



DISCUSSING ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT & BENEFITS OF INDIA LOOK EAST POLICY

VINOD

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ABSTRACT

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.

KEYWORDS- Policy, Asian Countries, global politics.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1980s, there has been a blast of different types of regionalist extends on a global scale. The widening and developing of EU is the most unavoidable precedent. In any case, regionalism is additionally made unmistakable through the rejuvenation or extension of numerous other regional activities around the globe, for example, the ASEAN, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Southern Common Market (Mercosur).

Today regionalism is firmly connected with the moving idea of global politics. The intensification of global regionalism is portrayed by the association of practically all legislatures on the planet, and prosperous assortment of non-state performing artists, bringing about multiplicities of formal and casual regional administration and regional systems in various areas. This pluralism and multidimensionality of contemporary regionalism offers rise to various new riddles and challenges. Verifiably, wonder of regionalism can be traced with the words "class",

"associations", "agreements", and "confederation". Due to contrasts of time, space and environmental factors, researchers gave diverse definitions and understandings of regionalism. Muthiah Alagappa characterizes regionalism as 'continued cooperation, formal or casual, among government, non-administrative association or in at least three bordering nations for shared addition. In this way, 'regionalism is a multilateral establishment and along these lines requires the support of at least three states. There Bhagwati is no characterizes regionalism as a special trade understanding among a subset of nations.

The beginnings and evolution of the Look East Policy was to be done with a lot of fanfare and rigour, even though it was not to be smooth sailing all the way. The relations with ASEAN witnessed India becoming a sectoral dialogue partner with ASEAN in 1992 and full dialogue partner in 1995. In July 1996, I.K. Gujral the then Foreign Minister of India, first participated in the ASEAN conference in Indonesia. Giving positive appraisal of the Indian government of this new relationship, he said, "we see the full dialogue partnership with ASEAN as manifestation of our Look East destiny.....India would work with ASEAN as a full dialogue partner to give real meaning and content to the prophecy and promise of the 'Asian century' that is about to draw upon us.

On a closer look at India's Look East policy, what gets revealed is that along with improved relations with Southeast Asia it was an attempt to relieve the negative reaction to navy and the political atmosphere in a Post-Cold War world. This policy was an attempt to strengthen strategic relations with many countries on bilateral and multilateral platform and also intended to have closer links with ASEAN on political and economical grounds. Further, it was also an attempt to make a place for itself in the larger Indo- Pacific region by showing India's economic potential for investment and trade. It had a major impact on India's foreign policy.

II. THE LOOK EAST POLICY

A close scrutiny of India's Look East policy reveals that it was not simply meant to improve relations with Southeast Asia but there were a number of other dimensions too. What started as an attempt to assuage negative reaction to the Navy, the post-Cold War political atmosphere offered an opportunity to include aspects political as well as economic. The Look East policy was a multi-faceted and multi-pronged approach to establish strategic links with many individual countries, evolve closer political links with ASEAN, and develop strong economic bonds with the region. Second, it was an attempt to carve a place for India in the larger Asia- Pacific. Third, the Look East policy was also meant to showcase India's economic potential for investments and trade. In a way, this policy also started influencing India's foreign policy significantly. India, which had all along been wary of regional multilateralism, was willing to actively participate. Other interesting dimensions of this policy are exhibition of greater sensitivity towards a large number of smaller countries of Southeast Asia and a total volte-face with regard to its attitude toward Myanmar. Last but not the least, the feeling of getting left out in the Asia Pacific, whether it was the Asia Pacific

Economic Cooperation (APEC) or the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences (ASEAN-PMC) with the Dialogue Partners of ASEAN, which had emerged as the only forum to discuss regional issues. Although both India and ASEAN refused to admit openly, the rise of China also played an important role in the evolution of the Look East policy.

The Look East policy began with a lot of fanfare but it was not smooth sailing. One can discern three distinct phases of this policy. The first phase marked enormous enthusiasm and a flurry of activity and exchanges. By mid-1990s, there was considerable cooling down of earlier zeal on both sides, which got further dampened by the 1997-98 financial crisis. The third and the latest phase is the revival of interest once again. The multi-dimensional approach and the progress that India's Look East policy has achieved are briefly explained below.

