



China's Claim on Arunachal Pradesh: Local Perspectives

Namrata Goswami

Dr. Namrata Goswami is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

July 7, 2011

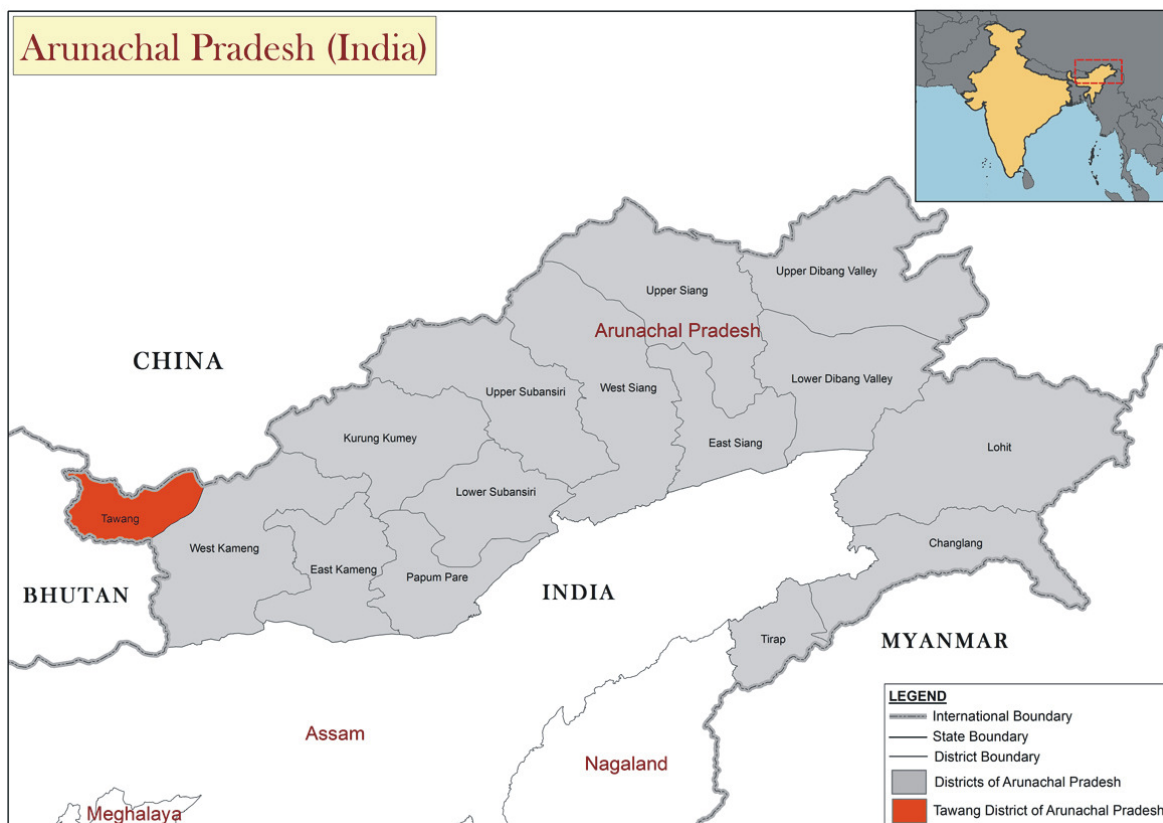


Summary

China's territorial claim on the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh is a critical foreign policy concern for India. This claim has tended to assume aggressive rhetorical dimensions on the part of China in recent years. It is therefore critical to establish an understanding of local perspectives on the Chinese claim. This *Issue Brief* offers such a perspective. It also details the challenges that have been afflicting the state over the years namely related to governance, rivers, and border security. The *Issue Brief* suggests certain policy recommendations to deal with these challenges.

Nestled amongst the eastern Himalayas, Arunachal Pradesh is one of the most strategic states in India, given its 1,080 kms border with China. In 1962, China and India fought a border war in Arunachal Pradesh, memories of which continue to linger amongst Indian policy-makers, defence personnel and the local population. China continues to claim 90,000 square kms of territory in the Northeast of India, which includes the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh (83,743 square kms). The gravity of the Sino-Indian border issue and the Chinese claim on Arunachal Pradesh need not be over-emphasised. Maps have been exchanged between India and China on their perception of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and in 2003, special representatives were appointed by both governments to arrive at an early settlement of the boundary question. In April 2005, both countries signed a pact underlining the broad principles for the settlement of the territorial conflict.¹

Figure 1: Map of Arunachal Pradesh



Source: IDSA, New Delhi

¹ For text of 2005 agreement, please see "Text of India-China Agreement", April 11, 2005 at <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/nic/0041/indiachinatxt.htm> (Accessed on July 7, 2010).

Despite all these efforts, China continues to assert its claim on Arunachal Pradesh in statements issued by its foreign ministry spokespersons.² In June 2009, for the first time ever on a multi-lateral forum, China tried to block India's request for \$2.9 billion loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as it included \$60 million for flood management, water supply, and a sanitation project in Arunachal Pradesh.³ According to ADB sources China was unhappy at India seeking funds for a project in what they termed as 'disputed territory'. The ADB however approved the loan on the grounds that there is no history of the ADB deferring a loan to India.⁴ China's move did signal to India that for China, power projection for arm twisting another country over a territorial issue was more important than a genuine bilateral effort to resolve it.

Given this backdrop, this issue brief offers an insight into the local populations' perspective on the Chinese claim over Arunachal Pradesh. It also outlines the challenges faced by the state on three important issues, namely: governance; riparian issues and border security. Finally, based on the collated data of government reports and field knowledge, the author offers certain policy recommendations to deal with these issues.

