

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON  
ACT EAST THROUGH NORTHEAST: INDIA'S WAY TO A NEW ERA OF  
DIPLOMACY**

**Organized by**



**The Jadavpur Association of International Relations (JAIR)**

**Venue:**



**Dera Natung Government College, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh**

**Supported by**



**Policy Planning and Research Division  
Ministry of External Affairs  
Government of India**

**15TH AND 16TH NOVEMBER, 2018**

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE**

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The National Conference on **ACT EAST THROUGH NORTHEAST: INDIA'S WAY TO A NEW ERA OF DIPLOMACY** supported by **Policy Planning and Research Division, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India** began on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2018 at the Auditorium of **Dera Natung Government College, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh** with the participants of the conference singing *Vande Mataram*. This was followed by **Smt. Srijata Roy's** address where she welcomed the participants and presented a general overview of the conference agenda along with some remarks on Jadavpur Association of International Relations (JAIR). She invited the delegates to the Inaugural Session to officially open the conference with the lighting of the lamp. The organizers of the conference were called on the stage to felicitate the distinguished delegates, who were given *uttoriyos, handmade diaries* presented in a *handmade paper bag*. The representatives from the **Dera Natung Government College** felicitated them with *traditional handloom shawls and scarves*. The Conference has been a great success owing to the sheer character of the entire spectrum of panellists, delegates, chairpersons and the audience who had participated actively in the proceedings. The Conference highlighted that **Northeast India** has been one of the most sensitive regions of India owing to a number of factors like, common international boundaries, porous nature of the borders coupled with ethnocultural similarity across the same, resource endowment of the region, the menace of insurgency which looms large over NER etc. This landlocked region is resultantly one of the most significant yet delicate links between India and many of her neighbouring countries. The two-day event has successfully brought to the fore the hitherto unexplored trajectories of Northeast India's engagement with the Southeast Asian Nations, including China and other regional organizations. A number of important areas were highlighted by the panelists which if receives adequate attention might prove to be beneficial in linking landlocked northeast. The other organizations which supported the Conference are

**Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi and Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi.**



### **The Inaugural Ceremony on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

The Conference was initiated by **Dr. N.T. Rikam**, Principal, Dera Natung Government College where he spoke about India's Act East policy and its relevance to the contemporary process of regional integration between South and South-East Asia. He expressed gratitude and pride on behalf of Dera Natung College for hosting and organizing the conference along with JAIR. **Dr. Ramkrishna Mandal**, Head Department of Ea economics, Dera Natung Government College, Itanagar, the Regional Convener of the Conference formally thanked **Policy Planning and Research Division, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India** for supporting the Conference and welcomed the delegates and paper presenters and thanked the representatives of the media for being a part of this academic conference.

**Professor Partha Pratim Basu**, President of JAIR and Professor at Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University reflected on the long journey of JAIR and how it evolved over the years as a major think tank in India. He made remarks on the theme of the conference. This was followed by special remarks by **Dr. Imankalyan Lahiri**, General Secretary, JAIR, who expressed his gratitude towards the **Policy Planning & Research**

**Division, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.** He also thanked the administration, staff, and students of Dera Natung Government College for hosting this National Conference. He reflecting his speech delivered on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018 at the Press Club, Arunachal Pradesh said that JAIR formed in the year 2007-2008 has organized such conferences at various parts of Northeast India like Manipur, Shillong, Mizoram, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh is the fifth state. He said, every scholar taking part in the seminar will have their own inputs on the topic and the inputs will be published by JAIR, which will give the academicians and policymakers to form a comprehensive idea regarding **India's Act East Policy.**

**Professor Omprakash Mishra**, Head of the Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University delivered the **Key Note Address** where he briefly discussed the current scenario on issues concerning the Northeast region with special reference to the **Act East Policy.** He said integration is the only path to successfully implement India's Act East Policy. He raised his concern regarding the security interests of India with the Southeast Asian States and Bangladesh. He said India must establish goodwill amongst the Southeast Asian States and must prudently implement its Act East Policy for the greater benefit of the country. Continuous engagement with China too is necessary to expand cooperation, particularly on the economic front. Professor Mishra pointed out that the forthcoming decades must ensure that areas of conflict are minimized and economic integration are fully leveraged. He also said that India's Act East Policy is balancing the increasing influence of China in the Southeast Asian region. He mentioned that India must respond to China's assertiveness through multilateral mechanisms.

