

Conflict and the City: Understanding Consequences Through A Native Lens

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Abstract

Much of the contemporary literature on the 1962 Indo-Sino conflict, especially of a historical nature, approaches the conflict from the centre of the respective state involved. Therefore, the subject matter under discussion usually ranges from the failure of early India's diplomatic and foreign policies toward Communist China to the political analysis of the ideologies underpinning the People's Republic of China, as manifested in the idea of the middle kingdom and its associated ambitions of aggrandisement. Whilst there is no doubt that many scholarly works are beginning to narrate the history of the conflict, contextualised within the unique circumstances of then NEFA [present, Arunachal Pradesh] after Independence, most of these works limit themselves to the causation of the conflict and the general policies of isolation that were followed during the colonial period and immediately after Independence. Meanwhile, the reactions of the tribal population and the consequences of changes in India's tribal policies are more or less treated as secondary. This article attempts to explore this by tracing the origin of the Capital City of Arunachal Pradesh, which was established a decade after the conflict, and its establishment as a political statement of the Indian government and the natives alike.

Keywords: 1962 conflict, Indo-Sino relations, North East Frontier Agency, Itanagar

INTRODUCTION

In 1962, when N.R. Rustomji, Advisor to the Governor of Assam on Tribal Affairs, visited the North Eastern Frontier Agency [thereafter, NEFA] sites of Along, Pasighat, Daporijo, Ziro and Tawang as a part of the interval administrative probing of the situation during the Indo-China conflict, the general mood of the native population, he would later describe, was that of disapproval and disappointment over the occasional nature of such visits during this time of danger and uncertainty (Nyori, 2003). At Along, while stepping out of the plane, a letter was handed to him by the gathered native people in which their disillusionments and resentment towards Indian government was expressed for being left 'unprotected and abandoned in the hour of danger' (Nyori, 2003, pp.17-8) while noting that if this is how situations are to be, even in the future, they should better continue to live in their own ways leaving 'their future course of action' at the mercy of Donyi-Polo¹ (Nyori, 2003, pp.17-8).

Much of the contemporary literature on the 1962 Indo-Sino conflict, especially of a historical nature, approaches the conflict from the centre of the respective state involved. Therefore, the subject matter under discussion usually ranges from the failure of early India's diplomatic and foreign policies towards Communist China to the political analysis of the ideologies underpinning the People's Republic of China, as manifested in the idea of the middle kingdom and its associated ambitions of aggrandisement. Whilst there is no doubt that many scholarly works are beginning to narrate the history of the conflict,

contextualised within the unique circumstances of then NEFA [present, Arunachal Pradesh] after Independence, most of these works limit themselves to the causation of the conflict and the general policies of isolation that were followed during the colonial period and immediately after Independence. Meanwhile, the reactions of the tribal population and the consequences of changes in India's tribal policies are more or less treated as secondary. This article attempts to explore this by tracing the origin of the Capital City of Arunachal Pradesh, which was established a decade after the conflict, and its establishment as a political statement of the Indian government and the natives alike. Here, the scholar intends to isolate the variables of the 1962 conflict and the changing policies and origin history of the capital city of NEFA from other developments that were simultaneously occurring in the newly independent nation of India. This is not to negate the equally significant possible influence of these developments, ranging from the question of Nagaland and the rise of NNC under the leadership of Zapu Phizo or the equally significant developments of the demands for a separate state in the lines of tribal identity and language in the north and southern India. Thus, this paper will begin with the exploration of the cause of the conflict between India and China in 1962, followed by a discussion of the major events of the 1962 conflict, focusing on the eastern theatre of the conflict, and the major consequences that followed in the NEFA aftermath.

India, China and the causes of the conflict

India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, on 30 April 1955, stood before the assembly of the elected leaders to recount the events of the past few days of regional significance, where twenty-nine newly independent and emerging Asian-African countries, representing half of the global population, met in the Indonesian city of Bandung. Emphasising its importance in declaring the newfound roles and ambitions of the gathered nation to the world, the Prime Minister proceeded to narrate decisions taken during the conference, of which the single most important, according to him, was the 'Declaration on World Peace and Cooperation' (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2024) which was an elaborated and more universalised version of the '*Panchsheel*, or the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' that were first formally introduced in the world stage in the agreement between India and China on 29 April 1954, titled 'Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India' as a precondition for the agreement between the two nations itself (Ministry of External Affairs, 2004).

