

INDIA'S LOOK EAST POLICY AND ITS IMPLICATION ON SOUTHEAST ASIA*

Napasakorn Suwanraksa

Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, Thailand.
E-mail: napasakornsuwanraksa@gmail.com

Received July 20, 2017; **Revised** July 20, 2017; **Accepted** October 28, 2017

Abstract

Since 1991 Transformation Of International System, None Of States Can Deny The Progress Of Indian Economy, Which Is Remarkable, As Well As The Increasing Of India's Role In The Global Context. One Of The Main Strategies For India To Develop Its Economy Is "Look East Policy". During The Cold War Period, India Seemed To Be A Threat To The Southeast Asian Countries Due To Its Intimate Association With The Soviet Union And Its Attempt To Become The Region's Naval Power. Before (Re)Initiation Of "Look East Policy", India Faced A Hardship In Country's Administration Because Of The Transformation In Both Internal And External Affairs. Domestically, India Was In Economic And Security Turbulence Caused By Political Instability And Terrorism. Consequently, New Delhi Needed To Liberalize Its Economy As Well As Secure National Stability. Nevertheless, The Change In International Community: The Dissolution Of The Soviet Union; The 1990 Gulf War Crisis; The Unstoppable Ascent Of China; The Frustrating Integration With South Asian Countries; And The Trends Of Globalization And Regionalism, Enormously Forced India To Alter Its Manner As Well. Significantly, In The Early 1990s, Southeast Asia, Actually The Entire Asia- Pacific, Is The Most Economic Vibrant Region In The World. On Geographical Aspect, India Needed To Cooperate With Southeast Asia To Facilitate State's Development And Maintain Position In Asia.

Hence, In 1991 India Under The Prime Minister Narasimha Rao Was Officially (Re)Initiate "Look East Policy", Which Aims To Cultivate And Strengthen Economic And Strategic Relations With Southeast Asia. In The First Phase Of Implementing The Policy, India Focused Only On Southeast Asia Region, But After 2003 The Policy Is Extended To Cover The East Asia Region. By Adopting The "Look East Policy", India Pursues The Engagement With The Asean Nations In Many Level Including Bilateral Integration; Regional Integration; And Multilateral Integration. All These Levels Of Engagements Have Been Encouraged The Intimate Relations Between India And Southeast Asia As Well As Distribute Developments Throughout The Region.

Keywords: India, Look East Policy, Southeast Asia

* National Academic Conference 2015 No.5 Siam University, Thailand.

Introduction

India's Engagement With The Southeast Asia Established Since The First Century. The Relations Between India And The Southeast Asian Countries Had Been Developed Constantly Until The Beginning Of Cold War When India Had An Intimate Association With The Soviet Union. The Involvement Brought An Mistrust Spreading Through The Southeast Asia Region. As A Result, The Engagement Between India And Southeast Asia Was Frozen Temporarily. However, The Relations Was Motivated Again Because Of The End Of Cold War And India's Economic Liberalization. In The Beginning Of 1990s, Southeast Asia As A Economically Vibrant Region Was Fascinating For India To Reform An Engagement With This Region. In Responding To The Necessity, India Has (Re)Initiated The "Look East Policy" In 1991 Under The Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. This Is The Watershed To Mobilize Relationship Between India And Southeast Asian Countries.

Background

The Look East Policy's Evolution Can Be Characterized Into Four Period Including Historical Period Or Pre-Colonial Period; Colonial Period; Post-Colonial Period; And Contemporary Period. In The Historical Period, The Engagement Was Limited In Culture And Commerce Which Begun At The First Century And Lasted Until The 12th Century. During The Colonial Period, The Strategic Interest Were Brought Upfront With The Commercial Interests Due To The Cost Of Cultural And Civilizational Links. Next, After The Indian Independence In 1947, It Was The Major Step Of Look East Evolution Because Of The Nehru's Vision Which Gave An Crystal Intention Of Engaging With Asian Countries In Particular Southeast Asian Nations. Latest Period, The Modern Period Of The "Look East Policy", The Policies Was Officially (Re)Initiated Under The Government Of The Prime Minister Narasimha Rao In 1991.

