

## Rediscovering of India's foreign policy: Evolution of Look East Policy to Act East Policy.

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### ABSTRACT

**Background** The dissolution of Soviet Union compels the then Government of India to find the alternative strategic partner to enhance the growing economy. As a result, The Look East Policy emerged as competent India's foreign policy. Initially The Look East Policy crafted during the early nineties by the Narsimha Rao government of India, stands as a significant embodiment of India's deliberate foreign policy approach aimed at Southeast Asia—a region known for its abundant resources and thriving prospects. Over time, this policy has evolved into a pivotal component of India's foreign relations, marking a distinct departure from its traditional foreign policy priorities.

**Methods** The study is definitely having a strong empirical bias. The scientific method has been followed to design the whole content of the study. Different testing methods for identifying different sets of relationship among the variables have also been executed. The study is both explanatory and experimental. Data have been collected thorough secondary sources and assembled data has been made.

**Results** Evolution of Look East Policy to Act East Policy has not only gained substantial momentum but has also acquired strategic depth. Both India and Southeast Asia share deep-rooted cultural and civilizational ties, and they share common interests spanning trade, tourism, investment, joint ventures, counterterrorism, climate change mitigation, and natural disaster relief. As major players in the global economy, their collaboration holds the potential to drive the development of the broader Asian region, benefiting the Asia-Pacific as well. Nonetheless, building a robust partnership in the 21st century will demand both ASEAN and India to surmount formidable challenges and capitalize on significant opportunities with a cooperative and forward-looking perspective.

**Conclusion** The present study has focused on Rediscovering of India's foreign policy and evolution of Look East Policy to Act East Policy. At present the

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Received	Reviewed	Accepted	Published
22-June-2025	27-Sept.-2025	22-Oct.-2025	01-Dec.-2025

<b>Volume</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>December</b>	<b>ISSN</b>
<b>No. 7</b>	<b>No. 2</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2583-1852(P), 2584-0878(O)</b>

**How to Cite this Article:** :Khandayatray, Mamata. Rediscovering of India's foreign policy: Evolution of Look East Policy to Act East Policy.. THE THIRD VOICE: REALITY AND VISION. 2025. Vol No-7. Issue No-2. December. Pp:70-75, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19411952>.

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**DOI:**  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19411952>  
Article No - TVRV00098

fluctuating relations with neighbourhood have shown a very distressing picture of socio-political harmony. This paper aims to illustrate the burgeoning cooperation between India and ASEAN across various domains while addressing the obstacles impeding their collaboration. Subsequently, it concludes by exploring areas of alignment between India and the countries of Southeast Asia.

### WHAT IS ALREADY KNOW?

- The Look East Policy include significantly enhanced economic growth through increased trade and investment with Southeast Asian countries.
- The Look East Policy promotes stronger strategic partnerships and countering China's influence, improved cultural and people-to-people ties, and enhanced regional connectivity via infrastructure projects.
- The Look East Policy expanded India's diplomatic presence and involvement in regional forums, contributing to regional stability and cooperation.
- The Look East Policy has helped open new markets for Indian businesses and facilitated technology transfer and skills development.

### WHAT THIS ARTICLE ADDS?

- The Look East Policy opens new option for the regional cooperation and stability.
- The Act East Policy forged stronger diplomatic relationships with ASEAN and other East Asian countries, leading to greater regional cooperation.
- It emphasized building infrastructure like roads, railways, and ports to improve physical and digital connectivity between India and Southeast Asia, benefiting trade and tourism.
- The policy fostered cultural exchanges and people-to-people connections, which helped strengthen India's soft power and deepen relationships with regional countries.

**Keywords :** *Look East, Act East, Neighbourhood Policy, Foreign Policy, Social and Political, Connectivity and Capacity Building*

### INTRODUCTION:

India's foreign policy aims to maintain international peace and security, oppose imperialism, and promote peaceful coexistence, based on the principles of non-alignment, mutual respect, and non-interference. India respects the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other countries and does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. India believes in equality and mutual benefit and promotes peaceful and political settlements of international disputes. The first prime minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru, shaped the country's foreign policy from 1947–1964. Still now India continues her stand to protect and promote the foreign policy. From the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century India focused on the Asian countries. Former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao launched look east policy in 1992 to strengthen economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Oceania. It is a good opportunity for India to revive the ancient relations with the eastern countries of the world. The Look East Policy was more effective while the Prime Minister Narendra Modi started Act East Policy 2014, in order to expand its scope and involve in different sectors of the Asian organizations. The relationship between India and east Asian countries will more beneficial for both sides.