Political Relations

The diplomatic strategy that was adopted appears two-fold. First, after having realised that ASEAN is the focal point around which it would have to rebuild its relationship, India's primary objective was to become a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN. Through intense diplomatic efforts, India was made a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1992 which got elevated to the status of Dialogue Partner during the Fifth ASEAN Summit Meeting of 1995 "reflecting the growing ties between the two sides that have developed in recent years.

Strategic Interaction

Interestingly, it was on the defense and strategic front that India has made impressive progress. In the Post-Cold War it became imperative for India to dispel fears about its military expansion in an otherwise traditionally no hostile ASEAN region. Also, Southeast Asia itself witnessed a sea change in the political atmosphere. The Cambodian issue was no longer contentious and Vietnam was perceived as a potential ally rather than an enemy by ASEAN. Nor could India's military might in the emergent Asian balance of power be ignored any longer. Contrary to the previous perception, the Southeast Asian nations began to look upon India as a power that could play a kind of 'balancing role'.

Economic Engagement

The Look East policy also gave a tremendous boost to economic ties between India and Southeast Asia. A number of institutional mechanisms have been put in place to promote economic exchanges. The earlier Joint Trade Committees with the ASEAN countries were upgraded as Joint Business Commissions and the India-ASEAN Business Council and ASEAN-India Joint Management Committee were formed. Consequent to India's elevation to Dialogue Partner status, the ASEAN-India Joint Cooperation Committee and the ASEAN-India Working Group on Trade and Investment were set up. An ASEAN-India Fund was created to promote trade, tourism, science and technology, and other economic activity. From virtually little or no investment from

Southeast Asia in the early 1990s, Malaysia and Singapore have emerged as the tenth and eleventh largest in terms of approved investments respectively by 2002.

III. ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

In the aftermath of the end of the cold war, the world appeared to be standing at the threshold of a new era, leaving behind a century that had witnessed two world wars and the nuclear brinkmanship of the cold war. With the aura of peace and expectations of a future secure from the ravages of war embracing the political horizon, nations were full of new hopes. It was but natural that in that new dawn, India, like much of the rest of the world, would seek new opportunities and look towards new frontiers to serve its national interests. It meant thinking out of the box and seeking fresh paradigms to build a matrix of external relations in tune with the brave new world that seemed to be shaping up all around. India's Look East Policy, launched in the early 1990s, was a significant step in that direction.

Briefly, that policy meant connecting India more firmly to South East Asia, East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region and building bridges to them, especially through India's eastern states – both in the north and the south. These states had played precisely that role from times immemorial but it had got atrophied during the colonial era and then by the intensity of the cold war. On the eve of India's independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had highlighted his dream of reviving that role for India when, at the first Asian Relations Conference convened by him in New Delhi, he talked of the resurgence of Asia and of its rising nations like India, China and Japan. He referred to their ancient glory and expressed the hope that they would contribute towards forging a new world order in which colonial exploitation would have no role and international relations would be based on the concept of the sovereignty and equality of all nations, large and small. From well before the Graeco-Roman times, the role of Asia as a hub of culture and civilization and as a centre of economic activity had been very prominent and it had remained so until the beginning of the colonial era. As the curtain closed on the cold war in 1990, suddenly new horizons seemed to open up for the nations of Asia once again to revive their ancient links and be an important part of the global economic wave by rediscovering themselves, intensifying regional solidarity, and facing the challenges in front with a united will and a united purpose. India's Look East Policy was part of the Indian dynamics of responding to those new challenges and opportunities.

In the post-cold war scenario India seized the opportunity "to look east" and forge new bonds with South East Asia, mend ties with China that had been traumatized by the border conflict in 1962, look at Japan differently than as an ally of one superpower in combat against the other, and help establish a world order more just than the one offered by the post-world war institutions in the second half of the last century. Since its very independence India had been in the forefront of the struggle for a new world order free from exploitation and based on the concepts of mutual respect among nations for each other's interests and mutual benefit.