These two nations, proverbially known as the two suns in the Asian sky (Narayan, 2024), iterating these conditions of engaging with one another and with other countries by restating the same in the greater platform gave more than hopeful future for the entire continental region as a whole – a hope that was supposedly cemented by experiencing the shared history of colonialism as a consequent product of aggression committed by the western imperialism; a hope repeatedly expressed by Prime Minister Nehru in his speeches and his policies towards China; a hope equally grounded on Nehru's dream of carving an alternative way of being for the newly emergent independent countries outside the influence of the two power blocs of the Cold War era; a condition which he firmly believed, as highlighted by the historians Garver (2001) and Mehra (2007), was not possible without the Indo-China friendship.

The logical follow-up would be to inquire into the question of: if India was determined in the 1950s, before the war of 1962, to realise its nascent dream of non-alignment alternatives of existence, and to do so, cultivate a cordial diplomatic relationship with China, presumably a tendency also being reflected in China's policy towards India in its ready signing of agreement and treaty with India, both in 1954 – Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India on 29 April, and Trade agreement between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China on 14 October 1954 – and

in its follow up participation in the Bandung Conference of 1955, what were the reasons that eventual cause both nations or, to be more specific, China to initiate two pronged attack on India's northeastern, and northwestern Himalayan frontiers?

In the modern political landscape of a nation-state, perhaps the flaw in their relationship is that there can only be one sun in the sky. In other words, conflicts and competitions are embedded in the very idea of modern nationalism, which in turn is also a product of their respective colonial past, and associated ambitions to secure its status by securing its stability, within and without, and its border so that the experience of the past national humiliation cannot be repeated. This is reflected in the fact that the very idea of the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' between India and China originated from the existence of conflict between these two nations. In other words, the necessity of the peace was necessitated by the conflict. Accordingly, Garver (2001) argues that these conflicts were mainly rooted in two reasons:

1. First is in their 'conflicting nationalist narratives' based on modern nationalism, which requires the leaders of these two nations to look into the same regional state as their sphere of influence to realise their 'nation's modern greatness', which, based on these narratives, has its roots in the past (Garver, 2001, p.11).
2. Second is the fundamental question of securing and strengthening their respective national security, which in turn is also affected by modern nationalism, since it is these narratives which decide where and whose presence is to be treated as a threat outside of one's obvious national border (Garver, 2001, p.11).

India, in terms of its regional role in South Asia, has often been accused of playing the unsolicited role of 'big brother' by smaller countries through influencing their foreign and defence policies, and by not permitting extra-regional power presence in the region to ensure there is no threat to its position in the area or to domestic security (Garver, 2001). Conversely, the Indian government asserts that since the 'security of its neighbours [is] essential to its own security' (Garver, 2001, p.16), the notion that India harbours hegemonic ambitions or threatens the security of neighbouring countries is unfounded. Building on this narrative, the Chinese government's core perception is that India has inherited the imperialist ambitions from its imperial predecessor, Britain, and aspires to 'dominate the entire South Asian – Indian Ocean region and all the countries in it' (Garver, 2001, pp. 18-9), which is also one of the main reasons for the 1962 conflict. More specifically, it was Nehru's imperialist dream and India's 'pure nationalism' to build a 'greater Indian empire within the realm of [the] old British empire' (Graver, 2001, pp. 18-9) that caused China to initiate the conflict. However, this argument fails to account for the fact that the entire notion on which Beijing claims its complete sovereignty over the territory of Tibet is based on its own modern nationalism, which aspires to attain the past glory of China based on the ideology of the middle kingdom. This idea of middle kingdom is rooted in the ancient classics of China's history, which views the attainment of power as a 'mandate from heaven', and divides the geopolitical region of the middle kingdom, with China or Han dominated territories in the middle, into five distinct zones: the capital, royal domains, pacification zones, allied tributary areas and the zones of 'barbarians' (Narayan, 2024, pp. 3-4). Based on this classification, the territory of Tibet, besides Sinkiang and Inner Mongolia, falls within the zones of pacification, a territory considered significantly prominent for strategically securing the interior regions of China (Garver, 2001, pp. 35-6).

