



Border Expedition Report

Tawang & Walong, Arunachal Pradesh

13-16 August 2023



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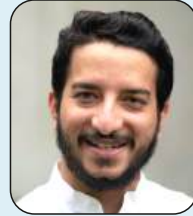
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3. **Shruti Pandey** – She is Research Scholar at University of Hyderabad, Telangana. She is strengthening the student wing of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh named ABVP from past 7 years in Telangana, leading several initiatives and bearing various responsibilities.



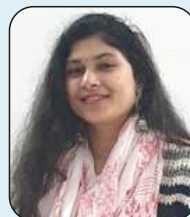
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5. **Anmol Mahajan** - She is a research fellow at India Foundation with a focus on the study of the psychological aspects behind terrorism and radicalisation. She completed her Masters in Clinical Psychology and BA (Honours) in Applied Psychology from Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Noida.



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2. **Akshay Nayak** - He is a research scholar in IIT Roorkee and currently pursuing his Ph.D. on 'Sustainable Development of Inland Water Transport in India'. Sustainability, Air Quality, Infrastructure Planning, Climate Change, EIA-SIA, SDG based Economic Growth are his core areas of expertise. His interests also include Geo-Economics and Political Economy.



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3. **Shruthi Thumbri** – She is a Social Media Specialist and has an experience of 6 years in the field of Public Relations and Social Media. She has vast experience in building and maintaining the public relations of her clients and has developed PR campaigns and media relations strategies.



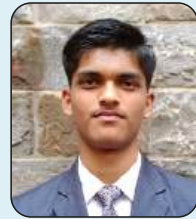
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4. **Divyanshu Jindal** - He is currently a Research Associate at NatStrat, India and a Non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute, Washington DC. He completed his Master's in Diplomacy, Law and Business from OPJGU, India and B.Tech in Computer Science from SRM University, India.



5. **Shashvat Singh** - He is a management consultant. His latest assignment has been with the Indian PAC Consulting where he led a campaign to onboard one per cent of Bihar's population as founding members of a governance reform movement. In his previous roles, Shashvat has served the Indian Government and the UN.



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6. **Soham Ketkar** – He is pursuing undergraduate degree at St. Stephen's College. Throughout his academic journey, he has developed a genuine passion for subjects such as Sanskrit, history, and global studies.



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7. **Suryanarayanan Dinakaran** - He is an accomplished professional known for his diverse expertise and achievements. As the Founder and Director of Webronic Industries Private Limited, a renowned software company, and the Co-Founder of Things at web Sweden AB, he exemplifies his entrepreneurial drive and global influence.

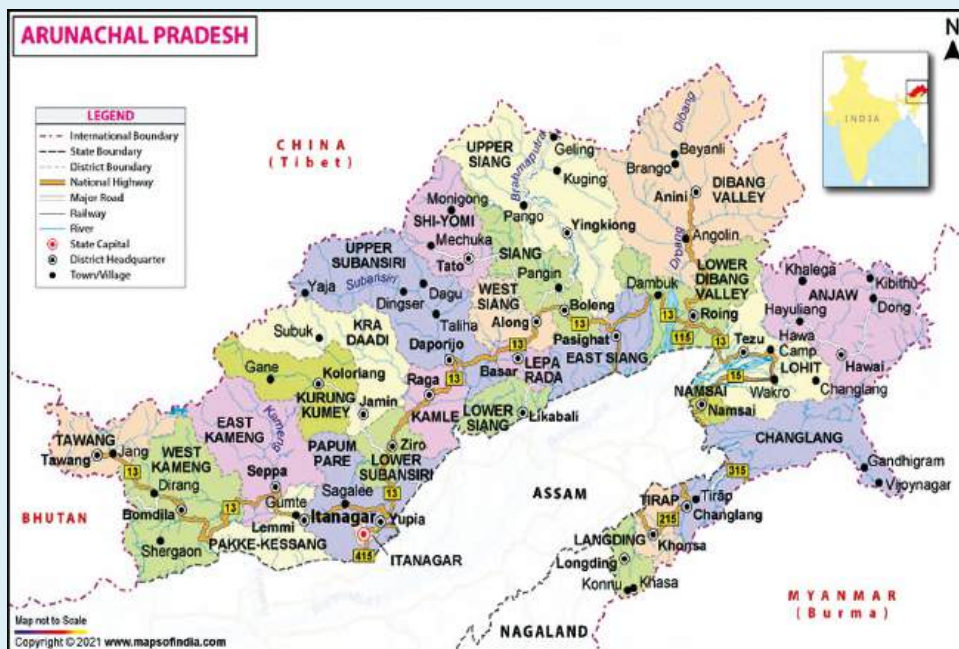


Introduction

As a prelude to the 12th edition of the annual Young Thinkers' Meet held in Guwahati, Assam, India Foundation organised the “Border Expeditions Programme” for a group of 14 young delegates, selected by the Foundation, to visit & explore border areas in Tawang and Kibithu- Walong, Arunachal Pradesh from 13 August 2023 to 16 August 2023. The following report is detailed account of the border expedition that took place in Tawang & Walong.

The Tawang Group consisted of seven members – Shashwat Kapoor, Chitra Shekhawat, Shruti Pandey, Anmol Mahajan, Ayadoure Stalin, Shivani Badgaiyan and Sudhakar Upadhyay.

The Walong Group consisted of seven members – Prajwal Busta, Akshay Nayak, Shruthi Thumbri, Divyanshu Jindal, Shasvat Singh, Soham Ketkar, and Suryanarayanan Dinakaran, who came together from different vocations and parts of India, reflecting India's diversity.