Local Perspectives on the Chinese Claim

Arunachal Pradesh became a full-fledged state of India on February 20, 1987. Under the British and up until 1972, it was known as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). From 1972 to 1987, it was administered as a union territory. In size, it is the largest state in the Northeast and shares international borders with China (1,080 km) to the north and north-west, Bhutan (160 kms) towards the west and Myanmar (440 km) to the east.⁵ Significantly, Arunachal Pradesh is designated as a restricted area and requires two kinds of permits for outsiders to enter the state. These are the Inner Line Permit (ILP) and the Protected Area Permit (PAP). The ILP necessary for Indians other than the locals to enter the state. The PAP is for foreign nationals.⁶

² "Chinese ire over India border visit", BBC, October 13, 2009 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8304679.stm> (Accessed on August 16, 2010). Also see Kritivas Mukherjee, "China Opposes Dalai Lama trip to Arunachal Pradesh", Reuters, September 11, 2009 at <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-42388820090911> (Accessed on November 13, 2009).

³ Pranab Dhal Samanta, "China Strikes Back on Arunachal", *The Indian Express*, September 18, 2009 at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/china-strikes-back-on-arunachal/518626/> (Accessed on October 19, 2010)

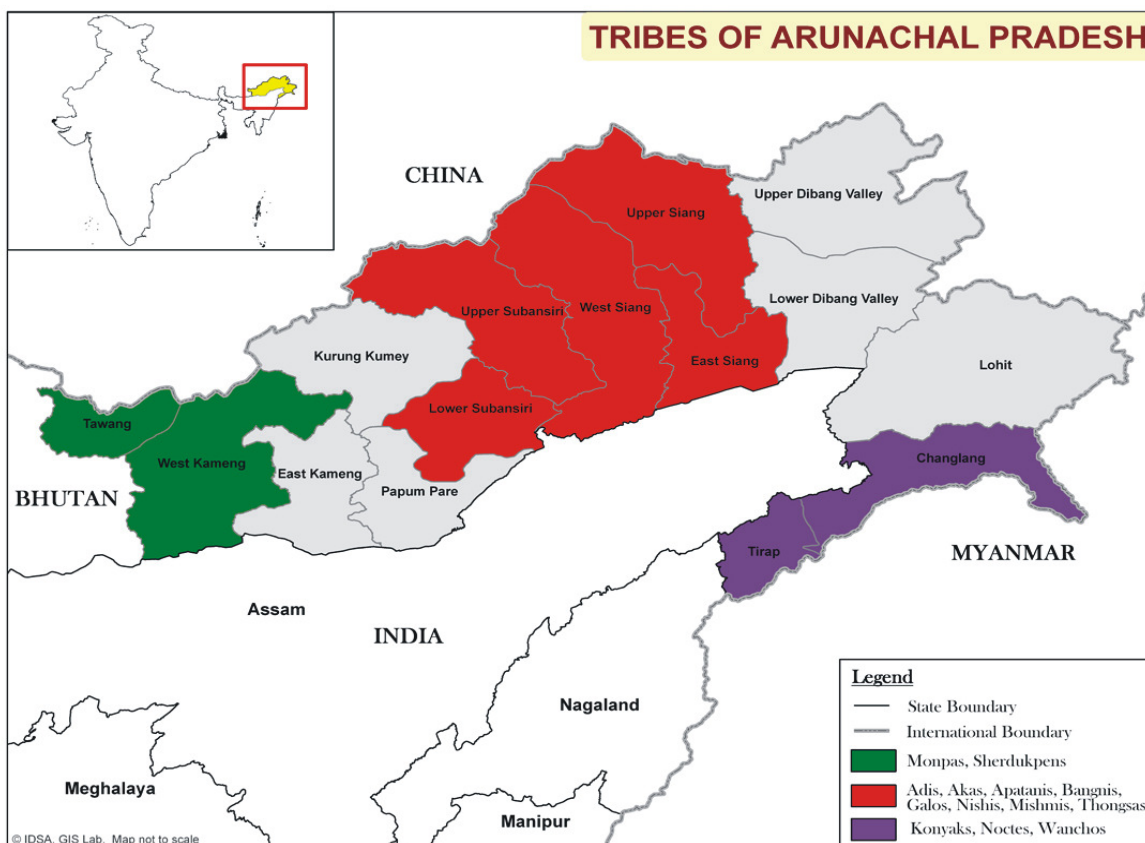
⁴ Raphael Minder, et.al., "China Blocks ADB India Loan Plan", *Financial Times*, April 10, 2009 at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/033935c2-25e4-11de-be57-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1QXVRpjF2> (Accessed on June 28, 2011)

⁵ "Arunachal Pradesh History of the State" at <http://arunachalgovernor.gov.in/html/history.htm> (Accessed on June 25, 2011)

⁶ "Entry Formalities, Department of Information, Public Relations, and Printing, Government of Arunachal Pradesh at <http://arunachalipr.gov.in/ILPEntry.htm> (Accessed on June 08, 2011)

The population of Arunachal Pradesh is 13.82 lakh according to the 2011 census (See Annexure I). There are 20 major tribes in the state, namely the Monpas and Sherdukpens (Tawang and West Kameng districts) who mostly follow Mahayana Buddhism; the Adis, Akas, Apatanis, Bangnis, Galos, Nishis, Mishmis, Thongsas, etc., who pray to the Sun God (Siang and Subansiri districts); and the Konyaks, Noctes and Wanchos (Tirap and Changlang districts). Amongst the Adis, Apatanis and Konyaks, there have been conversions to Christianity. While most districts in Arunachal Pradesh have remained peaceful, two of its districts, Tirap and Changlang have been affected by insurgent violence from across the border in Nagaland, due to the activities of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim led by Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu – NSCN (IM) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland led by S S Khaplang – NSCN (K). In fact, the NSCN (K) has a strong presence amongst the Konyaks in these two districts.

