

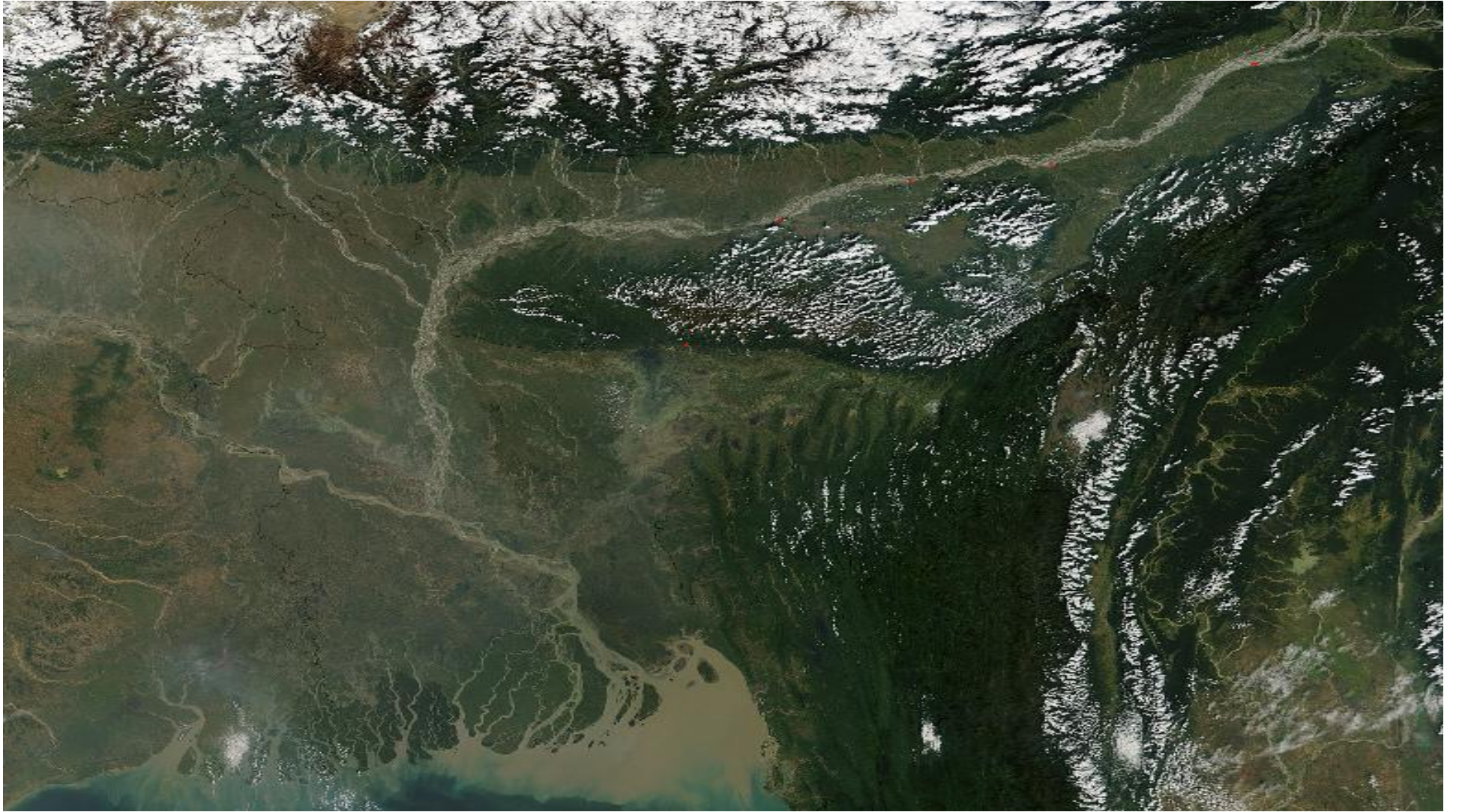
Infrastructure Development in Northeast India: Examining Inequality and Exclusion in the Development Promise of Progress and Prosperity

