“India’s Look East Policy 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. Most of all it is about reaching out to our civilisational neighbours in South East Asia and East Asia”– Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh

Introduction

ASEAN was formed in 1967 and its founding fathers had envisioned an organization which would include all the ten countries of Southeast Asia (SEA). It began with five Southeast Asian states (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand); and others including the LMCV countries (Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam) joined later. An eleventh country, East Timor, is yet to be granted membership. The SEA countries are diverse and at varying stages of development- with Singapore at the forefront and Myanmar still a least developed
country (LDC). The emergence of India from a gloomy to a glowing position in the global arena, coupled with a number of virtues like enormous size, huge population, convenient geostrategic location, progressive military might, meteoric economic growth inspired various states including South-East Asian nations to devise collaborative ties with India.

India-ASEAN relations are a reflection of the complementariness of interests between the two entities. As India chooses to embark on a benign projection of its rising power, it has become imperative to chart a foreign policy commensurate with its ambitions in Asia and the world. For India’s power to be accepted in the Asian Continent, it needs to look beyond its immediate neighbours in the sub-Continent, and diversify and cement its relations mainly with the South-East Asian nations, the very essence of its Look East Policy and its continuing effort to sustain and improve ties with a regional body like ASEAN. This paper will discuss the India-ASEAN cooperation in various fields, the on-going efforts and will also try to explore the Historical Overview, Bilateral-Dialogue Relations, Political and Security Issues, various possibilities and Strategic Implications of cooperation including defence cooperation and convergence of interest of both the region in 21st century.

**Historical Background**

In the annals of its history, India has had extensive cultural, economic and political ties with the Southeast Asian nations. But in the years after independence, this region was completely overlooked by India because of various reasons. The tumultuous relationship with Pakistan affected India’s policy considerations as India looked to develop and maintain good relations with the Western world, so that they supported India’s views on Kashmir. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) afforded a greater degree of interaction between India and many countries which it had neglected in the immediate years after its independence. India supported the anti-colonial movement in Southeast Asia—the convening of the Asian Relations Conference in 1947, a special conference on Indonesia in January 1949, Chairmanship of the International Control Commission on India-China in 1954 and the sponsoring of the Bandung Conference—all these reflected India’s deep involvement in the freedom struggle being waged by the countries of the region. But the growing pro-Soviet tilt in India’s foreign policy drove a wedge between India and the Southeast Asian nations. Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines were strongly anti-communist. India’s proposal for a security arrangement in the region also did not go down well with the ASEAN countries as it was seen to be part of the Soviet Union’s attempts to bring the region under its influence. ASEAN also did not support India’s cause during the 1971 Indo-Pak war.

**India ASEAN Relations after the end of Cold War**

The end of the cold war marked a turning point in India’s relations with ASEAN. The resolution
of the Cambodian conflict brought about a change in Indo-ASEAN relations. The then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s path-breaking visit to China in 1988 also marked a tremendous shift in Sino-Indian relations and had a bearing on Indo-ASEAN relations as well. With the launching of India’s economic liberalisation programme in 1991, ASEAN came to be identified as being pivotal to India’s policy in the Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN also decided to expand its membership to include all countries which are geographically part of Southeast Asia. A quantum jump in Indo-Asean relations came with the effort to forge closer links with the Southeast Asian countries after 1991. This period saw the beginning of its Look-East Policy which was intended to reach out to the countries of East and Southeast Asia which had been neglected by India in spite of cultural, religious, geographical proximity and historical links.

The changed global circumstances forced India to adapt itself to the new emerging world order. India began an overhaul of its foreign policy and it was felt that ASEAN could be of much help to India in this exercise. India extended support to ASEAN’s efforts in establishing peace in Cambodia and bring the warring factions to the negotiating table at the Jakarta Informal Meet (JIM I and JIM II) and later co-operated with the United Nations Transitional Authority in its efforts to bring peace to Cambodia.

It was in the wake of the failure of SAARC that India decided to “Look-East” as India already had deep-seated cultural, religious and political links with the Southeast Asian countries. But there were many factors which impeded India’s efforts in this process. The ASEAN countries were pro-West in their outlook and projected Vietnam as their common threat as opposed to India’s views on Vietnam and Cambodia. The booming economies of the Southeast Asian countries also attracted India. ASEAN was also on the lookout for new partners and untapped markets. The break-up of the erstwhile Soviet Union, its withdrawal from Cam Ranh Bay and the American withdrawal from the Subic Bay naval base created a security vacuum in the region. India’s close relations with the Soviet Union acted as a dampener. India’s position on the Soviet presence in Afghanistan and the recognition given to the Heng Samarin regime in Cambodia also hindered the development of close ties with ASEAN. However, India ultimately succeeded in becoming a sectoral- dialogue partner of the ASEAN in 1992 and a full-dialogue partner in 1996. The other full dialogue partners are: Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the US. With the inclusion of Myanmar, India and ASEAN now share a 1,600-km land border. Despite the economic crisis that plagued the region in the late 1990’s, Indo-Asean relations have been continuously on the upswing.

India’s Look East Policy

India’s notable presence in the global arena can be evidently discerned from its dynamic foreign policy orientation as well as from a number of enterprising collaborative ventures with
other nations. In the early nineties the then Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narsimha Rao initiated a new chapter as the ‘Look-East Policy’ in Indian foreign policy paradigm. The Look-East Policy portrays a strategic shift in India’s vision of the world and India’s position in the rapidly developing global economy. Since the time of inception of the Policy India and ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) have embarked upon multiple bilateral, regional and sub-regional initiatives for the flourishing pursuit of the Policy3.

