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The Focus

Learning to love the city in Northeast India

29-31 Introduction by Duncan McDuie-Ra

The rapid urbanization of India's Northeast frontier is one of the most crucial transformations the area has witnessed, yet urban environments are rarely part of imaginations of the frontier, unlike the stereotypical images of plantations, jungle insurgency, spectacular topography, and colourfully dressed ethnic minority communities. In this *Focus* section we explore the cities of India's 'unruly borderland' as crucial sites in their own right, and as sites in which to experiment with different ways of researching the region.

32-33

Bengt Karlsson discusses the nostalgia hanging over Shillong: a former colonial hill station and now the capital of Meghalaya. Within overlapping forms of governance and all the associated problems of rapid urbanisation on a limited amount of land, Karlsson considers the best way to think about contemporary Shillong, settling for analysing it as a 'tribal city'; one unable to come to terms with the present in favour of memories of the past.

34

Lallianpuii uses an account of print media in Mizoram and surrounding Mizo speaking areas to situate Aizawl city, the state capital, as the centre of the transnational Mizo world. Bucking the trend of a global downturn in print circulation, demand for daily print media emanating from Aizawl can barely keep up with supply, revealing the need for news produced close to the corridors of political power – from the Mizo metropolis.

35

R.K Debarma begins his account of Agartala, the capital of Tripura, with protests for an indigenous state and the demonization of the protestors by the state. This sets up an account of Tripura as a settler colonial state during the British period and especially after Partition of South Asia in 1947. Agartala is the main arena where spatial contests between settlers and indigenous communities play out, making it a settler colonial town.

36-37

Mona Chettri considers the infrastructure-driven growth of Chungthang in north Sikkim alongside the enduring presence of the armed forces deployed to monitor the border with China. At the centre of the town, between an enormous hydropower dam and various army barracks, is a Sikh Gurdwara (temple) built by the armed forces and currently at the heart of contentions over cultural history, space, and 'belonging' in Sikkim.

38-39

Opposition to dog meat sales from a government determined to make Dimapur (Nagaland) more 'city-like' and activists concerned with animal welfare exist alongside the persistence of impunity for the armed forces in their treatment of humans in Dimapur and beyond. But, **Dolly Kikon** wonders, if sales are to be banned what will become of the traders, mostly women, who peddle the meat in Dimapur's markets?

40

Three dynamics have shaped the history of Dibrugarh in upper-Assam: capital, calamity, and counter-insurgency. These dynamics produce what **Sanjay Barbora** refers to as a 'counterintuitive urban transformation', evident in the tea gardens in the city centre, the oil installations and gas cracker plants on the outskirts, and the 'silent social relations' of the city's multi-ethnic population.