Figure 2: Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh



Source: IDSA, New Delhi

The perspectives of the various tribes on the Chinese claim to Arunachal Pradesh are quite similar. Most people interviewed by me across tribes stated that the Chinese claim is not validated by history. Interviews in Tawang monastery, which is perhaps the core reason for the Chinese claim given its historical linkages with the monastery at Lhasa, revealed that while the monastery had historical links with Lhasa which included religious

education, barter trade, and exchange of religious documents, these links with Tibet did not include China. The monks argued that for China to claim that Arunachal Pradesh is part of southern Tibet in view of its historical ties with Tibet is a distortion of history as China's occupation/claim over Tibet itself is controversial. Tibet was an autonomous entity historically and while there was religious dialogue between the Lhasa and Tawang monasteries, this did not amount to Tibetan administrative rule in these areas.⁷

The Adis, Nishis and Apatani tribes stated that China's claim on Arunachal Pradesh is not backed by any historical facts whatsoever. While there was barter trade and movement of people to Tibet and beyond, there were no political or administrative connections. Trade relations included the barter of rice, cereals and handicrafts from Tibet and vice versa. Significantly, these tribes are not Buddhists and hence do not have any religious affiliation with Lhasa.⁸ In fact, representatives of the Adi and Galo tribes argued that the main reason why China was aggressive on Arunachal Pradesh was because of the frequent visits of the Dalai Lama to Tawang. They believed that Chinese insecurity over Tibet and the continuous international questioning of its legitimacy there is directly connected to the Dalai Lama's presence in India.⁹ His visits to Tawang create anxieties among other tribes and fears of Chinese aggression as in 1962. They insisted that the Dalai Lama should be stopped from visiting Tawang because it is not good for India-China relations in general and Arunachal Pradesh in particular.¹⁰

Most interviews in districts like Lower and Upper Siang, Lower and Upper Subansiri, Tawang and Papum Pare revealed a desire on the part of the local population to improve democratic structures within the state. The local population also supported strengthening of India's defences on the border, so that they are robust enough to counter China in case it engages in a repeat of 1962. While local politicians 'up the ante' on the Chinese claim stating that they fear a "Kargil type" operation by China in the area,¹¹ the local population however refrained from overtly exaggerating their fears with regard to Chinese territorial claims. Border districts like Tawang and Upper Siang enjoyed a peaceful atmosphere.

⁷ Interviews in Tawang Monastery, Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, March 18-21, 2011.

⁸ Interviews in Pasighat (Lower Siang district), Daporijo (Upper Subansiri District) and Ziro (Lower Subansiri district), March 13-15, 2011.

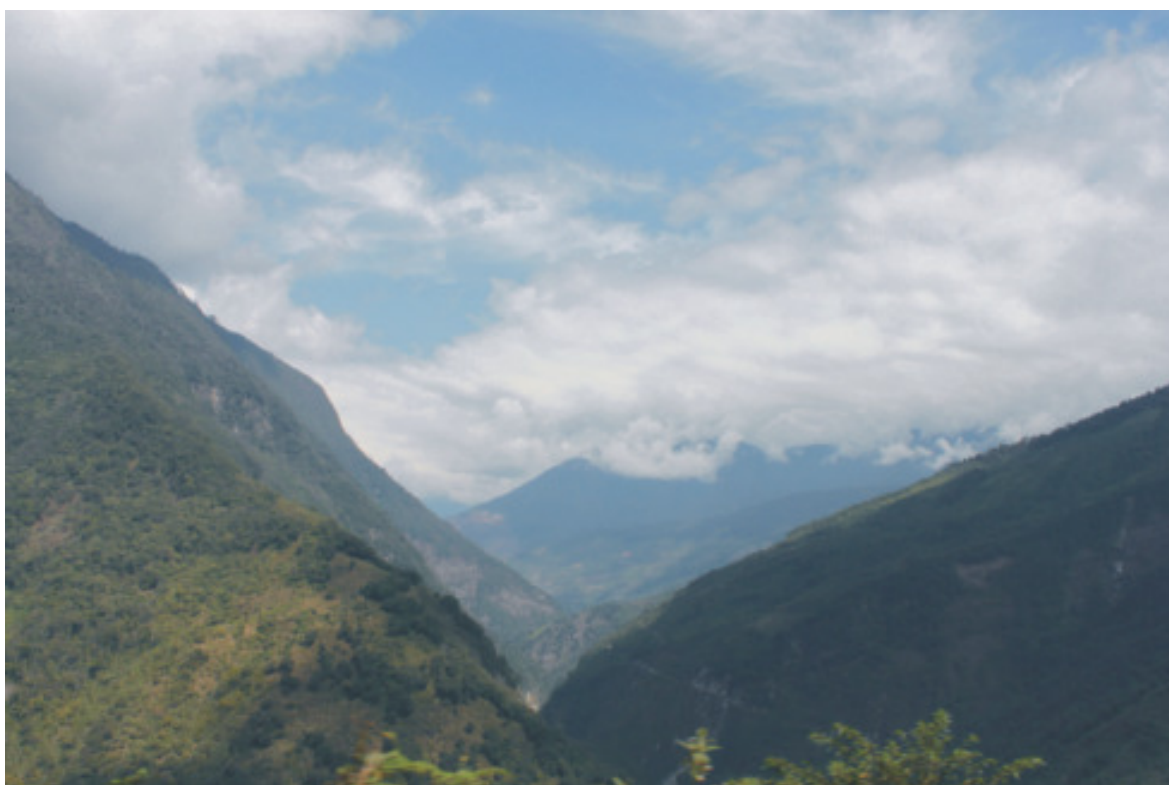
⁹ Interview with Vijay Tamang, Siang Peoples' Union, Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh, March 07, 2011. Also Mibon, Principle, Holy Child School, Mechuka, Arunachal Pradesh, March 11, 2011.

