
North-East India: A ‘Gateway’ to Enhanced Connectivity with East and Southeast Asia

Job Tasung*

*Ph.D. Scholar at MMAJ Academy of International Studies (AIS), JMI, New Delhi.

Corresponding Email: *jobtasung36@gmail.com

Received: 03 July 2024 **Accepted:** 21 September 2024 **Published:** 07 November 2024

Abstract: *North-East India, situated at the crossroads of South, East, and Southeast Asia, is poised to become a vital ‘gateway’ to foster seamless connectivity and cooperation between India and the ‘Asia-Pacific’ region. The region’s strategic location makes it a crucial player in India’s foreign policy, particularly through the ‘Act East Policy’ aimed at strengthening ties with ‘East’ and ‘Southeast Asia.’ With its geographical proximity to Southeast and East Asian markets, North-East India has immense potential for increased investment under the ‘Act East Policy,’ making it an attractive hub for trade, commerce, and connectivity. The region’s connectivity infrastructure, including roads, railways, airports, and ports, is being upgraded to facilitate seamless trade and people-to-people contacts. This improvement in connectivity is expected to boost regional economic growth, enhance India’s Act East Policy, and foster ASEAN-India cooperation. This paper explores North-East India’s potential as a ‘gateway’ to enhance connectivity with ‘East’ and ‘Southeast Asia,’ highlighting its geo-strategic significance, economic opportunities, and cultural connections, and assessing its role in shaping India’s foreign policy and regional integration. The paper also investigates the government’s initiatives and projects to facilitating connectivity with ‘East’ and ‘Southeast Asia.’*

Keywords: *North-East India, Act-East Policy, Connectivity, East Asia, Southeast Asia, Region Integration.*

1. INTRODUCTION

India’s engagement with “East Asia” has been expanding its influence across multiple sectors, such as economic, technological, diplomatic, political, and military realms. Initiated in 1992, the “Look East Policy” has yielded positive outcomes, positioning “East Asia” as India’s foremost trading partner, fostering increased diplomatic interactions, and establishing commitments to security collaboration in maritime, cyber, and space domains. The evolving relationship between India and East Asia is marked by deepening bilateral and multilateral ties, as well as enhanced trade, investment, and cultural exchanges. However, the relationship



with China remains complex, with India's reluctance to emphasise reciprocity indicating a growing power imbalance. As a result, India is strengthening its defence partnerships with Japan and South Korea (Kondapalli, 2010). In the 21st century, India's relationship with Southeast Asia has become vital to its foreign policy. The region offers immense opportunities for economic cooperation, strategic collaboration, and cultural exchange. India's engagement with Southeast Asia dates back centuries, with ancient trade and cultural exchange shaping the region's art, architecture, and languages. The "Act East Policy," launched in 2014, aims to revitalise India's historical connections, foster economic ties, and enhance strategic cooperation with the ASEAN. North-East India, "covers 7.97% of the country's geographical area," shares its borders with Bhutan, China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Nepal (MHA, 2024). Despite its rich natural resources and strategic significance, the region accounts for only 3% of India's GDP (Maini, 2023). Nevertheless, it holds considerable potential to enhance India's trade and investment landscape (Dhar, De, Das, & Singh, 2011). The geographical proximity of "North-East India" to "Southeast Asia" is pivotal for the execution of the "Act East policy," fostering essential connections. The evolution from the "Look East Policy" to the "Act East Policy" marked a shift from a primarily security-focused strategy to one that emphasises economic collaboration, aiming to harness the region's shared growth potential. This policy evolution, initiated in 2014, underscores the North-Eastern Region's emerging role in India's economic framework and its relations with neighbouring countries (Das & Gupta, 2019). Prime Minister Modi has highlighted the Act East Policy's objective of positioning North-East India as a 'gateway' to Southeast Asia (Chaudhury, 2019), suggesting that by capitalising on its strategic location and natural resources, the region could significantly contribute to India's economic advancement.