The Look East Policy have significant role in India's social, political, economic, security and cultural relations with the rest of the other Asian Countries. To make greater economic power and strong relationship with other Asian countries the government of India is trying to expand her economic relationship with other nations and develop infrastructure as well as communication system. In the present global order, India is the major stake holder in order to maintain international peace and development. The East Asian states is an appropriate forum to begin structuring Asia's future role in the global order as its membership is more inclusive, involving all major countries. Even though it is too early to presume that the Look East Policy is a failure, sceptic argue that there is more rhetoric than substance in the policy with the North eastern region filled with armed insurrections and the subsequent law and order problem, the implementation of various developmental projects is an arduous task. (Sundaram.

A: 169:2013). The soul intention of the look east policy is making closer economic relations with the Asian countries. Now India is the part of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the recognition on the part of India's elite of the strategic and economic importance of the region to the country's national interests. As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, the Look East Policy's is "not merely an external economic policy; it is also a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and India's place in the evolving global economy.

The position of India at present is growing economic power in the world. The current global financial turmoil represents an opportunity for Asia to assume global responsibilities commensurate with its strength. The EAS (East Asia Summit) is an appropriate forum to assume global responsibilities and commensurate with its strength. However, there are many hindrances will come but that should not stop the pursuit for economic development. The government of India needs to actively engage with the insurgent groups for political dialogue striving for peaceful solution to the discard old problems of the region and need to simultaneously go ahead with development projects. There is also an ardent need to give role to the Northeastern states in this policy. Thus, the proper implementation of the policy will help to develop this region.

### **JOURNEY OF LOOK EAST POLICY TO ACT EAST POLICY:**

'Look East' meant looking eastward for fostering newer ties with the immediate neighbours of South East Asia. Look East Policy of India was launched in 1991 by the Government of India led by the former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. The objective was to develop political, economic and security co-operation with countries in Southeast Asia. After the cold war, India wanted to act as a counterweight to China in Southeast Asia. The 'Act East Policy' of India launched in 2014 and helps one understand its difference with the 'Look East Policy' of India launched in 1991. Act East Policy of India succeeded Look East Policy. The main objective was to have greater engagement in all spheres with countries in Southeast Asia as well as with

far Eastern countries like Japan, South Korea, and countries in the Pacific region like Australia and New Zealand. India's Act East Policy is based on 4 C's – Culture, Commerce, Connectivity, and Capacity Building. As described by PM Modi, India's vision for the region is SAGAR – Security for All and Growth for All.

Thence, the Act East policy is an attempt to forge closer and deeper economic integration with its eastern neighbours as a part of the new *realpolitik* in evidence in India's foreign policy and the engagement with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the recognition on the part of India's elite of the strategic and economic importance of the region to the country's national interests. Thus, 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 a decade since India initiated its Act East Policy, there has been substantial progress in expanding economic and strategic engagement with the rest of Asia. The ancient civilization links have been bolstered by deepening economic and strategic relations, though the linkages between the two require substantial strengthening. India is now a member of the East Asian Summit (EAS), comprising 16 countries, which include the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, China, Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand. India is also a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum, which promotes dialogue among Asian and select major non-Asian powers on security issues.

The important factors influencing Act East Policy includes tends to connect to ASEAN and the East Asian nations with an *asianisation* content. In addition to India has made several multilateral agreements with East Asian nations that have boosted India's act east policy. The significant bilateral relationships include are India-China Relations, India-Myanmar Relations, India-Sri Lanka Relations and Asian nations. Other forums, regional groupings or platforms that have supported India's Act East Policy are BCIM – Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor, BIMSTEC – Bay of Bengal Initiative of Multisectoral Technical and

