

# Look East Policy to Act East Policy: A North-East India's Perspective

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**Abstract**—North East Region of India which comprises of eight states viz., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura is considered as the “Gate way to South east Asia”, and has natural trading advantages. Therefore this Region has wide scope of generating economic activities through the interaction with their neighbouring countries i.e. Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Nepal. Hence the Government of India felt the importance of this Region to foster the external trade of India as well as economic development in this land locked Region. Thus, the Government of India took a policy initiative in the form of “Look East Policy” in 1991. In November, 2014 the Prime Minister of India coined a new term “Act East Policy” to give impetus to the existing policy.

**Keywords:** Look East, Act East, Policy, Economic Development, External Trade

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of any country requires a considerable economic resource which is vital for a good education system, a healthy diet, safe water and good health services. Economic growth can generate the resources necessary to meet these development challenges. In order to mark a considerable economic growth, formulation of proper policies and its apposite implementation is one of the significant prerequisites.

A “policy” is a statement of commitments to achieve certain goal(s) by the governments of a country. A policy could be documented in legislation or other official documents. Policies are usually national policies (not district or provincial) and are not normally limited in time. For policy formulation to be effective, it is important to recognise at the outset that too many policy issues cannot be tackled simultaneously. It is essential that the most important issues be tackled first and that priorities be firmly established. The danger is that governments will utilise scarce resources on issues which are relatively unimportant. Policy represents a decision, made by a publicly elected or designated body, which is deemed to be in the public interest.

The Government of India in consultation with various expert committees, since independence has formulated and implemented various policies for overall development with an intention to strengthen the economy of the Land. Some of such policies were centralized and some were region specific. Although India experienced a positive impact to a great extent as a result of such policies, yet the country's north eastern region has been experiencing a comparatively slower pace of economic growth. Though the region is blessed with abundant natural resources for industrial development and social development, they have not been utilised to their full potential. The evolution and initiation of the Look East Policy is a step towards with a lot of fanfare in this regard.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study has been concentrated with the following desired objectives:

1. To highlight the background of Look East Policy.
2. To analyse the objectives of Look East Policy.
3. To analyse the impact of Look East Policy with special reference to north east India.
4. To analyse the transformation of Look East Policy to Act East Policy

## METHODOLOGY

The study has been conducted on the basis of secondary sources of information like various reports, books, journals and periodicals.

## BACKGROUND OF LOOK EAST POLICY

A nation do not exist in isolation, the realization of this fact is evidenced from India's concern towards regional cooperation which started in the pre-independence period itself, since during the mid-1940s and 1950s there were intensive efforts to develop cooperation with Asian and other developing nations of the world. But all attempts by India to develop cooperation among Asian countries did not work to the satisfaction of Indian leaders. The inter-state disputes, tensions, distrusting and apprehensions among the individual countries and the struggle for leadership between India and China were the main factors for the failure of India's attempt towards regional cooperation in Asia and Africa in general and Southeast Asia in particular.

The beginning of the 1990s was a turbulent period for India. The country witnessed an unstable domestic environment characterised by increasing terrorism and insurgency, political instability, economic doldrums and financial crisis. The unstable domestic environment was compounded by an unfavourable regional environment.

The 1990 Gulf crisis had a deep impact on India's economy as it depended much on the West Asian countries for oil and trade. It was followed by economic recession and political turmoil in India. The Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union abruptly and unexpectedly in 1991. India which was a natural ally of the Soviet Union, became isolated from Asian mainstream affairs. As a result, India's economic ties with South East Asia became loose and the level of interstate trade remained relatively low. The military strategic alliance of Pakistan and China also served as a repressive policy against India's national and economic interests, limiting its options in seeking trading partners in other states.