Key Areas of Growth in the Region Include:

- **Agriculture and Services:** Leveraging comparative strengths in sectors like fruits and vegetables, spices, bamboo, medical, and tourism (World Bank, 2019).
- **Cross-Border Connectivity:** Enhancing connectivity with ASEAN countries through initiatives like "India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway," "Asian Highway Network," "Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project," etc.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Japan's involvement in enhancing infrastructural connectivity, including the "Northeast Road Network Connectivity Project," will support regional growth.
- **Trade and Investment:** Collaboration with Taiwan in sectors like electronics, ICT, and petrochemicals, will boost economic growth and job creation.
- **Digital Platforms and Socio-Cultural Ties:** Developing strong connectivity networks is essential for regional stability and will enhance partnerships. Additionally, the increasing strategic importance of the "Indo-Pacific" region necessitates that India take a leading role in exploring various avenues of collaboration with regional nations. The creation of comprehensive and multifaceted connectivity networks, which include infrastructure, trade, digital platforms, and socio-cultural connections, serves as the cornerstone of these partnerships (Banerjee & Ghosh, 2023).



2. RELATED WORK

Most literature on “North-East India” shares a positive outlook on the potential of economic engagement and connectivity initiatives, emphasising that the region’s development can be enhanced by connecting it to the ‘Southeast Asian trans-regional market’. Ramesh posits that the region’s future hinges on its economic integration with Southeast Asia (Ramesh, 2005), while Baruah advocates for a region-building approach, echoing Ohame’s “region state” model (Baruah, 2005).

India’s “Look East Policy,” launched in 1991 by the Rao Government, marked a significant shift in foreign policy strategy in the “post-Cold War.” It aimed to strengthen ties with ‘Southeast Asian nations,’ acknowledging the region’s strategic and economic relevance to India’s national interests (Mir, 2017)). During Vajpayee’s Government, India introduced the “Neighbourhood First” policy, aiming for a more integrated and comprehensive approach to regional relations. Kalita emphasised that since the policy’s launch, successive governments have sought to bolster engagements with the “Asia-Pacific” region, recognised as the world’s fastest-growing area due to its significant advancements in security, economy, demographics, and politics (Kalita, 2018). This strategic effort taps into the region’s growth potential, addressing national interests and regional development goals, particularly in India’s Northeast.

According to Choudhury, the North-Eastern Region serves as a strategic link between the “Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia,” with close proximity to Southeast Asian nations and rich cultural diversity (Choudhury, 2017). Brahma, further note that the “Act-East policy” presents opportunities for the region to enhance its ‘bilateral’ and ‘multilateral relations’ with ‘Southeast Asian’ nations through ‘people-to-people’ contact and collaboration (Brahma, 2018). By leveraging its strategic location, natural resources, and skilled workforce, the NER can emerge as vital gateway to Southeast Asia, driving economic growth, cultural exchange and regional cooperation.

Sikri notes that India engagement with East and South Asian nations is driven by economic interests and a growing defence and security partnership. The country leverages bilateral agreements and regional frameworks, such as the “East Asia Summit” (EAS), “Asia-Europe Meeting” (ASEM), and “ASEAN” to achieve this goal. Sub-regional initiatives like “BIMSTEC” and “Mekong-Ganga Cooperation” also play a crucial role. Economic interests primarily drive these interactions, with numerous ongoing and proposed ‘Free Trade Agreements’ (FTAs) in the pipeline, alongside an increase in defence and security collaboration. Nevertheless, tensions persist in India’s relationship with China, due to unresolved border disputes, issues related to Tibet, and China’s support for India’s South Asian rivals, particularly Pakistan. For Asia to assume a significant global role, its key players must address internal conflicts and actively foster a cooperative security and collaboration framework (Sikri, 2009).

