



SCOPE OF LOOK EAST POLICY IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

VINOD

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ABSTRACT

India's North-East, a distinctive geopolitical entity, comprising the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. The region shares borders with four Asian countries such as China, Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh. A number of factors such as insurgency, ethnic conflicts, illegal migration etc have induced a certain degree of instability, political degeneration and have as well contributed to the economic backwardness, retarded infrastructural development and psychological alienation of this region from the mainland India. Thus, the development deficit in the North-East remains a challenge for the government of India. This challenge can be addressed by integrating the North-East with its Southeast Asia region through the policy namely Look East Policy. Since 1992, India started giving importance to South and South East Asian Countries in order to expand its trading activities. These countries have been considered as important trading destinations besides U.K. And other European countries. Government of India has started taking serious steps towards promoting Look East Policy. India has developed various bilateral and multilateral trade relations with these countries. Of the bilateral trade relations Indo-China, Indo-Myanmar and Indo-Sri Lanka and multilateral trade relations with India and South East Asian countries through BCIM, BIMSTEC, SAFTA, ASEAN and ASEAN Regional Forum are significant. Since 1992, India started giving importance to South and South East Asian Countries in order to expand its trading activities. These countries have been considered as important trading destinations besides U.K. And other European countries. Government of India has started taking serious steps towards promoting Look East Policy. India has developed various bilateral and multilateral trade relations with these countries. Of the bilateral trade relations Indo-China, Indo-Myanmar and Indo-Sri Lanka and multilateral trade relations with India and South East Asian countries through BCIM, BIMSTEC, SAFTA, ASEAN and ASEAN Regional Forum are significant. Since 1992, India started giving importance to South and South East Asian Countries in order to expand its trading activities. These countries have been considered as important trading destinations besides U.K. And other European countries. Government of India has started taking serious steps towards promoting Look East Policy.

Keywords: - Government, India, Policy, East, Countries

I. INTRODUCTION

In the era of liberalization, privatization and globalization for the promotion of export and import of the country, there is a need for the diversification of trade destinations. Historically, India had close trade relations with U.K. Besides U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Russia, Japan and OPEC countries were important trading partners for India. With the rise of South East Asian economies in the recent decades,



India felt the need for the diversification of its trade direction towards the eastern side i.e. East Asia and South East Asia. With the potential of vast market in East Asia and South East Asia, India started realizing the need to have closer economy ties with these countries

India's North-East, a distinctive geopolitical entity comprising the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh is spread over an area of 2.55 lakh sq.km. This accounts for 7.8 percent of the total landmass of India and 3.73 percent of India's vast population. Except the former princely states of Manipur and Tripura, all other states were parts of British colonial Assam. It is to be noted that during the post-colonial period the political map of the North-East transformed very significantly. Nationalism and ethnicity are the two factors which played a very decisive role in the process of transformation of these states in post-colonial period. In 2001, Sikkim was included as an eighth state to the key policy making institution namely the North East Council (Brahma, 2010. P18). This region is also known for its diversity, which represents multiple ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious identities and competing ethnic aspirations which is distinct from the mainland India. This distinctiveness places North-East in a unique geographical and political space that reflects its ethnic and genealogical connections to the rest of South East Asian countries (Gogoi, 2010. P1)

II. THE LOOK EAST POLICY

The Look East Policy, a part of India's extended neighborhood policy was initiated by the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in Singapore address in 1994 and have been followed by the successive governments of India. The intensification of the economic linkages with the ASEAN in the first phase was led by Rao government and later the second phase was led by NDA government under the leadership of A. B. Vajpayee. Under the leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Look East Policy has been re-energized with a renewed focus on the role of Northeast in India's vision of the world and India's place in the evolving global economy (Gogoi, 2010. P 34). In the early 1990's, the policy was initiated for the first time when India began a constructive engagement with the military regime of Myanmar. Economics has been a prime mover of India's Look East policy. India wants to have a developing physical connectivity with Southeast Asia through Myanmar and Thailand. With due course of time along with Southeast Asia, the Look East policy involves the deepening of ties with Australia, Japan and South Korea which are major effective economics and political factors in the region (Brahma, 2010. P 22). India's Look East policy has a strong economic imperatives and long term strategic importance. The domestic implication of this policy has given thrust to local economics and bilateral trade and in the long run could transform the economic profile of this region (Brahma, 2010. P 22). In this regard K Indrakumar stated that "the Look East policy is guided by a myriad of inter-related national interest. It is not simply guided by trade as the prime motive but overall politico economic interest of a burgeoning India vis-à-vis emerging geo-political configuration. India's Look East policy is a major foreign policy shift, in fact, a „paradigm shift“, which has brought changes in India's orientation towards China and Southeast Asia.

