid and ever-changing area of administration.

FEET & GRIT

A story of Valiant forged in war

By Editorial Team

In the rugged, unforgiving heights of the Himalayas, where oxygen is scarce and death often lurks behind every rock, stories of extraordinary courage are forged. Among these stories stands one that continues to echo across generations—a story from India’s Northeast that embodies raw bravery, sacrifice, and an unyielding spirit. This is the story of Captain Neikezhakuo Kenguruse, a son of Nagaland who became one of the most inspiring heroes of the Kargil War.

Born in the serene hills of Nagaland, Captain Kenguruse grew up in a land known for its beauty, culture, and quiet resilience. Like many young men from the Northeast, he carried within him a deep sense of pride for his roots and an unspoken commitment to serve the nation.



He removed his boots.

Barefoot, with only grit and determination to guide him, he began scaling the icy cliff. The freezing cold bit into his skin, tearing at his feet, but he climbed relentlessly, driven by a singular mission—to lead his men to victory. His act was not just one of physical bravery, but of supreme mental strength, a refusal to surrender to circumstances.

Reaching close to the enemy bunker, Captain Kenguruse launched a fierce assault. In hand-to-hand combat, he killed several enemy soldiers, pushing forward despite sustaining severe injuries. His courage ignited the spirit of his fellow soldiers, who followed his lead and continued the attack with renewed intensity.

Even as bullets tore through the thin mountain air, Captain Kenguruse fought on, embodying the highest traditions of the Indian Army. Ultimately, he made the supreme sacrifice, laying down his life so that his mission—and his nation—could succeed.

The capture of the enemy position was a turning point in the battle, contributing significantly to India’s victory in the Kargil War. For his extraordinary bravery and sacrifice, Captain Neikezhakuo Kenguruse was posthumously awarded the Maha Vir Chakra, India’s second-highest wartime gallantry award.

But beyond medals and military records, his story carries a deeper meaning—especially for the people of Northeast India. In a region often overlooked in mainstream narratives, Captain Kenguruse stands as a symbol of courage, identity, and belonging. He reminds the nation that valor knows no geography, and that the spirit of India is as strong in the hills of Nagaland as it is in any other corner of the country.

Today, his legacy lives on—not just in army folklore, but in the hearts of countless young Indians who see in him a role model. Schools, institutions, and memorials in Nagaland and beyond honor his memory, ensuring that his story continues to inspire generations.

In the silent, snow-covered peaks where he fought his last battle, the wind still whispers his name. A barefoot warrior, who climbed not just a mountain—but the very heights of heroism.

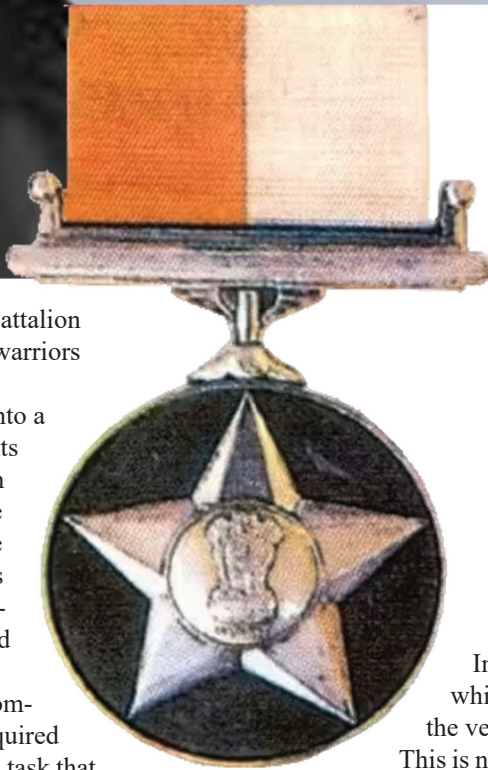
This is not just a story of war. It is a story of belief, sacrifice, and the indomitable spirit of the Northeast—etched forever in the history of India.

Commissioned into the Indian Army, he joined the 2nd Battalion of the Rajputana Rifles, a regiment known for its fierce warriors and unbreakable traditions.