& Economic Cooperation, SAFTA – South Asian Free Trade Area, ASEAN – Association of South Eastern Asian Nations, EAS – East Asia Summit, MGC – Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. The first Trans Asian Car rally from Guwahati to Batam (Indonesia) passing through North Eastern States of India, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and Singapore in 2004 was an important sign for the advent of India's Look East Policy. Moreover several governmental initiatives that boosted India's Act East Policy are Trans Asian highway starting from Singapore to Istanbul passing through India, Trans Asian Railway from Delhi to Hanoi, 800 km long Trans-National Gas Pipe Line between Myanmar, Bangladesh and India

The North-Eastern states of India were given a direct role under the Act East Policy. Opening the doors for maritime oriented look east policy by bringing in pictures the coastal states of East India. This way it will help to build relations with southeastern nations that are dominantly coastal. The Act East Policy was seen as a step towards competing China's presence in East Asia and is a major initiative to establish peace and security in this region. The growing security threaten, compels Indian policy makers to strengthened the external relations in the east Asian countries. Both China and India emerged as economic giant in Asia Continent. China competes with India in the political, economic and military sphere and most importantly, for economic influence in the region of South East Asia. The responsibility of India is to compete with China in the international market. Indian leadership welcomed Foreign Direct investment (FDI) into India. The need of hour is to seek a new market for the growth of the domestic economy.

The growing middle class in our country demands economic security and stability in this region. As a result, the creation of more employment opportunities will help the economic stability. At present India seeks new markets to export its restless workforce. India has a robust economic relationship with ASEAN countries. Moreover, the Act East Policy is an Opportunity to revive the old culture with the other East Asian countries. History has proven that in ancient as well as medieval period India's socio-cultural as well

as economic ties with the eastern countries. It reflects that the present Act East Policy will create a platform for the revival the old relationship in a new format.

India is a country surrounded by the water bodies. The sea border is important for our security. But the present status quo, with USA as the recognized unilateral superpower ensures relatively little foreign military activity for both India and China. The expansion policy of China is the major concern for our country. As a result, India needs extension of its capabilities in water bodies. In naval projection of power, once again China is assessed as holding an upper hand. China has been building up its naval capabilities for decades in anticipation of a naval crisis in the Taiwan Straits. In contrast, India's navy of various classes is designed to mainly balance against Pakistan's naval assets.

The bilateral relationship of India with the other eastern countries will solve many unresolved problems. India's relationship with Barma is also largely based on a need to counter China's influence in the region. The Kaladan Project has secured India's Northeastern province with a lifeline for opening up trade and transport to the rest of ASEAN and the world. The new version of Act East Policy has the idea of counterbalancing China and New Delhi should strengthen its relations with neighbouring countries. With the aim of destabilizing China's position in these countries, India is developing a new strategy oriented at stressing geographical proximity as well as economic development to convince nations such as Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, but also Vietnam, Myanmar and other Southeast Asian nations. India planning for functional relations with Asian countries could be reinforced by commonality of affinity of cultures, balancing with diplomacy China's military superiority and economic advantage. The Act East Policy will develop connectivity with other countries. It will strengthen the linkages between ASEAN and India. India is in process of building India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and its extension to Lao PDR and Cambodia and has undertaken a new highway project connecting India-Myanmar-Lao PDR- Viet Nam-Cambodia as well as enveloping the Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC) connecting Southeast Asia

to South Asia on the eastern part of India in order to add greater momentum to the growing trade and investment linkages between ASEAN and India.

## CONCLUSION

The position of India at present is growing economic power. The current global financial turmoil represents an opportunity for Asia to assume global responsibilities commensurate with its strength. The EAS is an appropriate forum to assume global responsibilities and commensurate with its strength. However, there are many hindrances will come but, that should not stop the pursuit for economic development. The government of India needs to actively engage with the insurgent groups for political dialogue striving for peaceful solution to the discard old problems of the region. They also need to simultaneously go ahead with development projects. There is also an ardent need to give role to the Northeastern states in this policy. Thus, the proper implementation of the policy will help to develop this region. The relevance of India's Act East Policy and its focus on neighbourhood connectivity is high due to its strategic, economic, and geopolitical implications. The policy represents a proactive approach to strengthening India's ties with Southeast and East Asia, using the northeastern states as a gateway. Robust regional connectivity is critical for advancing these goals, countering China's influence, and fostering economic development in India's border regions.

## FUNDING :

The authors received no financial support for this "research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

## COMPETING INTEREST :

The author declare no competing interests.

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