

Abstract

The Look East Policy of India, which was adopted in the post-cold war era, is to cultivate partnership with the ASEAN to enhance India's position in the politics of Asia-Pacific, to promote its national interests for stability, security and prosperity and to neutralize the growing challenges at the domestic and external levels. India share bordering territorial frontiers with China, Myanmar, Thailand , Indonesia and others and their cultural and religious past have had common features. India was very close to the socialist world before 1991 and it did not take any substantive decision to promote cultural or economic partnership with the ASEAN, Japan, China, the EU and the US, on the other hand, India attached importance to the ASEAN as favored nations.

The ASEAN boom, their independent standing and incentives of trade and investments attracted India as well as 'ASEAN was also looking for new partners and untapped markets. India also started to look forward this region because of two reasons: firstly the economic crisis that India faced in the early 1990s compelled it to look for alternate markets for exports at that time ASEAN was developed as world's most dynamic economic region. Secondly, ASEAN nations started accumulating large reserves of foreign exchange, so India wanted to attract investment from this region. Keeping in view the above factor India unveiled Look East Policy in this period and since the time India has done well so far as trade and investment figures testify to this fact.

In this study an effort has been made to evaluate the relations between India and ASEAN by discussing the changed global environment after the end of the cold war. The end of the cold war represents a significant development in international relations, which had serious implications for both India and the Asia-Pacific. It resulted into the emergence of “Look East Policy”. Furthermore after adopting the Look East policy, India started moving towards South East Asia to build strong economic, strategic and political ties with them. On the other hand, South East Asia, by leaving all inhibitions of the past, came closer to India to develop warm and friendly relations with them. The need for economic cooperation has been a two-sided affair, as South East also rated India very high on its economic priorities. Beside this the Look East policy adopted by India is a multi pronged approach to evolve political relations with ASEAN countries and to develop strong economic bonds with the region. Apart from this, people to people contacts have also been encouraged to cement the ties between India and ASEAN. Promotion to tourism, trade, cultural activities, academic exchanges etc has been enhanced to develop friendly contacts between the common men of the both the regions.

Thus, an objective assessment of nearly the past two decades of India’s Look East Policy would suggest that while notable progress has been made, there is still a long way to go and tremendous potential remains to be harnessed. There are a number of challenges in the form of global terrorism, instability of financial institutions like FTAs, growing gap between announcements and implementation of policies, the China factor etc are some important hurdles in the way of their smooth relations.

An objective appraisal of the existing relations indicates that the level of cooperation has increased substantially but it will take years to be at par with that of Japan, China, Korea or Australia. It is a reality that some of the dialogue partners are

considered more important than India. Although India is adjusting its policies in tune with ASEAN vision and prove herself a reliable partner, but it has not been allowed participation in ASEM or APEC. India must draw some lessons from economic reforms in Vietnam and China and should be quick to adjust in the changing environment.

The proposals of growth for infrastructure for service industries and tourism should be explored and given priority. Finally, the implementation holds the key to India's sustained engagement both at ASEAN level as well as the East Asian Community level. India should continue delivering on its promises and take proactive efforts in providing assistance to the ASEAN region.