Significance Of Study

The Emergence Of India As A New Regional Power Is Perceived By The Countries In The Same Region To Concern On The Role And Direction Which India Is Able To Have Toward Them Especially The Southeast Asia Nation. Since Southeast Asia Is The Focal Point To Respond To The "Look East Policy" So The Understanding Of Indian Manner Favors Asean Nations To Gain Mutual Benefits With India. Moreover, The Engagement Of India To Southeast Asia Is Also Beneficial To Asean Nations In Counter- Balancing With The Unstoppable Ascent Of China. Significantly, The Study Of This Topic Has Pictured A Policy Adjustment In The Time Of Turbulent Global Politics.

Research Questions

The Research Is Doing To Answer: What Is The "Look East Policy"; Why Does India (Re)Initiate The "Look East Policy"; And How Does India Implement The "Look East Policy" Towards Southeast Asia.

1.4 Conceptual And Theoretical Frameworks

The Study Is Conducting Under The Framework Of Policy, Paradigm Shift, And Implementation. The "Look East Policy", Is The Key Cornerstone Of The Study Was Initiated By An Encouragement Of Paradigm Shift During The Late 1980s To The Early 1990s. And India Has Implemented The "Look East Policy Towards Southeast Asia.

In The Research, I Employ The Neo-Liberalism To Explain. For India's "Look East Policy", It Mainly Adjusts In Responding To The Economic Liberalization. Previously,

India's Market Is Limited By India's Protectionism Policy But After The Economic Degradation The India's Government Had To Rethink On Its Economic Policy. Besides At The Time Of 1980s To 1990s, The International Politics Was Dramatically Changed So It Directly Affected To India's Position In The Forum. For Facilitating India's Economy And Preserving India's Position, India (Re)Initiated The “Look East Policy” In Order To Seek For Cooperation. India As A State Needs To Pursue Other Market When A Exist Market Did Not Functional In Term Of Economic Development. Therefore, Engagement With Southeast Asia Possibly Creates An Opportunity For India's Economy.

Objectives

This Research's Objective Is To Define The “Look East Policy”, Understand The Policy's History As Well As Study The Paradigm Shifts Which Encourage India To Adjust The Policy. Moreover, The Research Aims To Understand The Relationship Between India And Southeast Asian Nations In Bilateral, Regional, And Multilateral Sphere. Finally, The Study Purposes To Analyze The Challenges And Give Recommendations On Relationship Between India And Southeast Asia.

Methods

In Doing The Research, The Researcher Would Like To Employ Qualitative Method By Using Descriptive Analytical Approach To Clarify What Is The “Look East Policy”; Why Does India (Re)Initiate The “Look East Policy”; And How Does India Implement The Look East Policy Towards Southeast Asia. The Base Of Study Is Documentary Research Which Employs Mainly On Secondary Sources. In Essence, The Secondary Sources Are The State Documents, Statements, And Speeches Which Launched By Indian Government Agencies And The Leaders Of India. Moreover, Books And Academic Journals Which Provide Details Relating To India's “Look East Policy” And India And Southeast Asian Relations Will Be Understood And Analyzed.

Results

What Is “Look East Policy”?

“The Look East Policy” Is An Effort Being Made By The Indian Government To Cultivate And Strengthen Economic And Strategic Relations With The Nations Of Southeast Asia In Order To Solidify Its Standing As A Regional Power (Haokip 2011). Since The Adoption Of Look East Policy In 1991, The Objective Of The Policy Extends Broadly Due To The Changing Of Regional Context. At The First Phase, The Policy Aims To Fulfill The Regional Economic Integration And Mobilize The Liberal Economic Reform. Furthermore, The Policy's Objectives Are Going Beyond, The Purpose Of Sustained Economic Growth Is Brought To The Intention Of Policy's Implementor And In Order To Stabilized The Growth Development Of The North-Eastern Region Is Also Brought Upfront. For Making A Successful Stories Of “Look East Policy” Implementation, There Consists Of Three Approaches Including Geographical Focus; Negotiation Tactics And Sub-Regional Cooperation.