Till recently India's foreign policy has been Pakistan centric in particular and subcontinental specific in general. Thus, India has decided to come out of the „sub-continental cold war situation and take up a



proactive role in the region (Indrakumar, 2009. P 20).” Closer ties with Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries are needed to check rising China and to contain conflict in its northeastern region. These political objectives are conjunctively supplemented by the economic imperatives of integration with ASEAN economy vis-à-vis the interest of global economy (Singh, 2009. P17). During the last decade Chinese continental and maritime expansion has created a „perceived Chinese threat“ for India and Southeast Asian countries. The Chinese expansion and presence of US military in the region may create a Cold War situation in near future. Chinese occupation of the disputed Sparty groups of islands and Paracels islands is a testimony to the fact that China wanted to turn South China Sea into a virtual Chinese lake making its exclusive domain. In this juncture on the one hand Southeast Asian nations began looking forward to India’s balancing capability and felt that India’s military power can no longer be ignored in the emerging balance of power structure in Asia. On the other hand strategically it is important for India to check Chinese influence in the region in the eventual reduction of the presence of superpowers coincided strikingly with similar thinking within the Southeast Asian community (Indrakumar, 2009. P 20). In this context it can be argued that the policy shift through Look East policy is an attempt of India to response to changing geo-politics in Southeast Asia and to assert its role and power in collaboration with the advanced capitalist countries in the changing global equation (Indrakumar, 2009. P 21).

III. INDIA'S MOTIVE BEHIND LOOK EAST POLICY

(a) India's Hesitancy about Projecting NE India in its Look East Policy: One way to ensure a continental orientation to the Look East Policy would be to give a direct role to the North Eastern States. In 1999 when China brought together experts, scholars and business people from China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh to initiate a regional economic forum, it invited them to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province. The venue underscored Chinese intention to take advantage of Yunnan's geographical location and its cultural affinities with its neighbors across the border and to restore Yunnan's historical role as a bridge to South East Asia and South Asia. But, when it came to India's turn to host the Forum of Regional Economic Cooperation, created by Kunming initiative, the meeting took place in New Delhi and not in Guwahati, Shillong or Imphal. All this is no small irony.

(b) Possibility of a Maritime Oriented Look East Policy: North East Indians think of South East Asian countries as their neighbors. But in a maritime sense, the east coast of India - Orissa, Andhra or Tamilnadu - is also next door to South East Asia. Indeed, historically mainland India's ties with South East Asia have been more maritime than continental. NarasimhaRao, under whose leadership the Look East Policy began, was the first Indian Prime Minister from peninsular India. He belongs to a place very close to the Coromandel Coast, known for its maritime ties to South East Asia. Continentally oriented trade with South East Asia may not be encouraging for the mainland India as it is cheaper and less troublesome for India to trade with South East Asia by sea rather than land. It may be tempting therefore for India to build relationships with South East Asia that are primarily maritime rather than continentally oriented.



(c) The China Syndrome: In recent years, China's expansive economy has drawn India's South Asian neighbors into its economic orbit. Not surprisingly, this has made many Indians nervous. Myanmar's trade with both India and China has expanded since 1989 but the trade with China has grown much more rapidly than the trade with India. Even China's trade with Bangladesh has exceeded India's by a small but significant margin. Apart from the economic sphere, Chinese influence in Myanmar in military and political terms has been phenomenal. Indeed, it has led India to reassess its policy of opposing the military junta and supporting the movement of democracy led by Aung San SuuKyi.

(d) The Security Anxieties: It is quite apparent that the political uncertainty in North East India has been a major factor in shaping India's Myanmar policy in the light of India's Look East Policy.