Pulipaka et al. emphasise India’s involvement in the “Indo-Pacific” region, extending from Russia to Japan and encompassing ASEAN and Australia. Through its participation in the “Shanghai Cooperation Organisation” and the “East Asia Summit,” India’s revitalised “Act East Policy” seeks to bolster economic relationships and connectivity with “Indo-Pacific” countries, thereby reinforcing its influence in a ‘multi-polar’ Asia. This initiative increasingly



aligns with Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision," positioning Japan as a vital partner in the establishment of industrial corridors, high-speed rail networks, urban metro systems, and various connectivity projects in India's Northeast (Pulipaka, Singh, & Sircar, 2017).

Haokip's writing details mechanisms for promoting cross-border integration in "North-East India," contributing to understanding the region's development potential within the "Act East Policy" framework (Haokip, 2019). These literature reviews provide valuable insights into North-East India's potential for growth and development through economic integration and connectivity initiatives.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper explores North-East India's potential as a gateway to enhanced connectivity with "East" and "Southeast Asia," emphasising India's "Act East Policy" through a thorough analysis of secondary sources. Employing a descriptive research design, the research aims to offer a detailed assessment of North-East India's connectivity with 'East' and 'Southeast Asia.' The article's focus is specifically on 'North-East India,' utilising secondary data collected from various sources, including academic journals, books, policy documents, and reports from international organisations. The paper focused on literature published between 2005 and 2024 to capture the latest developments and trends in the region.

The paper examines the role of India's "Act East Policy" in enhancing connectivity between "North-East India" and "East" and "Southeast Asia." Rebranded in 2014, this policy seeks to bolster India's economic and strategic relationships with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The analysis focuses on various initiatives under the policy, including the enhancement of connectivity infrastructure, the implementation of trade facilitation strategies, and people-to-people contacts.

The collected data was analysed using content analysis and thematic analysis techniques. Content analysis involved examining the frequency and coverage of connectivity-related issues in the literature, while thematic analysis identified key themes and sub-themes related to North-East India's connectivity with East and Southeast Asia.

The paper employed various research tools, such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, Academia.edu, and ResearchGate for literatures, as well as online archives of government reports and policy documents. To ensure data quality and reliability, the research assessed the credibility of sources, employed multiple references for cross-validation of results, and analysed the data in the context of connectivity initiatives in North-East India. The methods employed to meet the research objectives encompassed the implementation of the North-East Road Connectivity Project, the construction of the "Trilateral Highway," the "Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project," and the establishment of the "Sittwe Economic Zone" (SEZ) in Myanmar, etc.

By employing a systematic and objective analysis of secondary sources, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of North-East India's potential as a 'gateway' to enhanced connectivity with 'East' and 'Southeast Asia,' highlighting the role of India's "Act East Policy."



4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This paper finds that improving North-East India's connectivity is crucial for boosting regional economic growth, enhancing India's Act East Policy, and fostering ASEAN-India cooperation. The region's proximity to ASEAN countries, natural resources, and potential for infrastructure development make it an attractive hub for trade, commerce, and connectivity.

The "North-Eastern Region" (NER) is strategically significant because of its location, which can act as a crucial connection to neighbouring countries in "South Asia," "Southeast Asia," and "East Asia." Government-led initiatives have improved transit infrastructure, promoting regional development within the NER. Additionally, cooperation between India and Japan in this region can help counter China's growing influence along India's Eastern and Northeastern borders.

The "Act East Policy" emphasises the importance of developing the NER, focusing on enhancing trade and economic relationships with 'Southeast Asian' nations, which creates opportunities for growth in India's Northeast states. Connectivity is of the utmost importance in the immediate neighbourhood, and the NER has the potential to serve as a vital link.

The paper's findings have practical implications for policymakers and stakeholders to be involved in implementing the Act East Policy in North-East India, highlighting the need for infrastructure development, trade and investment, cultural exchange, creation of job opportunities, and alleviation of poverty in the region. The paper also has implications for India's foreign policy and relations with its eastern neighbours.

Geo-Strategic Importance of India's Northeast

India's Northeast serves as a vital economic and strategic 'gateway' to "Southeast Asia and beyond," significantly contributing to the country's objectives of regional development and connectivity. The region boasts a unique geography, featuring a 5,385 km-long international border with five neighbouring countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Nepal. This extensive border enhances its geo-strategic significance (MHA, 2024).