¹⁰ Interviews with Siang Peoples' Union, Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh, March 06–8, 2011.

¹¹ P. Vaidyanathan Iyer, "Arunachal Minister Cautions against 'Kargil-like' Situation", *The Indian Express*, June 14, 2011 at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/arunachal-minister-cautions-against-kargillike-situation/803346/> (Accessed on June 15, 2011)



Mechuka, close to LAC, Upper Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh, March 2011



India-China Border Areas, Upper Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh, March 2011

Despite that, there are challenges that need to be understood and addressed, particularly with regard to governance, riparian issues and border security.

The Challenges

Governance: Most of the districts in Arunachal Pradesh are backward, lack adequate power supply, education facilities, health care, livelihood avenues, and surface communication.¹² Important border districts like Tawang suffer from bad road connectivity, a tenuous and risky helicopter service,¹³ poor electricity, and absence of good health care.¹⁴ The *Arunachal Pradesh 2005 Human Development Report*¹⁵ identified infrastructure development as one of the key concerns of the state. This was followed up with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's package of Rs. 24,000 crore in 2009 for building the 1,500 kms Trans-Arunachal Pradesh highway.¹⁶ Yet, ground realities continue to be grim with the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) stating that it is an arduous task to build two-lane highways in such a hilly and inaccessible terrain.¹⁷

Table 1: Funds Allocated to Education, Health and Infrastructure in Arunachal Pradesh: 2010-2011 (in Rs)

Education	Health and Family Welfare	Roads and Bridges	Forest	Hydro-Power Development
394, 52, 08,000	156, 76, 47,000	232,16,22,000	91,73,64,000	40,05,27,000

Source: The Arunachal Pradesh Gazette Extraordinary, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, March 29, 2010 at <http://india.gov.in/allimpfrms/allacts/3032.pdf> (Accessed on June 21, 2011)

¹² Based on collated interviews with the Deputy Commissioners of various districts in Arunachal Pradesh in March 2011.

¹³ Two horrific accidents in April 2011, one of which led to the death of the chief minister of the state are gruesome reminders of lacklustre security and safety measures in the state for civilian travel. "Chopper Crash in Arunachal Pradesh killing 17 Tourists", Reuters, April 19, 2011 at <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/04/19/idINIndia-56440220110419> (Accessed on April 23, 2011). Also see "Arunachal CM killed in Chopper Crash", *The Times of India*, May 04, 2011 at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-05-04/india/29508455_1_chopper-crash-handique-helicopter-crash (Accessed on April 25, 2011).

¹⁴ Field Visit to Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, March 17-22, 2011.

¹⁵ Arunachal Pradesh Human Development Report 2005 at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/asiathepacific/india/name,3398,en.html> (Accessed on March 12, 2011).

¹⁶ "PM Announces Time-Frame for Arunachal Projects", *Indian Express*, October 24, 2009 at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/pm-announces-timeframe-for-arunachal-project/524747/> (Accessed on December 11, 2011).

¹⁷ Interview with S.K. Pandey, Commandant, 44 BRTF, Border Roads Organization, Along, Arunachal Pradesh, March 10, 2011. I also visited the road construction sites along the India-China border in Tato and Mechuka. This is difficult terrain with high mountains and inaccessible terrain.

The rural development schemes that Arunachal Pradesh has activated are Community Development Programme (COMM), National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Rural Health (RH), Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Multi-Sector Rural Development Programme (MSRDP), Providing Urban Amenities to Rural Areas (PURA), Below Poverty Line Schemes (BPLS), etc. (See Table 2)

Table 2: District and Scheme Wise Release Position of Funds for Arunachal Pradesh

		Financial Year: 2011-2012					Report Upto 28/Jun/2011(Rs. in lakhs)						
SL. NO	NAME OF THE DISTRICT	COMM	.NREGA	PMGSY	RH	SGSY	DRDA	MSRDP	PURA	TRG	BPLS	TOTAL (RS)	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1	CHANGLANG	0.00	91.73	0.00	0.0	19.36	30.89	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	141.98	
2	DIBANG VALLEY	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	12.63	24.93	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	37.56	
3	EAST KAMENG	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	30.89	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	30.89	
4	EAST SIANG	0.00	54.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	30.89	0.70	0.00	0.00	0.00	85.79	
5	LOHIT	0.00	4.17	0.00	0.00	36.99	24.93	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	66.09	
6	LOWER SUBANSIRI	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	20.25	24.93	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	45.18	
7	PAPUM PARA	0.00	696.28	0.00	0.00	15.82	24.93	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	737.03	
8	TAWANG	0.00	18.76	0.00	0.00	16.89	30.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	66.55	
9	TIRAP	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	30.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	30.90	
10	UPPER SIANG	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	30.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	30.90	
11	UPPER SUBANSIRI	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	33.74	30.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	64.64	
12	WEST KAMENG	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	23.92	24.93	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	48.85	
13	WEST SIANG	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	35.23	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	35.23	
14	ITANAGAR	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
15	KURUNG KUMEY	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	30.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	30.90	
16	LOWER DIBANG VALLEY	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	24.93	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	24.93	
17	ANJAW	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	24.93	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	24.93	
	TOTAL	0.00	865.14	0.00	0.00	179.60	456.91	0.70	0.00	0.00	0.00	1502.35	

