



India's Act East Policy

Why in News

Recently, the Union Minister of State **Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)** said that connectivity is an important element of [Act East Policy](#).

Key Points

▪ About:

- 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, defence and people-to-people-contact** at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.

▪ Aim:

- To **promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and developing a strategic relationship** with countries in [Indo-pacific region](#) with a proactive and pragmatic approach and thereby **improving the economic development of the North Eastern Region (NER)** which is a gateway to the South East Asia Region.

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 the People's Republic of China**.

▪ Difference Between Look East and Act East:

◦ Look East:

- Look East policy focused on the [Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)](#) countries + Economic Integration.
 - India became a **dialogue partner of ASEAN** in 1996 and summit level partner in 2002.
 - In 2012 the relationship got **up-graded into a Strategic Partnership**.
 - The time when India launched the Look East Policy in 1992, India's trade with ASEAN was USD 2 billion. After signing the Free Trade Agreement in 2010 with ASEAN, the **trade has grown to USD 72 billion (2017-18)**.

- India is also an active participant in several regional forums like the [East Asia Summit \(EAS\)](#), [ASEAN Regional Forum \(ARF\)](#) etc.

- **Act East:**

- Act East Policy focused on ASEAN countries + Economic Integration + **East Asian countries + Security cooperation.**

- Prime minister of India highlighted **4C's of Act East Policy.**

- Culture
- Commerce
- Connectivity
- Capacity building

- Security is an important dimension of India's Act East Policy.

- In the context of growing Chinese assertiveness in the [South China Sea](#) and the Indian Ocean, **securing freedom of navigation and India's own role in the Indian Ocean** is a key feature of Act East Policy.

- In pursuance of this, India has been engaged under the narrative of Indo-pacific and informal grouping called [Quad](#).

- **Initiatives to Enhance Connectivity:**

- [Agartala-Akhaura Rail Link](#) between India and Bangladesh.
- Intermodal transport linkages and [inland waterways through Bangladesh.](#)
- [Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project](#) and the [Trilateral Highway Project](#) connecting the North East with Myanmar and Thailand.
- Under **India-Japan Act East Forum**, projects such as **Road and Bridges** and modernization of **Hydro-electric power projects** have been undertaken.

- **India-Japan Act East Forum** was established in 2017 which aims to provide a platform for India-Japan collaboration under the rubric of India's "**Act East Policy**" and Japan's "**Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy**".

- The Forum will **identify specific projects for economic modernization of India's North-East region** including those pertaining to connectivity, developmental infrastructure, industrial linkages as well as people-to-people contacts through tourism, culture and sports-related activities.

- **Other Initiatives:**

- Assistance extended in the form of [medicines/medical supplies to ASEAN countries during the pandemic.](#)
- Scholarships with offers of 1000 PhD fellowships have been offered at IITs for ASEAN countries participants.
- India is also implementing **Quick Impact Projects** in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam to provide development assistance to grass-root level communities in the fields of education, water resources, health etc.

- **Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)** are small-scale, low cost projects that are planned and implemented within a short timeframe.



India Acts East

With its Act East policy, India hopes to deepen its political, economic and security relationships with the countries of Southeast Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific. Balancing against the rise of China is a key driver.

- **China:** India views the rise of its principal strategic rival as a serious challenge and is forging relations with countries along its periphery to maintain the balance between them
- **ASEAN:** Boosting exports with the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a core plank of Modi's Act East policy
- **Japan:** The key regional power shares India's concerns over China's expansion
- **Australia:** China's rise has compelled Indian outreach to forge a stronger defense partnership
- ▨ **Northeast India:** New Delhi wishes for its remote northeastern wing to serve as a trading hub that connects to Southeast Asia through Myanmar
- **South Korea:** India wants to deepen trade, investment and security ties with this regional economic power

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