Covering "7.97% of India's geographical area" and home to "3.78% of its population," the North-Eastern Region is connected to the rest of India via the "Siliguri corridor" in West Bengal, often referred to as the "Chicken Neck." This corridor spans about "22 km in width" and "60 km in length," highlighting the region's strategic significance due to its proximity to neighbouring countries.

Map 1. Geo-strategic Position of North-East Region



The region is characterized by diverse ethnic communities and strong cultural, linguistic, and historical ties to these neighbouring nations, facilitating India's engagement in the Asia-Pacific (Brahma, 2018).

Scholars have extensively analysed the potential role of North-East India in India's engagement with regional groupings (Gogoi, 2019). The development of the Northeast is crucial for India's Act East Policy, particularly in achieving regional development and connectivity objectives.

The region's geographical location can be leveraged to promote prosperity, foster entrepreneurial opportunities, and enhance skills. Former Presidents Pranab Mukherjee and Ram Nath Kovind emphasised the importance of developing the Northeast through international cooperation. Mukherjee advocated for 'cross-border markets' to alleviate poverty and economic backwardness, while Kovind highlighted the region's strategic value as a 'natural gateway' to Southeast Asia and beyond (PIB, 2022).

Overall, India's Northeast is an important region capable of driving economic growth, cultural exchange, and strategic partnerships, making it an essential component of India's Act East Policy.

India's Act East Policy: Overview

India's "Act East Policy" seeks to strengthen economic, strategic, and cultural relations with the 'Asia-Pacific' region, underscoring its significance in international relations. The "Look East Policy" initially launched in 1991, focused on enhancing economic connections with Southeast Asia. Over the years, as India's economic strength and global standing have grown, the policy evolved into the Act East Policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, particularly as a counter to China's increasing influence (Ahmed, 2019; Lynch & Przystup, 2017).



During the 12th India-ASEAN summit, Prime Minister Modi emphasised the importance of the ASEAN bloc for economic growth, trade, investment, and industrialisation, prompting a shift in India's policy from 'Look East' to 'Act East.' In a November 2015 address in Singapore, he reaffirmed his Government's commitment to Asia, underscoring active engagement with the region. This commitment was further evidenced by the establishment of a dedicated Indian Mission to ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, along with the invitation extended to leaders of all ten ASEAN member states as chief guests at India's Republic Day parade in 2018, thereby reinforcing the proactive nature of the Act East Policy.

The policy has experienced a shift in its trajectory towards the North-Eastern Region (Brahma, 2018), incorporating initiatives like "Make in India," "Skill India," "Digital India," and efforts to promote 'energy security,' 'infrastructure development,' and 'smart cities.' The policy aims to enhance connectivity, promote economic growth, and increase strategic significance by positioning India's Northeast as a gateway to eastern neighbours. Prime Minister Modi emphasised that the Act East Policy places North-East India at its core, with a focus on culture, connectivity, and commerce to strengthen relations with ASEAN nations. Sushma Swaraj also highlighted the significance of these three elements in enhancing strategic ties with ASEAN (Das & Thomas, 2016). By prioritising the North-Eastern Region's development, Act East Policy aims to enhance the strategic significance and create political space for effective engagement with the region.

Connectivity is of the utmost importance in the immediate neighbourhood. The North-Eastern Region of India is strategically located to act as a key link between India and its eastern neighbours in "South Asia," "Southeast Asia," and "East Asia." The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is essential for enhancing these connections, particularly with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan (Ahmed, 2019). India's foreign policy, particularly through its "Act East" and "Neighbourhood First" initiatives, highlights the Northeast's role as a gateway to the wider "Indo-Pacific" region. Moreover, Japan, known for its expertise in infrastructure development, significantly contributes to the implementation of connectivity projects within and beyond North-East India (Banerjee & Ghosh, 2023).

By leveraging these initiatives and partnerships, India's NER can unlock its potential as a vital link between India and its eastern neighbours, driving economic growth and regional integration.