Border Expedition Report

Group-I : Tawang

A region of pristine beauty and cultural wealth, Tawang, is located in the tranquil Himalayan region of Arunachal Pradesh. Being a border district, Tawang is an important geopolitical trijunction having the confluence of three sovereign nations, being bordered by Chinese occupied Tibet in the north and Bhutan in the south west. This sparsely populated district has a population density of 23 people per square kilometer and has a total population of 49,977 according to the 2011 census.

Tawang, the name in itself is self-explanatory, it is made up of two words, Ta meaning horse and Wang meaning search. Hence Tawang meaning the place searched by a horse. Legend has it that it was the sixth Dalai Lama's horse which stopped here and hence discovered this place after which the construction of a monastery was commissioned. The 1962 Indo-China war has been an important turning point in its history, the impact of which we have tried to cover in this report.

Cultural & Historical Background

The culture of Tawang is highly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism. There are several monasteries in Tawang which are called Gompas. The Monpa people make up the majority of Tawang's population. Most of the tribals follow Buddhism. However, some continue to practice the original Animistic traditions followed by their ancestors.

Tawang Monastery was founded in 1680-81, named as Galden Namgye Lhatse Monastery which translates as 'celestial paradise in a clear night'. It is the largest monastery in India, second largest in the world and the oldest monastery in Asia. It belongs to the Gelug School of Mahayana Buddhism. The Gelug School was introduced in the region by Lama Thangston Gyalpo of Tibet, the disciple of the first Dalai Lama. The monastery has been the centre of Buddhist studies and cultural practices. The monastery was the center and the township gradually grew around the monastery, as Buddhism established firmer roots in the region.



The customary law in the Tawang region dictates that if a Buddhist family has three sons, the middle son ought to pursue monkhood, therefore the majority of monks in Tawang monastery are middle sons of their families. There also exists a system where the land owned by the monastery is cultivated by the local people, and the produce from it is divided evenly between the monastery and the family. This shows the connection shared between the people and the monastery, which acts as a centre of religious, social, and economic importance. The monastery is also a cultural hub that promotes craftsmanship like Thangka painting, wood carving, and Monshug paper making. Mon comes from Monpa and Shug means paper, loosely translating to “paper of the Monpas”.

The Tawang Monastery stands like a fortress guarding the valley of Tawang Chu. In olden days, the monks were also trained in combat, and the strategic location and architecture of the monastery served as an excellent military post.

Thus, the Tawang region is an example of Buddhism's influence to absorb and integrate native faiths to create prosperity and unity. The local people follow a culture which has integrated Buddhism with animist elements of faith.

During our visits to the Officers' Mess of 30th Battalion of SSB in Dirang and 38th Battalion of SSB in Tawang, we saw the paintings of Taradevi, female Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism, known as the mother of liberation; Nagarjuna, the proponent of Mahayana Buddhism and a figurine of dragon which symbolizes as the protector of Dharma.

The War Memorial in Tawang was built to commemorate the Indian martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the 1962 Indo-China War. The Army personnel explained the importance of how Buddhism was adapted in the architecture of the Memorial. The memorial is designed using Buddhist cultural and architectural elements including prayer wheels and other Buddhist relics. Some of the ornamental elements in the memorial have also been donated by the local population of Tawang as tribute. It is a 40 feet high memorial and the stupa is called Namgyan Chortel. The War Memorial is surrounded by the National Flag, the Army Flag, the Air Force Flag and 27 other Flags of the regiments that fought in the Indo-China war. The memorial was built in the memory of 2,420 members of the armed forces who laid down their lives in Kameng district during the Indo-China war. The stupa depicted the Sun and Moon which symbolize wisdom and compassion as an emblem of harmony. The visit to the



memorial was followed by a light and sound show, which was a very enlightening experience.

We also encountered the influence of Sanskrit in the Bhoti (or Bodhi) language used in Tibetan script of Buddhism that is practiced in the Tawang region. This language is based on Indic script. Bhoti is one of the most important languages of Central Asia. Bhoti falls under the Sino-Tibetan language group. It is an indigenous Himalayan language extending from Ladakh to Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Sikkim to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh. It is an offshoot of Sanskrit and its 'devanagari script' was created by the Tibetan scholar and minister Thonmi Sambhota in the 7th century AD. The Bodhi language is used in their scripts and flags and in the monasteries' buildings as well.

Another interesting observation for us was the local people's faith in the defence folklore. We experienced the same when we visited the Jaswant Garh Memorial, located in the Nuranang district of Arunachal Pradesh, 25 kms away from Tawang. It was built in the honour of Jaswant Singh Rawat, an Indian rifleman of 4 Garhwal Rifles, Uttarakhand. It has a temple-like structure and is dotted with a camouflage pattern all over the memorial. It was captivating to experience this in various practices still followed to this day such as the fact that, even now, the rifle man's shoes are polished every day and his bed is also made daily. Tourists even drop their letters at the memorial site in order to fulfill their wishes as an act of devotion and faith. The conviction behind the faith of the people in our fallen soldiers is a result of immense love and respect from the locals of the region.



Role of Local Community in Tawang

The word community has many definitions but in case of Tawang, the word has meaning in two contexts, the first being in sociological terms as, an organised set of people living in a physically defined locality with following characteristics:

- Commonality of interests, attitudes, and values
- A general sense of belonging to a unified, socially integrated group
- Members' self-identification as community members
- Some systems of communication, governance, education, and commerce.

The second, is in behavioral ecological terms i.e., in the form of a unit comprising all the animal and plant species that coexist and are necessary for each other's survival. Thus, a community includes predator and prey species as well as the various plants that animals need for food, shelter, and so forth.

The people of Tawang are hard-working, ambitious and harmonious. They pride themselves as Indians, they pride themselves as members of their village and they pride themselves on maintenance of old traditions of their lands.