The year was 1999. The icy peaks of Kargil had turned into a battlefield as Pakistani intruders occupied strategic heights on the Indian side of the Line of Control. The Indian Army launched a massive operation to reclaim these territories. Among the many dangerous missions was the capture of a heavily fortified enemy position known as “Area Black Rock” in the Drass sector—a near-impossible task given its vertical terrain and well-entrenched enemy.

Captain Kenguruse was tasked with leading a Ghatak (commando) platoon to neutralize the enemy. The mission required scaling near-vertical icy cliffs under heavy enemy fire—a task that would test not just physical endurance but the very limits of human courage.

As the platoon began its ascent in the dead of night, they encountered a daunting challenge. The steep rock face, covered in ice, made climbing with boots nearly impossible. Each step risked slipping into the abyss below. In that moment of life and death, Captain Kenguruse made a decision that would later define his legend.



GUARDING THE IDEA

Myanmar's collapse tempts old militancies with new sanctuaries. The nation's reply must be to deny the havens and to complete peace on the Republic's terms.

By Editorial Team

The long, slow ebbing of insurgency in the North East is one of the quiet national achievements of recent decades — ceasefires signed, cadres surrendered, a generation turning from the gun to the ballot and the market. Myanmar's collapse now tempts a reversal, and the frontier must name the danger plainly: the ungoverned spaces of the Sagaing hills and Chin State are becoming sanctuaries again.

The most stubborn presence is ULFA(I), the intransigent faction that clings to camps in northern Sagaing, alongside NSCN splinters operating across the same frontier. Reports last year of drone strikes on such camps — whatever their provenance — signalled how far the conflict has evolved, with cross-border havens and deniable methods now part of the landscape. Early this year, the National Investigation Agency arrested foreign nationals accused of smuggling drones and training armed groups in Chin State — a reminder that the frontier's grey zones now draw actors from far beyond the region, layering espionage upon insurgency.

The prescription begins with the denial of sanctuary: sustained, firm diplomacy with Naypyidaw to shut Indian insurgent camps, tight border management, and the resolve to act against those who wage war on the nation from foreign soil. A frontier whose enemies can strike and then vanish across an open line will never know lasting peace.

But the deeper task is political, and it is the Naga question above all. The NSCN(IM) has held a ceasefire since 1997 and signed a framework agreement in 2015, yet a final settlement remains elusive, snagged on demands for a separate flag and constitution and on the vexed question of Naga-inhabited areas across state lines.

The frontier's position is one of generosity within limits and firmness on essentials: honour Naga culture, history and legitimate aspirations fully and warmly; but conclude the peace within the framework of one national Constitution and one national flag, without dismembering neighbouring states. Sovereignty is not a bargaining chip; unity is not negotiable.

Underlying all of it is a contest of ideas. Myanmar's turmoil has strengthened transborder identities — the “Zo” belt across the Chin–Mizo–Kuki hills, the Naga homeland straddling the line. These kinships are real and worthy of respect, and the nation must engage them with empathy, not suspicion. But empathy for identity must never become concession to separatism. The answer to transborder kinship is transborder cooperation under Indian sovereignty — open, humane, prosperous — not the redrawing of the map of Bharat.

The frontier's hard-won, partial peace is not self-sustaining. It rests on political settlements that must at last be concluded — the Naga accord foremost — and on a Myanmar policy that denies Indian groups the sanctuary the war provides. It rests, too, on the quieter work this issue has championed: the school that gives a restless young mind a future better than the gun, the road and the market that make peace pay. Old guns are being offered new maps. The nation's task — with firmness where it must, and generosity where it can — is to ensure the maps are never redrawn, and that the idea of India holds, unbroken, to its farthest eastern hill.



RESTORING THE REPUBLIC'S WRIT

Three years of bloodshed, a summer of fresh horror and one non-negotiable principle: in Manipur, the only sovereign is the Constitution.

By Editorial Team

Manipur's agony has entered a cruel new phase. On 13 May, an ambush in the hills killed three Kuki church leaders returning from a delegation to neighbouring Nagaland — men who had gone, in good faith, to help broker peace between communities. In the violence that followed, more than forty people were seized as hostages by armed groups drawn from both the Kuki and Naga communities. On 10 June, the mutilated bodies of six Naga captives were recovered in Kangpokpi. On 5 June, an armed attack at Loibol Khullen left three dead and seven homes torched. On 22 June, a highway blockade at Kangpokpi had to be broken by force. Nearly three years after the conflict erupted in May 2023, more than two hundred lie dead and some sixty thousand remain displaced in their own land.