India-Japan Cooperation for North-Eastern Region Development

Historical connections between Japan and India have fostered collaboration for regional progress. Recent advancements in bilateral relations highlight increasing alignment in working together for the NER's development. Prime Minister Modi's 2014 Tokyo visit emphasised the region's significance, with the Tokyo Declaration reaffirming Japan's dedication to its growth and integration into a broader South Asian economic framework (MEA, 2014). In 2015, at the India-Japan summit, Prime Minister Abe offered "Overseas Development Assistance" (ODA) loans for enhancing connectivity.

The 'Japan International Cooperation Agency' (JICA) extended an ODA loan of around INR 980 Crore for the "North East Road Network Connectivity Improvement Project (Phase 4)" aimed at enhancing infrastructure and connectivity (JICA, 2020). Katsuo Matsumoto, the



Chief Representative of JICA India, highlighted that the strategic collaboration between India and Japan promotes socio-economic development through infrastructure and connectivity projects, which align with India's "Act East Policy" and the "North Eastern Region Vision 2020." This initiative covers various districts, improving travel and job opportunities. The project is being executed by the "National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited" (NHIDCL), with JICA's total ODA loan amounting to approximately INR 13,300 Crore. As of January 2021, Japan had invested 231 billion yen (approximately \$2 billion) in the infrastructure of India's Northeast (Borah, 2022). Overall, this project significantly contributes to the enhancement of transit infrastructure, thereby promoting regional development in the North Eastern Region (NER).

The "Act East Forum" (AEF), established in 2017, focuses on developing the North Eastern region, enhancing connectivity, and aligning with India's "Act East Policy" and Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision." The forum has held six meetings, focusing on groundwork and sustainable development. India and Japan have initiated a comprehensive plan for NER, leveraging its unique strengths and updating it through mutual agreement (MEA, 2022). In January 2021, the 5th AEF discussion reviewed ongoing projects in hydro energy, sustainable development, and skill development. Emphasis was placed on cooperation in "healthcare, bamboo production, tourism, agro-industry," etc. (MEA, 2021).

India and Japan's joint effort to develop the North Eastern Region (NER) holds strategic importance, potentially counterbalancing China's presence along India's Eastern and Northeastern borders (Bhatia, 2019).

Enhanced Connectivity with East and Southeast Asia

Connecting India's Northeast with Southeast and East Asia is a strategic effort aimed at boosting "economic development, fostering people-to-people contact, and promoting multidimensional relations" (Sarma & Choudhury, 2017). The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) includes ten member countries: "Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam." Myanmar serves as the main gateway for Northeast India to Southeast Asia, sharing a 1,643 km border with the northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland.

The "Act East Policy" aims to boost 'economic development' in Northeast India by linking it with the economies of 'East' and 'Southeast Asia.' To achieve this, India has launched various initiatives, such as "engaging in sub-regional economic forums, enhancing regional connectivity, and promoting border trade with neighbouring countries." These efforts are intended to create "sub-regional" economic partnerships and establish a "transnational region" that connects Northeast India with its eastern neighbours (Patgiri & Gogoi, 2022).

Sub-Regional Connectivity Initiatives:

- **BIMSTEC:** A sub-regional grouping promoting economic cooperation in specific sectors such as "information technology, telecommunications, tourism, transportation, and power." It acts as an important institutional bridge connecting "South" and Southeast Asia." India's participation in BIMSTEC seeks to strengthen economic relationships with ASEAN member nations, thereby aiding the development of its Northeast region.



- Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC): The MGC facilitates cooperation in various sectors, including tourism, culture, infrastructure, and information technology, between India and five ASEAN nations.