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 abstinence 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. India and ASEAN reciprocally have embarked upon a number of initiatives for rejuvenating their ties in multiple areas. Frequent tête-à-tête from both the sides promulgates better implementation of the Policy. The improving intensification of economic linkages with ASEAN has inspired India to enter into the second phase of its Look-East Policy. Phase 2 is the deviation from complete economic issues to the broader agenda involving security cooperation, actively constructing transport corridors and erecting pillars of linkages and connectivity. This phase of India’s Look-East Policy renders ample relevance to the development of its North-Eastern Region because of its geographical proximity to South-East Asia. The North-Eastern tip of India consisting of contiguous seven sister states- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and the state of Sikkim – constitutes a unique narrow passageway connecting the Indian subcontinent to East and South-East Asia and acts as a crucial corridor for human migration between these areas. The North-East region because of its favourable geographic location, cradled by the Himalayas in the north, Bay of Bengal in the south and flanked by 5 Asian countries- Nepal, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh, acts as a gateway to South-East Asia. There are ample possibilities for North-East India to reap benefits from India’s thriving relations with South East Asia as the process of globalisation provides the countries with the opportunities to grapple with cross-market accessibility and enabling them alleviate their poverty and economic backwardness4.

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.

As India’s External Affairs Minister SM Krishna said during his inaugural address at the recent India-ASEAN Delhi Dialogue III, “It has been a gratifying engagement for us, an engagement which has drawn strength from India’s rapidly developing bilateral ties with individual ASEAN countries, and from our millennia-old bonds with the countries and civilizations of the region.”

Reflecting on the kind of role that India sees for itself and the extension of its own democratic nature to its regional calculations, India’s National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon remarked at the Dialogue III, “From the Indian point of view it (the new Asian security order) should be open, it should be flexible and it should be inclusive. This is essential for the order to work.” India’s strengthening relations with the individual countries of the ASEAN and the regional body at large is mutually reinforcing.

The foreign policy vision of a rising India should reflect an enlargement of vision and a continuous effort towards cultivation of resources to increase its zone of influence, albeit in a more diplomatic and friendly manner without evoking sentiments that could brand India as a meddling power. Undoubtedly, this is basically where India could chart out a more benign space for itself in the South-East Asian region despite the overwhelming presence of the Chinese power. As Krishna said, “We feel that the principles of State sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of others must be the bedrock of our cooperative endeavours.” India’s strategic and diplomatic maneuvers in South-East Asia are signs of its intent to play a more substantial role in Asia.

As such, India and its relations with the ASEAN countries have a major role in shaping the future of Asia, and by repercussions the future of international politics. During the Delhi Dialogue III, Menon also reflected on the success of India-ASEAN cooperation in tackling
piracy in the Malacca Straits and called for replicating the cooperation model for promoting the new security architecture too for the region. He also emphasized that Asia, as the fastest developing region had to deal with security issues and it had “the most to lose from instability and insecurity in the international system.” The shifting nature of power is something constant in international politics, and the 21st century is being already labelled an Asian century, in which the two rising giants, India and China will definitely play a big role. As the saying goes: With great powers, comes great responsibilities, India is at a great juncture in its history, travelling an upward journey to major power status. According to sources, India and ASEAN are expected to widen their trade engagement by signing a free trade agreement (FTA) next year that will cover services and investment. “Next year, we will celebrate our 20th anniversary and it would be a commemorative summit…let’s hope that at the summit, we will be able to deliver a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) (between India and ASEAN), because so far it is only in goods,” ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan said. Recall, India and ASEAN had implemented Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in goods in January last year and are engaged in intense negotiations to expand this pact to include services and investments.

According to sources, India and the ASEAN are committed to achieving a trade target of $70 billion by 2012, up 40 per cent from $50 billion in 20106.

**India ASEAN Cultural similarities and Linguistic attachments**

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. It will be fatal for India in the long run if its government ever tries to get integrated with South East Asia by using North-East as a channel for its economic progress. 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. Thence, 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.

**India ASEAN Economic relations after India’s Look East Policy**

India has had close cultural and economic ties with Southeast-Asian countries throughout the history. But with the significant changes that occurred in the world’s politics and economic scenario since the early 1990’s and India’s own march towards economic liberalization has compelled India to focus on strengthened and multifaceted relationship with ASEAN countries.

Besides, ASEAN's political and strategic importances in the larger Asia-Pacific-Region and its potential to become a major partner of India in the area of trade and investment have encouraged India to seek closer linkage with these countries. Keeping theses points in mind a conscious effort was begun in 1991 to reach out these ASEAN countries through our “Look East Policy”. With the eastward expansion of ASEAN to include Myanmar, India and ASEAN countries are no longer just remain maritime neighbours but share a land boundary of over 1600 K.m2. It now provides a land bridge for India to connect with Asia-Pacific-Centred economic crosscurrents shaping with 21st century market place. On the other hand ASEAN seeks to India’s professional and technical strengths. Apart from recognizing India’s emergence as attractive trade partner and investment destination, ASEAN has also increasingly comes to see it as a stabilizing factor in the region. The convergence of interest of India and ASEAN in various fields provides further impetus to explore the possibilities which takes this relationship at its zenith in 21st century.
India’s relations with the major powers and her neighbouring nations have been conditioned by the changing contours of the international environment. Military and domestic political necessities have also influenced the nature of the policy towards particular regions at different moments. The relations between India and the South East Asian nations can be explored in this context. The links between India and South East Asia have followed a non-linear course. While the need to combat colonialism induced a sense of solidarity among the nations in the early twentieth century, the East-West rivalry of the Cold War era made their political, security and economic interests divergent. The geo-strategic and economic realities of the post Cold War period have propelled India and South-East Asia to forge strong economic and security ties. The potential of India and South East Asian relations and cooperation is yet to be exploited fully but consistent initiatives have made most analysts and observers hopeful. The role of ASEAN and the Look East policy (Phases 1 and 2) initiative by the Indian government have been most crucial in this regard. Situated in the Asian subcontinent, South-East Asian nations form the second ring of neighbouring states for India. Thus, the veering towards Southeast Asian nations at this juncture found a legitimate platform in India’s strategic thinking. The visits of Rajiv Gandhi to various capitals of the member countries of ASEAN were a landmark attempt to establish rapport with the Southeast Asian nations. Also, his visit to reengage China (December 1988) Japan and Australia was an indication that India was being driven to the East. Rising Security Concerns: In the wake of the 9/11 and especially after Southeast Asia was designated as the ‘second front of terrorism’, the security dimension has assumed tremendous importance in India-ASEAN relations. The Bali bombing of 2004 has particularly exposed the seamier side of the connection between international terror networks and their local outfits. India and ASEAN states have explored the possibility of establishing joint working groups to combat this new threat. Indian leaders have been vocal about pressing for a more coordinated effort to tackle traditional and non-traditional security threats.