Source: Department of Rural Development, Government of India at <http://rural.nic.in/distschemewise.htm> (Accessed on June 29, 2011)

As Arunachal Pradesh is 90 per cent dependent on the union government for financial resources, the lacuna in these schemes is that they do not cater to local needs specifically. Most schemes are too general in their focus given that they are formulated by the central government. Therefore, district administrators interviewed in Upper Subansiri, East Siang and West Siang argued that rural schemes should be formulated at the local level and attuned to the needs of the tribes. Significantly, the ministry for the development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER) has given priority to Arunachal Pradesh and sanctioned 29 infrastructure projects amounting to Rs.325.24 crore from Non Lapsable Central Pool

of Resources (NLCPR) Fund in 2010-2011. The North Eastern Council (NEC) also allocated Rs 70.07 crore in 2011 for the same purpose.¹⁸

Despite that, there is a noticeable tendency amongst the local population to compare the infrastructure development in Tibet to that of Arunachal Pradesh. Tibet is, however, much larger than Arunachal Pradesh with a territory of 1, 228, 400 million square kms and a population of three million, but comparisons are inevitable given its proximity to Arunachal Pradesh. For instance, between 2006 and 2010, China invested 137.8 billion yuan (\$20.3 billion) for Tibet's development which included the building of roads connecting 80 per cent of Tibet's villages, providing drinking water to Tibet's population of 2.76 million, free education, new houses, a new airport at Gunsu in the Ngari prefecture apart from the Gonggar Airport in Lhasa, and a 100,000 kilowatt photovoltaic plant at Ngari. In the first half of 2011, Tibet's GDP grew by 11.2 per cent more than China's overall GDP growth of 9.3 percent.¹⁹ Also, Tibet registered \$ 836 million in foreign trade in 2010 with a tourism turn over of more than \$20 million.²⁰ Tourism is also supported in Tibet by good connectivity *via* the 1,956 kms (Xining to Lhasa) Qinghai-Lhasa railway. In comparison, Arunachal ranked last in the tourism sector amongst the Northeastern states with Meghalaya taking the top spot.²¹ In 2010, India invested around Rs. 5,944 crore (approximately \$1.3 billion) under the consolidated fund in Arunachal Pradesh.²² Significantly, the GDP growth rate of Arunachal Pradesh in 2010 was 0.12 per cent.²³

¹⁸ See "DoNER Minister Review NLCPR/NEC Schemes", *The Morung Express*, April 27, 2011 at <http://www.morungexpress.com/regional/65300.html> (Accessed on June 29, 2011)

¹⁹ See "Hefty Government Investment in Tibet", *China Business News*, May 07, 2011 at <http://cnbusinessnews.com/hefty-govt-investment-in-tibet-from-2006-2010/> (Accessed on May 9, 2011). Also see "World Bank Raises China 2011 GDP forecast, urges tightening", *Reuters*, April 27, 2011 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/28/china-economy-world-bank-idUSB9E7FE02920110428> (Accessed on April 30, 2011). For more on Tibet investments, see Chris Devonshire Ellis, "Investing in Tibet, the Roof of the World", *China Briefing*, April 10, 2010 at <http://www.china-briefing.com/news/2010/08/20/investing-in-tibet-%E2%80%93-the-roof-of-the-world.html> (Accessed on April 13, 2011).

²⁰ See "China Economic News in Brief: C919 runway; Tibet foreign trade, Qingdao throughout, Jiangsu agriculture FDI", *China Daily*, February 02, 2011 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/xinhua/2011-02-01/content_1706047.html (Accessed on February 04, 2011).

²¹ "Tourism Development Arunachal Pradesh" Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, February 2010 at <http://tourism.gov.in/survey/ArunachalPradesh-Feb-10.pdf> (Accessed on March 12, 2011).

²² For more details see "Arunachal State Budget presented", *Arunachal News*, March 19, 2011 at <http://arunachalnews.com/arunachal-state-budget-presented.html> (Accessed on May 4, 2011). "Arunachal Pradesh Gazette, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, March 29, 2010 at <http://india.gov.in/allimpfrms/allacts/3032.pdf> (Accessed on April 15, 2011).

²³ See Also see Reserve Bank of India "Handbook of Statistics for Indian Economy" at <http://www.rbi.org.in/scripts/AnnualPublications.aspx?head=Handbook%20of%20Statistics%20on%20Indian%20Economy> (Accessed on May 03, 2011).

While the state has developed plans to expand the tourist industry, this is not supported by good infrastructure.²⁴

Table 3: Tourist Inflow into Arunachal Pradesh (2006-2008)

Tourist	2006	2007	2008	CAGR (2004 base year)
Domestic	80137	91100	89292	22.47%
International	706	2212	3020	50%-75%
Total	80843	93312	92392	22.5

Source: Tourism Development Arunachal Pradesh" Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, February 2010 at <http://tourism.gov.in/survey/ArunachalPradesh-Feb-10.pdf> (Accessed on March 12, 2011).

