

## India's Look East Policy and Its Perspective to South Korea

Amit Singh

*PhD Scholar, Korean Division, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India*

### Abstract

India's "Look East" Policy, which was initiated in 1991, marked a strategic shift in India's perspective of the world. We need to re-look on this bold foreign policy initiative of India with the new initiatives. It has rightly been suggested that India have taken a right step to update her relationship with the East especially to South Korea.

The various dimensions of India's Look East Policy focus on

1. Political, Economic, Strategic and Cultural dimensions with South Korea.
2. India's Look East Policy-working together with Democratic developments and movements in South Korea. India had dramatically transformed its economy by opening up to each other, to Japan, then to Taiwan and South Korea, and finally to China to establish strong economic linkages, consciously setting aside and overcoming mutual historical animosities, for the greater benefit and prosperity of all. Like India despite the progress of procedural and political democracy, the South Korean democracy is now faced with another challenge different from that of the past. From the social and economic perspective South Korean society is confronted with a serious regional disparities and social conflict. The next phase of LEP will be much more complex as India's increasingly global economic and strategic interests require capacity for undertaking coordinated and concurrent responses involving economic, commercial, cultural and strategic engagements. India recently announced Look East Act, will need to become adept at projecting various dimensions of her influence constructively in defending her own core interests.

**Key Words:** Indian policy, South Korea

### Introduction

India's "Look East" policy was developed and enacted during the governments of Prime Ministers P. V. Narshiman Rao (1991–1996) and Atal Vihari Vajpayee (1998–2004). Along with economic liberalization and moving away from Cold War-era policies and activities, India's strategy has focused on forging close economic and commercial ties, increasing strategic and security cooperation and the

emphasis of historic cultural and ideological links. India sought to create and expand regional markets for trade, investments and industrial development. It also began strategic and military cooperation with nations concerned by the expansion of China's economic and strategic influence.

India has established strong commercial, cultural and military ties with the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam and

Cambodia. India signed free trade agreements with Sri Lanka and Thailand and stepped up its military cooperation with them as well. It has numerous free trade agreements with East Asian economies, including a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement with Singapore and an Early Harvest Scheme with Thailand, while it is negotiating agreements with Japan, South Korea, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states. Ties have been strengthened with Taiwan, Japan and South Korea over common emphasis on democracy, human rights and strategic interests. South Korea and Japan remain amongst the major sources of foreign investment in India.

India has also increased its competition with China over the harnessing of Burma's significant oil and natural gas reserves, seeking to establish a major and stable source of energy for its growing domestic needs, countering Chinese monopoly over Burmese resources and reducing dependence on oil-rich Middle Eastern nations. Although China remains Burma's largest military supplier, India has offered to train Burma's military personnel and has sought their cooperation in curbing separatist militants and the heavy drug trafficking affecting much of Northeast India. China's winning of contracts harnessing more than 2.88–3.56 trillion cubits of natural gas in the A-1 Shwe field in the Rakhine state and development of naval and surveillance installations along Burma's coast and the Coco Islands has provoked great concern and anxiety in India, which has stepped up its investment in port development, energy, transport and military sectors.

The first phase of India's Look East Policy was ASEAN-centered and focused primarily on trade and investment linkages. The new phase of this policy is characterized by an expanded definition of 'East' extending from Australia to East Asia, with ASEAN at its aim. The new phase also marks a shift from trade to wider economic and security issues including joint efforts to protect the sea lanes and coordinate counter-terrorism activities. On the economic side, the new phase is also characterized by arrangement for Free Trade Agreement and establishing institutional economic linkage between the countries of the region and India.

India is looking to develop association with countries beyond its immediate neighborhood, perceiving countries in the East and Northeast Asia as its far eastern neighbors and the ASEAN countries as its near eastern neighbors. A lot of reasons have been advanced as having contributed to the development and evolution of the second phase of India's Look East Policy. As noted by Kuppuswamy , the Indian policy makers felt the need to pay more attention to the dynamic Asia-Pacific region as this region presented a lot of potential to the development and advancement of country's economic and strategic intents.