Infrastructure Development:

India has undertaken initiatives to improve connectivity between North-East India and Southeast and East Asian countries. Key projects include:

- “India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway” (IMTTH): The IMTTH is a significant infrastructure project that extends 1,360 kilometres, linking “Moreh in India” to “Mae Sot in Thailand” through “Beagan in Myanmar.” The Indian Government has “successfully constructed a 165-kilometre” segment of this highway, connecting the northeastern border of India to the “Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo” region in Myanmar (Nambiar, 2018). This highway is anticipated to enhance trade and commercial activities among Southeast Asian nations.
- “Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project:” This project establishes a connection between the seaport of Kolkata and the seaport of Sittwe in Myanmar, thereby improving the connectivity of Indian ports. This initiative also facilitates road and inland waterway links from Sittwe to North-East India.
- “Asian Highway Network:” Provides road connectivity to Southeast Asian countries via NH-39 and NH-36 in Assam, aiming to link Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Indonesia.
- ‘Sittwe Economic Zone:’ India is actively advancing its economic ties with Southeast Asia, notably through the establishment of the “Sittwe Economic Zone (SEZ)” in Myanmar. Covering an area of 1,833 acres in Ponnar Kyun, the SEZ is set to emerge as a hub for “agricultural, fisheries, and industrial initiatives” aimed at serving local, Indian, and broader Southeast Asian markets (Raihan & De, 2020).
- “Mekong-India Economic Corridor” (MIEC): Aims to connect ‘South Asia’ (India) with Southeast Asia (Vietnam) through Thailand and Cambodia. This corridor is driven by Japan to boost manufacturing and trade, particularly with India (Bhattacharyay, Kawai., & Nag., 2012).

Air and Railway Connectivity:

Efforts are underway to improve air and railway connectivity between North-East India and Southeast Asia:

- ‘Uddan Scheme:’ The Indian government has initiated the “Uddan Scheme” to create air links between “North-East India” and various cities in “neighbouring countries” including Dhaka, Kuala Lumpur, Yangon, Kathmandu, Singapore, and Bangkok.
- Railway Link: There are plans to construct a “railway line from Jiribam in Manipur to Hanoi in Vietnam,” passing through Myanmar, with these projects currently under consideration for implementation (Mazumdar, 2018).

India’s connectivity with Southeast Asia is advancing through multimodal and intermodal operations. Various connectivity projects aim to attract investments, boost regional



development, and improve the quality of life for local communities (De, 2017). These initiatives and projects are pivotal in strengthening ties with Southeast Asian nations, addressing geographical isolation, and enhancing trade and investment in the region. Establishing a comprehensive transport network and aligning policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks between India and ASEAN will strengthen economic integration (Tasung, 2024).

Government's Other Initiatives and Projects in North-East Region

The Indian Government has launched several initiatives to boost connectivity and development in the Northeast region. The “Prime Minister’s Development Initiative for North East Region” (PM-DevINE), has an “allocated budget of Rs. 6,600 Crore for the period from 2022-2023 to 2025-2026” (PIB, 2023). This initiative focuses on creating infrastructure, supporting industries, and generating employment opportunities for youth and women.

Key Projects and Initiatives:

- ‘North-East Venture Fund’ (NEVF): Aims to collect ‘Rs 100 Crore’ for development projects in the North-East (PIB, 2021).
- “North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme” (NESIDS): A Central Government initiative, with an allocation of ‘Rs 1600 Crore’ dedicated to enhancing power, water supply, tourism, health, education, and overall infrastructure development (MDoNER).
- “Science and Technology Interventions in the North East Region” (STINER): Brings advanced technologies to aid women farmers and artisans (PIB, 2018).
- “North East Road Sector Development Scheme” (NERSDS): Aims to improve road infrastructure with Rs 4500 Crores allocated (PIB, 2023).
- National Waterways: Development of “NW-1 on the Ganges,” “NW-2 on the Brahmaputra,” and “NW-16 on Barak” for better connectivity (PIB, 2022).
- Eastern Waterways Connectivity Transport Grid: 5,000 km of navigable waterways to connect the northeast with the rest of India (PIB, 2022).
- “North Eastern Region Power System Improvement Project” (NERPSIP): Strengthens intra-state transmission and distribution systems (MoP, 2020).

These projects demonstrate the government’s commitment to enhancing connectivity, infrastructure, and economic development in the “North-East Region,” in accordance with the “Act East Policy” (PIB, 2024).

