CHAPTER V

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION

I. ROADWAYS

This state has suffered in the past from isolation and its backwardness is greatly due to lack of transport facilities. The Imphal-Cachar hill trail was improved during A.D. 1837-44, and was renamed Cachar road. The Imphal-Mao road was completed in A.D. 1881. It was later extended to Dimapur in A.D. 1893 to connect Manipur with Brahma-putra valley through Naga hills.

The absence of surfaced roads in a large part of the state was keenly felt during the World War II. As a war effort the existing roads were improved and new ones laid. In the hills many jeepable roads were constructed. Since then there has been a lot of improvement. The Five-Year Plans have laid special emphasis on roadways. Much has been done in this sphere, but much yet remains to be done.

The existing roads of Manipur may be classified into metalled roads, unmetalled roads and cart tracks. Then there are footpaths and hill trails. The terrain of Manipur does not favour laying of railway up to Imphal. The Government of Manipur, however, is keen on getting a railhead in its own territory at Jiribam. For this, preliminary work has been taken up. It is expected that the railway line will be extended from Silchar to Jiribam during Fifth Five-Year Plan.
The roads are officially classified into: (1) National Highway, (2) State Highway, (3) Major District Road, (4) Other District Road, and (5) Village Road. There has been a steady increase in the length of each class of road since A.D. 1956 (refer to Table XXI). The total length of surfaced road in A.D. 1956 was 959.77 kilometres. In A.D. 1961 the length of surfaced and unsurfaced roads was 588.09 and 1117.29 kilometres respectively, making a total of 1705.38 kilometres. The decrease in the length of surfaced road might be due to reclassification of the surfaced road and declaring part of the length as unsurfaced.

In A.D. 1966 the total length of the road increased to 2400.04 kilometres with surfaced and unsurfaced length being 1001.06 and 1398.98 kilometres respectively. Thus, the total length of road increased nearly 2.5 times its length in A.D. 1956. In A.D. 1971 the total length of roads reached 2598.6 kilometres. The length of surfaced and unsurfaced roads is 951.2 and 1647.4 kilometres respectively (Map 12). One point to be noted is that the length of surfaced roads has not made much headway but there is substantial increase in the length of unsurfaced roads. It is so because an unsurfaced road is a prerequisite for a surfaced road.

The road development in Manipur is progressing under a twenty-year road development plan covering the period A.D. 1961 to A.D. 1981. The objective of the plan is that no village in the developed and agricultural area should remain more than 4 miles (6.44 kilometres) away from the metalled road and more than 1.5 miles (2.41 kilometres) away.
from any type of road. During this period there will be an outer ring road along the border; an inner ring road in the valley; link roads, connecting district headquarters with the ring roads; and radial roads, connecting the inner ring road with the outer ring road.

The outer ring road along the border is aimed to include ten main roads: (1) Tadubi-chaka, (2) Chaka-Magulong, (3) Magulong-Jirighat, (4) Jirighat-Tipaimukh, (5) Tipaimukh-Hengtam, (6) Hengtam-Samtal, (7) Samtal-Moreh, (8) Moreh-Rumine, (9) Rumine-Chingai and (10) Chingai-Tadubi. The inner ring road in the valley proper includes the improvement of the existing road linking Bishenpur-Moirang-Kumbi-Kakching Khunou-Kakching-Wangjing. There is provision for some link roads namely (1) Kanglatongbi-Kangchup, (2) Kangchup-Bishenpur and (3) Wangjing-Yangangpokpi.

In spite of the impressive development of roads it is still a fact that many important places are not properly connected with motorable roads. All the district and subdivisional headquarters are not yet connected with motorable roads. During fair weather, one may reach the subdivisional headquarters located in the interior but it is difficult to reach them during rainy season. It is felt that all the roads connecting subdivisional headquarters with the capital be improved to surfaced roads where there are unsurfaced ones.


3Ibid., p. 57.
II. AIRWAYS

The land-locked situation of Manipur calls for airways linking Imphal with Gauhati and Calcutta. As it is a border state there is no question of movement of men and material towards east and southeast across the international border. The important places to the west, with which Imphal has to maintain regular contact, are, as already mentioned, Gauhati and Calcutta.

The journey by surface routes (road and rail) to Gauhati and Calcutta takes two and four days respectively, which by air would take as many hours only. The most difficult part of the journey is Imphal-Dimapur by road, which takes a whole day. Journey by air is quick and comfortable, though costly.

Air transport remains the only alternative during periods of road blockade from landslide. It is a common experience that air service during monsoon months is very much dependent on weather conditions. And sometimes, both air and road transport are suspended simultaneously.

At present there is a regular passenger service between Calcutta and Imphal. The route of the flight is Calcutta-Silchar-Imphal. Thrice a week there is an additional flight between Silchar and Imphal. The Gauhati bound passengers have to change the aircraft at Silchar. At present the air freight is carried by converted Dakotas chartered by two firms, namely, Air Assam and Assam Travels.
III. WATER TRANSPORT

Conditions do not exist, at present, for the development of water transport in Manipur. However, a very limited and modest water transport exists in the Loktak lake area, where villagers inhabiting the island portion of Sendra, Ithing, Thanga etc. use small boats for transporting men and materials. In the Jiribam area a bit of water transport is seen on Barak river. Water transport will play a significant role in the development of that area in the foreseeable future.