Often when we hear people say we are proud Indian citizens, it is in the context of an achievement of our country but in Tawang, the ones who had the flag of India in front of their houses (everyone) and even their makeshift shops, spoke about being Indian in the context of their responsibility as citizens of India. The locals of this border district, have the ambition to achieve for India and their patriotism was reflected not only in their words but also their actions.

The hardworking people of Tawang have two-fold ambition. First, they want to develop their villages and ensure prosperity for their people and second, they want to make their village an example for what can be achieved when everyone works together for a unified goal.

During our interactions with the locals of Tawang, we noted that, the following moral values stood out the most in their conversations with us and in their cultural expressions.

1. **Unity:**

This value is reflected in the way homes emerge in villages and how they are sold. There is no system of land ownership in Tawang at least not in the same sense as city dwellers of the rest of India would be used to. Here the land of the village is common for every villager, which means that as a villager one doesn't have to buy



a plot in their village to make a house, they can simply start building the house in any vacant land in the village and once the house is made, it belongs to that family. This property can then be inherited across generations but when it is to be sold, permission is required from the village elder and once granted, the profits from this sale are equally distributed amongst all the villagers.

The homes in these villages are made to withstand the environment of that region and sometimes are even stronger than government made housings because these houses are built by the village locals themselves. No laborers from outside are involved. It is the village members, who go to the nearby cities and bring the raw materials to the upper hills and they themselves start building their houses, shops and other buildings from scratch.

2. Security

The locals of Tawang state that their district has one of the lowest crime rates amongst all other districts and this is not an empty claim. According to the Arunachal Pradesh Police website in the entire year of 2022, they received only 1 FIR for burglary. There were no murder attempts, no kidnappings and no child abuse cases in Tawang. Of the 27 FIRs filed in 2022, 15 were cases of adultery. There were 3 FIRs recorded for heinous crimes in the district in the entire year.

3. Equality

Another matter of pride for the locals of Tawang is that women play an important role in every aspect of decision making. As per our observations, the majority of the shops that cater to tourists and travelers were being run by women. According to the 2011 census, In Tawang Notified Town, the Female Sex Ratio is of 340 compared to the state average of 938. However, the Child Sex Ratio in Tawang is around 991 compared to Arunachal Pradesh state average of 972. As per an analysis from an older report by Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development: Guwahati, commissioned by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India, this discrepancy could be explained by migration of Male population from nearby villages in search of job opportunities.

Though in light of our observations the above statistics might be outdated and a clearer picture will be available in the data from the upcoming census. From a cultural point of view segregation of males and females is not prevalent in Tawang. The same report for instance conducted a survey taking a sample of 25 villages and found the sex ratio to be 853 at the time.



This is not to say that there are no issues in Tawang. There is a substantial gap between male and female literacy rates in Tawang (Further discussed in the upcoming section on education). Similarly, when it comes to inheritance of homes, the general norm is inheritance by sons only.

4. **Ambition**

The people of Tawang are highly ambitious and creative. This was reflected in the exhibitions they arranged in Tawang city during the Independence Day celebrations. The displays varied from awareness drives to creative scientific innovations. The highlights of the displays were the all women self-help groups promoting high quality foods and organic products, the display of local handicrafts and the young students spreading awareness on ways to check authenticity of products and their prices as well as ways to approach the local consumer courts in case people face related issues. The most amount of innovation was observed in organic agriculture with the highest quality vegetables displayed for all to see.

Ranjay K. Singh in the year 2013 published a paper for Indian Council of Agricultural Research, in which the interconnectedness between ecocultural knowledge and subsistence livelihoods of Monpa tribal communities in the West Kameng and Tawang districts were explored. He found in this research that Paisang (Oak, *Quercus griffithi*) trees play an important role enhancing agricultural crops in this region and in turn every village has customs surrounding it. For instance, in Namsu village, before anyone is allowed to collect Paisang leaves, the oldest Paisang tree is worshiped. All the villagers participate in this puja (spiritual function) and offer milk, fruits and other food to the spirit of the tree. This spiritual practice is designed to avoid conflict and to promote an equitable sharing of this resource among the users. Women of the village collect the dry Paisang leaves from both private and community forests. The leaves are then stored in the agricultural fields in specially made bamboo structures. Similarly, as previously mentioned, we observed that people from various communities in the city also maintain their animistic traditions such as the worship of sun and moon. In this way we noted that the biodiversity of the area within which the people lived became the center of the way the communities work together and function. This was also visible in the importance and care people put into their home gardens which resulted in striking views of houses with balconies full of healthy and colorful flowers in every corner of the city.



Education

With a literacy rate of 60.60% (2011 Census), the district still has a significant scope of improvement in the education sector. With a great number of students moving out of the district for higher education and a single college offering a single course for higher education in the entire district, the government urgently needs to attach importance to growth in the education sector. The expansion of the Higher Education Sector is important to ensure a qualitative and meaningful addition to the society.

The government has put in efforts to reduce literacy rate gaps since 2011 and this is reflected in the present Male-Female student ratio in Tawang schools as per the district websites, where, in 2017-18, the percentage of female students was 55% and 44% that of male students.

Primary Education

- The presence of a Kendriya Vidyalay and Sainik School have undoubtedly had a positive effect in the primary education sector.
- The opening of Navodaya Vidyalay for the underprivileged families could be an add on.
- Opening of more smart schools and adding vocational courses like coding and digital design can broaden the horizon for the students and open doors to a diverse range of employment opportunities.