5. CONCLUSION

North-East India plays an important role in shaping the country’s foreign policy due to its borders with five neighbouring countries. This region’s strategic location makes it a ‘gateway’ to enhanced connectivity with East and Southeast Asia, prompting policymakers to focus on its development. After years of neglect, India’s Northeast is now recognised for its geo-strategic importance and potential to strengthen ties with East and Southeast Asia. By leveraging its position, North-East India can emerge as India’s economic and strategic gateway to Southeast Asia and beyond, fostering regional development and connectivity. As a result, its proximity to ‘Southeast’ and ‘East Asian’ markets also present opportunities for



increased investment under the “Act East Policy,” facilitating a strong economic partnership with ASEAN that enhances India’s security and alleviates the region’s economic isolation.

6. REFERENCES

1. Ahmed, Z. (2019). India’s Act East Policy and North East India: A Critical Review. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 9(9), 1-11.
2. Banerjee, S., & Ghosh, A. K. (2023). *India’s Northeast: Gateway to Connectivity with Eastern Neighbours*. Observer Research Foundation.
3. Baruah, S. (2005). Beyond Durable Disorder: Northeast India and the Look East Policy. In A. Sarma, & S. Choudhury (Eds.), *Durable Disorder: Understanding the politics of Northeast India*. Oxford University Press.
4. Bhatia, R. (2019). *Japan in India’s North East*. Gateway House. https://www.gatewayhouse.in/japans-in-indiasnortheast/#_ftn3
5. Bhattacharyay, B. N., Kawai, M., & Nag, R. (Eds.). (2012). *Infrastructure for Asian Connectivity*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
6. Borah, R. (2022). *Japan’s Infrastructure Investment in Northeast India*. *The Diplomat*.
7. Brahma, A. (2018). India’s Act East Policy: The North-East States of India with 3 C’s Formula. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology*, 7(9), 10023-10033.
8. Chaudhury, D. R. (2019, Nov 03). *Northeast India gateway to Southeast Asia under Act East Policy: PM Modi in Bangkok*. *The Economic Times*.
9. Choudhury, S. (2017). *Northeast India and the Act East Policy: Opportunities and Challenges*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320921997_Northeast_India_and_the_Act_East_Policy_Opportunities_and_Challenges
10. Das, G., & Thomas, C. J. (Eds.). (2016). *Look East to Act East Policy: Implications for India’s Northeast*. Routledge.
11. Das, T. K., & Gupta, I. D. (2019). Is Northeast India Prepared to be the Gateway to Southeast Asia and Pacific Countries?, *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 5, 66-81. DOI:10.2139/ssrn.3113513.
12. De, P. (2017). “Look East to Act East: India’s Economic Engagement with ASEAN.” In Thomas, C. J., & Sarda, K. (Eds.). *Act East and India’s North-East*. Pentagon Press.
13. Dhar, B., De, P., Das, G., & Singh, B. (2011). *Expansion of North East India’s Trade and Investment with Bangladesh and Myanmar: An Assessment of the Opportunities and Constraints*. New Delhi: Research and Information System for Developing Countries.
14. Gogoi, D. (2019). *Making of India’s Northeast: Geopolitics of Borderland and Transnational Interactions*. Routledge India.
15. Haokip, T. (2019). *Development through Trade: Re-examining India’s Act East Policy and the Northeastern Region*. In R. Bhattacharya (Ed.), *Developmentalism as Strategy: Interrogating Post-colonial Narratives on India’s North East 2019*, (pp. 231–250).
16. JICA. (2020). *Press Release: JICA Extends ODA Loan of INR 980 Crore for the North East Road Network Connectivity Improvement Project (Phase 4)*. Japan International



