

India's Act East Policy with ASEAN countries: Manipur's outlook

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ABSTRACT

Association of South-East Asian Nations(ASEAN)-India is a strategic collaboration standpoint on a compacted groundwork of mutual geographical, historical and civilizational relations. ASEAN is central to Act East Policy and a more comprehensive vision of the Indo-Pacific region. The year 2022 has marked 30 years of ASEAN-India relationships. India and ASEAN have respective dialogue mechanisms which convene the economic relationship between India and ASEAN commenced in 1992 as both regions documented each other's trade competencies. The relationship has since been supported by India's growing manufacturing facility and the rise of ASEAN's services area exports, specifically travel, transport, and commercial services. Manipur can become a gateway to the dynamic Southeast Asian economics, which can help the trade and commerce with our eastern neighbours flourish and must be pursued with commitment and determination by the central government. The Act East Policy is of added interest to the Northeast. The traded goods can reap an additional commercial advantage. Efforts ought to be directed to build up physical and institutional infrastructure. This paper critically analyzed the probable relationship of India's Act East policy with ASEAN and Manipur's Opportunities.

Keywords: Act East Policy, ASEAN, Border trade

Introduction:

The 18th Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)-India Summit has reviewed the status of the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership and taken stock of progress made in crucial areas, including Covid-19 & Health, Trade & Commerce, Connectivity, and Education & Culture. Significant regional and international growths, including post-pandemic economic recovery, will also be discussed. ASEAN-India Summits are held annually and allow India and ASEAN to involve at the top level. The Prime Minister of India attended the 17th ASEAN-India Summit held virtually in November 2020.

ASEAN-India is a strategic collaboration standpoint on a compacted groundwork of mutual geographical, historical and civilizational relations. ASEAN is central to Act East Policy and a more comprehensive vision of the Indo-Pacific region. The year 2022 has marked 30 years of ASEAN-India relationships. India and ASEAN have respective dialogue mechanisms which convene the economic relationship between India and ASEAN commenced in 1992 as both regions documented each other's trade competencies. The relationship has since been supported by India's growing manufacturing facility and the rise of ASEAN's services area exports, specifically travel, transport, and commercial services.

The two regions share correspondences in their levels of economic expansion, and they are home to rapidly growing markets and aim to address infrastructure trials. These similarities offer space for continual and more varied trade in goods and services and business-to-business rendezvous between India and ASEAN – tapping into the investment desires of modernizing industries and domestic utilization trends in each other's markets.

India's top export-oriented industries

In 2019, 47.8 per cent of India's exports by value were delivered to fellow Asian countries; 19.3 per cent were sold to European importers, and 18.8 per cent of goods were transported to North America.

Among India's top 15 merchandising partners in 2019, Singapore came in fifth (US\$10.7 billion), Malaysia twelfth (US\$6.14 billion), and Vietnam fourteenth (US\$5.49 billion). That year, India's top 10 exported goods reported for three-fifths (60.2 per cent) of the overall value of its international shipment. The following areas are India's top ten export-oriented industries toward the ASEAN countries.

1. Mineral products, including oil: US\$44.1 billion
2. Gems stone and precious metals: US\$36.7 billion
3. Machinery, including computers: US\$21.2 billion
4. Organic chemicals: US\$18.3 billion
5. Vehicles: US\$17.2 billion (5.3 per cent of total exports)
6. Pharmaceuticals: US\$16.1 billion
7. Equipment and Electrical machinery: US\$14.7 billion
8. Iron and steel: US\$9.7 billion
9. Clothing and accessories: US\$8.6 billion
10. Crocheted clothing or Knitted accessories: US\$7.9 billion

Jewellery, pharmaceutical, and agricultural industries are pivotal as their exports are in the top 10 for India.