Higher Education

- Opening of higher education institutes will also yield fruitful results for the Higher Education landscape of the Tawang district. According to Dorjee Khandu Government College's (the only college in Tawang) official website, "It has been established in the year 2016 by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh on 16th June 2016. The college got approval for the commencement of its first Academic Session on 17th May 2017 and commenced from July 2017. The college is temporarily affiliated to Rajiv Gandhi University (Central University), Rono Hills, Doimukh" and the only course offered is a Bachelor in Arts.
- Various focus areas need to be identified and worked upon. These can be skill development training programs according to the requirements of the defence forces.



- Tourism related skill training could be helpful in research and development of the area in terms of the travel and hospitality sector. \
- Specialised training programs in local and traditional handicrafts could be helpful in preserving and promotion of the unique culture while providing livelihood to local people.
- With the Tawang monastery being the ancient institution for education, there is a need to set up modern institutions that can prepare individuals to be ready to cater to the current information-driven global economy.
- Given Tawang's climate and geographical location, more importance needs to be laid on preparing students for location independent jobs, hence more focus on the digital sector is needed.

Healthcare

The traditional medicinal system called Sowa-Rigpa, followed in high altitude mountains of himalayas, prevalent in Ladakh and Sikkim is also practiced in Tawang. The phrase Sowa-Rigpa originates from the Bhoti language and translates to "knowledge of healing". It is an ancient Indian medical system thought to have developed around 2500 years ago gaining popularity in the Trans-Himalayan during the eighth century CE region as it was propounded by Lord Buddha. It has since been propagated and transmitted through teacher-student-lineage (including family lineage) in the secular and monastic contexts of India's Trans Himalayan area.

While healthcare in Tawang has made progress, there's a need for continued investment in infrastructure, telemedicine, and community health programs to bridge the healthcare gap in this remote Himalayan region.

Despite its isolation, efforts have been made to improve healthcare accessibility in Tawang. The high altitude brings with it various challenges. Our group encountered the challenge of acclimatisation during our climb to Tawang as well. What was most notable to us at the time was the lack of availability of basic medical equipment such as a thermometer in the region. Even ORS was available in a select few clinics.

Novel community health programs need to be fostered in the region, including health education and preventive measures. Voluntary Organizations and NGOs can collaborate with the local government to raise awareness about hygiene, nutrition, and disease prevention. Such interventions are required to monitor the health indicators required to study disease prevalent amongst Tribal - Sickel Cell Anaemia, Tuberculosis, and Neonatal ailments.



Economy

Tawang's economy is a lovely tapestry of tradition and development, similar to the prayer flags that flutter in the Himalayan breeze. It is the tale of a place that upholds its traditions while reaching for the stars, where the economy thrives amidst the majestic mountains and serene monasteries.

Hidden beneath the mesmerizing vistas and the age-old monasteries of Tawang is a continuously evolving, vibrant and thriving economy. Like the glacial rivers' ever-flowing waters, Tawang's economy functions as a fusion of tradition and modernity.

Agriculture and livestock husbandry have always been the mainstays of Tawang's rural economy. The lifeblood of its residents has been the lush meadows and verdant valleys. But Tawang has changed just as much as the rest of the world.

Major Pillars of Tawang's Economy

- **Agriculture:** Agriculture still plays a significant role in Tawang's identity despite the diversification. Potatoes, maize, wheat, and barley may all be grown in the area thanks to its good soil. The apple orchards have become well-known for producing premium apples that are in high demand in local markets. The promotion of organic farming by the government has raised the value of Tawang's agricultural products even further.
- **Tourism - A Booming Industry:** The growth in tourism is acting as a catalyst for economic growth in Tawang. Travelers from all over the world have been drawn to the enchanting vistas, which include the renowned Tawang Monastery. The most recent statistics show that Tawang saw an astonishing 15% rise in tourist arrivals over the previous year, considerably boosting its GDP.
- **Hydropower - Producing Energy and Income:** The hydropower industry is yet another economic engine. The swift rivers of Tawang are now used to produce sustainable energy. The Tawang-I and Tawang-II, two significant hydropower projects in the area, have not only made the area self-sustaining but also brought in a sizable amount of money for the local administration. These initiatives have greatly contributed to the creation of jobs and the improvement of the infrastructure.



Challenges and the Road Ahead

Tawang's economic development has its share of difficulties. Logistical challenges arise from poor connectivity, particularly during cold winters. Furthermore, protecting the delicate environment is crucial since excessive infrastructure development and unchecked rise in tourism could jeopardize the area's natural beauty. But these difficulties also present opportunities. With better connectivity, Tawang can draw in more investors and diversify its economy further. Utilizing sustainable tourism strategies, one may make sure that the influx of tourists benefits both the environment and the local community.

When we look at Tawang's economy, we witness a fusion of history and modernity, where historical practices and untouched natural beauty coexist with the possibility of economic expansion. Tawang can continue to maintain a balance between preserving its rich past and seizing the potential of a contemporary economy with careful planning.

Strategic Significance of Tawang

Tawang is not only geographically, culturally significant for India but also strategically important, being a border district with China. Ever since the 1962 war, China has continuously daydreamed of Arunachal Pradesh becoming a part of its own territory.

If we see on the map of India, after Sikkim, Arunachal's Tawang is the second-best option as a passage for the Chinese to enter the northeastern region of India. The expansionist approach of China from the very beginning has been a major hindrance towards maintaining the peace along the LAC. Tawang holds a tactical location as it is just 45 to 50 kms away from Bum La Pass, a peacekeeping border between India and China. Being such a crucial location, there is heavy deployment of Indian Army, Sashastra Seema Bal, ITBP & a small unit of Air Force in Tawang.



Figure 1: India China Border (P.C : Newsbharati)



Factors that enhance the Indian Defence capabilities in Tawang

1. Number of trained troops with advanced weapons and artillery.
2. Infrastructure and communication.
3. Intelligence network
4. Relation of personnel with local residents and coordination with local administration.
5. Government policies for bordering areas and for soldiers.