**Dr. J.K. Sachdeva** spoke about the conference and its immense potential in helping create a wider understanding of issues related to the Act East Policy. Professor **Amitava Mitra**, Former **Vice-Chancellor** of Rajiv Gandhi Central University and Professor of Economics at Rajiv Gandhi Central University delineated the various intricate aspects of the conference theme, providing a summary of the ideas discussed by the various delegates. The Inaugural Session was concluded with a vote of thanks by **Dr. B.L. Behra**, Head of Department of English, Dera Natung Government College.

The students of **Dera Natung Government College** thereafter presented a dance-drama on National integration.

During the **Special Lecture Sessions** on **India's Act East Policy: Issues and Opportunities**, **Ms. Deepika Saraswat**, Fellow at **Indian Council of World Affairs**, New Delhi was the first speaker he spoke on India's options with regard to Southeast Asia. She elaborated her idea by

saying that India's Act East Policy must continue to focus on strengthening collaboration with the ASEAN countries. Partnerships must aim at promoting economic revival through the implementation of India-ASEAN FTA in services and investment and strategic cooperation to fight terrorism, freedom of navigation, maritime security, and defense cooperation. She further said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's use of soft power such as Buddhism, tourism, people-to-people contacts, and cultural ties with the region must also be harnessed. **Professor Partha Pratim Basu**, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University spoke on the various facets of development in Southeast Asia and the importance to link Southeast Asia with India's Act East Policy. The foreign policy also has a domestic standpoint i.e., to develop India's north-eastern region by intensifying trade links of the region with South and Southeast Asian nations Professor Basu added. **Professor Anindya Jyoti Majumdar**, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University spoke on the geopolitical aspects of India's Act East Policy and connectivity. **Professor Vivek Mishra**, Netaji Institute of Asian Studies presented a paper pointed out that BIMSTEC has often been held to be the bridge between South and Southeast Asia, connecting the crucial Bay of Bengal to Southeast Asia. **Professor Biswanath Chakraborty**, Rabindra Bharati University pointed out that during the ASEAN-India Summit on November 12, 2014, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made a statement that internally a new era of economic development, industrialization and trade has begun in India and externally, India's 'Look East Policy' has become 'Act East Policy'. ASEAN constitutes the foundation and core of this policy. India's engagement with ASEAN has evolved in response to the developing strategic contours of the Asia-Pacific region. India's Act East Policy is undergirded by security and economic concerns. Even though it is known that during the early phases of the policy, India integrated itself institutionally with ASEAN and was concerned by the presumably deterministic goals of the new era of the free market, it did try its level best to lay emphasis on trade and investments. **Dr. Sukalpa Chakrabarti**, Deputy Director, Symbiosis School of International Studies, Pune pointed out that despite China playing a potentially negative role that instigated the militarization of the region, the engagements so far have been responsive within the states and the negotiations made with the civilian lifestyle in order to incorporate the same has been fairly satisfactory. However, if the negativities are to be overcome in the near future, vigorous attempts from both sides would be necessary. Japan is one of India's dependable allies and was the only country that was allowed to take part in a foreign exchange with the Northeastern states last year. One would probably like to note that India and Japan are members of forums such as the quad of G4, Quad of Democracies or the Triangular Ministerial Dialogue. The setting up of the Indo-Japan Act East