Gems and jewellery industry

India’s gems and jewellery industry contributes about seven per cent to its G.D.P. and 15 per cent to its total merchandise export. India has endorsed 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in the sector under the regular route. Cumulative FDI inflows in gold ornaments and diamonds were around US\$1.18 billion between April 2000 and September 2020. The industry has employed more than 4.64 million people, which is expected to near twice by 2022. India’s gems and jewellery market is projected to grow by US\$103.06 billion between 2019 and 2023. The sector is export-oriented and labour-intensive. A Report to the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (G.J.E.P.C.), India exports 75 per cent of the international’s polished diamonds. Despite the pandemic, between April and October 2020, exports of gems and jewellery were US\$11.62 billion. At the same time, India’s export of cut and polished diamonds was worth US\$18.66 billion, which contributed 52.4 per cent to the total gems and jewellery export. Meanwhile, India imported gems and jewellery at US\$24.41 billion in Financial Year 2020. In Financial Year 2021 (up to September 2020), imports amounted to US\$4.23 billion.

The Indian gems and jewellery industry has become the world’s largest country supplying 29 per cent of the global jewellery consumption. It is particularly valued due to the traditional way Indian jewellers cut and polish diamonds; they also incorporate contemporary techniques that do not affect the traditional craft. Mandatory hallmarking in the industry contributes to its growth and reputation. The size of India’s home market is also vast. India is the second-largest end-user of gold, with a demand of around 690.4 tons in 2019.

Pharmaceuticals Industry

The Indian pharmaceutical industry has recognized itself as a globally competitive manufacturing and research hub, supported by raw materials and a large workforce. The industry is the world’s third-largest in terms of the volume of medicines it manufactures and the 13th largest in terms of value. The Indian pharmaceutical industry was predictable to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 22.4 per cent to reach US\$55 billion in 2020.

The Indian pharmaceuticals market is subjugated by generic drugs that constitute nearly 70 per cent of the marketplace, whereas over-the-counter (O.T.C.) medicines and patented drugs make up 21 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively. India plans to launch a fund (worth about US\$1.3 billion) to boost companies’ capacity to manufacture pharmaceutical elements domestically by 2023. India’s total drug and pharmaceutical export from April 2020 to November 2020 was US\$15.87 billion; for November 2020, it was US\$1.99 billion, according to the Indian Brand Equity Foundation(I.B.E.F).

TABLE 1: INDIA’S TRADE WITH INDIVIDUAL ASEAN COUNTRIES (2020-21)							
<i>Trade Figures in Billion USD</i>							
S no	Country	Export (2020-21)	Export April 2021-Feb 22	Import (2020-21)	Import April 2021- Feb 22	Total Trade (2020-21)	Total Trade (April 2021-feb 22)
1.	Brunei	0.062	0.039	0.329	0.378	0.392	0.418
2.	Cambodia	0.168	0.175	0.039	0.081	0.208	0.257
3.	Indonesia	5.026	7.522	12.470	15.520	17.496	23.043
4.	Lao PDR	0.027	0.014	0.001	0.00075	0.029	0.015
5.	Malaysia	6.057	6.317	8.373	11.195	14.430	17.513
6.	Myanmar	0.772	0.807	0.526	0.865	1.299	1.673
7.	Philippines	1.457	1.902	0.572	0.665	2.029	2.568
8.	Singapore	8.675	10.228	13.304	16.593	21.980	26.822
9.	Thailand	4.237	5.156	5.682	8.295	9.919	13.452
10.	Vietnam	4.999	6.130	6.120	6.508	11.120	12.638

Source: Directorate General of Foreign Trade(2021)

TABLE 2: EVOLUTION OF INDIA-ASEAN OVERALL TRADE (1996-2022)