At the same time, trade with the Eastern European countries had suffered severely with the end of communist rule and the collapse of that system. Consequently, by mid-1991, foreign exchange reserves had fallen to barely enough to cover two weeks imports and India was forced to seek the help of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The political scenario of India during this period was marked by instability, in which three successive governments were formed within two years. Thus, India faced both economic crisis and political instability. The economic reforms launched during 1990s with the inclusion of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation constitute a watershed in India's economic history. The main objective of these economic reforms was to bring the derailed economy back to the track by providing a boost to foreign trade and attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

With these economic reforms, while India was opening up to the world market in one hand, but in the other hand it became aware of the growing trends towards regionalism and feared that it would be marginalised from the dynamics pushing the global economy. The evolution of India's Look East policy during the early 1990s which has emerged as an important foreign policy initiative of India was a step towards such economic reform. It was

launched in 1991 by the Narasimha Rao government with the aim of developing political contacts, increasing economic integration and forging security cooperation with countries of Southeast Asia. Although the term 'Look East Policy' was mentioned for the first time in the Annual Report of the Ministry of External Affairs in 1996. I.K. Gujral had stated that 'What look east really means is that an outward looking India, is gathering all forces of dynamism, domestic and regional and is directly focusing on establishing synergies with a fast consolidating and progressive neighbourhood to its East in Mother Continent of Asia'. The Look East policy is thus a product of various compulsions, changed perceptions and expectations of India in the changed international environment.

## OBJECTIVES OF LOOK EAST POLICY

As India moves towards maturity in its Look East policy, the policy is moving beyond its initial goal of tapping the opportunity offered by East and Southeast Asia's growth, which is still important. With the continual growth of India's economy, the policy now serves a much broader agenda. Under the Look East policy, four broad objectives have been pursued in the several years since its initiation:

1. Regional economic integration,
2. Reform and liberalisation,
3. Sustained economic growth, and
4. Development of the North-eastern region.

The emphasis placed on each of these objectives has been different at different points of time during the past years. More recently, the emphasis has been on developing the North-eastern region through economic integration with East and Southeast Asia. The major priority areas of the Look East policy are discussed below.

## REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

The main objective of the Look East policy is economic integration with East and Southeast Asia. India realised that its East Asian neighbours achieved rapid economic growth and that it was lagging behind. Fascinated by the East Asian economic miracle, the Indian economic leaders came to realise that the East Asian open economic system could be a model for its own development strategy. Thus, India wanted to expand ties with these high-performing economies with the aim of getting integrated into the process of economic regionalisation in East Asia. The Look East policy, to some extent, is a reaction to the formation of regional economic groupings like the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), European Union (EU) and Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR). In this increasingly regionalised world, it is believed that India's grouping with East Asian countries would enhance its position in relation to other regional partners. India adopted a three-pronged approach in its attempt to forge regional cooperation through the Look East Policy. They are:

1. To renew political contacts with the ASEAN member nations;
2. To increase economic interaction with Southeast Asia (trade, investments, science and technology and tourism); and
3. To forge defense links with several countries of this region as a means to strengthen political understanding.

## **REFORM AND LIBERALISATION**

Though the Look East policy is a by-product of India's economic reform and liberalisation in 1991, the policy seeks further reforms to liberalise trade and investment in order to forge deeper economic integration with East and Southeast Asian countries. Thus, India seeks to lower trade barriers and liberalise the investment regime. India has signed a framework agreement during the Bali Summit in 2003 to create a Free Trade and Investments Area with ASEAN by 2016. Since 2003, India, ASEAN and individual ASEAN member countries have agreed to and begun negotiations on FTAs after signing the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation. India and ASEAN agreed to implement an FTA for the ASEAN by 2011 and for all ASEAN member countries by 2016. The Framework Agreement announced an early harvest programme of immediate deliverables and unilateral trade preferences by India in favour of the least developed members of the grouping. Till date, India has concluded a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement with Singapore in 2005. India has also entered into a number of pacts with Thailand and Singapore. The ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement was signed in August 2009 with the 10 members of ASEAN.