The conflict of 1962

The 1960s began with China's diplomatic offer of an 'East-West swap' to resolve the Aksai Chin dispute

with India in the west. This was because the second half of the 1950s saw two major developments in India-China relations – India protesting China’s construction of a road on India’s side of the border in the Aksai Chin region, and China accusing India of covertly instigating feelings of rebellion among the Tibetan population to weaken China’s international position. This deteriorating relationship between India and China led China to propose a solution in April 1960, during Zhou Enlai's visit to New Delhi, then the Premier of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), through a comprehensive offer of an ‘East-West swap’ (Garver, 2001, pp. 100-01).

What was this ‘East-West swap’? According to the Chinese narrative, India’s claim to the Aksai Chin territory in the west was illegitimate, as was its ‘occupation’ of the territory of NEFA in the east. In both cases, India’s presence was the result of the colonial aggression by the British Empire during the early centuries, where the Chinese influence was well established and exercised for centuries. India, being the offspring of imperialist Britain, is attempting to continue this illegal occupation of these territories in the modern era, which China refuses to accept. However, following the Chinese principle of peaceful coexistence with neighbouring countries, as affirmed in the 1954 treaty with India, China is willing to accept India’s ‘occupation’ of the NEFA region in exchange for maintaining the status quo in the west, where China has recently completed its all-weather road system, and justifiably so (Garver, 2001, pp.107-08).

This argument was mainly grounded on their understanding of the ‘illegitimate’ nature of the McMahon Line in southern Tibet. This was because the final copy of the Shimla Convention in July of 1914 was never initialled by the government of the Republic of China. Although earlier on 27 April 1914, the draft version of the Shimla Convention, where the boundary of the Inner and the Outer Tibet with respect to China, including the line of McMahon running between southern Tibet and the British frontier territory of NEFA, which included the territory of Tawang within British India, was initialled by Iven Chen, plenipotentiary of China, along with the Tibetan and British counterparts (Mehra, 2007). What follows from this is that since the Government of China never initialled the convention, the provision of it is not binding on the current government of China under the PRC. Consequently, PRC, being the successor state of the Tibetan Government, by default acquires the territories in the NEFA region that fell within the administrative jurisdiction of the latter. Therefore, whilst the claim of the Government of India is based on its colonial past of sparse presence and irregular interactions, the claim of the PRC is based on the region of NEFA's historic reality. Adding to this narrative is the Chinese government's simultaneous exploitation of the racial difference between the tribal population of NEFA and the rest of India, outside the Northeastern region.

This argument of the Chinese government, however, does not explain the difference between the imperialist force originating in the West and one in the Asian continent. Does imperialism become acceptable when the act of forceful occupation of a territory is acted upon on a racially similar stock of population? As Mehra (2007, p. 33) would later point out, the very crime the Chinese government is accusing the Indian government of – continuing the imperialist legacy of the British in the territory of NEFA – is the one on which China is claiming legitimacy over NEFA. After all, it is based on the imperialist expansion of the last reigning dynasty of China, the Qing (1648-1912), the PRC is claiming its sovereign territorial limit in Tibet, and therefore, as an extension of Tibet, to the territory of NEFA, which China referred to as a ‘Southern Tibet’ (Mehra, 2007, p.33)

As expected, the Indian government rejected the argument and, likewise, the proposal, and provided China with a counter-argument, one that was based on history, tradition, customs, geography, and, most

importantly, treaties – reminding China of the existence of the Ardagh-Johnson Line in the west, and the McMahon Line in the east (Garver, 2001). Instead, India tabled the primary condition for any future deliberation on the border issues would be for China to retreat from India's side of the border in the west (Garver, 2001). This declaration of condition was followed by the 'forward policy' with the announcement of Operation Onkar on 2 November 1961, and Operation Leghorn at the Dhola-Thagla ridge on 10-11 September 1962 in the NEFA (Hoffmann, 1990). The objectives of these operations were to build up border security through the erection and manning of outposts along the McMahon Line. Similar operations were also introduced in the West (Hoffmann, 1990).