Riparian Issues: Riparian issues are significant in Arunachal Pradesh. Most of the rivers of the state have been identified as possessing enormous potential for hydro-power to the tune of 49, 126 megawatt (MW) of electricity.²⁵ Arunachal Pradesh has signed nearly 103 memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with private groups to construct around 103 dams in the state.²⁶ The state has five major river basins, namely the: Kameng River Basin, Subansiri River Basin, Siang River Basin, Dibang River Basin, and Lohit River Basin on which 89 major hydro-electric projects are being planned - as on date (See Figure 3). The largest river is the Siang, which is called the Yarlang Tsangpo in Tibet and the Brahmaputra in Assam. The Brahmaputra flows for around 5, 80, 000 square kms across Tibet, Bhutan, India and Bangladesh. In India, its basin is shared by Assam (36.33 per cent), Arunachal Pradesh (41.88 per cent), Nagaland (5.57 per cent), Sikkim (3.75 per cent), West Bengal (6.47 per cent) and Meghalaya (6.10 per cent).²⁷

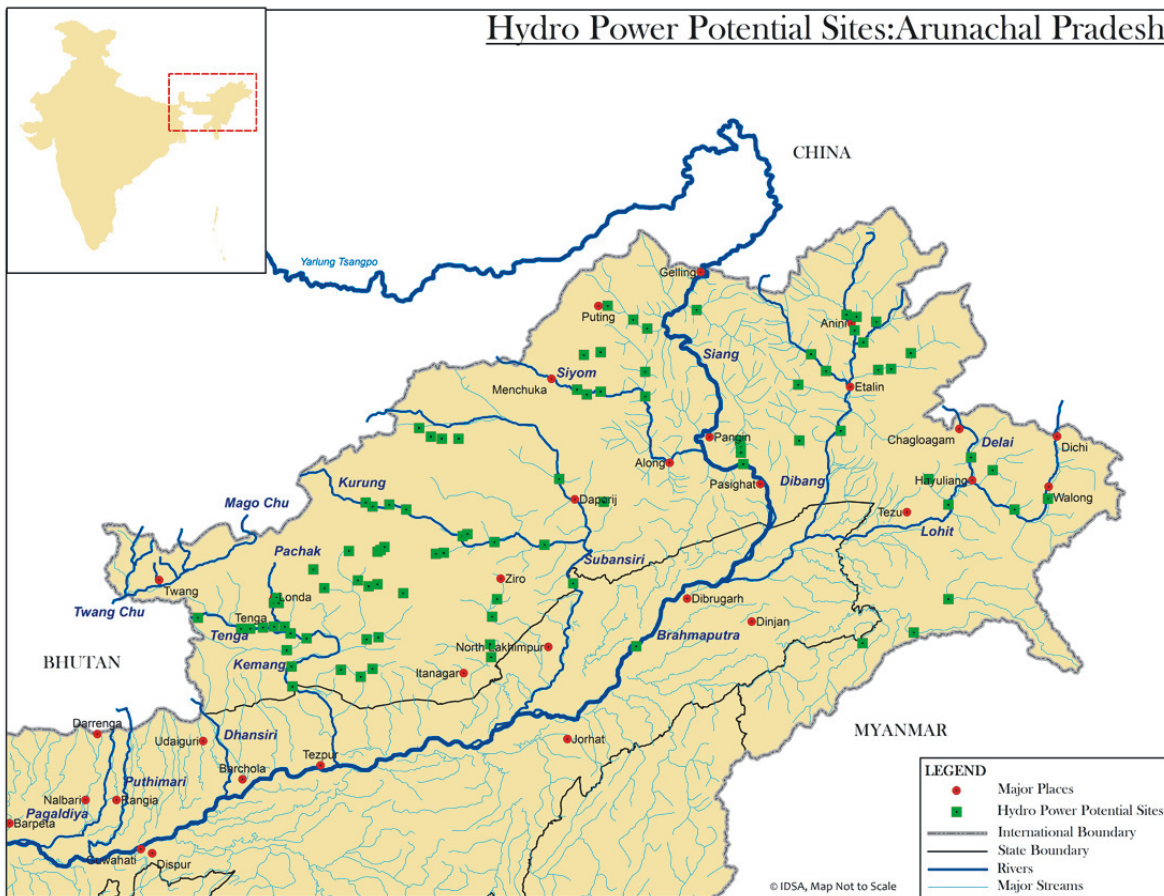
²⁴ "Tourism Development Arunachal Pradesh" n. 21.

²⁵ For more on hydro-electric projects in Arunachal Pradesh, see "Hydro-Electric Power Policy Arunachal Pradesh" at <http://www.arunachalhydro.org.in/pdf/State%20Mega%20Hydro.pdf> (Accessed on May 12, 2011).

²⁶ Subhir Bhaumik, "Damming the Northeast", *The Caravan*, October 2010 at <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/PrintThisStory.aspx?StoryId=513> (Accessed on June 27, 2011)

²⁷ For more on the Siang, see "Lower Siang Hydro-electric project" at http://agropedia.iitk.ac.in/gangapedia/sites/default/files/Lower%20Siang%20Hydroelectric%20Project_Aquatic%20Ecology.pdf (Accessed on June 18, 2011).

Figure 3: Hydro-Power Dams in Arunachal Pradesh



Source: IDSA, New Delhi

Private companies like the Jindal Group, Jaypee Arunachal Power Construction and Reliance have signed MoUs with the Arunachal Pradesh government to develop multi-purpose hydro-electric projects believed to be largest power projects in the country.²⁸ In 2006, an agreement was signed with the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO) for development of about 10,230 MW of hydro power.²⁹ The two most prominent projects are the 2,000 MW Lower Subansiri project, the 405 MW Ranganadi project and the 2,700 MW East Siang project. Others include the Bharali Lift Dam II on the Kameng River Basin with a capacity of 330 MW, the Hegio on the Subansiri with a projected capacity of 250 MW, etc.³⁰

Significantly, local anxieties in Arunachal Pradesh are growing with regard to dams being built by private companies like Jaypee Arunachal Power Construction and Reliance Group.