**India ASEAN Avenues of security cooperation based on evolving convergences**

- Maritime security, combating and containing terrorism and transnational crime.

- Preventing the spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction, human trafficking and trafficking in small arms.

- Confidence building, conflict prevention and resolution

- Energy and environment preservation

- Promotion of democracy, human rights, peace, development and disarmament.
ASEAN functional cooperation includes cooperation in sectors such as, Science & Technology, Human Resources Development, Health and Pharmaceuticals, Space Sciences, Agriculture, Information & Communication Technology, Transport and Infrastructure, Tourism and Culture and Small and Medium Enterprises etc.

Strategic Implications For India in current Scenario

Defence and Security is a major area of future co-operation between India and ASEAN. No longer is security of South Asia and Southeast Asia separate. Both the region has suffered from new threat of terrorism. Thus, to get rid of it, a global alliance for Counter Terrorism is need of the hour, where both India and ASEAN can play the major role. The tsunami in the recent years has brought the issue of Disaster Mitigation as another possible area of cooperation. Besides, other transnational crimes such as trafficking particularly in women and children, cyber crimes, international economic crimes, environmental crimes, sea piracy and money laundering needs to be checked through effective institutional linkages and programmes of cooperation giving priority to information exchange and capacity building.

Making this cooperation more interesting at the 14th annual meeting of the ARF in 2nd August 2007 in Manila, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee offers a training module on Maritime Security, specifically for the ARF member-states, with themes of anti-piracy, search-and-rescue [missions], offshore and port security, anti-smuggling and narcotics control and anti-poaching operations.” The nucleus of the module would be “capacity-building” for these and related aspects of maritime security. Thus, the prospect of cooperation in this area is tremendous. Another convergence of interest to foster closer cooperation in reforming of and democratizing the UN and its institution by making them more reflective of the contemporary realities, might strengthen the bond between India and ASEAN in 21st century. In fact, both sides are eager for a multilateral world order with genuine role of the UN. Emphasizing the importance of multilateralism in ASEAN Business Advisory Council at Kula Lumpur, Indian PM Dr ManMohan Singh said “regional building block of multilateralism in an increasingly globalised world. Besides their co-operation in multilateral forum, particularly the WTO and in addressing the challenges of economic, food, human and energy security will bring these two region more closer than ever before.

Thus, the two sides have to work for more space for the developing and the least developed countries in the WTO. It is also expected that, India might convince all the ASEAN members to support its candidature for the permanent membership in Security Council.

India has made impressive progress on the defence and strategic front in changing situations. A sea change in the political atmosphere that Southeast Asia witnessed in the aftermath of the cold war, especially after the Cambodian issue was settled and looking at Vietnam as a potential ally of ASEAN, contributed to this in a big way. Moreover, India’s military might in
the emergent Asian balance of power could not be ignored any longer. The Southeast Asian nations began to look upon India as a power that could play a kind of 'balancing role' vis-à-vis China in particular. On the other hand, it was in India's interest to ensure that Southeast Asia would not be dominated by a regional great power once it became obvious that the superpowers were going to build-down their presence, which coincided with a similar thinking within Southeast Asia. The upshot of convergence of interests was the genesis of a new strategic interaction with several of the ASEAN nations. A unique advantage India enjoyed was that its military, despite being dominated by the Moscow supplied equipment, had continued to maintain links with West Europe.

Critical remarks with regard to the ambitions of the Indian Navy were replaced by many instances of greater defence cooperation. A number of confidence building measures (CBMs) that India undertook and greater appreciation by the Southeast Asian countries of Indian maritime concerns ushered in a new era of cooperation which began to transcend beyond the naval contours. Aside from periodic naval exercises and the biannual get-together of regional navies, called the Milan, India has entered into bilateral defence cooperation agreements with Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Laos, and Indonesia. India has also been actively involved in assisting the armed forces of Myanmar and Thailand. For instance, Singapore has not only made use of India's missile testing range to test its own guns and missiles, but also uses Indian facilities to train its naval personnel- the first time ever that India has done for a foreign country. Similarly, the Thai pilots are being trained in India to gain experience to operate their aircraft carrier, and the Myanmarese get anti-insurgency training. India and Indonesia have also frequently conduct joint patrolling in the critical straits of Southeast Asia ensuring security of sealanes of communication. It is notable that India’s strategic engagement with Southeast Asia is the strongest compared to any other Asian power. One reason why India has been relatively more successful is that, apart from the absence of any border/territorial disputes and any historical baggage, India is seen to be not having any ‘ambitions’ in and posing no security threat to the region10.