On 20 October 1962, China launched a unilateral two-pronged attack on India's northern border in both the east and west. Between 20 and 24 October, the site and the villages of Dhola and Khinzemane were overrun by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Tawang fell on 9 November, whilst the forward posts of the Indian Army at Sela Pass and Bomdila fell on 17-18 November and 19 November, respectively (Mehra, 2007). Meanwhile, a separate operation was being carried out in the eastern corner of the NEFA territory, where PLA forces had attacked near Walong during their October offensive. The Indian Army's operation at Walong began on 14 November with the primary aim of securing the strategic positions of two hills known as Yellow Pimple and Green Pimple to prevent Chinese forces from accurately targeting Indian troops' forward movements. PLA responded with a second offensive, using heavy artillery, on 15 November (Hoffmann, 1990). On 19 November, Prime Minister Nehru sent a personal letter to President Kennedy, seeking air aid for Indian cities if the China crisis persisted, as the major concern among government officials was that if the situation in NEFA continued, 'the loss of Assam, Tripura, Manipur, and Nagaland' (Hoffmann, 1990, pp.174-75) in the northeast was imminent. However, before the American government could reply, on 21 November 1962, the Chinese government announced a unilateral ceasefire through an official statement. A subsequent withdrawal of PLA forces began on 1 December, with troops stationed 20 km behind the Line of Actual Control (LAC), established between India and China on 7 November 1959, in both the east and west. In NEFA, this was along the McMahon Line and outside the Indian territory of Tawang (Hoffmann, 1990).

The consequences of the 1962 conflict

The consequences that followed in the aftermath can be understood within the changing perspectives of the decision makers and the simultaneous shift in the attitudes and demand for greater integration among the native population. However, the scholar would like to exercise caution in generalising this attitude among the native tribal population, as archival records are very sparse on this matter, and the spread of education was minuscule in the 1960s, along with the practice of spreading war propaganda by the Indian administrative officials in the region.

Hoffmann (1990) attempts to examine the changing attitude of the decision makers in New Delhi through the concept of the 'attitudinal prism'. Accordingly, he explains that an 'attitudinal prism' is a worldview or lens through which decision makers of a nation 'filter and structure information', especially during a time of crisis. This prism is based on their 'fundamental psychological predisposition', which in turn is inextricably connected to their 'ideology, tradition, culture, history, and individual personality' and idiosyncratic behaviour (Hoffmann, 1990, pp. 47-8). Thus, Hoffmann (1990) argues that the following were the conclusions the decision makers of the Indian government had about the conflict of 1962:

1. China aspires to hold a premium position in Asia to realise its nationalistic ambition and therefore sees the economically and politically strong and independent India as a major threat to its aspiration and

territorial ambition (Hoffmann, 1990, pp.215-16).

2. At the non-military front, China wanted to discredit India's standing and ethical principles of non-alignment as a mere political rhetoric to further its imperialistic ambition as an 'Asian outpost of the Western powers' in the geo-political region of Asia-Pacific (Hoffmann, 1990, pp.215-16).
3. Moreover, the 1962 conflict was also a means for China to 'deal a serious blow to the Indian economy', just emerging out of the colonial exploitation, to further stunt its growth (Hoffmann, 1990, pp.215-16).

Therefore, we can argue that the most significant consequence of the 1962 conflict was the change in India's attitude towards China; thereafter, all the changes introduced by the Indian government were premised on this single shift. To begin with, the pre-conflict attitude of the Indian government under Prime Minister Nehru was shattered once and for all. The dream of eternal friendship was now replaced with the constant threat of China along India's Himalayan border, especially along the Line of Control, including the region of NEFA. As a consequence, major changes were brought into the defence policy of India with a consideration not only of a possible conflict with China in the future, but also the possibility of a 'two-front war with China and Pakistan' in the east and the west (Hoffmann, 1990, pp. 222-23). Post-conflict India also reoriented its Tibet policy. The early policy of caution and restriction on the Tibetan refugees' cross-border activities was changed to 'benign tolerance', especially regarding the 14th Dalai Lama's action of establishing an exile Tibetan government in Dharamshala in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. In 1963, the Dalai Lama's decision to promulgate a new constitution for Tibet, whilst simultaneously opening overseas offices in New York and Geneva, was neither protested nor condemned by the Indian government (Garver, 2001, p. 62).