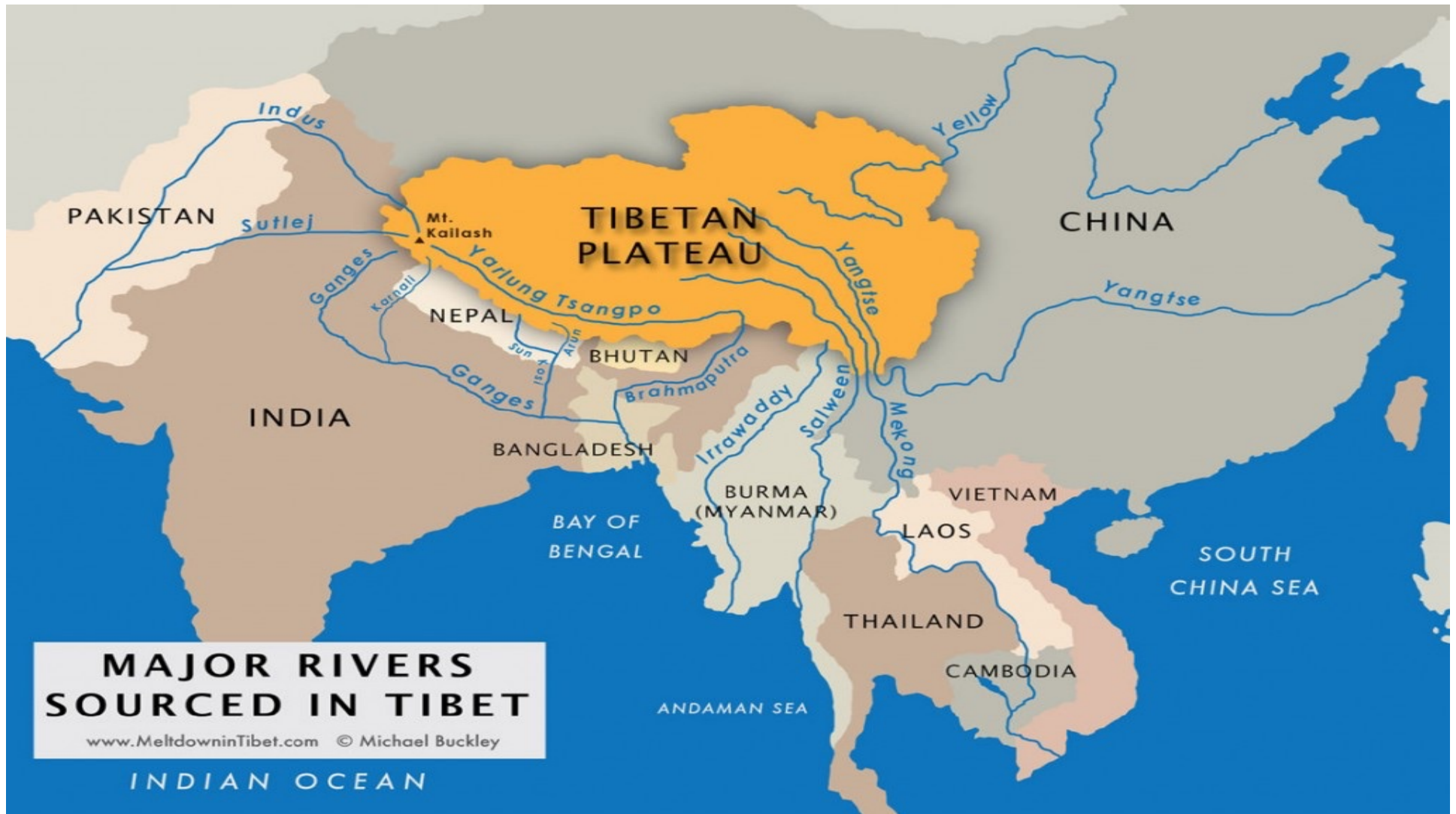
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Transboundary Spaces and Borders

- The understanding of borders as territorial compartments, as fixed drawn lines on maps, the territorial trap (Agnew 1994)
- The notion of fixity of territorial borders, viewed almost as being natural formations, and not artificial (Anderson 1995)
- Nation-states having absolute sovereign territorial power, the concept of ‘bordered power containers’ (Giddens 1985)
- The transboundary spaces and flows of rivers as opposed to the fixities of the territorial bordered lines of nation-states

Transboundary Spaces and Borders

- The contiguity of transboundary spaces and its flows as being natural in a larger physical and geographical context
- Transboundary rivers are excellent examples of the flows versus fixed notion in territoriality and nation-state borders
- The container concept is challenged by geopolitical realities owing from the transboundary ecological interdependencies
- The vulnerabilities and interdependencies in transboundary spaces are of social, political, economic, ecological nature



Northeast India: Borders/Development

- The eight provinces of Northeast India shares over 90 per cent of its borders with India's neighbouring countries
- It has traditionally been a hub of trade and migration routes in the larger South and Southeast Asian region and beyond
- Communities in Northeast India inhabit across transboundary spaces, with informal exchanges and flows
- The development of Northeast India has been positioned as part of India's Look/Act East Policy towards Southeast Asia

Look/Act East through Northeast India

- Northeast India as the pivot of India's engagement with Southeast Asia and East Asia through the continental route
- A foreign policy of India deployed to usher in economic and social development to its frontier borderlands/communities
- An uptick in large infrastructure and connectivity projects in the region in line with Look/Act East Policy development
- The 'Securitization through Development' agenda of New Delhi in Northeast India through the Look/Act East Policy

What is Sustainable Development?