The other, according to C. Raja Mohan , is the movement away from exclusive focus on economic issues in phase one to a broader agenda in phase two that involves security cooperation, including joint operations to protect sea lanes and pooling resources in the war against terrorism. The military contacts and joint exercises that India launched with ASEAN states on a low key basis in the early 1990s are now expanding

into full fledged defence cooperation. India has quietly begun to put in place arrangements for regular access to parts in Southeast Asia – India's defence contacts have widened to include, Japan, South Korea and China. Never before has India engaged in such multi-directional defence diplomacy in Asia.

As stated by Sridhran, in the wake of 9/11 and especially after Southeast Asia was designated as the second front of terrorism, the security dimensions has assumed importance in India-ASEAN relations. Speaking to the gathering of ASEAN leaders in Brunei in 2001, the Indian Foreign Minister said, "we now face an unprecedented challenges in the gray threat posed to regional and international peace and security by the dark focus of terrorism. As a major victim of terrorism herself, India full sports ASEAN's efforts to develop bilateral and regional cooperation to combat terrorism. India is ready to work together both bilaterally with ASEAN countries and in the India-ASEAN framework, to develop practical programmes of cooperation".

The another feature of the second phase of Look East Policy is that now India is trying to establish air and road links to East and Southeast Asia. As parts of its road diplomacy, India is now actively building transports corridors to the region. These include the trilateral highway project involving Myanmar and Thailand and the proposed rail link between New Delhi and Hanoi. Besides these, the second phase of India's Look East Policy has allowed India to break the artificial political barriers between the subcontinent and Southeast Asia. India's membership in the groupings

like BIMSTEC and MGC has opened the door for the first time since independence to break out of the political confines of the subcontinent that have severely limited India's grand strategic optimism.

Rationale and Significance of the Study:

Compared to the Indian diaspora, the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia is much larger, very prosperous and controls significant sections of the economy. It therefore carries considerable clout in Southeast Asia. Indian diaspora is different. Historically, the first Indian immigrants were from the lower strata of society, who were taken from British India to work mostly as plantation workers and agricultural laborers. Similarly, the Indian diaspora in Myanmar is also disadvantaged due to their historical collaboration with the British colonial rulers to rule over Burma. Therefore, India has benefited less than China has from their respective Diasporas in Southeast Asia, it is the political dimension of the India's Look East Policy.

India's engagement with East Asia with the economic aspect of Look East Policy would not have been as dramatic if it were not for the fact that the East Asian region itself has been witnessing unprecedented developments whereby many countries found it useful to involve India in regional affairs. While the unparalleled economic dynamism that is sweeping the region is its most visible feature, serious security problems also beset the region, which could undermine peace and stability and seriously affect economic vibrancy. Evidently, the rapidly increasing economic interdependence, both in terms of intra-

regional trade and investments, does not seem to have translated into the much anticipated political dividends. The complexity of the regional environment is further compounded by the recent resurgence of new global power centers—most prominently China, Japan South Korea and India.

With a combined GDP of around US \$28 trillion in PPP terms, East Asia is already nearly as large as the United States and the European Union combined (and is set to overtake them by 2013). Besides it is being home to nearly half of the global population, the world's fastest and largest growing markets are located in this region. Now that talks are going to begin in early 2013 for a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), it will become the single largest free trade area in the world.

Since the early nineties, there has been steadily increasing cooperation on all fronts and India has begun to figure in the strategic thinking of Southeast Asia. When India became a nuclear power in 1998, major powers like United States, Japan and many other countries sat up and took note of this important development. ASEAN wanted closer ties with India to balance the influence of China. Singapore played a particularly important role in creating awareness of India's strategic importance. You would have noticed that there is a domestic political and public consensus on India's LEP. No party has ever questioned the desirability of closer engagement with Southeast Asia. More could have certainly been done to build relations with the Southeast Asian countries, but the overall

balance sheet during this period is satisfactory.

India has also developed close strategic understanding and cooperation with China, Japan and Korea. India and China signed a "strategic and cooperation Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in April, 2005". It started conducting Joint Naval exercises between them. Last joint naval exercise that took place between the two nations was at Kunming in the year 2007 and at Belgaum in 2008. An agreement was made on 4 September 2012 between India and China to boost defence ties during the visit of Chinese Defence Minister Gen. Lian Guangle to India and his meeting with his Indian counterpart A.K. Antony.