If we look at above mentioned points from the post-independence era till emergence of the present-day Government, we can observe that we were on the backfoot before the emergence of the present Government in the Centre in 2014. But today's picture is different. Today India's image is soaring on all these points.

During the expedition, we got the opportunity to interact with Sashastra Seema Bal at Tawang and the Indian Army at Bum La Pass, we found the jawans to be filled with more confidence, courage and fervor than ever because present day Government policies have reinforced more confidence in them. They were firm on their belief that today's policies are much stronger than earlier.

In 2013, the then Defense Minister Shri A.K. Antony had given a statement to the Parliament in New Delhi, regarding securing the border of the country. In his statement he said, “Independent India has a policy for many years that the best defense is not to develop the border. Underdeveloped border is safer than a developed border. So, for many years, there was no construction of roads, airfields, or anything in the border areas.” From this statement of the then Government's approach towards border security and from the feedback received from the army and paramilitary during the border expedition, it is crystal clear that the paradigm of ground reality has shifted.

The Border Road Organisation is doing exceptionally well in constructing roads along the border. Also, construction of an all-weather tunnel at Sela Pass to Tezpur, Assam will solve the problem of connectivity which arises due to climatic conditions. This will surely take our border security to another level.



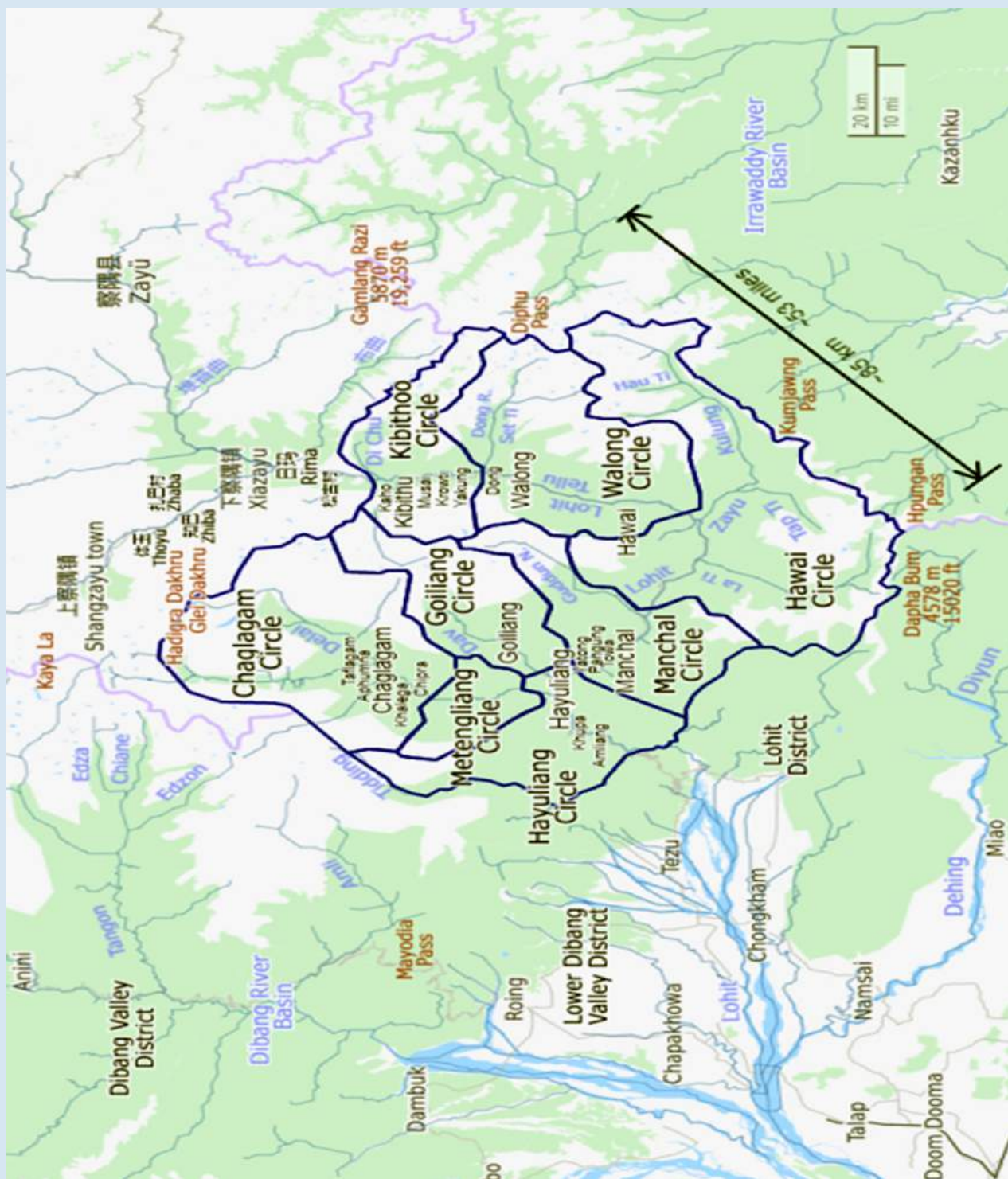
Suggestive Measures

- PLA has roads on which snow doesn't stick, using similar technology The topographical condition of Arunachal Pradesh, specifically the Tawang side, doesn't allow much involvement of the Air force in keeping security tighter in certain seasons. We should also construct such all-weather roads in the concerned areas.
- Apart from the Helipad, an airstrip can also be constructed, to tackle any out of the blue situation.
- The Government of India needs to work on Bum La pass as mobile networks get jammed. More so, time in mobile phones and in digital watches automatically moves 2.5hrs ahead of the Indian time zone to the Chinese time zone. Such technological advancement should also be used by the Indian Government that in our border, time-zone should also be ours and it should not get affected by Chinese technology.
- Land acquisition process should be simplified, streamlined and accelerated in case of the need for emergency infrastructure development by the military.