**ASEAN-INDIA Dialogue Relations**

India dialogue relations have grown rapidly from a sectoral dialogue partnership in 1992 to a full dialogue partnership in December 1995. The relationship was further elevated with the convening of the ASEAN-India Summit in 2002 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. All these took place in a decade, which clearly signifies the importance of the dialogue partnership to ASEAN and India and the progress made in the cooperation11. This reflects the confidence both ASEAN and India have in the dialogue partnership which is reflected by the expanding and intensifying dialogue and cooperation in many sectors. ASEAN-India cooperation covers the economic, political and security, and development cooperation dimensions with a number of mechanisms established to promote dialogue and cooperation in these areas. In recent years, sectoral
cooperation has been gaining strength with the establishment of working group level meetings in science and technology, transport and infrastructure, and small and medium scale enterprises.

**Political and Security Issues**

Since India became a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN, the collaboration has transcended the realm of functional cooperation to cover political and security dimensions. India participates in a series of consultative meetings with ASEAN which include the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Post Ministerial Conferences (PMCs) 10+1 and 10+10. Since July 1996, India has been an active participant of the ARF. It views the ARF as valuable process in promoting stable relationships between the major powers, and as a useful complement to the bilateral alliances and dialogues between India and ASEAN Member Countries, which are at the heart of the region’s security architecture. ASEAN and India committed themselves to jointly contribute to the promotion of peace, stability and development in the Asia-Pacific region and the world, and respond positively to the challenges of a dynamic regional and international environment. ASEAN and India are now intensifying their political and security dialogue to add a new dimension to a mutually beneficial economic and commercial relationship. Reflective of India’s interest in intensifying its engagement with ASEAN, both sides now are in the process of jointly developing an India-ASEAN Vision 2020, as a roadmap to mutually desired objectives.

**India ASEAN Bilateral Relations**

India has strengthened its bilateral relations with all the South East Asian nations in the last two decades since launching of the Look East Policy. High level visits of heads of states from most of these nations have taken place. India has entered into a few bilateral Free Trade Agreements (Thailand) and economic cooperation agreements (Indonesia and Singapore). The high point of India’s relations with Malaysia is the defence cooperation which began in 1993 and has developed over the years with annual meeting of the defence secretaries, military training and supply of defence equipment. Special attention is being paid to the three economically under developed countries, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, where there is enough scope and opportunity for India to extend its influence. Indonesia and Singapore has helped India to get into the East Asia Summit despite objections from some other ASEAN members and China. Of all the South East Asian nations, Myanmar has a special place from India’s strategic and security perspective.

**Look-East and the North-East**

The North Eastern States of India are often described as land locked. They are joined to the rest of India by a narrow land corridor that skirts the north of Bangladesh. This land corridor
is only 21 to 40 Km in width and is known as the Chicken’s Neck. This has been a serious impediment for the development of the region, which has lagged behind the rest of the country in terms of infrastructure and industrial development. With the release of the document "North Eastern Region Vision 2020" by the Prime Minister in July 2008 a serious effort has been made for socio-economic development of this region to match with the objectives of the Look East Policy. Several measures have been undertaken under the aegis of the Look East policy to uplift North East India such as the “Asian Highway”, “Asian Railway link” and “Natural Gas pipeline”. The Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport facility is aimed at establishing connectivity between Indian ports and Sittwe port in Myanmar through riverine transport and road links in Mizoram. With the Ganga Mekong initiative there is potential for direct flights between Guwhati - Ho-Chi Minh city – Imphal – Hanoi. This document (Vision 2020) admits that the Look East Policy has failed to uplift the North East in the last fifteen years or so as most of the goods from ASEAN is sent through the sea route as the land route is thought highly unsafe for reasons such as lack of infrastructure and insurgency.

The China Factor: India getting preference over china

In the cold war era, South East Asian nations perceived China as dangerous because of its military expansionist scheme in Asia. While now the “peaceful rise” of China is being considered more of an opportunity despite the challenges. China is virtually dominating the South East Asian region. The ASEAN-China Free Trade Area created by an accord in 2004 has come into effect from January 2010. This covers nearly 1.9 billion people. In terms of economic value this is the third largest regional agreement, after only the EU and the NAFTA. “A new talking point in East Asia is that of the multi-lateralisation or, more precisely, the likely enlargement of the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI) later this year. The CMI is basically a currency pool of the ASEAN+3 countries (China, Japan and South Korea). The move was a direct response to the recent outbreak of the US-induced global and financial economic crisis, which has not fully blown away as now” (P.S. Suryanarayana-Frontline January 29, 2010). China is predicted to overtake Japan as the world’s second largest economy some time in 2010. India must be aware of the fact that it has not been invited to the EAS because of its rising economic potential alone but more as a balancing force to offset the China factor. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has repeatedly mentioned that in a global environment, India is not afraid of competition and it can complement rather than compete in the East Asia Summit (EAS)14. China is virtually dominating this region. By the ASEAN-China Accord entered into in November 2004 (during the 10th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane), the world’s biggest free trade area has been created removing all tariffs. The tariff cuts that began in 2005 will be completed by 2010 drawing the ASEAN’s combined economies of US $ 1 trillion closer to China’s US $ 1.4 trillion. In the Cold war era, India perceived China as dangerous country because of its high military expenditure and ambitious plans in this field. But now the image of China has changed
and now is seen as an economic powerhouse. To gain confidence and to build trust among the Asian countries Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, said in a speech during the last ASEAN Summit that “China will continue to seek peace and development through cooperation and will strive to achieve development that will bring about peace, openness, cooperation and harmony as well as benefit to itself and other countries”. Despite the remarks of the Chinese Premier some analysts are of the opinion that China preferred a smaller Asian grouping (without U.S., India, Australia and New Zealand) that can integrate quickly on the economic front and which China can influence more significantly. Perhaps it is this increasing influence of China and its motives that had prompted countries like Singapore and Indonesia to cooperate with India, Australia and New Zealand into the EAS. Hence India must be aware that it has not been invited to EAS because of its rising economic potential alone but more as a balancing force to offset the China factor. Although it is being said that India and China are not rivals and they can complement rather than compete in the EAS.