- Development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising needs/wants of future generations
- Sustainable Development recognizes that growth must be inclusive and environmentally and ecologically sound
- Such growth will reduce poverty, inequality, build shared peace and prosperity for both present and future generations
- Keywords: inclusive growth, environment, ecology, poverty, inequality, peace, prosperity, present and future generations

Northeast India: Vision 2020

- The ‘Peace, Progress and Prosperity in the Northeastern Region: Vision 2020’, a policy document, unveiled in 2008
- Outlining the development policies, aimed at reducing the infrastructural and connectivity deficit in the region by 2020
- A slew of big infrastructure and connectivity projects were announced by New Delhi in various parts of Northeast India
- An attempt to examine the larger trajectory of development projects in Northeast India, ten years since the Vision 2020

Connecting Peace Progress Prosperity

- In the context of Northeast India, what is the larger vision to connect peace, progress and prosperity by the government?
- Is the development vision in Northeast India inclusive, participatory, environmentally and ecologically conscious?
- Is the core aspect of sustainability and ecological contiguity of transboundary spaces factored in the development goals?
- Is the core aspect of inequality and unequal spaces within Northeast India factored in the development vision/projects?

Connecting Peace Progress Prosperity

- The connections between peace, progress and prosperity has been portrayed in a linear narrative in Northeast India
- Such narratives of development cannot hop, skip and jump the core questions of inequality among various communities
- It cannot bypass questions of long-term ecological sustainability of development infrastructure/ interventions
- Infrastructure development leapfrogging sustainability and inequality can lead to new patterns of conflict in the region



Sustainable Development Chokepoints

- Infrastructure and Connectivity can serve as Sustainable Development Chokepoints, if core questions not addressed
- Conditions where local communities are not able to meaningfully participate in decision-making on such issues
- Prior consultation with local communities on major infrastructure and connectivity projects has not been a norm
- The projects are pushed through, the community comes in to the picture only if it comes as their opposition to projects

SAVE

BRAHMAPUTRA

FROM Chinese Conspiracy



Jana Jagriti
Regd. No. DAR/2015

2008

Strategic vs Socio-Ecological Spaces

- The framing and narrative of national security threats/ considerations on infrastructure and connectivity projects
- Such a framing helps push through such mega-projects in borderlands, making for bypassing local community voices
- Northeast India is effectively framed as a strategic space as opposed to the socio-ecological spaces of its communities
- This strategic construction of spaces in Northeast India effect conditions for sustainable development chokepoints



Development Lag and Impetus

- The framing of the development lag Northeast India has seen over past decades as requiring development impetus
- A rushed sense of infrastructural development and connectivity projects in Northeast India to address such lag
- The bypassing of rigorous environmental and social impact assessments of large infrastructure and connectivity projects
- The invocation of the national security discourse effects the bypassing of democratic public-hearings with communities



The Coupling of Unequal Spaces

- The development lag in Northeast India over the past decades has resulted in huge inequalities within the region
- Infrastructure projects, bridges, roads have led to coupling of unequal spaces and communities in Northeast India
- This has the potential to create new patterns of conflict in the region, of deprivation and lopsided development pattern
- This piecemeal/unequal manner of development has led to a sense of infrastructural chaos and futility in Northeast India



Democratic Deficit in Northeast India

- There is an overwhelming sense of democratic deficit among communities in Northeast India on decision-making
- The coupling of unequal spaces through infrastructure development cannot by itself talk to the linked communities
- The national security discourse invokes communities to share a national burden, forego democratic decision-making
- It means undertaking ecological risks, loss of sacred spaces, even forego participation in the development process/gains



Meanders of Sustainable Development

- Infrastructure development and connectivity projects will be effective with a development vision linked to communities
- Such a development vision cannot be linear, but meander the social, ecological and political landscape of the region
- The development vision has to imitate the physical, ecological and socio-cultural landscape of the larger region
- The development vision has to involve communities in a participative manner with prior consultation as a basic norm



Sustainable Infrastructural Scaffolding

- The lack of a sustainable connected vision of infrastructure development has led to pickled roads and sun-dried dams
- Social, ecological, political, economic and institutional scaffolding for infrastructure development to be meaningful
- New Delhi cannot join A and B together, hope infrastructure and connectivity will ensure prosperity in Northeast India
- Reconciliation of development lag and resultant inequalities will allow communities to absorb the development impetus