forum in the December 2017 is hence a promising step toward the institutional affinity in the near future. This shall also help in the economic and strategic development of the landlocked mass of the Northeastern states. The integration with the other part of Eastern Asia also becomes a valid possibility in this case. This decision is substantially important and significant since this instigated the decision of India not to be a part of China's BRI (Belt and Road initiative) and truncated Japan's decision to develop a military alliance with India and Australia. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi describing Japan as the cornerstone of India's Act East Policy and the two countries agreeing to cooperate in more concrete terms for the development of the Indo-Pacific region, the Northeast has emerged as a very important link in this chain. Since the Indo-Pacific region stretches from the east coast of Japan to the east coast of Africa and both India and Japan agree that the association of ASEAN regional bloc has to play a central role for the peace and prosperity of the region. Both sides are also considering sharing and exchange of knowledge on the issue through a Japan-India through workshops on disaster and risk reduction. **Dr. Indrashis Banerjee**, Head, Department of Political Science, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math said, Bangladesh is one of the most important neighboring countries given the geo-strategic intrinsic value it is capable of constituting. The world has seen old democracies of the West but even then, who would not be accepting the onslaughts of epidemics such as Nazism that civilizations time after time have succumbed to? Nazism, for instance, could be a valid example. Nonetheless, there have been issues that the EU have been prompt in at least trying to answer. Given the liberal and apparently welcoming, democratic approach on dissent, the conglomeration of the nuances of details on which the state machinery develops itself upon have been strengthened over time. Bangladesh, in contrast, has had a miserable history of - authoritarian control over its terrain, and hence – the people. Regionalism can develop itself based on sharing; i.e. – sharing the culture, the commerce, the connectivity. Drawing from empirical evidence from rural India and with reference to Myanmar, the submission holds that hurdles remain. However, institutionalized and constitutional democracy might be the key to peace and progress beyond the fixed goals of the region and the ideation of the same in our minds. **Sri Rajeev Bhattacharjee**, Author, and Journalist said, the essential political element in the ideation of policy is an undeniable one. The question of the hour is if the Northeast is ready to connect with Myanmar. There are three main arteries envisaged connecting the landlocked region to Myanmar. A reality check, however, reveals a picture that could take quite some time for the plans to materialize in reality.

In other Technical Sessions on various topics ranging from *Act East Policy- Domestic Dimensions to connectivity*, **Dr. Vienna Awomi**, Department of Political Science, Northeastern Hill University, Shillong University spoke on the prospects and challenges to Act East through Nagaland. Dr. Awomi said the Act East Policy (AEP) represents a genuine shift in India's foreign policy, with more focus on, and a greater role for, India's Northeastern Region. Nagaland has endowed with rich forest and other natural resources and with the right intervention the region has the potential of becoming one of the largest exporters of some agricultural products. However, Nagaland which shares around 215 kilometers of the international border has the dubious distinction of having the worst roads in addition to active insurgencies and inter-tribal conflicts which poses many challenges in implementing the AEP through Nagaland. Dr. Awomi focussed on how it is important to eliminate the problems in Nagaland by implementing India's Act East Policy. **Dr. A. Ibotombi Singh**, Associate Professor of Economics & OSD (RUSA), Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar presented a paper on connectivity: the driven force of India's Act East Policy. **Dr. Chow Khanseng Manang**, Department of Economics, Saint Claret College, Ziro and **Smt. Sangeeta Magar**, Saint Claret College, Ziro spoke on transportations an economic reform through Act East Policy. **Dr. Sylvia R.K. Nongkhlaw**, University of Hyderabad, Telangana spoke on the transition from Look East to Act East in the context of institutionalizing India's Act East policy. **Dr. Nongkhlaw** added that the strategies of potential actors to accommodate the policies of the center in its institutional settings would underpin the transformation of the Act East Policy. She highlighted the policy components which invigorate optimism for implementing a robust and result-oriented policy. **Ms. Ratna Tayeng**, Department of Anthropology, Dera Natung Government College spoke on how the Act East Policy can help Arunachal Pradesh. **Dr. Arpita Ghosh** presented a paper on peace and conflict situation and some glimpses from India's north-east. **Dr. Sukumal Deb** spoke on an initiative to combat poverty in India with reference to India's north-east. **Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Jha** spoke on the Act East Policy and the infrastructure of Nagaland. **Dr. Pebam Munindro Singh** spoke on the plausible impact on Act East corridor from hazards of E-waste and the need for assessment of awareness level of these hazards with special reference to a case study of Papum Pare district of Arunachal Pradesh.