Returning to the main discourse, the 1962 conflict between India and China prompted significant changes in India's North-East policy. Chief among these was the shift from the previous policy of 'positive isolation' towards rapid development, improved administrative efficiency, and increased acculturation among the tribal communities of NEFA (Bose, 1997, pp. 234-39). Many of these changes aimed to counter the threat posed by China in the region by strengthening administrative and cultural links to the rest of India, since much of China's claim over the region was based on racial and ethnic affinities of the tribal communities with China vis-à-vis Tibet, rather than the culture of 'mainland' India, along with a sparse administrative presence since colonial times.

Before the 1962 conflict, the peripheral existence of NEFA in India's political discourse was exacerbated by the deliberate policy being pursued in the region, which later came to be known as the 'Philosophy of NEFA'. It was a conscious attempt of the Indian government to regulate the opening up of the region to the rest of India slowly and methodically, not to disrupt the tribal way of living the communities in the region have been living for so long, owing to the frontier policy of the British Indiaⁱⁱ, through the sudden inundation of general rule of law of the newly enacted Indian constitution and unfamiliar presence of the non-tribal communities among them (Elwin, 2016). According to Elwin (2016), this policy was based on the scientifically approved lines and historical lessons India has accumulated over the two hundred years of colonial subjugation. Many of India's tribal communities were destroyed because they were opened too soon to the exploitation of their well-developed neighbours over their land and living ecosystem during the colonial period, without first laying the safety net for their proper growth and development so that they could participate in the 'civilised' world on equal terms. At the same time, pursuing the myth of Rousseau's 'noble savage' and Voltaire's bliss and greater happiness in 'cultivating one's own garden', Elwin (2016, pp. 1-3) argues, will be equivalent to freezing these tribal communities as some museum

specimens for the benefit of scientific studies and anthropological objectification, besides the political danger of leaving a frontier region administratively vacant. Thus, between these two extreme ways of establishing a relationship with NEFA was the middle path of NEFA's philosophy. It was a philosophy of building on a tribal culture without an extreme break from its historical past through the introduction of the 'best things of the modern world' phase by phase to 'activate and develop' all things that were good in tribal culture without breaking its essence (Elwin, 2016, p.9). Most importantly, it was to be pursued slowly and steadily without overwhelming them with too many changes all at once. To its criticism of delaying the progress by giving them too little too late, Elwin (2016, p.3) argued that the administrative goal in NEFA was not that of assimilation but of fair inclusion by digging a firm foundation of real progress in a planned manner, which ought to take time. Unfortunately, the time for progress and advancement was disrupted by the international development between India and China. Thereafter, a shift in policy was introduced in the region, with a greater tendency towards integration with the rest of India, not just administratively but also politically and culturally. The cultural aspect of this change was an effort towards discrediting China's strategy of pulling a racial and ethnic card against India with respect to this region (Sharma, 1963).

The most significant consequence was the enactment of the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act on December 30, 1971, with an effective date of January 21, 1972. Through Section 7 of this Act, the region of NEFA was officially declared a Union Territory of India on January 20, 1972, with a changed nomenclature of Arunachal Pradesh. This meant that the territory of Arunachal Pradesh was now to be governed by the President of India through the Chief Administrator of Arunachal Pradesh instead of the Governor of Assam. The Chief Administrator was to be aided by the Pradesh Council, consisting of 30 members with an advisory role. This newly established administration was to function from the freshly declared site of the capital of the Union Territory in Itanagar, which was then a sparsely populated small village of the Nyishi tribe. Thereafter, the 37th Constitutional Amendment Act was passed in 1975, thereby enacting the provisions of the Union Territory Act of 1963 in the territory of Arunachal Pradesh on August 15, 1975. Consequently, the position of Chief Administrator was replaced by the Lieutenant Governor, and the former Pradesh Council was upgraded to the status of Provisional Legislative Assembly on the same day. The Lieutenant Governor was to be advised by the Council of Ministers chosen among the members of the Provisional Legislative Assembly. At the political level, these administrative changes meant the introduction of democratic principles within the territory, whilst constitutionally making it a more integral part of the Indian Union.

