



Connecting India's East with Indo-Pacific

This editorial is based on "[Connecting India's East with the Indo-Pacific](#)" which was published in The Hindu on 03/12/2022. It talks about the significance of the northeastern region of India in integrating the rest of India with the Indo-Pacific region.

For Prelims: Indo-Pacific, Northeast India Look East Policy and Act East Policy.

For Mains: Significance of Northeast region of India, Indo-Pacific region.

The concept of [Indo-Pacific](#) is a recent one; about a decade old. However, it has risen to significance quite rapidly. One of the reasons behind the popularity of the **Indo-Pacific region** is the shift in the **center of gravity of geopolitics** towards **Asia**.

The world's largest economies are located in the **Indo-Pacific region** namely, **China, India, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand, Australia, Taiwan, Malaysia and Philippines**.

India's "**Look East**" and "**Act East**" policies also entered the phase of **Indo-Pacific policy and strategy in 2018**. The [northeastern region of India](#) is immensely significant from strategic as well as economic point of view when it comes to strengthening India's ties with the southeast and east Asian nations which are also a part of the Indo-Pacific.

What are the Look East and Act East Policies?

▪ Look East Policy:

- In order to recover from the loss of the strategic partner **USSR** (end of the [Cold war 1991](#)), India sought to build up a relationship with the **USA** and allies of the **USA** in **Southeast Asia**.
- In this pursuit, former Prime Minister of India **P V Narasimha Rao** launched [Look East policy](#) in **1992**, to give a strategic push to India's engagement with the [South-East Asia region](#), to bolster its standing as a **regional power** and a **counterweight to the strategic influence of China**.

▪ Act East Policy:

- The '[Act East Policy](#)' announced in November 2014 is the **upgrade** of the **Look East Policy**.
- It is a diplomatic initiative to promote **economic, strategic and cultural relations** with the vast **Asia-Pacific region** at different levels.
- It involves **intensive and continuous engagement** with [Southeast Asian countries](#) in the field of **connectivity, trade, culture, defense and people-to-people-contact at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels**.

How NER Connects India with Indo-Pacific Region?

- **Strategic Significance:**
 - **North-East India** is the gateway to **South-East Asia** and beyond. It is India's land-bridge to **Myanmar**.
 - **India's Act East Policy** places the northeastern states on the territorial frontier of India's eastward engagement.
- **Economic Importance:** Investments in NER states basically have two fronts:
 - The strategic location of the region connects the product markets of the larger Indian geography with the robust **South and Southeast Asian markets**.
 - The existence of potent input market catalysts such as **social** (diversity, cultural richness), **physical** (potential energy supply hubs), **human** (inexpensive, skilled labor) and natural (minerals, forests) capitals in the region.
- **Infrastructure Development:**
 - **Japan** has been engaged for decades in the development and modernization of infrastructure, particularly road connectivity, across states in the region.
 - **The country** is presently involved in the construction of the **Dhubri-Phulbari bridge across the Brahmaputra River**.

What are the Major Challenges in Connecting NER with Indo Pacific?

- **Serious Non-Traditional Threats:** It includes the pernicious phenomena of **smuggling, drug trafficking, transnational border crime, rebel activity, and the [inflow of refugees](#) from Myanmar**.
- **China's Malicious Activities:** China has been known to play a pivotal role in the India's border tensions in the Northeast region such as [Doklam conflict](#) and in exacerbating the above-mentioned serious non-traditional threats.
 - Militant groups in northeastern region are getting funding from **China** such as [United Liberation Front of Assam \(U.L.F.A.\)](#) in 1979.
- **Internal Security Concerns: Extremist and insurgency groups** that have international links in escaping security forces, using of **hideouts in neighboring countries** like **Myanmar**, and the alleged **presence of international intelligence agencies** like **ISI** that operate in the **NER** are other major concerns that **hinder the optimum utilization of NER's potential**.
- **Growth and Developmental Challenges:** Isolation from the rest of India, lack of efficient infrastructure, poor road connectivity and slow pace of industrial growth are major causes of the NER's backwardness.

What can be Done to Uplift NER?

- **Act-East from Northeast:** Comprehensive implementation of Act East policy is relevant to the entire country but particularly important for the long-term growth of the NER.
 - The agenda for its implementation must be prepared in **active association with the State Governments of NER**.
- **Managing Border and Connectivity Issues:** Connectivity drives commerce, **air links to the NER should be a priority**. The development of road and railway projects should also be in **accordance with disaster-resilient measures**.
 - A fair assessment shows that there is **plenty of room for future border management and road connectivity**, that is both functional and people-focused.
 - **Japan** has been India's major partner in development of NER; such partnerships need to be leveraged with other countries too.
- **More Employment Opportunities:** Thousands of graduates are produced by local universities of NER. To uplift their living standard, creation of appropriate jobs and employment opportunities are need of the hour.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the implications of linking India's northeast to the Indo-Pacific region.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains

Q. Analyze internal security threats and transborder crimes along Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan borders including Line of Control (LoC). Also discuss the role played by various security forces in this regard. **(2020)**

Q. How far are India's internal security challenges linked with border management particularly in view of the long porous borders with most countries of South Asia and Myanmar? **(2013)**

Q. What is the significance of Indo-US defense deals over Indo-Russian defense deals? Discuss with reference to stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

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