### **Participants attending the Conference**

During the technical sessions on **Act East Policy and Connectivity**, **Dr. Jyotiraj Pathak, Bodoland University, Assam** spoke on the Act East Policy: Challenges and opportunities for north-east India. He said, today, the Southeast Asian countries are looking towards India as an alternative to China in the context of trade, commerce, connectivity and so on. Because of the Act East Policy (AEP), at the regional level, all the nations are going to be mutually benefited which in turn will lead to stability, development, and peace in the long run. **Dr. Saheli Bose** spoke on locating India's northeast through trade, connectivity, and energy cooperation in Act East policy. **Dr. Amit Kashyap** presented a paper on Act East through the north-east and India's way to a new era of diplomacy. **Dr. Ranjita Mannow** spoke on tourism as a potential catalyst of economic empowerment of women through an analysis of women of Arunachal Pradesh. **Professor Maitreyee Choudhury, North Bengal University** spoke on the journey of Tawang from cultural convergence to strategic significance. **Dr. Biswajit Maitra** spoke on poverty, human development and economic growth in the north-eastern region of India. **Dr. Mriganka Saikia & Pankaj Saikia** presented a paper on the economic impact of tourism on the people of tourist destinations of Assam through a study on selected destinations of Assam through Act East. There were several other interesting papers presented during the Conference. **Smt. Titas Biswas** of Jadavpur University spoke on the socio-political aspect of the indigenous culture of the northeast and traced how they are in a quest for sustenance unified in pluralistic



discourses. **Smt. Avipsa Singh**, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University said, India and China are both great ancient civilizations that have had substantial territorial and economic influence on the topography of world civilization. As close neighbors, they share a history of mutual influence among the whole arena of conflict and dissatisfaction that has been rampantly discussed on this panel for so long. Since ancient times, the people of both countries have engaged in cultural, spiritual, educational and economic exchange. The communication of the spiritual methodology of Buddhist philosophy, astrology, medicines, music, literature, and dance have laid solid ground for strategic, economic and geopolitical relations. China's silk, porcelain, tea have made their way to India since the ancient times. Rather than discussing the extent of dissent that has developed over the course of time, it might be beneficial to juxtapose the context with the soft-power tactic we know is still existent. If bilateral cooperation has to be developed out of everything, culture has to be considered as an important component. Massive people to people connectivity can help overcome the often-disturbed political overtone of both the countries. **Smt. Parna Bhattacharya**, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University said, in an attempt to fortify its Act East Policy, India's country-specific strategy must give the much-awaited importance to Vietnamese relations by taking its defense and economic ties to the next desired level. Vietnam has been extremely helpful in helping India with its ever-increasing commercial interests by providing the ammunition and equipment necessary to facilitate protection from enemies. Moreover, India's investments in the substantial amount of hydrocarbons present at the South China Sea is one of the main reasons why it is concerned to protect its maritime trading routes. Vietnam has been facilitating the process while India has been helping Vietnam by providing the defensive capacity to resist the conversion of the South China Sea into a part of Chinese territory. This acts as a counter-encirclement strategy against China and acts as a balancing technique in the bigger scenario of the long history of dissent between India and China. **Smt. Upasana Mishra**, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University pointed out that this Act East Policy was set in motion by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the East Asia Summit in Myanmar in 2014. It focuses on the extended neighborhood in the Asia Pacific region and the establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation. Myanmar is the only ASEAN member state that shares both land and sea borders with India. The two share a land border of 1,643 kilometers. Myanmar is key in the new outlook, for it serves as a crucial buffer state between China and India. As an emerging power, India, with its economic, technology and energy development as well as geopolitical advantages, is expanding its presence in Myanmar. However, India has yet to formulate a consistent Myanmar policy,

unlike China, which has been reinforcing political mutual trust and economic relations with Myanmar. The emerging NDA regime took initiatives to rebrand the erstwhile 'Look East' policy into the 'Act East' policy in 2014, keeping the essence somewhat alike in both situations. Since the inception of India's Look East Policy, a number of agreements were signed for enhancing bilateral trade. This included the Moreh-Tamu and Zokhawthar – Rhi border trades. The aim remains to improve the living conditions of the stakeholders of India and Myanmar and enhance the cross-border trade. Other than the commercial interests and state policies trying to figure out the best of what can be achieved of mostly positive interstate relations, the Narco-terrorism and drug trafficking issues are substantial threats to the security of both nations. The 'barter' system facilitated in terms of illegal ammunition trade from the side of Yunnan in China is another difficulty that needs to be overcome. Both India and Myanmar have taken steps to check the illegal activities and improve trade activities with the neighboring countries by developing a trade hub. **Sri Atendriya Dana**, pointed out that a new dawn in Indian diplomacy is marked by upgrades in its trading relations with South-East Asia and the ASEAN. A paradigm shift in policy has occurred from up Narasimha Rao's 'Look East' to Modi's 'Act East' policy. The pertinently essential components continue to remain infrastructure and connectivity. Commercial relations with South-East accounts for around 45% of India's foreign policy. The shift from Atlantic to Pacific Network has favoured several 'Look East' projects. The India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral is perceived to be a massive trade booster for India. But this very intention of facilitating a seamless cross-border trade flow is often interrupted by local problems. The deal now remains as to how this project can ultimately get the entire Eastern region connected in the next few years. **Dr. Reamy Mega and Tailang Rillung**, from Ziro pointed out that Northeast India have the potential to become India's 'Powerhouse' in terms of trade and investment. The region is richly blessed with cultural heritage, with natural resources and all the other elements necessary for making a certain territory a geo-strategically important one. Due to its geopolitical location, Arunachal Pradesh, in particular, has a lot of opportunities for developing cross-border trade with its immediate neighbours. The gradual process of such trade is a boost towards the economic development of Arunachal, and then north-East as a whole. The Indo-Myanmar border trade via Pangsau Pass, located in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh is a substantial facilitator in that context. It also is an earnest effort to study the challenges and prospects of the cross-border trade. **Dr. Aditya Kant Ghising**, Doctoral Candidate, Dept. of International Relations, Jadavpur University pointed out that the north-eastern region has been the focus of policy planners in India with regard to the Look East Policy of the former UPA government and currently termed