²⁸ Interview with JP Power Constructions, Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh, March 09, 2011

²⁹ Bikash Singh "Arunachal govt inks hydro-electric project deal with Jindal Group" August 04, 2009, at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/4857492.cms> (Accessed on July 09, 2010).

³⁰ For more on these projects, see "Hydro-Electric Power Policy Arunachal Pradesh", n. 25.

These fears are most apparent with regard to the East Siang River project being built by Jaypee.³¹ Locals argue that this project is 'water storage' and not a "run of the river" project with a dam height of 86m. Consequently, locals assume that if water overflows during the rainy season and falls from such a height, it will lead to massive flooding downstream and population displacement.³² There is also a widespread belief that such projects will involve outsiders as workers in dam sites who will stay back once projects are completed outnumbering the locals thereby threatening local cultures.³³ Interestingly though, while the younger age group - from 20-40 - amongst the local Adi populace in East Siang was against the building of mega dams for fear of outsider influx and environmental degradation, the older generation, age group 60 and above are pro-dams, as they view it as part of a larger development package.³⁴ That said, the paramount view in local discourse is that India is now planning to build dams on Arunachal rivers primarily to counter the Chinese territorial claim.³⁵ Disturbingly, the young people were even ready to take up arms to safeguard their land prevent their rivers from being utilised by the state to build dams against their wishes.³⁶ Similar is the case with the Subansiri project where the dam height of 115m is creating anxieties that during the monsoons, water will overflow and cause flash floods inundating several downstream villages.³⁷ The biggest opposition however is coming from neighbouring Assam, where peasants, students and environmental groups are protesting against this dam because of it being located in one of the most seismically sensitive zones in India.³⁸ Hence, the fear of dam collapse is high in the lower riparian i.e. Assam.

³¹ Most of the dams are viewed as storage dams and not run-of the river. Interviews with Peoples' Unions, local academics, activists, civil society and policy makers in East Siang, West Siang, Lower Subansiri and Upper Subansiri districts of Arunachal Pradesh by author, March 06-17, 2011

³² Interviews with Siang Peoples' Union, Pasighat, March 07, 2011

³³ See "Tribals fear Arunachal dam will extinct its people", *The Hindu*, December 02, 2010 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/states/other-states/article927247.ece> (Accessed on May 12, 2011). Also see Sripad Dharmadhikari, "Massive Dam plans for Arunachal Pradesh", at <http://www.indiatogether.org/2008/feb/env-arunachal.htm> (Accessed on April 01, 2011). For detail view of dams in Arunachal Pradesh, see Independent Peoples' Tribunal on Dams in Arunachal Pradesh, February 03, 2008, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh at http://www.iptindia.org/wp-content/pdf/report/AP_Dam_Report.pdf (Accessed on March 23, 2011).

³⁴ Interview with village elders near Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh, March 07, 2011.

³⁵ Interviews with local civil society groups and individuals in the affected areas in Arunachal Pradesh, March 06- 21, 2011.

³⁶ Interview with local young leaders of communities in Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh, March 06-09, 2011.

³⁷ "Lower Subansiri dam height to prevent disaster", *The Hindu*, November 1, 2010 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article863226.ece> (Accessed on March 03, 2011).

³⁸ Bhaumik, n. 26.



Near Site of Dam Project, East Siang, Arunachal Pradesh, March 2011

Border Security: Border security is another major issue in Arunachal Pradesh.³⁹ The shadow of the 1962 India-China war still looms large in the local political discourse.⁴⁰ At present, the border roads are in bad condition and in some cases non-existent near the LAC in the Mechuka area, and landslides obstruct smooth flow of traffic on the Along-Tuting-Gelling and Tawang-Bumla road ways.⁴¹ Most significantly, military intelligence and the local people pointed out that roads on the Tibet side are good and enabled smooth flow of traffic.⁴² In terms of defence, India has stepped up its troops' presence in the

³⁹ Common view enunciated from interviews by author with policy makers, security personnel, and civil society in Pasighat, Along, Daporiju, Ziro, Tato, Tuting-Gelling area, Mechuka, and Hari village in Ziro, and Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, March 2011.

⁴⁰ Interview with political officers from the 1962 period; village elders in Mechuka affected by the Chinese aggression in 1962.

⁴¹ Field visit by author to these areas in March 2011.

⁴² Interview with military intelligence, Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, March 17, 2011.

border⁴³ but the state of the roads makes logistics and supply lines difficult to maintain. The dangerous air-routes through the mountains also render it difficult for air-traffic to flow in this treacherous mountainous terrain. The Chinese concept of 'jointness' in its military⁴⁴ is not visible on the Indian side of the border. Troops stationed in the border areas state that the best way to handle the India-China border issue and the claim on Arunachal Pradesh is through confidence building measures.⁴⁵



Bridges to border villages, Arunachal Pradesh, March 2011

⁴³ Estimated strength at around 120, 000 troops stationed in Arunachal Pradesh. This also includes the 2009 announcement by Governor of Arunachal Pradesh J J Singh about two new mountain divisions raised for Arunachal comprising 25, 000 to 30, 000 each. Interviews with military personnel in Arunachal Pradesh, March 2011. Air support envisioned from Tezpur, Assam where there around two Sukhoi 30 MK1 squadrons. The distance from Tezpur to the Tawang is 345kms and from Tawang to LAC is around 60 kms. A fighter jet Sukhoi 30 MK1 will cover the distance to over 16,500ft in less than 15 minutes given its cruise speed: 860 mph (1380 km/h) at 32780 ft (10000 m) and 1350kmph over sea level. Based on field inputs in Tawang, March 2011. Field observation by author, March 2011. Also see Indian Military.org Arunachal Pradesh at <http://www.indian-military.org/tag/arunachal%20pradesh.html> (Accessed on March 13, 2011). "India decides to step up military presence in Arunachal Pradesh", Arunachal News at <http://arunachalnews.com/india-decides-to-step-up-military-presence-in-arunachal.html> (Accessed on March 12, 2011).

