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Q7(b)

What are the implications of 'Look-East' Policy on the north-eastern region of India?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · India and South Asia

India and South Asia: Regional Co-operation; South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation; South Asian Economic cooperation; Impediments to regional co-operation; India and the Look East / Act East policy.

Core demand of the question

- What are the implications of 'Look-East' Policy on the north-eastern region of India?
- Write at 15-mark length

Revision summary

Look East recast the north-east from a cul-de-sac to an ASEAN bridge.

Kaladan, the **IMT highway**, and **BIMSTEC** are the hardware of that claim.

Insurgency, drugs, and Myanmar's coup are the security implications.

Ecology and tribal land are the domestic social implications.

Gains remain below promise until corridors actually run and stay safe.

Introduction

Look East, later Act East, treated India's north-east as a bridge to ASEAN rather than a dead-end frontier. Implications are connectivity, security, ecology, and uneven local gain.

Body

Intended implications

- Roads, the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit to Myanmar, the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway, and border haats were meant to end the region's partition-era isolation.
- Trade with Bangladesh and Myanmar, plus **BIMSTEC**, would give landlocked north-eastern States a Bay of Bengal outlet.
- Tourism, education, and cultural diplomacy with South-East Asia use ethnic kinships across the border.

Security and political implications

- Insurgency, arms, and narcotics routes can thicken with the same corridors that carry legal trade.
- Myanmar's post-2021 turmoil showed that Act East hardware depends on a neighbour's order.
- China watches the same geography from the north. Connectivity is also a strategic denial and a vulnerability.

Development implications

- Some State capitals gain logistics jobs. Hill ecologies and tribal land rights face dams, highways, and in-migration.
- The policy can look Delhi-centric unless local governments and Inner Line regimes are part of the design.
- Bangladesh transit and water politics (Ganga, Teesta) sit next door; the north-east is not only a Myanmar story.

Balance

- Look East is the best available growth story for the region. Delivery gaps and conflict in Myanmar have so far kept implications below the brochure.

Flow diagram

Look East Act East -> Kaladan IMT highway
Kaladan IMT highway -> North-east as bridge
Myanmar instability insurgency -> Risks
North-east as bridge -> Implications mixed
Risks -> Implications mixed

Conclusion

Look East implies a north-east that is a commercial and cultural bridge to ASEAN. It also implies new security, land, and ecological pressures. The implication is opportunity plus exposure, not an automatic peace dividend.

Facts & figures

Look East / Act East

Policy turn from the 1990s, renamed to stress security and connectivity with ASEAN.

Kaladan project

Multi-modal link through Myanmar meant to give Mizoram and the north-east a sea route via Sittwe.

IMT highway

India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral road as an Act East land bridge.

BIMSTEC

Bay of Bengal grouping that places the north-east on a trans-regional economic map.