

Look East Policy of India

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Abstract

The look east policy was officially launched in the year 1991 during the tenure of former prime minister of India P.V Narasimha rao. The relations with ASEAN Countries were pursued with a lot of vigour and dynamism which saw India became sectoral dialogue partner with ASEAN in 1992 and full dialogue partner in 1996, summit partners in 2002 and Strategic partners in 2012. The present government under the leadership of Mr. Narendra modi pointed to prioritization of relations within India's own neighbourhood. This has lent unveiling an upgraded 'Act East Policy' during the India-ASEAN summit in Myanmar in November 2014.

The Look East Policy is also a means in reducing India's internal development disparity particularly the North-Eastern states. Under Look East Policy, broad objectives have been pursued like Regional economic integration, reform and liberalization, development of North Eastern region of India. The policy still faces many challenges with the growing aggression of China in Indo-Pacific region and South China Sea.

Look East Policy of India

India is an old civilization of sun worshipper it has therefore always been looking to East. In this respect it may not be correct to trace India's Look East policy to beginning of the 1990's when the cold war ended as is necessarily and usually said. The Policy can be classified into four different phases namely **pre-colonial, Colonial, post-independence and contemporary**. In this paper we will discuss contemporary phase in detailed.

Pre colonial period (first phase)

In this phase there is an evidence of India's dynamic and extensive relation with its Eastern neighbors since the first century this phase lasted until the 12 century and can be described as a first wave of "Look East" in cultural and commercial engagements during this period the first Hindu empire (in what later came to be known as indo china) flourished based entirely on cultural and philosophical contacts with India. No major military missions were launch and no major wars took place.

The expansion of Buddhism was also spread in this phase. The cultural synthesis of Hinduism and Buddhism is seen in various arts and architecture of far east e.g. temples like Angkor vat in Cambodia, Borobudur in Indonesia and Watphu in Laos. The other courier of culture was commerce. The spice trade routes from West Asia and Persian Gulf stretched over to Indonesia and far east bring traders closed and commercial links was established which later facilitated spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. The Indian festival 'Bali jatra' is a perfect example of India celebrating for those who braved through the rough seas across Bay of Bengal, to carry trades in far eastern nations.

Colonial period (second phase)

The advent of Islam after the 12 century and then the colonial expansion of European nations disrupted these cultural and commercial links. British build India as the bastion of their power and influence in Asia that protected their colonial holding as far in the East as possible and so strategic interest bring at the cost of cultural and civilization links during this phase.

Post-independence period (third phase)

The architect of the Indian foreign policy Pt Jawaharlal Nehru was of keen interest of Asian solidarity and which he has shown in 1947 before India's independence by organizing Asian Relation Conference in this very year in India. In the year 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung was another effort to promote regional and Asian unity but things are not being materialized as no dedicated foreign policy is being formed for South East Asia until 1990.

Contemporary period (fourth phase)

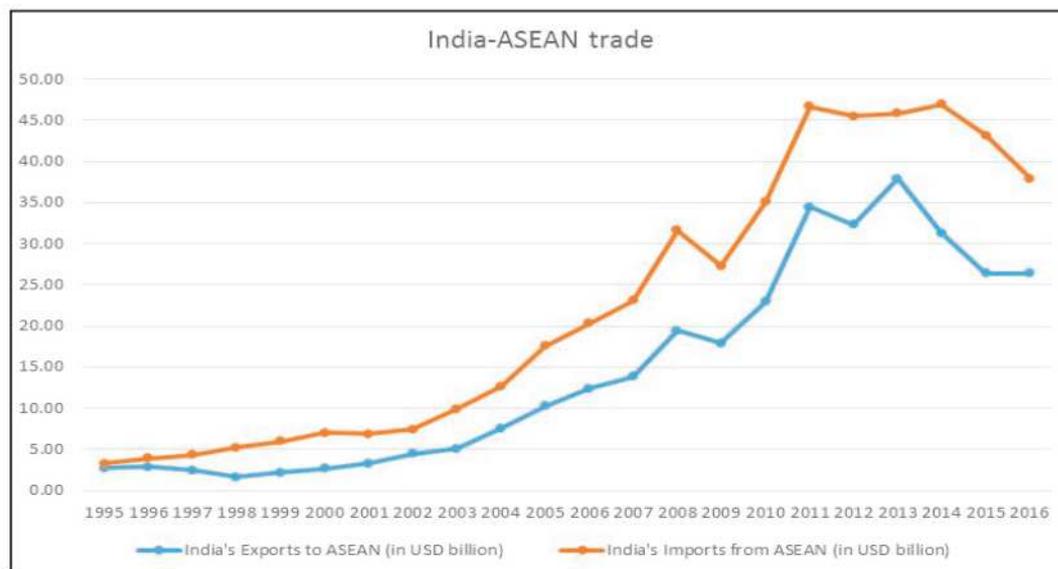
This period starts after 1990's and with the formal beginning of Look East policy(LEP) when former Prime minister P.V Narasimha Rao regime officially started the policy with the regional engagements in the ASEAN countries