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“Experience Column”

Group II : Walong



Walong Expedition Timeline

- The group embarked on the expedition on 13 August 2023 from Dibrugarh Assam and visited several places on route to Walong. They explored:
 - o Golden Pagoda in the Namsai district.
 - o Parshuram Kund in the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh.
- After a night halt at Khupa in the Anjaw district, the group reached Walong on 14 August 2023. Here they visited:
 - o The Namti Village, also known as the Tiger's Mouth.
 - o The Kibithoo Indo-Tibetan Border Police's Border Outpost.
 - o The Wacha Border Personnel's Meeting Outpost, and the first village of India – Kaho.
- The next day on 15 August 2023, the Walong group participated in the 76th Indian Independence Day celebration at the Walong General Ground, in the presence of distinguished dignitaries like HMP Shri Tapir Gao. Here they witnessed
 - o Folk dances by the Mishmi and Meyor community.
 - o Performances by the Indian Army personnel like the Khukri and Ghakta dance.
 - o Patriotic dances by students of schools in Walong and nearby areas.
 - o Later in the day, the group visited the Helmet Top and the Walong War Memorial and enjoyed the Light and Sound Show on the 1962 Indo-Chinese War.

The expedition concluded with a dinner at the Officer's Mess Walong, where the group interacted with the officers and shared their observations while learning more about the different security aspects and challenges in the region.

The personal experiences of the group members are highlighted in the following section -



“Coming from a hilly region myself, I knew that I would find that familiarity, relatability and fellowship that every “Pahadi” from one hill state of India, finds when they visit another hill state of India. However, like every Indian state, Arunachal Pradesh, popularly known as the 'Land of the Rising Sun', too had its own unique geographically, culturally and historically significant features for visitors to observe and experience.

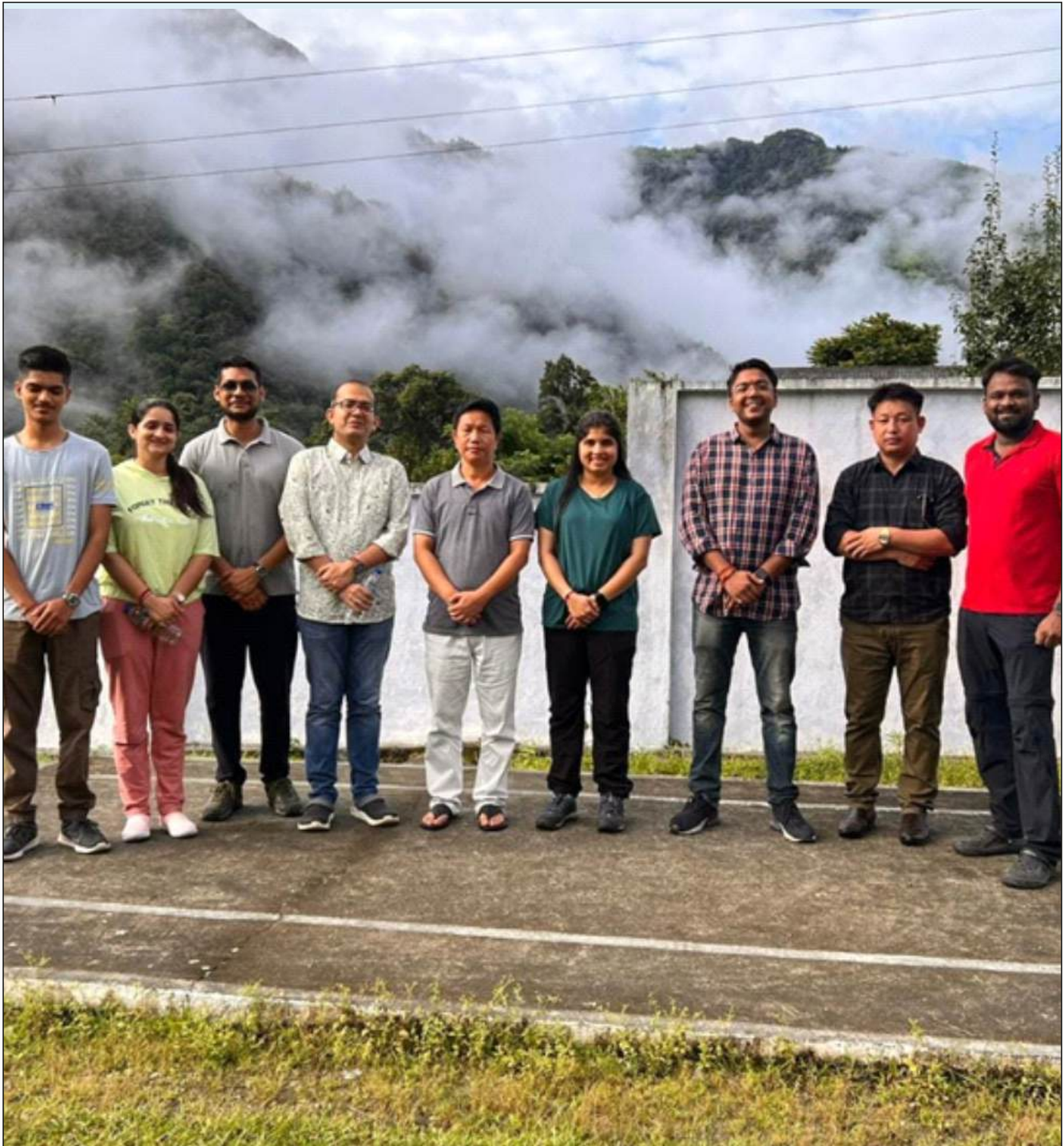
Books don't do justice to the extent of the 1962 battle of Walong. Neither do they capture the courage, strength and determination displayed by our soldiers during the battle. Namti valley, about 7 km from Walong, which witnessed much of the battle, today stands as a reminder for one of the most successful fightbacks against China by our soldiers who were vastly outnumbered and outgunned Indian at the time.