as the Act East Policy under the ruling NDA government. Much has been promised and yet a lot needs to be done in order for this vision to take shape. In this regard, the role of China has been immense and with the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative, the focus now turns to how India can work to achieve tangible results in Southeast Asia. China's growing presence in the region is one of the many factors that need immediate attention and introspection. Based on a qualitative study of events on the ground and the status of cross-border agreements between the various governments in the region, the role of China in shaping India's Act East Policy is not limited to a single role. India's Act East Policy and the policies taken up by Japan and Australia are balancing the increasing influence of China in Southeast Asia, in all totality. He further argued that Sino-Indo relations have metamorphosed through the ages. From the 1st century AD, when Buddhism was being exported to China and trade relations prospered through the iconic 'Silk Route' to Nehru's India to the days of Narasimha Rao's 'Look East Policy' of involving China with the aim to shed the baggage of the '62 war to Modi's era of repackaging Look East to Act East and attempting to isolate China through multilateral initiatives. And from negating OBOR, to China's bonhomie with Pakistan to disputes in the South China Sea, Sino-Indo terms remains on perilous grounds.

**Similar other papers were presented during the conference. There was a special session only on Act East Policy and Arunachal Pradesh. ,Nearly 120 papers were presented during the Conference with 320 footfalls.**



**Shri B.D Mishra, Hon'ble Governor of Arunachal Pradesh during the Valedictory Session of the Conference on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

**Shri B.D Mishra, Hon'ble Governor of Arunachal Pradesh** delivered the **Valedictory Address** on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2018. Governor BD Mishra has said that Indian diplomacy today is at its best since independence. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our approach today is 'We matter', which is important for the dignity of the nation and for the prestige and honour of every Indian, the governor said during the Valedictory function. The governor said that to realize the goal of development of the nation, every plan, actions, and policy must national interest oriented. The governor said that Northeast Region has great potential. It has hydropower, minerals, fertile land, pristine environment, and abundant forest cover. It is important for national security, resources, and best human resource. The development of the region is very important for the overall development, national defense, security and integrity of the country. It has a big area and sizable population, he said. Mishra said that the eight Northeastern states have almost similar geography, demography, assets, and challenges. They need to be considered as one entity, he said. The governor emphasized that the development of the region must not be piecemeal but with an integrated approach, focused on 'PHIRAN', which stands for power, highways, inland waterways, railways, airway and electronic and communication network. He also stressed peace, stability and good law and order environment, within the region and also in the neighboring countries, like Myanmar and Bangladesh in addition to maritime security along the sea route. Mishra complimented the Dera Natung Government College, Itanagar and Jadavpur Association of International Relations (JAIR), Kolkata for organizing the seminar. He also congratulated the students for the brilliant dance-drama presentation, emulating the vigor and heroism of Ashok Chakra awardee, martyr Hangpan Dada. On the occasion, the governor released a book 'Us Raat ki Subah', a novel on social issues related to women of Arunachal Pradesh, authored by DNGC Professor **Tumbom Riba Jomoh**. Representatives from Several Institutions of Higher Learning from All over India took Part in the Conference. The Institutions include Jadavpur University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Mumbai University, Symbiosis School of International Studies, Northeastern Hill University, Manipur University, Rabindra Bharati University, Netaji Institute of Asian Studies, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math, Times of India Group, Rajiv Gandhi Central University, Hyderabad Central University, Bodoland University, Scholars and teachers from the colleges of Arunachal Pradesh. **Several Proposals came out during the two days Conference:**