## **SUSTAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH**

In the aftermath of India's liberalisation, the Look East policy become more than just a foreign policy alternative as it provided a development alternative as well, in synchronisation with the globalisation and the resurgence of Asia as an economic powerhouse. It is only with the formulation of the Look East policy in 1991 that India started giving East and Southeast Asian region due importance in the foreign policy planning. Thus, tapping East Asia's growth was an important cause for India's engagement with the East Asian economies. When the Indian economy started growing at a high rate from the late 1990s, India has increasingly turned its focus to sustained rapid growth. Strong economic ties with East Asia would position India well for accessing growth opportunities in Asia. India is also encouraging East Asian investment in the transport, communications and power sectors to keep pace with its expanding economy. India believes East Asia holds a key to India's sustained economic growth, particularly when international economic activities are becoming more critical to India's own growth and other regions are growing at a much slower pace and becoming more protectionists.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTH-EASTERN REGION**

The Look East policy is also a means of reducing India's internal development disparity. The North-eastern states lag behind in economic development and this gap has widened since independence. The sense of neglect has resulted in various forms of unrest in the region. With the launch of the Look East policy, India sees the region not as cul-de-sac but as a gateway to the East, thereby attempting to link the North-eastern region with Southeast Asia through a network of pipelines, road, rail and air connectivity. This is expected to initiate economic development and help the eight North-eastern states to develop infrastructure, communication, trade, investment, logistics, agro-business and other commercial activities. Knowing fully well the potential, the North-eastern states strongly support the Look East policy. Indeed, the Look East policy is believed to be the new mantra for development of the North-eastern region.

## BRIEF PROFILE OF NORTH EAST INDIA

The North East of India constitutes the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. It has over 2000 km of border with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and is connected to the rest of India by a narrow 20 km wide corridor of land. One of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions in Asia, each state has its distinct cultures and traditions. A place renowned for its magical beauty and bewildering diversity, North East India is the home for more than 166 separate tribes speaking a wide range of languages. Some groups have migrated over the centuries from places as far as South East Asia; they retain their cultural traditions and values but are beginning to adapt to contemporary lifestyles. The lushness of its landscape, the range of communities and geographical and ecological diversity makes the North East quite different from other parts of the subcontinent. In winters, mist carpets the valleys but swirls around the traveller in hills during summer rains, thus creating an enchanting and romantic atmosphere.

Flanked by hills and with the mighty Brahmaputra river slashing a central path between its north and south, the North East is bounded by the States of Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura with Assam comprising the heart. Arunachal Pradesh lies to its north and Sikkim a little away in the North West bordering China and Bhutan. Bangladesh and Myanmar lie to its southwest and east. The torrential Brahmaputra deposits its rich alluvial silt along the banks of the plains of Assam. Tropical rain forest, rich in flora and fauna, spread their arms across Arunachal Pradesh into Assam. It is a land where tea is an industry, handicrafts a major occupation and martial arts a favoured sport.

The western side of the North East is connected to the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent by a narrow land corridor, sometimes referred to as the Siliguri Neck or "Chicken's Neck". The eight states that comprise the region reflect ecological and cultural contrasts between the hills and the plains; there are also significant elements of continuity. Available medieval and modern records indicate interdependence and interaction between the hills and plains. The North East is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. The forest cover varies but average 65 per cent is government owned. Village communities, individuals and chiefs own the rest. The area can be divided into three geographical divisions—the Shillong Plateau, the North Eastern hill Basin and the Brahmaputra Valley.

The economy of Northeast India has got its definite identity due to its peculiar physical, economic and socio-cultural characteristics. The NER of India covers an area of 2.62 lakh sq. km. It accounts for 7.9% of total geographical area of the country.

The growth of infrastructure, both social and physical, has not kept pace with the rest of the country leading to widening of disparities. The per capita income in the northeastern region on an average is Rupees 12,918 (as per Net State Domestic Product), as compared with the national average of Rupees 17,823 (at current prices of 2001-02). Interestingly, at the time of independence, the per capita income in the undivided state of Assam was higher than the national average by four per cent.

The region lags behind the rest of the country in several other development indicators. The region generates less than eight per cent of its 63257 MW of hydroelectric power generation potential and the per capita power consumption in the region at 97 Kwh is less than a third of the all-India average (355 Kwh). Although the literacy rate in the region (68.77) is above the national average (65.38), the employability is low resulting in high rate

of unemployment and underemployment. The region, according to the Ministry of the Development of the Northeast Region (DONER), has a net unemployment rate of 12 per cent. The incidence of poverty in the region is also high. Assam has 36 per cent of its population below the poverty line compared to the national rate of 26 per cent. Mizoram, in fact, is the only state in the region, which has less percentage of people below the poverty line (19 per cent) compared to the national rate. Tele-density (number of telephone connections per 100 persons) of 1.69 (in 2000) in the northeastern region, lags far behind states like Delhi (15.27), Kerala (5.55) and Maharashtra (5.33). However, it is better compared to Jammu & Kashmir (1.31) and Uttar Pradesh (1.33).