This was an effort towards streamlining the NEFA administration and political system in line with the rest of India, in accordance with democratic principles, which had otherwise been debarred from the region of NEFA. The 1960s in India were also a period when India was making a significant headway in the direction of democratic decentralisation, following the enactment of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee's recommendations on the three-tier Panchayat Raj Institution on April 1, 1958. In line with this trend, the parliamentary committee under the chairmanship of Dying Ering, who was a nominated member of the NEFA in the Lok Sabha, was appointed on April 11, 1964 (Siga, 2014). The committee's report was submitted in January of the following year. Some of the significant recommendations of the committee were:

1. The establishment of a four-tier representative body, the first three – Gram Panchayat, Anchal Samiti and Zilla Parishad – in line with the rest of India, and the fourth, the Agency Council, as an apex representative body at a territorial level of NEFA as a whole (Siga, 2014, p.233).

2. Introduction of the ‘district system’ to replace the system of division that was established by the Regulation Act of 1954, to standardise the administrative structure with the administration of the state of Assam (Siga, 2014, p.233).
3. To establish the procedure of election for the member of parliament from NEFA, instead of being directly nominated by the Governor of Assam on behalf of the President of India (Siga, 2014, p.233).
4. Transfer of the NEFA from under the aegis of the Ministry of External Affairs to the Ministry of Home Affairs (Siga, 2014, p.233).

The Government of India accepted these recommendations with some modifications, and the North-Eastern Frontier Agency Panchayat Raj Regulation (Regulation 3 of 1967) Act was enacted with effect from 2 October 1968. Ultimately, following the completion of the elections to the Anchal Samiti and Zilla Parishad in September and October 1969, respectively, the Governor of Assam officially inaugurated the Panchayat Raj Regulation for the region from the state capital of Shillong on 3 December 1969 (Siga, 2014). On that same day, the first sitting of the Agency Council, consisting of 23 members, was convened in the Durbar Hall, Raj Bhavan, Shillong, under the chairmanship of B.K. Nehru, the governor of Assam (Sulu, 2022). Similarly, the administrative jurisdiction of NEFA was transferred from the Ministry of External Affairs to the Ministry of Home Affairs on 1 August 1965. This shift was implemented alongside the introduction of the ‘district system’ and a redefined designation of administrative officials in line with this system (Bose, 1997).

Without a doubt, the introduction of these changes was a momentous achievement for the Indian government and the tribal leaders of the NEFA, who had been working tirelessly for the greater integration and proper recognition of the region within the Indian Union. On the part of the tribal leaders, the recognition meant more schemes and financial assistance, more opportunities for the local population, not just in terms of the economy, but also politically well represented and with opportunities for greater participation in the decision-making process, and a consolidated and assured political identity with the rest of India, thereby feeling less alienated owing to their distinct ethnic and racial identity with more or less homogenous population of the ‘mainstream’ India.

As for the Government of India, the idea of greater integration of the NEFA with the Indian Union was taken for granted and was assured on the entitlement of being the successor state to the British Empire. However, the process of actualising this integration was tempered by the dominant administrative policy of the early decades in the region. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the 1962 conflict, this already well-established intention towards all-encompassing integration of the NEFA acquired new political meaning. It was not just an effort of the Indian leaders to spread the ideals and benefits of democracy or, for that matter, mere appreciation of some abstract Gandhian philosophy of valuing and involving people’s participation through decentralisation within the greater Indian tradition of unity in diversity. Besides all this, it was a political statement to the Chinese government on the legitimacy of India’s sovereignty in the region through the ideals of democracy. Modern democracy, as a political system, inherently dismisses any foreign claims questioning a domestic state’s sovereignty over its territory; after all, the very essence of the system is rooted in the conscious assent of the people to their government’s sovereign rights. Thus, on the surface the introduction of the decentralisation process in NEFA through the enactment of Dying Ering Committee’s recommendations might look as the natural outcome of the administrative process of increasing integration of India’s territories following India’s Independence, the essence of this action in reality had a double meaning, especially when studied within the context of the 1962 conflict and change in policies in the region in the aftermath of the crisis. The other being the obvious declaration of legitimacy