<i>Trade Figures in Billion USD</i>					
S. no	Year	Export	Import	Total Trade	Net
1	1996-97	2.902	2.934	5.836	-0.032
2	1997-98	2.464	3.396	5.86	-0.932
3	1998-99	1.629	4.317	5.946	-2.688
4	1999-00	2.237	4.629	6.866	-2.392
5	2000-01	2.913	4.147	7.06	-1.234
6	2001-02	3.457	4.387	7.844	-0.93
7	2002-03	4.618	5.15	9.768	-0.532
8	2003-04	5.821	7.433	13.254	-1.612
9	2004-05	8.425	9.114	17.539	-0.689
10	2005-06	10.411	10.883	21.294	-0.472
11	2006-07	12.607	18.108	30.715	-5.501
12	2007-08	16.413	22.674	39.087	-6.261
13	2008-09	19.14	26.202	45.342	-7.062
14	2009-10	18.113	25.797	43.91	-7.684
15	2010-11	25.627	30.607	56.234	-4.98
16	2011-12	36.744	42.158	78.902	-5.414
17	2012-13	33.008	42.866	75.874	-9.858
18	2013-14	33.133	41.278	74.411	-8.145
19	2014-15	31.812	44.714	76.526	-12.902
20	2015-16	25.133	39.909	65.042	-14.776
21	2016-17	30.961	40.617	71.578	-9.656
22	2017-18	34.203	47.133	81.336	-12.93
23	2018-19	37.473	59.321	96.794	-21.848
24	2019-20	31.546	55.369	86.915	-23.823
25	2020-21	31.485	47.420	78.90	-15.93
26	April 2021- Feb 22	38.295	60.10	98.39	-16.69

Source: Directorate General of Foreign Trade(2021)

A paradigm shift in look east policy and Northeast

The N.D.A., led by Narendra Modi government, which came into power in May 2014, has accorded high priority to India’s Look East Policy. India’s interest in the countries to its east is evident from the fact that it has undergone a paradigm shift in policy and is moving away from the “Look East” approach to the “Act East” mode. India is not merely ‘Looking East’ but is now ‘Acting East’, thus, revising the title to ‘India’s Act-East Policy’. The Look East policy is now branded as the Act East policy. “The Act East policy” is India’s effort aimed at bolstering extensive strategic and economic ties with

Southeast Asian Countries that would possibly act as a counterweight to the influence of China in the region. The Modi Government’s policy has also been driven partly by India’s external balancing strategy against China. Although India does not vociferously propagate the China factor beyond a point, western analysts see India as a remedy to China in the Southeast Asian region. If India now wants to “Act East,” instead of merely “looking”, there is much catching up. While China’s share of trade with ASEAN countries jumped from 4.3% in 2000 to 14.7 % in 2019, India's share from 1.3% to 10.6 % during the same period. Thus, the fact is that China is way ahead of India, and for the latter, even if it tries to or wants to, it would be challenging to enter a race. So, it is senseless and even counterproductive to contain a rising China. The truth is that China has already risen, and any plan to contain China would be a mistake. There is a lot to learn from China concerning China’s unique economic development model. If India can learn suitable lessons from China, the 21st century might be a century for Asians.

Keeping in view the dynamics of the recent development which are taking place in the world and having the need to race against a great regional rival, China, the miracle economy of Asia, India launched its look east policy in 1992, with North East as its stated epicentre, to develop economic cooperation with its eastern neighbours. As an integral part of its Look-East policy, there has been thrust on Regional Trade Arrangements (R.T.A.s), especially with its eastern neighbours such as Thailand, Singapore, ASEAN; B.I.M.S.T.E.C., and so on. India has also become an active member of the East Asia Summit, a significant development with the potential to shift the global balance of economic power. As it has emerged as a leader in the information technology and software field, it can share its expertise and training personnel with lesser developed countries, Myanmar and Vietnam and Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Thus, the Indian leadership came up with the concept of the "Act East Policy" of India, an active economic policy of engagement with South East Asia to be implemented as an official initiative in achieving the above-cited goals. . These are the main factors which make the Act East Policy important to India.

Coming to the North East, it may be argued that although India's "Act East" policy is firmly rooted in the national interests, it has been aiming toward the strategic importance of India's Northeast region. On a trip to Tripura, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the northeastern region of India would be made a gateway to Southeast Asia, and an economic passage would be established using northeastern India, Myanmar and the adjoining regions. Northeast India would be an entryway to Southeast Asia soon. He further claimed that the northeastern states would not remain backwards now. As the entryway to Asian Nations, it had the potential to move forward. Towards this end, the Government is a keen interest in building modern infrastructure in the Northeast, to unlock its potential." Elucidating the importance of the North Eastern Region and why it is essential to the Look East – Act East Policy, Dr Gupta and Yeravdekar noted, "The Northeast region has the potential to play the arrowhead role in the evolution of the 'Look East- Act East Policy', and in fact, it would rightly to say that looking and acting east will begin from here. South Asian states such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan are so closely linked with Act East policy that they also need to be considered as part of the policy".