Although infrastructure has developed over the years, the region has a long way to go before it catches up with the national standards. The total rail length in the Northeast is 2578 kilometres, which is only four per cent of the total rail length in the country. Similarly, the 1.74 lakh kilometre road length in the region is seven per cent of the total roads in the country. Compared to the all-India road density (road length per 1000 square kilometre area) of 749, Manipur has a poor density of 490 and Meghalaya 379. Assam has a healthy density of 872 and Tripura 1405. The longevity of the majority of roads, the region's main communication link, however, remains affected by recurring floods, landslides and erosion. Serious erosion occurs in about 15 per cent of the total geographical area of the region and moderate erosion in about 47 per cent area.

The industrial sector in the region has mainly grown around tea, petroleum, natural gas in Assam, and mining, saw mills and steel fabrication units in other parts. However, manufacturing capacities in all the states except Assam to some extent are virtually non-existent. Industrial production is only 2.16 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Northeast, compared to the all-India figure of 27 per cent. This creates endemic problems for finding remunerative prices for basic commodities and agricultural produce. One of the end results has been the proliferation of activities in the unorganised sector and dependence of the people on government schemes and for employment avenues. This in turn has inhibited growth of entrepreneurship on the part of the population while impacting on the credit deposit ratio (CDR) of the region. The CDR has varied between 16.8 and 38.3 compared to the national ratio of 58.7. The primary and secondary sectors of the region's economy continue to be overwhelmed by the tertiary sector.

## **LOOK EAST POLICY AND NORTH EAST INDIA**

The term North-East is an ambiguous one leading to portray the image of a single state with homogenous attributes, which is vastly different from the actual standing. On the contrary, the North-East India largely bears the tenets of diversity and distinctness. The North-East India unfortunately is not free from many evils and is often thwarted by gruesome happenings retarding the pace of development. The Look-East Policy is being embarked upon with the presupposition that the improving trade ties between India and ASEAN will certainly elevate the North-East out of the menace of insurgency, poverty and economic backwardness. The Look-East Policy is expected to usher in a new era of development for the North East through network of pipelines, connectivity, communication and trade. The ASEAN-India car rally of 2003 was a notable initiative undertaken by the Indian government to emphasise on the geographic proximity between North-East India and South-East Asia. Moreover, India has undertaken some bilateral and multilateral projects for boosting

connectivity between the North-East and South East Asia. The important ongoing and potential infrastructure projects in this regard are Moreh-Tamu-Kalewa Road, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Trans Asian Highway, India- Myanmar rail linkages, Kaladan Multimodal project, the Stilwell road, Myanmar-India- Bangladesh gas or oil pipeline, Tamanthi Hydroelectricity project and optical fiber network between North East India and South East Asia. But certain obstacles like lack of infrastructural development, absence of enthusiastic response from local people, frequent insurgencies, poor governance in the states, the easy availability of arms and weapons from across the international border to be utilised in armed movements and criminal activities impede increased relations between North-East India and South East Asia. Moreover, the geographic location of the North-Eastern region makes it more vulnerable to be the core of hostility with massive negative outcomes.

There are enough avenues through which North East India can be related to South-East Asia. Racial, linguistic and cultural similarity prevails among the people of North-East India and those of South-East Asia. If the concerned governments really strive to translate their policies into reality their collaborative endeavors would invariably revive age-old cultural and historical bonds. To highlight the linguistic attachment it should be stated that it is an area of extensive linguistic diversity with predominantly three language families represented- Austro-Asiatic, Indo-European and Tibeto- Burman. Austro-Asiatic languages are now spoken by a single group in North-East India (the Khasi) but they are also found in East India and South-East Asia reflecting that they might have been more frequent in North-East in the past. Indo-European language is spoken from Europe to Central and South Asia with their easternmost occurrence in Nepal, Bangladesh and North-East India. Tibeto- Burman languages are a branch of Sino- Tibetan family which is mainly spoken in North-East India, China and South-East Asia. Thus North-East India sets up an important linguistic contact zone.