Encouragement Of “Look East Policy” Initiative

As India Could Not Stand In Isolation, The Domestic And International Environment Have Affects On Its Foreign Policy. Foreign Policy Constitutes A Set Of Responses To External Challenges And Opportunities (Mann 2000: 1). During The 1980 To Early 1990s, There Were Transformations In Both Domestic And International Arenas Which Encouraged India To Rethink About Its Direction Of Foreign Policy In Order To Mobilize Itself Through

The Era Of Transition. Firstly, Domestic Arena, India Faced An Increasing Of Terrorism And Insurgency In Its Countries As Well As Neighboring Countries. Moreover, The Non-Continual Of Government Brought A Political Instability And Economic Degradation So India Had To Reform Its Economic System. On The Other Side, An External Affairs, During The Late 1980s To The Early 1990s, The International Circumstance Was Turbulent In Some Region However It Directly Affected To India's Economy And Security. For Instance, There Were The End Of Cold War, The 1991 Gulf Crisis, And The Frustrating Integration With South Asian Countries. Conversely, In The East Asia Region, There Were A Blooming Of Southeast Asia And Emergence Of East Asian Tigers. Furthermore, The Global Trends Also Come Into The Transition, The Regionalism And Globalization Were Taken Concerns In Adjusting The Foreign Policy. To Sum Up All These Changing Caused India To Rethink About Its Foreign Policy In Order To Maintain Its Interests.

Implementation Of “Look East Policy”

“Look East Policy” Is An Attempt Of India's Government To Pursue An Economic Interests As Well As Cooperative Security By Engaging With One Of The Fastest Economically Growing In The World; Southeast Asia. India And Southeast Have Been Related With Each Other Since The First Century And It Becomes More And More Engaging Together Due To The Development Of Transportation And Communication Technology. In This Part, I Would Like To Clarify An Attempt Of India To Engage With Southeast Asia Through The Lens Of “Look East Policy”. The Relationship Will Be Scoped In Between 1991 Until Today. The Implementation Of The “Look East Policy” Towards Southeast Asia Is Able To Be Captured In Three Main Aspects Including Bilateral Integration, Regional Integration, And Multilateral Integration.

Bilateral Integration

In The Sphere Of Bilateral Integration, The Relations Between India And Some Asean Member States Will Be Illustrated Including India-Thailand Relations, India-Indonesia, India- Malaysia Relations, And India-Singapore Relations.

1) India-Thailand Relations

Since The Initiative Of “Look East Policy” The Engagement Has Been Tied Gradually. The Visit In High-Level Has Been Done Often. Most Of Cooperation Are Created In The Field Of Economics. Currently India Is An Important Trade Partner For Thailand And It Seems To Be Expanded Greater For Exports And Investments. On The Other Hands, India Would Like To Keep Thailand As An Good Alliance To Get Through The Southeast Asia Region As Well As Contribute Its Interests In Thailand And Asean. For The Other Aspect Of Cooperation, It May Not Be Distinguish But It Is Also Important Such As A Cooperation In Connectivity Which Favors In Facilitating And Encouraging Regional Economy. Although Some Agreements Are Still In The Negotiation Stage But Both Countries Have Shown Their Intention To Complete. Finally, Indo- Thailand Relations, The Relations Is Ongoing To More And More Engagement.

2) India-Indonesia Relations

India And Indonesia Have Enormously Intimate Relations. Since The Historical Period Until Nowadays, India And Indonesia Have Shared Many Identity And Experience Together. Some Religions, Cultures, Arts, And Languages, Which Have Been Used In Indonesia, Have Influences From India. They Shared Colonial Experiences, Post-Colonial Political And Economic Pathway. These Indicators Encourage The Bilateral Relations Between India And Indonesia. Therefore, The Indo-Indonesia Cooperations In Many Fields Have Been Generated And Improved Constantly.

3) India-Malaysia Relations

“Look East Policy” Shown The Potentiality Mostly In Economic Integration For Indo- Malaysia Bilateral Relations. Economic Cooperation Seems To Be The Mainstay Of The Relations. The Large Amount Of Exports From Malaysia To India Is Imbalance, It Gives The Favor To Malaysia To Captivate More Benefits In Indian Market. On The Other Hands, India Has A Deficit To Malaysia's Trade. Significantly, In Malaysia, There Is One Of The Largest Persons Of Indian Origin Community In The World. These Indian Origin People Are Able To Be One Of The Malaysian Political Parties. This Position Reflects The Amount And Importance Of Persons Of Indian Origin In Malaysia.

4) India-Singapore Relations

Although The Bilateral Relations Between India And Singapore Were Established Since 1960s But The Proactive Relations Have Been Proposed Remarkably When India Launched “Look East Policy” And Liberalized Its Economy. Significantly, Singapore Is A Multi-Cultural Society. Indian Culture Is One Of Main Culture In Singapore.