- CooperationAgency.https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/india/english/office/topics/press200327_08.html
17. Kalita, S. (2018). India's Act East Policy and North-East: Prospects and Challenges. *International Journal of Advanced Research and Development*, 3(1), 268-270.
 18. Kondapalli, S. (2010). India's Interactions with East Asia: Opportunities and Challenges. *International Studies*, 47(2-4), 305-321.
 19. Lynch, T. F., & Przystup, J. J. (2017). *India-Japan Strategic Cooperation and Implications for US Strategy in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Region* (p. 0058). National Defense University Press.
 20. Maini, T. S. (2023, January 04). *Northeast India and its Economic Potential. The Geopolitics.*
 21. Mazumdar S. S. (2018). *Revisioning India's North-East through the Look East Policy.* Manohar Publishers.
 22. MEA. (2014). *Tokyo Declaration for India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership.* Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/23965/Tokyo+Declaration+for+India++Japan+Special+Strategic+and+Global+Partnership>
 23. MEA. (2021). *5th Joint Meeting of the India-Japan Act East Forum.* Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
 24. MEA. (2022). *India-Japan Sustainable Development Initiative for the North Eastern Region of India.* Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34993/IndiaJapan+Sustainable+Development+Initiative++for+the+North+Eastern+Region+of+India>
 25. MHA. (2024). *North East Division.* Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
 26. *Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India.*
 27. Mir, J. A. (2017)). *India's Look East Policy: Its Evolution, Objective and Approach.* *International Journal for Social Studies*, 3(4), 8-18.
 28. MoP. (2020). *NERPSIP & Comprehensive Scheme for Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.* Ministry of Power, Government of India.
 29. Nambiar, S. (2018). *India's connectivity with ASEAN: What role for Northeast India?* In A. Sarma, & S. Choudhury (Eds.), *Mainstreaming the Northeast in India's Look and Act East Policy* (pp. 131–158). Springer.
 30. Patgiri, R., & Gogoi, D. (2022). *Act East through India's Northeast: Limits of Neoliberal Strategies towards Developing an Underdeveloped Region.* *South Asian Survey*, 29(1), 23-41.
 31. PIB Delhi. (2018). *Schemes for North-Eastern Region.* Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India.
 32. PIB Delhi. (2021). *The North East Venture Fund (NEVF) is gaining popularity among Start-Ups and young entrepreneurs: Dr Jitendra Singh.* Ministry of Development of North-East Region, Government of India.



33. PIB Delhi. (2022). Projects under the ‘Act East Policy. Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Government of India.
34. PIB. (2022, May 04). North-Eastern Region is the Natural Gateway for India to South-East Asia and Beyond: President Kovind. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1822716>
35. PIB Delhi. (2023). Development Initiative for North Eastern Region. Ministry of Development of North-East Region, Government of India.
36. PIB Delhi. (2023). Road Connectivity in North East Region. Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India.
37. PIB Delhi. (2024). 10 Years of Infrastructure Development. Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India.
38. PIB. (2022, May 04). North-Eastern Region is the Natural Gateway for India to South-East Asia and Beyond: President Kovind. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1822716>
39. Pulipaka, S., Singh, A. G., & Sircar, S. (2017). India and Connecting Framework. Delhi Policy Group, 1-72.
40. Raihan, S., & De, P. (Eds.). (2020). Trade and Regional Integration in South Asia: A Tribute to Saman Kelegama. Springer.
41. Ramesh, J. (2005). Northeast India in a New Asia. Seminar: Gateway to the East—A Symposium on Northeast India and Look East Policy (p. 550). <https://www.india-seminar.com/2005/550/550%20jairam%20ramesh.htm>
42. Sarma, A., & Choudhury, S. (Eds.). (2017). Mainstreaming the Northeast in India’s Look and Act East Policy. Springer.
43. Sikri, R. (2009). India’s “Look East” Policy. *Asia-Pacific Review*, 16(1), 131-145.
44. Tasung, J. (2024). North-East India: A ‘Gateway’ to South-East Asia. *International Journal of All Research Education and Scientific Methods*, 12(2), 423-432.
45. World Bank. (2019, December 13). Press Release: High Impact Value Chains Can Spur Growth and Inclusiveness in India’s Northeastern Region. World Bank Group.