China’s growing presence and influence in the region, economic and strategic makes diversified relationship with India necessary for Southeast Asia. With the US down-scaling its relations with the region, many believe that India will provide added stability and security to the region. In the immediate future, India and ASEAN countries must intensify their cooperation both at the bilateral and regional levels to combat common threats to security that have the potential of shaking the very foundations of the polity. Since India’s north-eastern region is being recognised as the ‘corridor to South East Asia, integration with the traditional neighbouring regions like Myanmar, Bangladesh and Thailand should be facilitated through transportation networks and this would contribute to sustained peace and development. It maybe stated therefore, that changing political, economic and security considerations condition the bilateral or multilateral policy ties of any country and India-Southeast Asia relations is no exception to this. The potential of the relations must be carefully cultivated by policymakers and strategists as Southeast Asia is likely to remain a viable foreign and security policy option for India in its quest to establish its geo-political and economic prowess in the years to come. As India deepens its ties and employs pragmatic diplomacy to increase its influence in South-East Asia, the repercussions in India-China relations are inevitable. China considers itself the unchallenged “dragon” of the Asian Continent; hence the Indian “elephant” strides would be unsettling. But if Indian foreign policies manage to ruffle feathers and unsettle the Chinese strategic community, then India must have been doing something right.

The South China Sea Disputes and Indian Policy

In recent weeks (October 2011), statements by Chinese officials reasserting China’s “indisputable sovereignty” over the South China Sea and warnings to India against investment in the region are seen as signs of Chinese aggressiveness that would inevitably precipitate
conflict. Suggestions for greater Indian involvement in the South China Sea disputes are made on the grounds that India must be forceful in its dealings with China. The continuation of ONGC Videsh Limited’s (OVL) investments in Vietnamese energy fields is certainly advisable. In fact, there is nothing to indicate that the Indian government is thinking otherwise. OVL’s presence in Vietnam is not a recent phenomenon. Its first joint-venture for offshore oil and natural gas exploration in Vietnam’s Lan Tay field along with Petro Vietnam and BP became functional in 2003. Deals for the investments now in the headlines were signed in May 2006; this is a project that will not be halted because of oblique Chinese statements. India simply need not take heed of Chinese views on Indian economic ventures.

In the aftermath of statements by the US and skirmishes over fishing vessels, ASEAN and China agreed upon The Guidelines on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea at the Bali Summit in July 2010. Recent tensions may well prod the parties towards a more binding code of conduct. This is not to suggest that territorial claims and sovereignty issues will be resolved, but certainly can become more manageable to prevent military conflict. A revision of Indian policy on the issue should be based on a clear understanding of what India stands to gain and how Indian national interest is strengthened. India’s relationships with South East Asian countries are not uni-dimensional. They are not geared only towards checking the Chinese imprint in the region but are reflective of India’s multifarious interests globally. As regards military support for OVL’s operations, the issue should be reflected upon seriously. It is one thing to build capabilities in order to deter misadventure, quite another to back investment with military might. This is a matter that will affect Indian ventures globally.

Advantages of the India’s Look East Policy

Look east policy has helped India in strengthening its place in the global economy and gets a better deal in its interactions outside the region. America and European countries had entered into a lot of different mutual agreement which has further increased their reputation and bargaining power. India was in danger of isolation in the global economy. India was not getting its due importance. But due to its Look east policy India economy is getting integrated with the Asian economy, so India gets support from Asian countries which have increased India’s importance at global level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>East Asia’s Strengths</th>
<th>India’s Strengths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Electronic equipment</td>
<td>Computer Software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Heavy engineering</td>
<td>Light engineering and pharmaceuticals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Product development and marketing</td>
<td>Process development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Underutilized capacity in construction</td>
<td>Huge potential demand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Look east policy has helped India in strengthening its place in the global economy and gets a better deal in its interactions outside the region. America and European countries had entered into a lot of different mutual agreement which has further increased their reputation and bargaining power. India was in danger of isolation in the global economy. India was not getting its due importance. But due to its Look east policy India economy is getting integrated with the Asian economy, so India gets support from Asian countries which have increased India’s importance at global level.

**Short Comings in the India’s Look East Policy**

- India still remains outside the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum

- India has entered into a number of pacts, agreements and FTAs with nations of ASEAN but its record for implementation of such accords has been poor. The Indian industry has doubts about its own competitive efficiency or it does not want competition at home or it is scared of cheaper exports to India from these countries.

- India lags behind China and Japan in almost all spheres of Pan East Asian cooperation, East Asian observers reckon that India has so far appeared less proactive than China on some critical issues.

- Some analysts feel that India’s Look East Policy lacks a strategic vision despite seeking defense cooperation with some ASEAN nations (Myanmar, Indonesia and Vietnam) and securing a role for joint patrolling in the Malacca Straits. India does not take an assertive role perhaps due to its limited military capability

- There are some domestic political compulsions which impinge on the desired reforms and the struggle the liberalization process is undergoing in the “minds of our people”. India has come under harsh criticism for the big negative items list and the delay of over six years in finalizing the ASEAN-India FTA.

India should go ahead with proper implementation of the pacts, agreements and FTAs without bothering about the aforementioned factors. The Indian industry will ensure that India will always gain from these arrangements.