The Walong War Memorial highlighted the details and realities of the 1962 battle. The museum attached to the memorial houses the ammunition used in the war and the uniforms as well as helmets of the soldiers.

Needless to say, the Independence Day celebration was of very high significance for the locals and knowing the history of the area, it was very significant for me to. Everyone was enthralled with the colours of the national flag waving all around in the middle of the mountains, the colours white and green and the sound of patriotic songs. The celebration was attended by the local MP and MLA, with various programs organized in Walong where local people, army officers, the Art of Living organization, school children and local administration participated enthusiastically.

Through this expedition, I got the opportunity to know and understand the basic culture, civilization, food habits and lifestyle of this beautiful state. This experience had many moments that amazed me in ways I have never been amazed before and has left an impression in my mind which will stay forever. ”

By: Prajwal Busta



“I was fortunate and privileged to be on this expedition along with six others who became good friends by the time it ended. The group comprised passionate young Indians from different parts of the country, and from varied professional and academic backgrounds. We travelled to the Indo-China border, popularly called Walong-Kibithu, in the north-eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh. Located in the picturesque Anjaw district in the lap of the mighty Himalayas and fed by river Lohit, this area also bore the brunt of the 1962 Sino-India War.

For me, this expedition was enriching in a number of ways. Though I was aware to an extent about the 1962 War, being at the battleground interacting with public representatives as well as civil and military officials, provided a different perspective based on actual realities of that time period, the nature of the location and the people involved.

Celebrating, India's 76th Independence Day with the local population and soldiers at the international border was an enthralling experience. It is often true that for many in the country's heartland region, national days are holidays. But for these people at the periphery, these are the days of celebration. I was mesmerized to see not just school children but even elders actively merrymaking.

Understanding, the challenges faced by our military and paramilitary forces and their ability to still act effectively and confidently at times of conflict only increased my respect for them further. The robust infrastructure there made me feel secure and confident that the debacle of 1962 would not be repeated. I got to know that most of these developments have happened in the last decade.

Lastly, interaction with the local population there exposed me to their problems and aspirations. As a development professional, I am motivated now to contribute to solving their problems so that our brothers and sisters from the 'Land of the Rising Sun' are able to realize their aspirations.

As I jot down my observations, I realize that I have returned from there as a more evolved and aware person. The fascinating insights, experiences and friendships I have in these three days will remain some of the most cherished possessions of mine in the coming times. ”

By: Shashvat Singh



“The arena of border security has always been an area of deep interest for me, however, the chance to visit frontline areas through the border expedition allowed me an opportunity to be a naturalistic researcher instead of merely acting as an observer fully dependent on news portals.

While touring the 'first village'/'vibrant village' Kibithu, Walong, Helmet-Top, Watcha and other locations, a sense of pride was felt and the reason behind it was not only our 'ready to combat' Indian Army but the immense love and patriotism of residents belonging to Walong and nearby places.

As it was my first experience of the North-Eastern state of India, on one hand, I got to know various new aspects of culture, while on the other I also felt that there is a strong, unshakable bond between the value system and cultural ethos with other states (for me, my home state of Uttar Pradesh).

While having conversations, I learnt that in the last few years, great affirmative actions have been taken by the state as well as central government to make the lives of locals easier but still a long way is still ahead of us.

For example, digital connectivity is very poor and needs immediate attention from authorities and it is important to understand that without proper connectivity, people can't utilize the facilities of e-learning, telemedicine and awareness in the era of globalization. It would also need to be seen from the perspective of security and perception war as in many areas, cell phones catch signals of Chinese network providers and Indian network providers are way behind. After having this mesmerizing experience, I wish a day would come when greater representations would be seen from Arunachal in every aspect of India and in my institution too (would have a chance to interact more).”

By: Akshay Nayak



“Having been fascinated with the idea of exploring the Northeastern parts of India for a long time, I was keen on making sure that I make the most of this opportunity. The beauty of the place and the people was such that it was impossible to not feel connected and attached to this part of India. This expedition has given me some of the most memorable experiences, that I will cherish forever.

The expedition could not have been arranged at a more opportune moment, as the schedule included a visit to the Indo-China border and participation in the 76th Independence Day celebration in the most unique environment.

Starting the expedition from Dibruragh, Assam on August 13, the group explored the various historic and strategically significant points like the Namsai Plains, and the Helmet Top, and dived into the history of the 1962 Indo-China war and the stories of valor and commitment of the Indian soldiers. Our visits to these points instilled a deep sense of appreciation and respect towards the soldiers and armed forces who serve the country and remain steadfast in the face of adversities.

Beyond these visits, I was privileged to witness the most heart-warming sight on 15 August 2023, as students from the Walong Secondary School conducted the celebratory parade across Walong at five o'clock in the morning. The passionately loud chants of "Long Live India" and chants celebrating India's diversity made sure that every household noticed, came out to their windows, and participated and supported the students.

During my discussions with the school principal, and the teachers, I tried to grasp the motivations, and challenges faced in the process of running the school with around just a hundred students and less than a dozen teachers. Though the low exposure to outside opportunities was underlined as a hindrance to focus on studies, the inner zeal of the students and their families for contributing to society and the nation acts as the motivation fuel.