IV. SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

- (a) Initiative to build a community/common check post and Manipur Government's readiness to give 48.5 acres of land out of 50 acres asked by Government of India.
- (b) Government of India's willingness to lift the restriction imposed on trade items of the Indo-Myanmar border trade. The Centre has sought the opinion of the State Government in this regard in the month of July, 2007. A report is being prepared to reply by the State Government.
- (c) Steps taken up to open up a bus service from Imphal to Mandalay. Discussion has been done among the officials and opinion has been sought from the Centre. Permission would be granted soon for going to Mandalay from Imphal through the existing service from Tamu.
- (d) North East India Investment conference organized by Development of North East Region (DONER) Ministry along with Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) on 26th September 2007 held at New York. Honourable Chief-Minister, O. Ibobi took part in the conference along with leaders of Public Sector Units, policy makers and many other experts.
- (e) To encourage businessmen to invest in North Eastern States of India, the Ministry of Commerce, Government of Thailand have hosted North East Investment week at Bangkok from October 1 to 4, 2007. Chief-Minister, O. Ibobi Singh shared the investment opportunities in Manipur to the businessmen and investors of Thailand and South East Asian countries.
- (f) The Joint Secretary of Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, T.S. Tirumurti disclosed that the Myanmar's Government has agreed in principle to the proposal of the Government of India for converting the ongoing Indo-Myanmar Border Trade activities at Moreh into normal/free trade activities.

V. BENEFITS OF LOOK EAST POLICY

The shift of manufacturing industries to lower middle class economies benefitted ASEAN members including India. The 'Make in India' initiative of Modi government in India was aimed to collaborate with the least developed economies of the region and this would be beneficial for all the members of the collaboration. India should now also focus on transport facilities in the region and connectivity between the nations. India limited its focus on capacity building of human resources and significant projects for poverty attenuation. There is around 6 times increment in the trade between both the sides from 2006 to 2015 that has reached to 12 billion US dollar. The global recession of 2015 has affected this trade also reaching export at \$ 9 billion and import at US\$ 3.8 billion in 2015-16. Major part of this trade was dealt with Vietnam while Cambodia and Lao PDR has a lower status despite the index ratio went up to double.

Despite exporting raw commodities like meat products and sugar to Vietnam and Myanmar respectively, India has a vast scope of bilateral trade growth in automotive, electrical goods, pharmacy products and manufactured products. However, being the highest importer from Vietnam, India imports only electrical goods and machinery. There is also scope of increasing import index in engineering goods, food processing, textiles, pharmaceutical products and agricultural products and machinery.

VI. CONCLUSION

Two and half decades passed away since India initiated the Look East Policy (LEP) with the view of strengthening its strategic and economic relations with Eastern neighbours along with South Eastern also. The impetus in regional integration received through LEP has gained new momentum through the Act East Policy (AEP). The LEP was devised as a strategy to boost trade and foster economic cooperation with far Eastern neighbours. But, the incentive to intensify political dialogue was not there. India's dynamic participation in constructing a common market with interconnected programs has influentially increased the size of its genuine image in Southeastern and Eastern Asia. India's Act East Policy (AEP) with its objective of identifying and threading the cultural tangibles and intangibles to place, India in their cultural mosaic must be understood in the light of the attempt to create an alternate discourse to the predominant Western ones.

With the coming up of the Look East Policy, service sector undoubtedly will be the most promising area. There is strong need for establishment of Tourism and Hospitality Management Institutes, an Institute of South East Asian Studies for understanding the similarities and differences of culture between Manipur and South East Asian countries and for better understanding and free interaction with the businessmen and people of South East Asian countries an institute for Foreign Languages particularly Myanmarese, Thai, Chinese, etc. Should be established. For the promotion of trade with South East Asian countries and entrepreneurship development, an Institute of Foreign Trade should be established to provide short term as well as long term courses.

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