The opportunities of India’s Northeastern states:

Linking Northeast India with Asia countries promised vast economic opportunities and benefits, including deepening social and cultural ties between the people of the Northeast and its neighbouring areas. Market integration of the land-locked northeastern region with southeast and East Asian counties would boost trade. Trade would thus serve as a driver of rapid economic development in the region. The following observations could be considered potential benefits that N.E.R. could derive from implementing India's Act policy.

Potential items to be exported

It is challenging to identify the potential items which could be exported from the northeastern region to the outside because a large number of items, from handloom and handicraft products to mineral products, could be named as potential items of export from this region. However, many well-known numerous organizations in India like the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (I.I.F.T.) in New Delhi, the National Council of Applied Manpower Research (N.C.A.M.R.) in New Delhi, Federation of Indian Export Organisation (F.I.E.O.) in Kolkata, Tata Consultancy Services (T.C.S.) in Kolkata, Export-Import Bank India (E.X.I.M. Bank) in Kolkata. Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (F.I.C.C.I.), Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (I.I.E.) in Guwahati, North Eastern Chamber of Commerce and Industry (N.E.C.C.I.) Guwahati and Federation of Industry and commerce in North Eastern Region (FINER) in Guwahati undertook research Studies investigating potential items of the Northeast that have to be offered border trade and have listed many potential items for export from the Northeast. The F.I.E.O. in Kolkata has identified the items exportable from the Northeastern Region of India, is highlighted in Table 3

TABLE 3: POTENTIALS AREA OF EXPORT OF NORTH EASTERN STATES OF INDIA

States	Items
Arunachal Pradesh	Homemade carpet, homemade paper, citrus fruits, processed fruits, herbal products etc.
Assam	Chilli, ginger, Handloom and Handicraft, process fruits, Tea leaf, limestone, coal

Manipur	Handloom and Handicraft, horticulture products and products that are procured from the outside the state and being are exported to Myanmar, Information technology Healthcare and Education, Medicinal and Herbal products
Meghalaya	Ginger, orange, potato, turmeric, betel vine, acreea nuts, broomsticks, limestone, coal
Mizoram	Passion fruits, raw cotton tung seeds, citrus fruits, tapioca, ginger, process fruits, process spices, tung oil and handloom and handicraft
Nagaland	Chopsticks, Horticulture products and handloom and handicraft
Sikkim	Orchid, Floriculture pepper and ginger
Tripura	Fresh Fruits, processed food, raw and processed rubber and handloom and handicraft

Source: Ministry of Commerce, Government of India (2021)

Several economic opportunities of N.E.R.

The numbers of economic opportunities that could emerge for the N.E.R. may be enumerated as follows:

1. Agri processing zone: The region’s climate and topography are suitable for horticultural development, plantation of crops, vegetables, spices, rare herbs and medicinal plants.
- (2) Eco-tourism prospect: The region’s rare flora, fauna, and natural scenic beauty offer an ideal place for eco-tourism. Besides, the region inhabited by people with diverse cultures is endowed with unique performing arts, varied customs and handicrafts;
- (3) Base for foreign/domestic investors: The region close to southwest China and Southeast Asia may become a suitable base for foreign and domestic investors to tap the world’s most populous region. A large number of educated classes who speak English is an added advantage for investors. For industrial growth centres, the region has been provided with several incentives like transport, capital investment and interest subsidy on working capital;
- (4) Harnessing the power: Blessed with huge hydro-power potentials and other natural resource like oil, natural gas, coal, limestone etc. and also being endowed with India’s most extensive perennial water system in the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries, the region has the potential of becoming the next India’s powerhouse;
- (5) Socio-Cultural Cooperation: Organizing many programmes may boost People-to-People Interaction with ASEAN, such as inviting ASEAN students to India every year for the Students Cultural/Exchange Programme. The cultural aspect of the external interface is a powerful tool in governments’ diplomatic schemes. A pragmatic cultural policy could drive a convergence of interests towards cooperation in finding standard solutions. The fusion of our cultural past could be enriched further through robust cooperation between ASEAN and India.