The formal begining of the policy emerged in 1990's where regional and domestic factors play a crucial role, the Indian economy is also suffering from balance of payment crisis and economic doldrums in India pushed the policy makers for LPG (Liberalization, privatization, globalization) reforms and at the same time the end of Cold war leads to end of ideological conflicts and so East Asian nations also come close to the India to foster its economic ties

Ultimately in the year 1991 The Look East policy has emerged as an important foreign policy initiative of India in the post-Cold War period. It was launched by the Mr P.V Narasimha Rao government with the aim of developing political contacts, increasing economic integration and forging security cooperation with countries of Southeast Asia. The policy marked a shift in India's perspective of the world, with the strategic and economic importance of Southeast Asia to India's national interests being recognized.

Initial relations of South East Asia begins with the ASEAN nations which in that time is collective voice of South East Asia. The economy of India and ASEAN countries realize the mutual benefits and so the huge market of India attracts ASEAN countries and ASEAN countries as investor for India.

India become sectoral dialogue partner in 1992. Dialogue partner in 1996 and summit level partner in 2002. . In second half of 2014 Prime Minister Narendra Modi, upgraded LEP to **Act East Policy** which focuses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region.

Figure 1: Trends in Indian Exports to and Imports from ASEAN countries, 1995-2016

Source: UNCTAD Statistics

India recently celebrates **25 years of India ASEAN relations**.

The major initiatives and programs of India-ASEAN are

- socio cultural cooperation like student exchange program
- various developmental projects like CLMV
- funds like ASEAN India cooperation fund, AISTDF, ASEAN-India green fund.

LOOK EAST POLICY AND NORTH EASTERN INDIA

The LOOK EAST POLICY (LEP) touted as the harbinger of change and prosperity to the Northeast region (NER) of India, for all purpose and intent largely remain on paper. The time has come to examines and highlight internal and external caustic factors responsible for look east policy to remain ineffective in NER various efforts has to be done but before proceeding we first have to understood

- 1 - General problem associated with the surface transport and connectivity.
- 2- Changing profile of ASEAN geo political reality.
- 3- Various internal problems and issues of NER.

If the steps to connect the continental route is not taken for the Northeast region. The policy will remain largely unaltered much more on paper than in reality. Some argues that while LEP has been a tremendous success when looked from India's point of view, it has failed to boost the economies of NER of India Cross border trade between NER and Myanmar has not registered any perceptible growth. The denial of Bangladesh in providing a transit corridor which could have eased out the connectivity problems between NER and mainland India.

If the trinity of initiatives –making Bangladesh corridor available for NER promoting Subregional development cooperation and providing space for bordering states in making neighborhood policy – is factored into the act east policy it would be able to transform the NER from landlocked to the land linked and holds the key to development to this peripheral region .This involves the centrality of NER in India’s act east policy or else the new initiative would merely remain lip service like its older versions

MAJOR REGIONAL GROUPINGS

The major groupings and projects in Asia pacific region particularly those which are concerned with India like *BIMSTEC*, *MGC*,*ASIAN HIGHWAY*, *BCIM CORRIDOR*, *KALADAN MUTIMODAL TRANSIT PROJECT*

India has realised how these groupings and projects can make look east policy a success for northeast development in particular and country in general



CHALLENGES

The relations and engagement with Southeast Asian nations also put some challenges like.

- The issue of connectivity that acts as a major hindrance.
- China assertive and aggressive on border of sino china
- Islamic Radicalism and IS influence
- Non traditional security threats.
- Fragile governance structures, especially in countries like Myanmar.

- Issues of refugees like Rohingyas
- Chinese Diaspora controlling economy in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore
- The Russia and China growing synergy.
- ASEAN fissures coming to surface that is even weakening the ASEAN integrative process.
- India's lack of initiative on economic and trade issues.
- Multilateral institutions and proactive diplomacy.
- Regional security – China's assertive posture.
- The issue of the South China Sea
- ASEAN facing serious disruptions and no new adjustments in post pandemic.
- RCEP failure and withdrawal of India from RCEP .

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