Regional Integration

Under The Framework Of Regional Cooperation Among India And Southeast Asia Nations, There Are Two Highlighted Integrations Which Are Functional Since The Establishment Until Today Including India-Asean Relations And The Bay Of Bengal Initiative For Multi- Sectoral Technical And Economic Cooperation (Bimstec).

1) India-Asean Relations

In The Cold War Period, India Asked To Become A Dialogue Partner With Asean But The Request Was Denied Due To The Indian Manner On Kampuchea Crisis. However, After The Ideological War Was Ended, It Impacted On India's Position In Global Politics As Well As Regional Circumstance. Plus, At That Time India Needed To Reform Its Economy. The India's Answer Was To Propose A New Foreign Policy, “Look East Policy”. After The (Re)Initiation Of “Look East Policy”, India Improved Its Image To The Eye Of Southeast Asia Countries. As A Result, India Became A Sectoral Dialogue Partner In 1992 And Escalated To A Full Dialogue Partner In 1996. Since Then India And Asean Have Engaged In Every Pillars Of Asean Community Including Political And Security; Economics; And Socio-Culture. However, India Does Not Come To Asean As Only A Exploiter But At The Same Time India Is A Contributor. Since India Is The Second Largest Population In The World, This Opportunities Are Beneficial For The Southeast Asia Countries To Captivate Interests. Moreover, In The Time Of Chinese Power Expands Throughout Asia, In Particular The East Asia, The Coming Of India To Counter-Balance China Is Needed For Increasing A Bargaining Power Of Asean To China. Currently, China's Economy Seems To Be Temporarily In A Downturn Because Of The Internal Reformation. This Situation Directly Affects To Asean Counties Which Mostly Have China As A Largest Trade And Investment Partner. Fortunately, The India's Economy Is Growing Gradually, It May Not Be Distinguish As Chinese Economy But It Is Constant. There, India Is A Spectacular State For Southeast Asian Counties To Jump In.

2) The Bay Of Bengal Initiative For Multi-Sectoral Technical And Economic Cooperation (Bimstec)

Due To The Fact That India Could Not Accomplished Its Goal Economically And Strategically With Saarc Because Of India And Pakistan's Rivalry, Beside With An Uncertainty Of India's Position Was Created By The Dissolution Of The Soviet Union, Therefore, India Had Been Encouraged To Go With Other Options. Composing With The Adoption Of “Look East Policy, India Would Like To Engage With Southeast Asia Increasingly. At The Same Time, Thailand Proposed “Look West Policy” In Corresponding To The “Look East Policy” So India And Two South Asia Nations Couple With Thailand

Had Established Bist- Ec, Lately Became Bimstec After The Joint Of Bhutan, Nepal, And Myanmar. Bimstec Is More Functional Than Saarc Because Member States Are Looking For Economic Interests Rather Than Political Interests. Moreover, By Forming Bimstec, It Favors India To Get Through The Southeast Asia Via Myanmar Where India Has Built Infrastructure To Facilitate Trade And Other Kinds Of Cooperation. However, The Northeastern Part Of India Is A Area Of Insurgency So This Is A Obstacle Which Often Blocks A Regional Connectivity.

Multilateral Integration

India's "Look East Policy" Have Gone Beyond Two Regions; South Asia And Southeast Asia. It Has Brought India To The East Asia To Reap More Benefits. The Multi-Regional Integration Is Occurred By Asean Which Cooperates With Three And Six Countries Group Respectively. Asean+6 Or The East Asia Summit Has Included India As Well. Under The East Asia Summit, India Does Not Seems To Be A Major Player Comparing To China And Japan. However, It Does Not Mean That The East Asia Summit Cannot Contribute Interests For India Economically And Strategically. In This Sector, The Relations Between India And Southeast Asia Countries Will Be Elaborated Under The East Asian Summit As Another Mechanism.

East Asian Summit

Although The Role Of India's In The East Asia Summit Might Not Distinguish As Other Member States Such As China And Japan, But The Intention Of India Still Be Crystal Clear In The Eye Of Asean That India Mostly Focuses On An Economic Cooperation Rather Than Other Dimension In Particular, Political Sphere. Nevertheless, India Sometimes Comments And Suggests On Political Problem But India's Comments And Solution Will Be Expressed In a Peaceful Mean.