Indeed, it has been argued that in India's security anxieties - getting Myanmar to act against North East Indian insurgent groups that take shelter in Myanmar - rather than a desire to give the Look East Policy a continental orientation that explains India's U-turn vis-a-vis Myanmar.

IV. SCOPE OF INDIA'S "LOOK EAST POLICY"

The political and economic advancements in various pieces of the world amid the mid-1990s got radical changes the relations among nations, bringing about the rise of a period of globalization. Globalization achieved an expanding combination of economies and social orders and has tossed open chances and just as challenges to both the created and creating nations. This globalization of world economies significantly increased international challenge and has, in the meantime, offered rise to another rush of regionalism? Regionalism, as a rule, has turned out to be a viable gadget to serve economic and business goals. In the process, old associations are recasted and new associations formed to suit the changing global political and economic setting. Geological proximity, economic complementarity, political responsibility, policy coordination, and infrastructure improvement give conditions to development of such groupings. Consequently, quantities of proximate states in various pieces of the world establish themselves into areas to give crisp impulse to a wide assortment of agreeable endeavors dependent on regionalism. In this changing political and economic setting India need to intently look at the developing international circumstance and took convenient initiatives to modify its policies to receive rewards for itself At the full scale level, India coordinated its foreign policy at accomplishing three imperative targets: "Keeping up the regional trustworthiness of India, guaranteeing its geo-political security by making a tough environment of harmony and steadiness in the area and to assemble a system for the prosperity of the general population by encouraging a solid external economic environment." Inside the South Asian district, India and its neighboring nations have made several endeavors for regional cooperation. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was built up on December 8, 1985 to quicken the process of economic and social advancement among the seven part states. There have been several endeavors to improve trade in the area through South Asia Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) and Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). In spite of such efforts trade inside the nations keeps on being horrifyingly low. Till date Pakistan is yet to sanction the organized commerce understanding. Economic exchanges and agreeable ties inside SAARC were constrained, if not hindered by the India-



Pakistan debate and India's sheer weight. The frustrating pace of SAPTA and SAFTA exchanges constrained India to look past the limits of South Asia for regional economic cooperation.

The collapse of the Soviet Union has serious repercussions for India. Former Soviet Union had been a tried and true accomplice for provisions of arms, oil, and to some degree economic help. It had additionally been a main accomplice and a major market of Indian customer products. The collapse of the Soviet framework denied India not just of a profitable accomplice, where the Rupee Trade Area represented around one-fourth of its exports and constantly bolstered India strategically through United Nations cast a ballot, yet in addition of a critical model of brought together planning. One of the significant worries for New Delhi was that it could never again depend on Soviet conciliatory help at the Security Council of the United Nations and therefore India was presented to international weights to indispensable interests like demilitarization, non-expansion and the Kashmir issue. It was a major misfortune for India in political, strategic and economic terms.

The transitory separation of the oil economy in the Gulf district following the crisis over Kuwait conveyed home to India the importance of broadening its wellsprings of vitality supply so as to decrease its reliance on its customary providers in the Gulf and the recent Soviet Union. In this undertaking, the accessibility of vitality sources in nations like Myanmar, Brunei, Indonesia and Australia in the Asia-Pacific gave conceivable choices. In this manner, it was natural for Indian chiefs to search for another international job and to swing to the most economically unique area of the world - Southeast Asia.

V. CONCLUSION

For whatever imperatives or adjustments or agenda the policy has been formulated, the Look East Policy must be seen both as an opportunity and a challenge for the people of the NE region and particularly for Manipur. It would, therefore, be immature to hastily attribute a 'good' or 'bad' tag to the policy. On the contrary, more pertinent question would be how good are we in reaping maximum benefits out of the policy while trying to minimize on the negative impacts of the policy. The Look East policy definitely hold great potential but it is only for the prepared mind.

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In this backdrop, necessary to highlight that there are some challenges such as geographical & technical challenges, security & political challenges that stand to limit the process of connecting India's Northeast with Southeast Asia. However, given the present level of technological development, the geographical & technical problems are no longer a concern. As far as the political and security obstacle are concerned positive result could be achieved through continuous dialogue. The challenges are not insurmountable if all the concerned parties are committed to find out the solutions.



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