This magazine holds to a conviction that offers the only durable way out: the writ of the Republic must be restored, wholly and without exception, over every inch of Manipur. That means the state's monopoly on legitimate force must be re-established. Looted and illicit weapons — whether held by valley-based groups such as Arambai Tenggol or by armed formations in the hills — must be surrendered and recovered. Armed men who abduct, execute and burn are not parties to a negotiation; they are what the law says they are, and must be treated so.

It means, too, resisting firmly the demand to partition the state. The call for a separate administration carved along ethnic lines — however deeply felt the grievance behind it — points toward the balkanisation of a frontier state, and no nation can concede the redrawing of its internal map to the pressure of armed blockades. Manipur has been called a miniature India for its diversity; the answer to its wounds is not to divide that miniature but to heal it under one Constitution, one law, and equal citizenship for Meitei, Naga, Kuki-Zo and Pangal alike.



The cross-border dimension cannot be ignored. Drones used in the conflict are traced to Myanmar; arms looted from state armouries circulate through the same channels that move fighters across the Sagaing frontier. Sealing the international border is therefore not a task separate from restoring peace in Manipur — it is part of the same task. So long as fighters and weapons can flow in from ungoverned hills across the line, no settlement within the state can be made to hold.

The Centre's road-opening drive and the new state government's outreach are steps in the right direction, but symbolism is not security. What the people of Manipur need is the visible, impartial return of the state: highways open to all communities, relief camps emptied through safe and dignified return, the guilty of every community prosecuted without fear or favour, and the border sealed against the traffic that feeds the fire. The republic's writ is not a slogan. In Manipur it is the difference between a state and a battlefield, between citizenship and clan. Restoring it — evenly, firmly, and for every community — is the first and highest duty owed to that suffering land, and the surest proof that the nation does not abandon its own, whatever hills divide them.

FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK

There was a time when India's North East was described as a frontier—distant from the centres of power, disconnected from the country's strategic imagination, and viewed largely through the prism of insurgency or infrastructure. The frontier is usually spoken of in the language of danger — of fences and infiltrators, of dams and disputed maps, of the long watch kept on cold ridges. This issue keeps that watch faithfully; the despatches that follow read the pressures bearing on our borders this June with the clarity our readers expect. But we open the June number with a different kind of frontier story, and we do so deliberately. For if the North East is to be truly secure, it will be held not only by the soldier on the line but by the child at the desk.

Our lead this month turns to the border districts' classrooms — to the brilliant, first-generation learners of the last villages who have everything a scholar needs except the chance to become one. We argue, without apology, that quality education on the frontier is not a welfare afterthought but a security imperative of the first order. A talented child failed at the border is a vacancy the tout and the trafficker are waiting to fill; a talented child taught is a doctor, an officer, a teacher who stays, and a thread binding the last village to the heart of Bharat. The frontier's truest defence may also be its quietest: a good teacher, a fair ladder, and a future worth staying for.

Around that lead we set the month's harder news. Across the eastern wire, June brought fresh testing — a tense confrontation on the Assam border, a steady stream of interceptions, and, at last, the wire itself rising in the sensitive stretches near the Chicken's Neck. In Naypyidaw, a general exchanged his uniform for a sash, entrenching a China-backed order on our doorstep. In Manipur, a cruel summer of ambush and abduction reminded us that the writ of the Republic must be restored, wholly and without exception. Along the northern ranges, Beijing prints fantasy maps and pours concrete, and India answers with roads, villages and an unbending word: inalienable. And through it all runs the quieter war — narcotics aimed at the frontier's youth, met now by seizures that prove the tide can turn.

Readers will find in these pages our settled convictions: that sovereignty is not negotiable; that national integration is the patient work of a generation; that the border-dweller — whether farmer, jawan or student — is the first citizen of the nation's defence; and that development and security are not rivals but the same task seen from two sides. We hold these views plainly, as a frontier journal should. But we hold them in service of the region's people, in all their magnificent plurality, and never against them.

To our readers along the border and beyond it: thank you for keeping this watch with us. Turn the page, and begin — as India's own day begins — here, at the eastern gate.

Sanjay Aditya

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Chairman - Editorial Board



FRONTIER

INSIGHTS

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