The Look East policy did not find Japan on its radar and failed to improve India’s economic ties with it. Trade with Japan actually declined dramatically dropping its share to one-third of its level of 7 per cent in 1993. One of the causes, of course, was the fact that the Japanese economy was stagnate during this period. But still it is difficult to explain the reason behind this dramatic drop. This was the biggest failure of Look east policy. Failure to involve Japan
and a build economic relationship with it also resulted in closing the doors on Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI). But now the situation is getting better and trade with Japan is increasing. During 1993-2003, Japan’s global FDI averaged at $ 50 billion a year, of which India received $ 220 million a year or less than one-fourth of 1 per cent! Even at the regional level, India received just 2 per cent of Japanese FDI. (China’s share was 10 times higher at 22 per cent).

**Improving Border Infrastructure**

The lack of proper cross-border transit points and integrated transport networks has posed major challenges. To facilitate growth of border trade the Union Minister of Commerce has introduced an Export Development Fund (EDF) for the Northeast traders and entrepreneurs. There is no provision to track where and how these funds are utilized. International trade centres at the border points and connecting these points through the existing roads to state capitals is vital, as is coordination in banking operations, such as extending banking services and ATM booths, telecommunication network at the border points to improve trade activities.

Maintaining and monitoring the functioning of the major border points such as Moreh, Tamu and Tiddim (in Manipur) and Champhai (in Mizoram) should be the priority. Till date only the 160 km Tamu-Kalaywa-Kalemyo Road connecting Moreh to Myanmar has been accomplished. This road will eventually become a part of the Asian Highway. However, the completion of this project has not been able to bring any economic development for the region, due to increase in informal trade. In addition, exploring and developing new points-Lungwa/Ledo, Pongru and Pokhungri in Nagaland and Nampong, Vijayanagar and Khimiyang in Arunachal Pradesh are needed. The Manipur Commerce and Industries Minister had proposed an alternative border point-Beihiang in Manipur’s Churachandpur district along the Indo-Myanmar border which needs consideration. The proposal to upgrade the Rih-Tidim and Rih-Falam road, which will operationalize the India-Myanmar border trading point at Rih-Zokhawthar in Mizoram along with the Moiwa-Chindwin-Thailand trilateral highway project, needs immediate attention.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has embarked on a journey to the east to Japan, Malaysia and Vietnam from 24-30 October 2010. The Prime Minister’s visit is to reiterate India’s commitment to further strengthen multifaceted bilateral relations with Southeast Asian and East Asian countries. The first visit by Manmohan Singh to Malaysia as Prime Minister will be a landmark in reinforcing the rich cultural and historical links between India and Malaysia. This visit marked by talks on economic cooperation, integration in terms of infrastructure development, information technology, bio-technology, defence, railways, energy cooperation and greater-people-to-people linkages. This meeting will see the inauguration of the first meeting of the Malaysia-India CEO Forum and revival of the highway project between India and Malaysia that has been long delayed. India is also hoping to
conclude the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with Malaysia that has been in discussion since 2008 and which Kuala Lumpur appears to be delaying. It needs to be remembered that so far, out of the 10 ASEAN countries, only Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore have ratified the India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement with India. Mr Singh visited Vietnam for the 8th India-ASEAN Summit and the 5th East Asia Summit held on 30 October 2010. Indian leaders will hold bilateral talks with ASEAN and EAS leaders on the sidelines of the summits. The India-ASEAN summit will have the India-ASEAN Plan of Action for 2010-15 as the big item on its agenda. Both India and ASEAN are keen to liberalize the trade in services and investments that will provide new opportunities for the expansion of trade between them. ASEAN under its connectivity scheme looks forward to implementing the Comprehensive Asian Development Plan that will provide a road linking India with ASEAN, creating the Mekong-India economic corridor. The East Asian Summit that will be held on the same day will deliberate on energy, environment, financial cooperation, education and plans for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership of East Asia (CEPEA) and the creation of the Economic Research Institute of ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). The Indian Prime Minister is likely to also discuss bilateral ties with Vietnamese leaders. Both India and Vietnam approved setting up of a joint committee to strengthen their cooperation in the trade, investment and agricultural production sectors earlier this year. India has extended support to Vietnam to enhance and upgrade its capabilities in the defence sector and to help Vietnam to train forces for maintaining international peace and stability. Vietnam, on the other hand, will provide assistance in the repair and maintenance of Indian naval ships. Both the countries will share their experience and knowledge by developing linkages and cooperation among their defence institutions. All of these have implications for the South China Sea disputes and show that India is taking a greater interest in security matters in the region. While the most important drive for Singh’s visit is economic cooperation, India also needs to address several other issues. One is the matter of the rights and status of the Indian diaspora settled in Southeast Asian countries. For instance, ethnic Indians in Malaysia suffer from various kinds of discrimination. Next, India should revive and deepen its regional engagement through the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation initiative and with other regional schemes such as BIMSTEC, as well as initiate more cooperation with the ADB, World Bank, and IMF that will help in providing assistance in facilitating trade and promoting development in the region. Meanwhile, ASEAN should extend its supportive hand to India’s entry to Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and in the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM), a mechanism created in March 2010 to help manage future regional financial crises. At the same time, India should also continue to pursue bilateral FTAs with each ASEAN nation.

Conclusion

Each ASEAN nation has its own characteristics – some are supportive of India, some are predominantly Muslim, some are economically more developed then India, some are
underdeveloped and one is a close neighbor influencing the security of India. Hence India should tailor the bilateral relations with every country in different way to suit the requirements of that particular country and that of India. ASEAN and EAS hold great promise for India. Adequate interaction with these groupings will result in better integration with this region and facilitate India economic development. Indian businesses which are looking to go global will get huge markets in other countries. They will be able to export their goods and get a market share because of low tariffs due to the pacts, agreements and FTAs. Although foreign companies will also get this advantage but Indian companies will be able to compete with these because of their competitiveness. CMI and emerging FTAs / RTAs between Asian countries provide foundations for a broader and more ambitious initiative to take the existing India-ASEAN relationship to a higher level, like an Asian Economic Community, which constitutes ASEAN, China, Japan, Korea and India as member countries. Such a community would be roughly the size of the European Union in terms of income, and bigger than NAFTA in terms of trade. It would account for half the world’s population and it would hold foreign exchange reserves exceeding those of the EU and NAFTA put together. This can give a greater push to Indian growth.