To discuss the above facts, the researchers have collected data from competent persons to analyze the data.

TABLE 4:RESPONSES OF PROSPECT AREA INDIA’S ACT EAST POLICY WITH ASEAN COUNTRIES

	Highly satisfied	satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied	Total
Economic upliftment	45	25	10	15	5	100
Developed strategic trade relationship	45	35	3	9	8	100
Development of M.S.M.E.s	50	30	4	9	7	100
Physical Infrastructure Development	39	38	17	4	2	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 shows the satisfaction level of the respondents with regards to Prospects areas of India’s Act East Policy with ASEAN countries.

Economic upliftment: The standard of living of the country's population should move from a low-income simple economy to a modern economy and high income with a sustainable growth of Manipur if India's Act East Policy is implemented

correctly and on time. In the age of globalization, only arbitrary border map lines and barriers are significant and prominent. Economic integration can increase global trade and prosperity. National borders signify changes in institutions, policies and regulations of economic importance. The importance of these policies is immediately apparent when compared to regions and countries that are not separated by national borders. In many countries, cross-border Trade accounts for much of their economic activity. This is a natural phenomenon for cross-border Trade. It has indicated that a maximum of 45% of the respondents expressed 'Highly Satisfied', 25% of the respondents expressed 'Satisfied', 10% of the respondents expressed 'Neutral', 15% of the respondents expressed 'Dissatisfied', and a minimum of 5 % of the respondents are expressing 'Highly Dissatisfied' with the Economic upliftment as a Prospects areas Act East Policy of India and ASEAN countries: Manipur's perspective.

Developed strategic trade relationship:

A developed strategic trade relationship is an agreement between two or more entities to carry out certain activities or processes to achieve specific goals such as product development or distribution in Act East Policy in Manipur. It is shown in figure1.1 and found that a maximum of 45% of the respondents expressed 'Highly Satisfied', 35% of the respondents expressed 'Satisfied', 3% of the respondents expressed 'Neutral', 9% of the respondents expressed 'Dissatisfied' and a minimum of 8 % of the respondents are expressing 'Highly Dissatisfied' with the Developed strategic trade relationship of Act East Policy and ASEAN.

Development of M.S.M.E.s: M.S.M.E.s growth is the driving force behind economic growth. Industrial growth is also a result of international economic competition. The development of industrial-intensive industries is often a policy that guides the Government of the developing country to limited natural resources and a small domestic market. It is found that a maximum of 50% of the respondents expressed 'Highly Satisfied', 30% of the respondents expressed 'Satisfied', 4% of the respondents expressed 'Neutral', 9% of the respondents said 'Dissatisfied', and a minimum of 7 % of the respondents are expressing 'Highly Dissatisfied' with the Development of M.S.M.E.s and Industries of Act East Policy and ASEAN.

Physical Infrastructure Development:

Infrastructure is a general term for the essential physical systems of a company, region or country - for example, transportation systems, communications networks, sewers, water and electricity systems - all infrastructure models. These systems are capital-intensive and costly investments critical to a country's performance, economic growth and prosperity. It is found that a maximum of 39% of the respondents expressed 'Highly Satisfied', 38% of the respondents expressed 'Satisfied', 17% of the respondents expressed 'Neutral', 4% of the respondents expressed 'Dissatisfied', and a minimum of 2 % of the respondents are saying 'Highly Dissatisfied' with the Physical Infrastructure Development of Act East Policy implementation.

Hypothesis:

Ho: There is no significant relationship between India's Act East policy with ASEAN countries for a better outlook of Manipur.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between India's Act East policy and ASEAN countries for a better outlook of Manipur.

The chi-square statistic is 29.5117. The p-value is .003306. The result is significant at $p < .05$. They indicated that at a 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom of 12, the calculated Chi-square is greater than the critical value, i.e. table value 21.026. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and we conclude that "There is a significant relation between India's Act East policy with ASEAN countries for a better outlook of Manipur.