- In order to link the landlocked Northeast through the **Act East Policy**, a great emphasis was laid by the speakers on the enhancement of connectivity primarily on two levels;

*first*, within the Northeastern states; *second*, between the Northeast and the rest of India and finally, between the Northeast and the neighbouring countries of India. The buzzwords of the conference remained construction of regional highways cutting across international boundaries which would facilitate cross-cultural exchanges in the region.

- Stress was also laid on the need to tackle insurgency in the region on economic lines so that a secure milieu could be offered to the entrepreneurs who wish to invest in the region.
- Creation of a common regional platform in order to address the menace of insurgency and terrorism has been tabled during the conference in order to bring about a commonality of cause across the region, which in turn would act as a spur to the overall development of the region.
- An earnest call was also made to showcase and uphold northeast as one of the tourism hubs of India in order to create newer gateways of people to people contact which might prove instrumental in linking the landlocked northeast.
- The conference also brought to our attention the general lack of awareness about the resource endowment of the region which according to some has acted like a colossal impediment in the way of investment and resultant development in the region. Along with demands of infrastructural development to attract investors in the region, a great deal of attention was also sought in the area of public-private partnership.
- Moving away from the economic and commercial aspect of the notion of development per se, the considerable focus was also laid on the social aspect of development by underlining the dire requirement of effective and quality healthcare services in the region, better educational facilities, and skill developmental policies at the grass root level.
- Enhancing regional entrepreneurship skills, establishing rural banking systems and the creation of a stable environment have been identified as prerequisites for prosperity in the region.
- Citing the identical nature of hurdles which eastern India faces, the need for Sikkim, West Bengal, Orissa, and the Seven Sisters to act as a single unified entity nationally and regionally was put forward during the deliberations.

Overall the presentations which were made implicitly and explicitly indicated towards the desired policies that the government should follow or at least should be mindful about. The policy feedbacks hereby can be identified are:

- On the question of Northeast India's development, a need for more inclusive growth has been reiterated in many presentations. Merely building flyovers and huge constructions cannot symbolize an overall growth scenario rather what is required is to turn Northeast India into a potential economic hub. To do that the abundance of human resources should be put to use through proper institutions and training. For proper development, it has also been observed that the Central government and government agencies should pay heed to the local demands and sentiments. It has been argued that a convergence of strategic and commercial interests is what is required. To make that a reality connectivity should also increase which should comprise of virtual and political ones. It has been also pointed out that the present Government at the Centre is already implementing several projects through India's Act East Policy.
- Policies focusing on developing information technology potential should be dynamic and should widen transcending beyond IT Parks. It has also been proposed not to overlook the agrarian potential of Northeast rather policies should be drawn up to develop horticulture and sericulture. Assam has been looked upon in the presentations as an important factor in the process of Northeastern development. Apart from tea cultivation Assam also contains huge reserves of hydrocarbon which should be diligently used. Some very basic and specific ideas which have been harped upon for the region's development are the creation of democratic institutions, winning the confidence of the local population, greater cultural interaction, tapping the student potential and mobilization of the youth ensuring educational opportunities and food security.
- Media also needs to play an important role in the Northeast. What has been argued is that to conduct business, there is no need to have big publicity houses, rather media can work through local agencies to prepare the ground level. Local knowledge, skill, and resource-based industries could work as most favorable for the Northeastern region. Potential areas of development need to be identified, exportable goods have to be ensured so that the region does not turn into a dumping ground.
- On India-BIMSTEC and India-Southeast Asia relations, many proposals have been presented. The role that Northeast India could play in India's relations with the regional

groupings has also been looked into. Northeast India has been viewed as strategically important with regard to India's Look East Policy. Thus Northeast India according to some speakers should be treated as the starting point of India's Southeast Asia and BIMSTEC engagement. Thus the development of Northeast is extremely essential to serve India's objective either as a developed region or as a thriving corridor. Adoption of a more cooperative approach towards BIMSTEC would automatically mean India to adopt a dynamic policy towards Myanmar and Bangladesh especially. Relations with Thailand and Bhutan have also been focused into.