Indian policy-makers should create such a scenario where India’s arrival as a major power in the international system should not be seen as a liability but as an asset by the ASEAN countries. In recognizing India’s stature in regional Asian and international politics, these countries should see a reflection of their rising opportunities for their own countries in an inclusive, healthy and peaceful Asian order. To make them realize their own success in the success of India would indeed be the litmus test for present and future Indian policy-makers. India’s objectives in Look East Policy can be furthered through areas—education (human resources development), democracy and culture—where it has a comparative advantage over Asian countries. In this context the Nalanda project which envisages the setting up of an international university is noteworthy. India has a lead in Information Technology. Many South East Asians are not only interested in our IITs and IIMs but also want campuses opened in places like Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta. Tourism is an area where much can be done to reverse the trend of more Indians going to South East Asia (Singapore) for shopping. Places of Buddhist interest like, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Nalanda and places of Muslim interest like Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri Ajmer, and Hyderabad have to be suitably promoted for establishing people to people contacts.

At the strategic level, India’s Look East policy envisages the ASEAN states and Japan as key partners in East Asia. Ties with South Korea are also strengthening. With India-US relations also expanding in scope and content, India can become a stabilizing and balancing force in this region. India’s inclusion ab initio into the Group of Twenty Economies (G-20) has boosted its image in this region. Six of the 20 (Australia, China, Japan, India, Indonesia and South Korea) are from East Asia. The crux is that this Look East policy should reinforce and demonstrate
India’s commitment to this region which accounts for about one-third of India’s trade. It should also be made clear that this commitment will not be influenced in any way by the improving relations between India and the US and EU. The dialogue process with ASEAN is meant to complement and augment India’s bilateral relations with the Southeast Asian neighbours. There is much more that can be achieved. It is up to India and ASEAN to seize the initiative. The potential is huge and as they say, the sky is the limit. However, at the political level, India intends to gain more support for its candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council and to create a framework to mark 20 years of ASEAN-India Dialogue during the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in 2012 in New Delhi.

Besides building defence cooperation, the LEP has also helped India to get its own security needs better understood in the region. May 1998, when Pokharan-II (the test explosions of five nuclear devices) took place, the Western members of the ARF as well as Japan and Australia expressed strong reservations and disapproval, and imposed sanctions on India. These reservations have since melted away and both Japan and Australia are trying their best to make for the lost time and opportunities in India. The ASEAN countries showed considerable understanding, at least informally through bilateral diplomatic channels, of India’s security predicament. A number of ASEAN members are willing to support India’s permanent membership of the UN Security Council (UNSC). Understanding has also been shown to India’s position during the Kargil conflict and the persisting challenge of cross-border terrorism to India’s stability and political harmony. Thanks to the 9/11 events, today India’s concern with regard to cross-border terrorism is also better understood and appreciated among its eastern neighbours. The security significance of this region has been further reinforced in the context of 9/11 events and the global war on terrorism, as India is also one of the most seriously affected victims of this menace. Reports about Al-Qaeda and Jihadi forces having links in the whole of Southeast Asia surface frequently. With the Islamic rebellions of differing intensity raging in various countries of the region like Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Myanmar, the threat of global jihad linking up with regional extremists will continue to loom large on the region.

As there are no basic conflicts in the bilateral relations between India and ASEAN Nations and given their shared perceptions of the regional strategic environment defence collaboration offers new opportunities for Both India and ASEAN Nations to further strengthen their relations in the 21st century. Now that India has become a summit partner of ASEAN, it provides an opportunity for the top leadership to visit Southeast Asia every year for exchange of views with counterparts. The three distinct features of the Look East policy are: one, India has managed to develop a multi-faceted relationship; two, successful defence diplomacy has been put in place; and three India is not averse to participate in regional multilateralism, security or economic. India’s connectivity diplomacy in the Southeast Asian region is also reflective of its invigorating ‘Look East’ policy. Linking itself to far-flung places in Southeast Asia...
Asia will not only help integrate India into the region, but also offer it decisive economic and strategic advantages.

However, New Delhi needs to speed up its efforts, otherwise its sluggish approach will fail to deliver long-term results. However, Indian policy makers have used this “opening-up” to strengthen ties with the military regimes in Bangladesh and Myanmar and launch counter insurgency movements against the groups from North Eastern India. More than the development of backward north eastern states and ending their isolation through re-establishing their historical cultural and economic ties, the military and security establishment has high-jacked the policy to fight insurgents from the region.

Author:
Asif Ahmed, is Assistant Professor. Defence & Strategic Studies. Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra. (Haryana) India asifahmed081@gmail.com

References
3. Reinforcing ‘Look East’ Policy [An article by Minister of State for External Affairs Mr.E.Ahamed], The MEA website, accessed electronically at http://www.meaindia.nic.in/interview/2006/01/17in01.htm
6. Ibid.1
10. Looking East: India and Southeast Asia, G. V. C. Naidu ,Research Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, India. Revised version of the paper presented at the Institute of International Relations (IIR)- Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) Second


12. ASEAN-INDIA DIALOGUE RELATIONS. As of March 2011, Accessed from the official website of ASEAN at http://www.asean.org/5738.html