Conclusion and The Main agenda of India's Act East policy with ASEAN countries for a better outlook of Manipur :

India-Myanmar needs a strong bonding in the light of India's Act East Policy and India's fruitful engagement in ASEAN and BIMSTECH for a more robust geopolitical standing.

India's initiative focuses on connectivity, trade, commerce and cultural relationship for strategic and economic benefits to the partnering countries.

For stronger India-Myanmar cooperation, the following points need to suggest well.

1. Trades under the legal regime are reduced to almost zero; reasons could be tariff structure not suitable for the trading, especially the betel nuts and also not having an awareness of Most Favoured Nations trade, so the bilateral agreement between the two countries is needed for enhancing the formal trade including transit trades of third-party countries.

2. Trade-related Infrastructural facilities:

Integrated Check Point/Land Customs Station should have adequate facilities such as Information Communication Technology /internet connectivity, Electronic Data Interface facilities are operationalized, and the employees are educated well for a formal trading mindset.

3. Proper benchmarking to improve the trade-related infrastructural facilities and overall development of border zones at the Moreh-Tamu sector of India –Myanmar vis a vis Muse-Ruli (Myanmar-China and Myawady-Mysot (Myanmar Thailand).

4. The India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway should be made operationalized at the earliest possible as it has been delayed unduly by not being able to complete the construction of the roads and bridges in the portions India is supposed to undertake.

5. Establishment of Special Economic Zones/Border area development Zones/Export-oriented Units etc., especially in the border areas of Manipur and Sagaing region with warehousing and other logistic facilities for the vibrant economic corridor in this part of the region as this junction point, should be the gateway of both the countries in the trilateral connectivity.

6. Collaborations in the education, skill development, entrepreneurship, culture and sports-related areas are encouraged. As such, formalization at the government level is needed to collaborate and exchange knowledge, ideas and experiences at the operational level, maybe, at the University/Institutional level in the neighbouring areas for fruitful results.

7. Proper connectivity should be linked with the productivity of the people in local areas, and as such adequate skill development for employability and livelihood should be taken up, keeping in view the appropriate local resources and skilled workforces in the light of the talent landscape of the country for India to become USD 5 trillion economies by 2025.

8. The bus service initiative between Imphal and Mandalay is an appreciable work, and it has to be operationalized at the earliest possible. Further, airline service between Imphal and Mandalay/Kalay should also be taken up for closer understanding and people-to-people connectivity. It will boost tourism like medical tourism, heritage, education, culture, sports and businesses.

9. Moreh-Tamu has been recognized as an immigration point for both countries. As such, visa on arrival/e-visa facilities for the Myanmar nationals should also be made available at this immigration point.

10. Attracting investment foreign/domestic in the areas of horticulture, processed foods, pharma, floriculture, bamboo, education, IT/ITES, Tourism, healthcare, and organic farming as these products /services can have the potential to take part in the global value chain.

ASEAN is one of the leading economies in Asia, power-driven by a rapidly growing middle class and a collective consumer market of 628 million people.

The ASEAN Economic Community (A.E.C.) was created in 2015 to amalgamate the economies of 10 nations into a single support and production base. It is widely seen to enhance ASEAN's aptitudes as global economic inspiration. With the A.E.C. in the entire move back and forth, ASEAN is wished-for to become a borderless trade and industry community, Desire to connect with ASEAN and fill in the blanks for an accreditation certificate on the ground, including the Small Medium Enterprise (S.M.E.) or multinational freight (M.N.C.).

Manipur can become a gateway to the dynamic Southeast Asian economics, which can help the trade and commerce with our eastern neighbours to flourish and must be pursued with commitment and determination by the central government. The Act East Policy is of added interest to the Northeast. The traded goods can reap an additional commercial advantage. Efforts ought to be directed to build up physical and institutional infrastructure. In the meantime, state governments must be ready to confront competition from these economies and prepare them to increase their economic efficiency by removing the constraints and bottlenecks in the operation of commodities, money and labour Markets.

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