In terms of security cooperation, Japan and India in recent times have confined themselves to energy security, maritime security and enhanced contacts between the Armed Forces of both countries. Regular exercises visit between the two Coast Guards through meetings of head of Coast Guards, mutual visits of Coast Guard ships and holding of combined exercises are very vital for both India and Japan in strengthening their respective security perimeters. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Tokyo in 2008 gave further fillip to India-Japan security relations, which regulated in India and Japan signing a significant declaration on security cooperation towards making their partnerships an essential pillar for future architecture of the region. In 2012, naval vessels of both sides made mutual port calls and Maritime Self Defence Force (MSDF) visited India. Coming into force of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on

Combating piracy and armed robbery against ships in Asia and reaffirming to enhance cooperation in respect of Anti-piracy counter measures under its framework are welcome measures in this directions. This has been and aspect of Strategic dominance if India's Look East Policy.

China currently enjoys a privileged position as being the only Asian power to have a permanent seat on the UNSC . It is aware of the changed dynamics if India succeeds in joining the UNSC as a Permanent Member. For years India has been bogged down in tackling its neighborhood problems. India's relations with Pakistan have worsened as a result of the policies of China – and the United States – towards Pakistan. If India is a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council, I think it would have a positive impact on India's relations with its neighbours. This does not detract from the urgent need for India to rethink and rework its neighborhood policy.

To improve linkages between India's Northeast and Southeast Asia, in recent years India has tried to engage the Northeast in several ways. In 2004 an India-ASEAN car rally was held. It started in Guwahati and ended in Indonesia's Batam Island off Singapore after traversing through Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and Singapore. Mini rallies were held in all the Northeast states. There was a lot of public support for this event. For the Northeast, this initiative sparked hopes of ending isolation from the rest of India and their immediate neighbours to the east. This confidence-building event

should have been followed up with concrete policies as a matter of high priority.

The decision to go in for an India-ASEAN FTA was based on economic logic, but political factors too were an important consideration. As a result of various developments in the late 90s and early 2000s, such as India's becoming a nuclear weapons power and its economy taking off meaningfully, ASEAN became interested in engaging India far more seriously. At the end of 2001 India got the indication that ASEAN wanted to invite India for a summit. Notwithstanding the 'Look East' policy, which had been underway for a few years by then, India's understanding and of engagement with ASEAN was limited. India was a Full Dialogue Partner of ASEAN but that was it. There was disagreement among ASEAN countries regarding the level and extent of India's involvement. For example, Singapore was very much in favour of engaging India much more, but Malaysia was reluctant. After the first India-ASEAN summit, India was seen as a credible partner and a decision was taken to make the India-ASEAN summit an annual event. Thus, India's Look East Policy has to be seen under the view of variety of regional Multilateral Framework.

India's Look East Policy and South Korea:

With the Signaling of India's environment ministry which gave its go-ahead to POSCO's proposed 12 million-tons-per-year steel plant in Odisha in January 2010, providing a valuable opportunity for New Delhi and Seoul to impart new dynamism to bilateral relations and underscoring the success of India's "look east" policy. It has

been delayed for more than eight years over various clearances and land acquisition, the first phase of the plant is likely to be commissioned in 2018.

By signing nine pacts during the visit of South Korean President Park Geun-hye in January 2010, including the Agreement on the Protection of Classified Military Information, concluding negotiations for revision of the existing Double Taxation Avoidance Convention, agreeing to hold annual interactions between the national security structures of the two countries, launching a cyber affairs dialogue, stepping up collaboration in peaceful uses of space science and technology, and agreeing to India's extending a "tourist visa on arrival facility" to South Korean nationals, New Delhi and Seoul have signaled that they are intent on imparting new momentum to their bilateral relations.

New Delhi and Seoul decided to elevate their bilateral relationship to a "strategic partnership." Nevertheless, economic ties need rejuvenation even as defense ties need a sense of direction. India's "look east" policy won't mean anything if India is not able to further cement ties with South Korea.

As they carefully assess the evolving strategic environment in the Asia-Pacific region, New Delhi and Seoul need to advance their political ties so that a mutually beneficial and long-term partnership can evolve. The result could be as important for greater regional stability as it is for Indian and South Korean interests in the coming years.

The China factor in India-South Korea ties cannot be underestimated. At a time when

India's tensions with China have become more manifest, there are signs that South Korea, too, is re-evaluating its ties with China. In recent years, China could count on South Korea as a friend in the region — a cultural admirer, with residual memories of the close political and cultural ties that existed in Ming times.