---

Asif Ahmed

Asif Ahmed is Assistant Professor at the Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra teaching Defence and Strategic Studies having seven years Graduate and Post Graduate classes teaching experience. He holds an MA in Defence & Strategic Studies from Punjabi University, Patiala with couple of other Post graduate diplomas in Journalism & Mass Communications and in Distance Education. Asif Ahmed has published a Punjabi book National Security of India (2nd Edition also published) and recently Edited a book Science Technology and War. Also authored more than 60 Articles/Research papers in English, Punjabi, and Hindi languages in various newspapers, magazines, journals and has also edited 7 chapters in various books at the national and international levels. He also participated in Live Radio Talks and Phone in counseling programs at the All India Radio Patiala and Kurukshetra AIR station. Associate Member of Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, India and associated with many other different academic bodies and Organisations like Centre for Defence Sciences Research & Development (CDSRD) Allahabad, Advance Research Institute for Defence & Security Studies (ARIDSS) Meerut etc. His articles regularly published in Eurasia Review, Third Concept, Online Thinker, Radiance Views weekly, Iran Review, Sharnoff’s Global Views, Suraksha Chintan,
2 THOUGHTS ON “INDIA – ASEAN RELATIONS IN 21ST CENTURY: STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA – ANALYSIS”

Assamese
JULY 11, 2012 AT 6:00 PM

How does Indian Lok East policy fare in light of the fact that the land bridge from India to the east and south-east is populated by people whether Assamese, Naga, Mizo, Meitei that hates Indians to the core? Proof: India has to employ their Army to keep these populations in control. There is one Indian soldier for every 50 Manipuri, and every 100 Assamese. With Chinese help, India can be disrobed.

ASIF AHMED
JULY 14, 2012 AT 10:41 AM

INDIAN GOVERNMENT NEGLECTED THE DEVELPMENT OF THE NORTHEAST REGION IN PAST BUT NOW GOVT DOING SOME GOOD THINGS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION AND WELFARE OF ITS PEOPLES, The strife-riven States of India's Northeast are a case in point. It is commonplace to say that this region has remained an area of neglect for more than five decades since independence. From the point of view of national political consciousness, this is, perhaps, a correct
evaluation. In the context of developmental allocations and a wide range of economic and social indices, however, this is far from the truth. The States of the Northeast are ascribed a “special category” status by the Government of India, and the National Development Council (NDC), the apex body for the approval of Plan funding, earmarks 30 per cent of total Plan allocations for special category States as central assistance for State Plans. Significantly, these States receive 90 per cent of Plan assistance as a grant, and just 10 per cent as a loan, as against the norm of 30 per cent grant and 70 per cent loan for other States. Favoured treatment is also given by the Finance Commission with respect to the sharing of Central tax revenues. Clearly, therefore, these States have not been made to suffer as a result of their resource endowments. The Department of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) was created in 2001 and was accorded the status of a full fledged ministry on May 2004. The ministry is mainly concerned with the creation of infrastructure for economic development of North-Eastern region. Of late there is a wide recognition among policy makers and economists of the region that the main stumbling block for economic development of the Northeastern region is the disadvantageous geographical location. The coming of globalisation propagates deterritorialisation and a borderless world which is often associated with economic integration. With 98 percent of its borders with China, Myanmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal, Northeast India has better scope for development in the era of globalisation. As a result, a new policy developed among intellectuals and politicians that one direction the Northeastern region must be looking to as a new way of development lies with political integration with the rest of India and economic integration with the rest of Asia, with East and Southeast Asia in particular as the policy of economic integration with the rest of India did not yield much dividends. With the development of this new policy the Government of India directed its Look East policy towards developing the Northeastern region. This policy is reflected in the Year End Review 2004 of the Ministry of External Affairs, which stated that: India’s Look East Policy has now been given a new dimension by the UPA Government. India is now looking towards a partnership with the ASEAN countries, both within BIMSTEC and the India-ASEAN Summit dialogue as integrally linked to economic and security interests, particularly for India’s East and North East region.

However, the heavy and privileged status of the security forces in Northeast India, as well as seeming discriminatory treatment against Northeast Indians remain factors that contribute to tensions in the region. For example, the hunger strike by Irom Chanu Sharmila following the “Malom Massacre” has not received widespread coverage in India. The Central Government- irrespective of the Political Party in power, have always looked down upon the people of region and is not at all interested in their welfare. I accepted that The Government at Delhi is more concerned about the “Oil-Fields” of
Assam than the all around development of the North East and its people. The Indian Govt should try and overcome the Insurgent Groups operating in the region through good will and development of the region and genuine concern for its people. And not through the use of brutal and excessive force, ill-conceived adhoc policies mean only to oppress and intimidate the people of this region. The imposition of the Draconian Law – The Armed Forces Special Act in few states of the North East Region is a testimony enough to this fact. Only when the People Republic of China makes an ‘unlawful intrusion’ into the North East Region, and claims a part of it as its own then Govt of New Delhi’s sit up and take notice and starts showing ‘a genuine interest’ in the North East Region. The Root cause for Insurgency in this region lies in New Delhi Step Motherly Treatment and apparent lack of concern for the North East and its people.

corruption appears to be a view that is gaining ground among officials at the Centre who now claim that the States of the Northeast are afflicted by levels of corruption that are higher even than those that prevail in the perennially sick State of Bihar. Evidently ‘leakages’ – as the diversion of public monies to private coffers is euphemistically referred to – are extraordinarily high in the Northeast, and this is one reason why “Development packages leave the people – all people – of militancy-affected States cold.” Indeed, the greatest enthusiasm for ‘financial packages for the Northeast’ is displayed only among the bureaucracy – both at the Centre and in the States – and by the nexus of politicians and contractors who will eventually and substantially benefit from these flows of funds. The ‘corrupt elite’ of the Northeast has thus frequently been accused of enriching itself at the cost of the common people and of the development of the region.