- It has been proposed that BIMSTEC can act as a bridge between SAARC and ASEAN. Bengal –Bangkok connectivity can create a whole new economic paradigm whereby Bangladesh, Myanmar can be accommodated to share the benefits of such arrangements. Northeast India would benefit in the process.
- Act East Policy provides a multi-sectoral cooperation possibility where Bangladesh can act as a corridor towards more regional integration. It has been suggested that India can act as a raw material provider to the neighboring countries of Southeast Asia and can help to develop economic sectors. The interaction between Southeast Asia and India can thus serve as a platform for greater cultural relations.
- India-Myanmar relations have been viewed as very important for any workable order at regional grouping. To that effect, it has been argued that India ignored Myanmar for a particular period and thus much strategic ground has been taken over by China. Such mistakes should not be repeated keeping in view that India's Northeast is vulnerable and the geo-strategic posture of China is a serious threat to India's interest in Southeast Asia. What has also been taken note of is that central and northern Myanmar have already been turned into a Chinese economic hinterland and thus Northeast India is turning into a dumping ground. It has also been noted that Chinese product selling spree is an indirect economic expansionist policy which if it includes large areas of the Northeast can seriously threaten India's larger stakes in Southeast Asia.
- Multiple arguments have been forwarded about what India should do regarding Myanmar. A common line has been adopted which states that India should be proactive in reaching out to Myanmar without any prejudice. It has been viewed that Myanmar holds the key to bilateral and multilateral engagements with the Act East Policy framework. Relations with Myanmar should focus on strategic perception and an economic one. Large reserves of hydrocarbon in Myanmar, tourism potential linking

northeast can produce such end results which would benefit India and thus long-term goals can be set.

- Apart from Myanmar Thailand has also been focused upon. In several presentations, it has been stated that Look West of Thailand envisages a close and cooperative relationship with the South Asian region. Thus the policy pursued by Thailand is congruent to India's desire to engage more deeply with the Southeast Asian grouping so it has been proposed that India Thailand engagement can open new options and new avenues for India's regional engagement. The areas where India Thailand can work together as identified by many are essentially knowledge-based economic sectors, tourism, and energy.
- Bhutan also has been looked upon as a potentially important player and given the record of Bhutan India friendship India should consider taking Bhutan along in the quest for creating larger stakes in the Northeast. To this effect, a Bhutan-Assam-Arunachal-Myanmar corridor has been proposed. India should also help Bhutan so as to establish a strategic blind lane for the insurgents/terrorists who are active in the Northeast. Clear policies towards promoting tourism between Bhutan and India have to be envisaged so that social mobility increases which would lead to cosmopolitanism and the economic benefits can be shared.
- It has been suggested by panelists that policymaking by the government for these sensitive regions of the country should be done in such a manner that they involve the people concerned. This inclusiveness by the government is especially expected by the people of a democracy. Hence whatever development projects are to be undertaken by the government should have the support of the people living in the concerned area. People should not face any kind of harassment in the name of development.
- Development may hamper ecological balance. Thus, both the Central and the State governments should take care that ecology is least hampered due to projects which will otherwise lead to the development of the region. Only if there is the preservation of the natural environment along with industrial advancement can it be called a true development.
- A lot of money is invested in the developmental projects of Northeast India within the framework of India's Act East Policy. Hence it needs to be seen that the outcome of the projects leads to long-term benefits than short-term ones. ,



- NER and Southeast Asia should be in a symbiotic relationship with each benefitting the other in the various endeavours that are carried on by them. Because of the regions shared cultural and historical ties, this regional organization should work in a manner that will lead to profits and benefits for everyone coming under its purview. India's security will be guaranteed once her relations with countries like Myanmar prosper. Non-traditional security concerns like the use of drugs and illegal immigration from Myanmar can be handled more easily through cooperation between and successfully implementing India's Act East Policy.
- , There is a lot of potential for the actualization of the tasks undertaken through India's Act East Policy.

**Finally, the Conference supported by Policy Planning and Research Division, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India is an effort to bring together the policymakers, the business groups, the academicians and the civil society. India's Act East Policy will definitely be successful and Northeast India will prosper not only within the country but also in the region and the whole world.**

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