For its part, Seoul counted on Beijing to help stabilize the situation on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea has become China's largest trading partner in the region and has been hospitable to Chinese visits. But strategically Seoul is growing weary of Beijing's support for North Korea amid the regime's provocations and its aggressive claims on contested territory.

India is emerging as a serious player in the Asian strategic landscape as smaller states in East Asia reach out to it for trade, diplomacy and, potentially, as a key regional balancer. The "look east" policy, initiated by one of the most visionary of India's Prime Ministers, P. V. Narasimha Rao, is now the cornerstone of India's engagement with the world's most economically dynamic region.

With South Korea the convergence of interest started after signing a MoU on Defence Logistics and Supplies in the year 2005. In May 2007, India and South Korean Defence Minister held their first ever consultations on 'matters of mutual interests' and agreed to strengthen cooperation on training of armed focus personal exchange of visits and strengthening the mutual cooperation between the Coast Guard of two countries. This partnership has become appreciably more intense and diversified in the recent years, and has been elevated to

the level of 'strategic Partnership' during the visit of RoK President Lee Myung-bak to India in January 2010. Former President Pratibha Patil's visit in March 2012 would help further strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries. Apart from military cooperation, there is a strong case for both countries to cooperate in defence trade since South Korea possesses sophisticated military technology to trade-off with India.

The way goods are now produced and traded around the world has dramatically changed. Under the traditional theory of comparative advantage, developing countries produced labour-intensive goods which they then exchanged for relatively capital- and skill-intensive goods produced by the more advanced countries. This model explains the geographic separation of production and consumption as what Baldwin (2006, 2011) calls globalization's 'first great unbundling'. South Korea has developed its economy on export led heavy industrialization which could be the model for the country like India to learn from it in the fields of electronics, military equipments, infrastructure developments or automobiles sectors etc.

### **Conclusion**

India after the cold war, as a nominal ally of the Soviet Union, became isolated from Asian mainstream affairs. The military-strategic alliance of Pakistan and China also served as a repressive policy against India's national and economic interests, limiting its options in seeking any options further. India, a vast sub-continent in Asia, was a fast emerging economic and political force to be reckoned with. Thus it was, that the Indian

leadership came up with a concept of ideas called the "Look East Policy" of India, an active economic policy of engagement with East Asia to be implemented as an official initiative in achieving two objectives, the encouragement of trade links with individual partners and to provide foreign employment for India's own expanding work force. India has an improved interest in East Asia (EA). The economy of South East Asia was a virtually untapped market in early 1990's which was up for grabs by major regional economic entities such as India, China, Europe, or United States.

In the meantime, other ASEAN states had gone forward from ex-colonial backwaters in the Pacific oceanic region, to becoming rapidly developing societies and eventually, towards the goal of modern, industrialized states with well developed and sophisticated economies based on the twin pillars of national prosperity – trade and industry.

India has missed the bandwagon of opportunity once during the Cold War, by placing its stakes on the wrong superpower, the Soviet Union, which collapsed abruptly and unexpectedly in 1991. As a result, India's economic ties with East Asia are loose and the level of inter-state trade remains relatively low in revenue, such as engaging in relatively insignificant import-export trade of local Indian consumer products regulated by demand from local Indian communities in East Asian countries.

Deprived of a strong allied nation, it is imperative that India seeks new markets with which to fuel its own economic growth alongside its own burgeoning population. India depends largely on itself on promoting

its Look East Policy, having the need to compete against a great regional rival, China. Having less attractive pre-set conditions in contrast to China, India's revenue from Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), is minuscule compared with China's FDI. An analysis of what factors make the Look East Policy important to India, the response of East Asia towards India's economic engagement and of what advantages it can gain as an edge over China in competing for the attention of East Asia in economic co-operation.

The "Look East" policy has achieved positive results with improved Indo-Japan relations, transparency measures to demonstrate non-corruption, and most importantly, India's inclusion in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Thus, India reacted smartly by maintaining its ties with other nations in east like Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea etc.

The driving factors fuelling to India's Look East Policy a success could be:

1. Need to counter China economically.

The open door policies of China, India's regional neighbour, during the 1980s had seen the meteoric rise of an emerging economic giant in Asia, in contrast with India's own Fabian socialist policies in India under the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru's rule. China competes with India in the political, economic and military sphere and most importantly, for economic influence in the region of South East Asia. In short, India must adopt an economically aggressive stance to compete well with international market forces at work in the region.