Through centuries there has been exchange of peoples, goods and services between our North-East and countries of South and South-East Asia. The Ahoms of Assam migrated several centuries ago from the Shan state of Burma where the language spoken is almost identical to that spoken in Laos and Thailand. The Chins from Myanmar migrated over the past centuries to Manipur and Meities of Manipur have ties for over 2000 years with the Burmans of Myanmar. Similar migration has also occurred to North-East from Yunan province of China. Boosting people to people contact transcending political barriers is an imperative for facilitating cultural interaction among various regions. In contemporary era, physical connectivity is of utmost importance as it channelises the means to accelerate the movement of goods, people and services and thereby acts as a gateway to reviving economic enterprise.

Advanced communication and interaction would foster trade, commerce and tourism prospects in the entire North-East region. But because of the existing hurdles the people of North East region are quite apprehensive about the developmental strategies and consider it as mere rhetoric. The people of the North-East should not feel ostracised from the mainstream one and simultaneously need to be convinced of the genuine concern of the government about the overall betterment and security of the region.

Hence, it can be asserted that India's North-East Region is a solid domain in orchestrating India's Look-East Policy. The development of the region is a stepping stone towards the success of the policy. For utmost achievement India and ASEAN should be steadily oriented towards their innovative measures with the adequate knowledge of their

common interests and gains. India should devote its potential to utilise the available resources in the North-East in their best possible way. The existing opportunities and the challenges need to be assessed and grappled skillfully. North-East India and South-East Asia must grasp the skill of understanding each others' proficiencies, should pay tribute to each others' potentials and must reveal greater endurance towards each others' drawbacks. Cooperative endeavours based on mutual trust and confidence will lead to enduring development and proper accomplishment of the Policy.

### IMPACT OF LEP

The Look East Policy of India, framed by the Narasimha Rao government in the early nineties, is a substantial manifestation of India's focused foreign policy orientation towards South East Asia; an immensely resourceful and flourishing region. The economy of South East Asia is a virtually untapped market which is up for grabs by major regional economic entities such as India, China, Europe or the USA. India's compatibility with the South East Asian countries with regard to better regional cooperation lies in the fact of its abstention from exhibiting hegemonistic ambitions, making it more benign towards South East Asia. The camaraderie between India and South-East Asia is clearly visible through the dynamic persuasion of India's Look-East Policy.

### CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

India's attempt to promote trade with Bangladesh and Myanmar through Preferential Trade Areas has failed as India takes undue consideration of the law and order situation of the Northeast and the military and security establishment having a say in India's foreign policy towards these two countries. Trade with both these countries has been stagnant and there is a difference with Bangladesh over transit arrangements that India seek for its links to the Northeast and also about the existence of training camps for insurgents in their territory. Similarly, trade with Tibet and Yunnan provinces of China have been almost absent except the existing trade at Nathula in Sikkim, though India and China have agreed to initiate border trade through the Himalayan pass between Tibet and Sikkim.

There is much talked about opening new trade routes or reviving the ancient silk routes through North-East leading to economic development of the region. Before meaningful trading activities can take place the region needs to prepare itself starting from agriculture in terms of productivity. Processing industries have to be set up to manufacture quality goods which can be offered in international markets at acceptable prices. The entire infrastructure of roads, railways, communication and air transport will have to be completely revamped. Similarly hotels, restaurants and resorts will have to be built for tourists. If this cannot be achieved the Look East policy will not benefit the region and in that case it will only act as a corridor between mainland India and Southeast Asia.

