

Chicken Neck

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Introduction

In the grand, eternally restless theatre of nations, where the fragile borders of the world are constantly rewritten by the fevered, sweat-soaked dreams of gold-braided generals, there occasionally unfolds a comedy so exquisitely, perfectly absurd that Clio herself—the ancient, stern-faced muse of history—must have set down her heavy iron stylus to laugh until the tears ran hot down her cheeks. The stage for this geopolitical farce was not a sprawling, desolate desert or a vast, grey ocean, but a place defined by its claustrophobia. Behold the Siliguri Corridor, known to the world by its far less dignified moniker: the Chicken Neck. It is that slender, vulnerable throat of earth connecting the vast, thrumming heart of

the Indian mainland to its verdant north-eastern limb. It is a corridor of land no wider than a miser's cold smile, a geographic bottleneck of staggering fragility, and yet, it serves as the absolute jugular vein of a sleeping, billion-strong giant.

To stand in the Chicken Neck is to be assaulted by a sensory symphony of the subtropics. The air here is a physical entity, a heavy, wet blanket smelling intensely of crushed cardamom, bruised tea leaves, and the rich, dark decay of the ancient Himalayan foothills. The sky is rarely a flat blue; it is a bruised, swirling canvas of deep violet storm clouds and blinding shafts of golden sunlight that pierce the canopy like physical spears. The earth hums with the relentless, deafening chainsaw-whine of millions of unseen cicadas, a sound that vibrates in the teeth. Through this narrow artery of wet, emerald-green jungle, the lifeblood of commerce flows in a chaotic, brightly colored stream. Massive transport trucks, painted in hallucinogenic hues of hot pink, saffron, and electric blue, adorned with jingling brass tassels and stern-faced deities, roar down the cracked asphalt. Their heavy diesel exhaust mixes with the sweet, cloying scent of wild orchids and the metallic tang of impending rain. This was the stage, perfectly set, for a disaster of architectural proportions.

It was here, in the humid, oppressive shadow of the great mountains and the meticulously manicured, rolling tea-scented valleys of Siliguri, that two neighboring states—nations who had long traded both bustling commerce and deep, paranoid suspicion—resolved to perform an act of reckless, unanesthetized geopolitical surgery. Bangladesh, operating with a sudden, uncharacteristic martial swagger, found an eager, well-armed accomplice in Pakistan. Together, they plotted to seize this narrow passage in a nocturnal gambit they christened, with entirely

unintentional, deeply unfortunate culinary poetry, Operation Chicken Neck. The very name smelled of hot grease and cheap roadside diners, utterly lacking the sterile, Latin-infused gravitas usually reserved for the deployment of armies.

The planning occurred in rooms devoid of fresh air, illuminated by the harsh, flickering, pale-blue light of fluorescent tubes that hummed with a maddening, insectoid buzz. Men in starched uniforms, smelling of synthetic cologne, stale cigarette smoke, and nervous perspiration, leaned over expansive maps. They used thick, red wax pencils to draw aggressive, sweeping arrows across topographic lines, reducing the vibrant, chaotic reality of the jungle—the mud, the monsoon, the blinding greenery—to flat, manageable geometry. They believed they were engineering a masterstroke of systemic disruption. They sought to pinch the wire, to sever the network, to choke the flow of resources until the giant capitulated.

When the operation launched, the immediate effects were a cascade of sensory deprivations. The vibrant, chaotic supply lines instantly withered. The roaring, rattling trucks were halted, their engines clicking into silence, leaving behind only the smell of cooling rubber and hot asphalt. The bustling north-east, cut off from its mainland, fell into a heavy, unnatural silence. The vibrant markets, usually smelling of raw turmeric and freshly caught river fish, grew hollow and dusty. The subcontinent, that ancient, blood-soaked stage of grand epics, sweeping empires, and tragic poetry, found itself once more the setting for a conflict. But this was a farce written not by romantic poets or calculating strategists, but by men who had never, in all their years of academy training, learned the vital, humbling difference between grand strategy and outright slapstick.

What followed the initial seizure was a cascade of retaliations so perfectly, mathematically reciprocal in their sheer folly that one might have easily mistaken them for the carefully choreographed, symmetrical steps of a classical, temple dance. Every action provoked a reaction of equal absurdity. India, utilizing its immense infrastructural architecture, closed the great western rivers. The sensory shift was apocalyptic: the deafening, earth-shaking roar of millions of gallons of rushing water was choked down to a sickly, dripping silence, leaving behind the foul, sulfurous smell of exposed mudbeds and dying fish.

In response, Pakistan starved for flour. An Atta Revolution rose organically from the panicked, flour-dusted bakeries of the west. The comforting, warm, yeasty smell of baking bread was replaced by the sharp, terrifying scent of burning wood and the metallic, electric energy of riotous crowds shouting in the dusty streets. Puppet regimes, hastily assembled from the ranks of opportunists, bowed deeply under the blinding, magnesium-white flashes of press cameras. The great eastern dams were opened in vengeance, and the cities of Bangladesh drowned under a thick, swirling, coffee-colored soup that smelled of raw sewage and ruined lives.

And in the midst of this chaotic, swirling vortex of systemic collapse, the grand armies simply dissolved. Soldiers, terrified and marooned, shaved their regulation beards with cheap, scraping tin razors, leaving patches of nicked, bleeding skin. They slipped invisibly out of the occupied zone in the dead of night, trading the stiff, scratchy wool of their uniforms for the soft, worn cotton of civilian lungis, emerging from the darkness as documented citizens of an entirely different administrative ledger. And somewhere, in the surreal aftermath of it all, a high-ranking general was handed a pink slip of paper and fined a handful of crumpled rupees for the simple,