



## 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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