of its sovereign rights over the NEFA through the conscious consent and participation of the local tribal communities. The symbolic representation of which was not only coded in the first meeting of the Agency Council at Shillong in December 1969, which began to take all the major decisions on the region before passing the baton to its successor, the Pradesh Council, but also in its decision during this first sitting to shift the secretariate, later capital, from Shillong to within its own territory (Sulu, 2022). The shifting of the capital of NEFA, later Arunachal Pradesh, in other words, was a consequent outcome of the change in policies of the Indian government in the region following the 1962 conflict with China. However, it is important to note that the shift was more than just a symbolic representation of the Indian government's sovereign right over the territory. It was also a delicate statement of the government to the tribal communities of the region that they were part of the Indian union, and their well-being, security and grievances mattered and therefore must be addressed with efficiency without the bureaucratic hurdles of distance and lack of communication.

Conclusion

The dissatisfaction with the idea of being administered from a faraway land might have existed among the native tribal communities even before the 1962 conflict, though there's very little available evidence of it, since the idea of sparse administrative presence and political exigencies followed during the colonial period could no longer be rationalised based on frontier policy with the independence of India, and with the Government of India claiming its sovereign rights over the region. However, after the 1962 conflict, the lack of the Indian administrative presence in NEFA came to the forefront of the political discourses, with the growing demand of the local population and students to shift the secretariat within the region itself, instead of being governed from Shillong, causing unnecessary delays in the redressal of the grievances and in availing any administrative assistance (Nyori, 2003). This increasing vocalisation of dissatisfaction by the local communities coincided with the changing perspective of the Indian government regarding the best possible administrative policies to be introduced in NEFA. Thus, before the decision to shift the secretariat of the NEFA was passed unanimously in the first sitting of the Agency Council on December 3 1969, a parliamentary delegation headed by the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha visited NEFA in May 1966 to inspect the conditions of the local administration, and consequently recommended the shift of the secretariat from Shillong to NEFA (Bose, 1997). Accordingly, after the Agency Council meeting, a 'Capital Site Selection Committee' was formed among the members to inquire about and select the most suitable site for the future capital of NEFA (Nyori, 2003). As history unfolded, out of all the potential sites, the village of Itanagar was chosen by the committee members, and in the fifth and final session of the Agency Council on 28 February 1972 at Raj Bhavan, Shillong, then the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, arrived in Shillong and declared Itanagar as the capital of the newly established Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh (Sulu, 2022). More than a month before this declaration of the site of the capital, on 20 January 1972, the Prime Minister had arrived in Ziro, the headquarters of the Subansiri District, to inaugurate the new status of NEFA as a Union Territory and rechristen it Arunachal Pradesh (Sulu, 2018). These developments laid the foundation to begin the process of shifting the capital from Shillong to Itanagar to mark not only the newfound status of the Union Territory, but also the commitment of the Indian government to reclaim the territory as a symbolic gesture against China's claim and take greater responsibilities for its overall development and integration with the rest of India.

End Notes

ⁱ Donyi – Polo, literally translates to Sun and Moon, is a traditional belief system of many tribes of the present-day Arunachal Pradesh in north-east India. These tribes trace their origin history from a mythical ancestor, Abo Tani (Abo means father) and his consort Ane Donyi (Ane means mother), who is believed, among the tribes, to be one of the supreme goddesses of the heaven/sky.

ⁱⁱ The frontier policies pursued in the region during the colonial period were based on their understanding of peripheral defence. In other words, the region was meant to serve as a buffer between the British Empire's actual possession and the possession of their neighbouring state, which they see as a threat. As a buffer, it was deliberately left underdeveloped and politically and administratively loose, whilst securing enough influence through occasional visits and expeditions to simultaneously ensure its independence from other foreign state by depending on the British Empire.

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