For me on a personal level, the expedition also stimulated a deeper curiosity for understanding both the demography and topography of the region, as well as the regional security challenges. In our conversations with the local people, the group grasped the agricultural and rainfall patterns of the region and the role of seasonal migratory practices for livelihood purposes. Moreover, the importance of the Lohit River and the tourism opportunities became clear to us during conversations with the local people as well as the security forces.

Our interactions with the security forces were also extensive, with discussions ranging from the challenges faced by the forces due to remoteness and low



connectivity in the region, to how the region is one of the most calming and beautiful venues for deputation.

Finally, the perfect execution and coordination of all the visits and components of the border expedition were among the most impressive feats. Opportunities like this help scholars and thinkers to inculcate a new perspective in their journeys ahead, as underlined in the Panchatantra - पर्यटन् पृथिवी सर्वा, गुणान्वेषणतत्परः। (Those who wish to seek virtues travel the entire world.)”

By: Divyanshu Jindal

“*The unique characteristics of Arunachal Pradesh made me think of my hometown because of the striking similarities. However, the fascinating cultural sweetness, patriotic fervour, and ingrained humility were elements that amazed me deeply.*

While walking near the China-India border was a thrilling experience, visiting the Namti plains (the site for a large portion of the 1962 conflict) and the Helmet top (an army position where the 1962 conflict occurred, and hundreds of our army's helmets were later discovered) invoked the feelings of gratefulness toward our fallen heroes.

We also visited Dong, the easternmost region of India, where the country's first sunrays arrive; Kaho, once known as India's last hamlet, now known as India's first village; and Wacha, from where the Chinese flag and buildings were visible. There we also learnt about how the Indian military engages with the Chinese counterparts in peacetime for festivities and important events like the Indian Independence Day.

There appear to be strong infrastructural facilities being arranged at Kaho. There is an Airtel tower, however, it is not operational. Meanwhile, China appears to generate some perception for tourists by sending SMS such as “Welcome to China”.

We were privileged to celebrate Independence Day at the Walong Army Camp in the presence of the local ministers and administrative heads. We experienced various performances by the students from Mishimi and Mayor tribes and my feelings can be summed up through one of the performances which used the RRR song in the background which reminded me of the statement “We are One.”



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First glimpse of Arunachal Pradesh reminded me of multiple Shiva Lingams-interlocking mountains with rivers flowing elegantly beneath them. I immediately felt a connection between the Arunachaleshwara Temple in Tiruvanamalai, Tamil Nadu, and the towering peaks and serene valleys of Arunachal Pradesh, with their enigmatic charm. On the way to the Walong border, we decided to trek down to Parsuram Kund.

My grandfather, freedom fighter Nellai Jebamani, once told me that serving in the army is one of the greatest jobs in the country. After my close experience with them at the borders, I now believe it's not only the greatest but also the toughest job. I yearned to experience the rugged beauty of the borderlands, to understand the lives of those who inhabited these remote areas, and to witness firsthand the geopolitical significance of this terrain.

The proximity to neighbouring countries like China-occupied Tibet and Myanmar has made these areas strategically significant. The border outposts I visited served as a stark reminder of the challenges and complexities faced by the security forces guarding the frontiers. I had the privilege of visiting the Wacha border and The Namti Plains, where I gained insight into the dedication and sacrifice of the Indian armed forces. I realized that with the support of the people, whom I prefer to call 'The Great Citizen Wall of Bharath,' combined with our highly trained forces, no external force can dare to cross our borders today.

This experience reinforced for me, the idea that development should encompass not only material progress but also the enrichment of the human spirit. It is a reminder that when citizens come together, they create not just a stronger nation but a more harmonious and prosperous world. It was a transformative journey that allowed me to peel back the layers of this enigmatic frontier. It was a testament to the indomitable spirit of the people who inhabit these lands and the dedication of the security forces who protect our borders.

The expedition reaffirmed my belief in the beauty of the unknown and the importance of understanding the geopolitical complexities that shape our world. As I left the borderlands behind, I carried with me a deeper appreciation for the diversity and resilience of the human spirit. ”

By: Suryanarayanan Dinakaran



“The visit to Walong and to the India-China border provided me with a profound understanding of this strategically significant region. From a student's viewpoint, this report recounts my eye-opening experiences and interactions during this journey, shedding light on the historical, socio-political, and cultural aspects that define life on the border. Notably, I learned about the history of the 1962 Chinese invasion, which has left enduring emotional scars on the local community. This historical context is pivotal in grasping the significance of Walong in India's strategic priorities.

Witnessing the stringent security measures during my visit underscored the dedication of the Indian armed forces to safeguarding the nation's territorial integrity. I observed constant patrolling and surveillance, emphasizing the gravity of the situation in this border region. Moreover, the management of border villages like Walong is a commendable effort by the local administration, with support from the Indian government, to provide essential services and infrastructure to these remote communities. Conversations with local residents revealed the deep bond they share with the military stationed in the area, appreciating their presence for both security and local development.

Life in these remote border villages presents significant challenges due to their isolation and harsh conditions. Despite these challenges, the people of Walong exhibit unwavering patriotism and cultural pride. To enhance their quality of life and support the armed forces, improved infrastructure, including roads and healthcare facilities, is urgently needed. This requires a collective effort from various stakeholders.

Amidst the challenges and history, the natural beauty of the Walong border region was a sight to behold. Pristine rivers, clear skies, and untouched landscapes added a serene backdrop to this dynamic border area. The clean water and untouched environment were a testament to the locals' commitment to preserving the land they call home. My visit underscored the Indian armed forces' multifaceted approach to border security, encompassing military power and soft power engagement with local communities. This comprehensive strategy ensures not only the security of the border but also the promotion of development and harmony in these regions, benefitting both residents and the nation as a whole.”

By: Soham Ketkar