⁴⁴ See China National Defense in 2010" Information Office of the State Council, The Peoples' Republic of China, March 2011 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-03/31/c_13806851.htm (Accessed on April 24, 2011).

⁴⁵ Interview with 190 Mountain Brigade stationed in Tawang for securing the LAC on the Indian side at Bumla, March 19, 2011. Also interview with army division stationed at Along for LAC security, Tuting-Gelling, Arunachal Pradesh, March 09, 2011. Interview with Indo-Tibetan Border Police, Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh, March 15, 2011.



Road to Mechuka, Near LAC, Arunachal Pradesh, March 2011



Road in Upper Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh March 2011

Way Ahead

Despite these challenges, there is a way forward for better future in Arunachal Pradesh. This road-map could be based on six pillars.

First, bad governance is not due to the lack of funds. In comparison to other states in India, Arunachal Pradesh's per capita income is favourable (See Annexure I). However, for long term prosperity and self reliance, Arunachal Pradesh needs to harness its own resources. There are three ways of doing this:-

- i. Utilise its large forest cover, incidentally the highest in India. Out of 83, 743 square kms, nearly 68, 847 square kms (82. 21 per cent) of the state is under forest cover.⁴⁶ Certain scenic spots, besides Tawang, like Ziro, Mechuka, Tuting, Along, Dibang, etc. should be made tourist friendly and easily reachable.
- ii. Curtail local corruption which is massive⁴⁷ by vigilant central oversight. The Arunachal Pradesh Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 1989 is a good mechanism to prevent illegal activities.⁴⁸ In 2010, the former Arunachal Pradesh chief minister, Gegong Apang was arrested following a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on his alleged involvement in a Rs 1,000 crore Public Distribution System (PDS) scam.
- iii. The Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2005 is an excellent way to stay informed on development schemes, the allocation of funds, and their implementation process. Arunachal Pradesh has one of the highest number of RTI applications. It is also a sound mechanism to curtail corruption.
- iv. Generate resources from local handicrafts and industry.

Second, there has to be a better public relations mechanism between the state institutions and the local population with regard to hydro-power generation. Right now, the approach appears 'top down' and hence there is a ground swell of local resistance to dams. If there is better communication on the benefits of dams for the state in terms of resource generation and financial self reliance, coupled with sound information on environmental safety checks, the local people will welcome it.

Third, local people are wary about the Chinese claim. A certain degree of assurance and transparency with regard to India's defence preparedness vis-à-vis border security must be communicated to the people to create a sense of security.

⁴⁶ See "Hydro-Electric Power Policy Arunachal Pradesh", n. 25.

⁴⁷ Tom Simai, "Corruption A Way of Life", *Arunachal News*, August 20, 2010 at <http://arunachalnews.com/corruption-%E2%80%93-a-way-of-life.html> (Accessed on June 12, 2011)

⁴⁸ "The Arunachal Pradesh Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 1989" at <http://www.lawsofindia.org/statelaw/1482/TheArunachalPradeshPreventionofCorruptionAmendmentAct1989.html> (Accessed June 23, 2011).

Fourth, incentivise deputy commissioners who perform best in terms of district development by openly acknowledging their efforts and creating an award system of recognition for the best developed district.

Fifth, Arunachal Pradesh has an immense potential for eco-tourism. Adventure sports, mountaineering, camping and rafting can be promoted to enable tourists to fully enjoy the state's natural beauty. Besides the Tawang monastery, there are several other monasteries which could draw tourists with proper infrastructure development. Serious thought should also be given to remove obstacles to tourism like the PAP as is being done this year -on an experimental basis - for a period of one year in Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland.

Sixth, connectivity to Arunachal Pradesh needs to be improved across the international border. The old Ledo Road also called the Stillwell Road during World War II connecting Assam (via Margherita and Lekhapani) and Arunachal Pradesh (Lisok and Pangshau Pass on the border) via Myanmar to Kunming in China should be looked at as a realistic option for trade connectivity between these two countries and the Northeast.

In conclusion, it must be stated that China is not attractive to the local people, Indian democracy is. However, the inefficient structures of the Indian state do democracy a disservice in such a strategic state when they fail to provide basic amenities to people on a daily basis like health, education, power-supply, roads and drinking water. There is also the urgent need for better perception management. At present, there are several myths doing the rounds with regard to New Delhi's designs for Arunachal Pradesh which are interpreted through Delhi's paranoia about China. People of Arunachal Pradesh need to feel that the Indian state exists for them and cares for their overall progress. The road to a better future should start from this premise.



Mechuka, Arunachal Pradesh, March 2011

Acknowledgement: I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi for supporting my field trip to Arunachal Pradesh in March 2011. I also thank Dr. Jabin Jacob, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi and Mirza Rehman, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi for being such a wonderful team during the field trip. Credit for the excellent pictures goes to Jabin. I also thank everyone in the districts of Arunachal Pradesh that we visited for their valuable insights.