Discussion and Conclusion

Challenges

Currently, Southeast Asia Region, Entirely The Asia-Pacific Region, Is Increasingly Persuasive For Major Powers To Spread Their Influences In Order To Maintain Their Power As Well As Secure Their Significance. However, In This Region There Also Has China As A Big Boss Who Is Enthusiastic To Expand Its Power Throughout The Whole Region And Extending To The World. The Manners Of Our Regional Major Power, China, Coupled With The Pivot To Asia Of The United States Would Challenge The Role Of India Which Efforts To Increase Its Influences And Significances In Both Economic And Security Spheres. Moreover, The Global Economic Doldrum Is Another Challenge Which Every Countries In The World Are Not Able To Avoid.

Under These Circumstances, The India's Role In Southeast Asia Would Be Oppressed. India Needs To Prove Itself For Asean Nations That It Could Be An Alternative For Southeast Asian Countries To Rely On Apart From China, United States, And The European Union.

5.2 Recommendations

In This Research, I Would Like To Propose Two Recommendations Which Seems To Be Favorable For Developing The Engagement Between India And Southeast Asian Countries.

Firstly, India And Asean Nations Should Focus On Bilateral Integration Rather Than Regional Or Multilateral Integration. When Actors Increase, Complications Are Also Accrued. Currently, India Has Accomplished To Have Free Trade Area (Fta) And Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (Ceca) With Some Asean Nations Such As Thailand, Malaysia And Singapore, These Attempts Have Facilitated The Trades And

Investment Between India And Partners. The Bilateral Agreements Are Able To Finalized Faster Than The Multilateral Agreement Because Of Less Actors.

Secondly, The Benefit's Sharing Should Be Acceptable In Order To Continue The Engagement Between India And Southeast Asian Nations. As I Have Researched, Currently India Seems To Be Deficit From Trade And Investment With Asean Nations. Therefore, Both India And Asean Nations Should Give And Share Adequate Interests For A Sustainable Relations. For Instance, India Expresses Its Interests In Joining The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnerships (Rcep) With Asean But The Agreement Have Not Been Signed Yet Due To The Possibilities Of Losing More Than Gaining.

To Sum Up, India And Southeast Asian Engagement Would Be Potential And Effective If It Is Established In Term Of Bilateral Integration And The Benefits Are Sharing In Acceptable Manner.

Conclusion

The Engagements Between India And Southeast Asian Nations Have Been Established Since The First Century But The Relations Among These Countries Are Developed In A Large Scale Since The Official Initiative Of “Look East Policy” In 1991. Due To The Transformations Of Both Internal And External Arena During The Late 1980 To Early 1990s Which Encouraged India's Policymakers To Rethink On Their Foreign Policy In Order To Stand In The Turbulent International Community. As A Result, The “Look East Policy” Was Launched To Cultivate The Extensive Economic And Strategic Relations With The Southeast Asian Countries. In Addition, After The Year Of 2003, Scope Of Look East Policy Was Extended To Cover The East Asian Region. However, The Coming Of India Does Not Perform Only As A Exploiter But Also A Contributor. Since India Is The Second World Largest Population Country, It Means The Large Market For Southeast Asian Investors To Extend Trade And Investment. Moreover, In The Age Of Rising China, Asean Nations Need Other Regional Power To Counter-Balance China. The Attempt Of India In Cooperating With Southeast Asian Nations Is Able To Capture In Three Integrations Including Bilateral, Regional, And Multilateral Integrations. Nevertheless, The Bilateral Integration Seems To Be More Functional And Effective In Term Of Successful Agreements And Tangible Performance Due To Less Involved Actors. Currently, India Under The Prime Minister Narendra Modi Has Changed “Look East Policy” To “Act East Policy” In Order To Emphasize More Proactive Role Of India In East Asia Region.

References

- Vinod, A. (2013). India's Look East Policy Gains Momentum, Its-Institute For Transnational Studies, Landshut Germany.
- Tr Jain And Vk Ohri. (2010). *Indian Economic Development*. New Delhi: V.K. Publication.
- Nanda, P. (2003). *Rediscovering Asia: Evolution Of India's Look East Policy*. New Delhi: Lancer Publishers & Distributors.
- Naidu, G.V.C. (1996). *Looking East: India And Southeast Asia*.
- Raghavan, V. R. (2015). *Consequences of Long-term Conflicts in Northeast India*. India: Vij Books
- Grare, F. & Mattoo, A.. (2001). *India and Asean*. New Delhi: Manohar.