India's trade with countries bordering the Northeast has witnessed a remarkable growth, with the share going up more the five times from 1.7% in 1992-93 to 8% in 2003-04. This impressive expansion of trade with India's eastern neighbors has had little or no impact on the economy of the Northeast as this trade expansion has taken place mainly through the seaports. A skeptic like Sushil Khanna observes that the North-East has once again been marginalised. He argues that "India is looking east, but not through its contagious Northeastern borders. For the Northeast to gain from FTAs with the economies of the East,



the key variables are transit arrangements, proliferation of trade routes and custom check post, easy visa regime making it possible for traders, businessmen and transport operators to move in and out of the region." This can happen only when there is considerable investment in infrastructure, transport and communication facilities, which is largely absent. To take maximum benefit from the policy, the Northeastern region needs to develop industrially. The North East Industrial Policy 2007 has made the whole region a special economic zone. However, the industry departments of various states of the region have only benefited from this. It is the vision and concentrated efforts in various thrust areas after micro studies and appropriate project formulation which can bring North-East to a standard in which it will be able to stand the challenge of the Look East policy and will also be able to fully participate in the new milieu. The macro studies have been already done. Considerable work of identification of agriculture, horticulture, floriculture and industrial products have also been carried out. What now needed is the real work in the field. When work is done in the field, only then the Northeast can really reap from the Look East policy. Sushil Khanna complained that in contrast to the lukewarm effort for economic integration, the Look East policy concessions and aid are meant to persuade the neighboring countries to expel insurgent groups seeking shelter in these countries. As seen in the past, India's policy of developing ties with its eastern neighbors has been limited to counter insurgency strategy. Up till now there is almost no role for the Northeastern states in the Look East policy, which is in sharp contrast with the role that the Yunnan province plays in the Chinese pursuit of closer relationship with its neighbors in Myanmar and Indo-China countries. There is little room for the Northeastern states in the Mekong Ganga Cooperation, BCIM forum and in BIMSTEC.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LOOK EAST POLICY**

To immediately increase border trade in agriculture and some industrial goods it is necessary to remove current restrictions on border trade via Moreh, Nathu La and other entry points. Unrestricted trade with neighboring countries in agricultural and meat products could lead to considerable reduction in the costs of these items in NER.

The Look East Policy has important security dimensions. There is urgent need to promote interaction with neighboring countries through sports, music and other cultural activities. In the case of neighboring countries which are members of WTO, formal request for trade facilitation would improve trade access for NER states.

In the longer term, industrial output of NER should cater to the demand for industrial goods in the neighboring countries. This is particularly important for border trade in items like cement, coal, timber and steel. To facilitate trade it is essential to activate existing land-customs stations (LCS) and to provide a secure transport corridor for traders. In the long run, NER needs to plug into the growing trade with ASEAN countries particularly in items like wood products, ores and rubber products. It is imperative to integrate IT facilities in promoting infrastructure for trade with the ASEAN countries.

## **LOOK EAST POLICY TO ACT EAST POLICY**

Under the new leadership in Delhi, India's Look East policy has morphed into a proactive Act East policy, which envisages accelerated across-the-board engagement between the two growth poles of a vibrant Asia. This has been reflected in a spate of two-way visits in the first few months of the Modi government. President Pranab Mukherjee went on a landmark visit

to Vietnam in September, followed by the visit of Vietnam's prime minister to New Delhi in October. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj chose Myanmar as one of her first few foreign destinations abroad in August, and met a spectrum of ministers from ASEAN countries as well as East Asian countries. She has already visited Vietnam and Singapore and looks set to travel to most of other ASEAN countries in the months ahead. During her visit to Singapore, India's foreign minister articulated the need for an Act East policy forcefully: "Look East is no longer adequate; now we need Act East policy."

## CONCLUSION

India's LEP has over the last two decades strengthened its economic, political, security, and civilization links with the rest of Asia. To cope with the global financial turmoil, India however should become even more persistent and proficient in deepening its linkages with the rest of Asia, while strengthening its capacities to meet its developmental challenges.

To accomplish this task, India will need to develop far greater expertise in geo-economics, an area which has not received the requisite attention. India should also consider establishing a well-funded, resources, think-tank for researching, debating, communicating, and influencing foreign policy issues and options. This will also enable India to better communicate its intentions to rest of the world, including its partners in Asia.

The success of the policy depends on the commitment of the Indian government to implement the proposed plans and projects under the policy and to give role for the Northeastern states in this policy. Nearly two decades since India initiated its Look East Policy (LEP), there has been substantial progress in expanding economic and strategic engagement with the rest of Asia. To conclude for '*Looking East*' it took almost 23 years for the Government of India, now how much time it will take for the government of India to '*Act for East*'.

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