2. India to develop an emerging middle class.

The Americans invented the concept of outsourcing, essentially the exploitation of foreign labour with minimal amount of control, but nevertheless, governed by motivation for profit. A US software engineer earns US\$75,000 per year as compared to his Indian counterpart, who earns US\$20,000 per year in India. 60% of India's one billion population is below the age of 30, meaning that a vast number of educated and talented people formed a huge manpower pool waiting to be tapped. Globalization and the Western media have also brought about influences in Western tastes and a materialistic lifestyle in a growing middle class in India. A world wealth report in June 2004 by US brokerage firm Merrill Lynch, revealed that India has 61,000 millionaires, in US dollars. However, the average Indian earns just US\$1.60 per day. Materialism has led to a disturbing trend in mercenary pursuit of wealth at the expense of traditional, conservative social values. In a local crackdown in New Delhi, nearly 300 women from middle class background were arrested for prostitution. Thus, India seeks new markets to export its restless workforce. An ignoring of changing trends however, could well lead to serious social problems for the government of India.

3. Containment from West and Central Asia.

India's long dispute with Pakistan over the Jammu and Kashmir region has caused long standing hostile bilateral ties between these two states. China, as Pakistan's ally and a potential economic rival, would sensibly pursue policies that either not promote or



even hinder India's economic progress and interests.

Although India also possesses business interests and provides foreign labour to the Middle East, geo-political instability and the constant threat of terrorism meant that there can be no serious undertaking of worthwhile financial investment in Middle Eastern countries. As a consequence, India remains hemmed in and severed from mainstream Asian affairs on either the western or northern direction. The only remaining alternative of potential development is to look eastwards towards the South East Asian region. Central Asia having periodic irritants and economic disruptions much more than East Asian nations such as occasional terrorist or militant attacks, as in the case of the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand, the threat level remains well contained and pose no danger of regime change to East Asian state governments.

4. Response of South East Asia and how it regards India.

India's long standing recognition of English as the official language breaks down language and cultural barriers in trade communications, and in theory, accelerates business procedures. This is the advantage that India's Look East Policy has over China, and should be exploited to the full to gain an edge in the East Asian Regions. Thus it is very much up to India's present leaders how they wish to promote the "Look East" policy and market the virtues and advantages of having bi-lateral economic ties with their nation.

5. Fear in a growing regional hegemony: the race to project naval power in South East Asian waters.

India's navy of 145 ships of various classes is designed to mainly balance against Pakistan's naval assets. Its awkward proximity of its naval bases on both east and west coasts of the Indian sub-continent meant that attempts to control sea lanes in South East Asia is difficult at best, with the Straits of Malacca making only one possible strategic zone. China is assessed as holding an upper hand. China has been building up its naval capabilities for decades in anticipation of a naval crisis in the Taiwan Straits. It has three fleets – North Sea Fleet, East Sea Fleet, and South Sea Fleet, comprising a total of 888 ships by 2005 that can be easily brought to bear anywhere in the Pacific oceanic region. However, ships may still bypass this narrow sea zone easily on voyages from the Middle East and beyond to South East Asia. In conceiving a strategy for possible Indian naval projection of power, it is necessary that India secures an ally such as Indonesia, Singapore or Australia for access to naval bases in the region for convenient deployment of naval ships

The onus of driving the "Look East Policy" of India, of course, lies in the new generation of India's leaders, since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Seoul in May, 2015 when he addressed leadership conference organized by Chosun Ilbo. The summit will serve as catalyst to push India-South Korea business relations and take it to the next level," Woosuk Kenneth Choi, Deputy Editor, The Chosunilbo (one of the chief organizers of the Summit), said that—

"India and South Korea want to grow together by complementing each other's strength and by joining hands. India has skills and South Korea has manufacturing experience. By merging these two qualities the two countries can enter markets in third countries," remarked Choi. Following flooding of markets in various countries by the cheap Chinese products it is being felt that India and South Korea can join hands to enter various markets.

India and Korea are the third and fourth largest economies in Asia. The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CEPA) signed between the two countries provides an excellent platform for expanding the bilateral trade, which is currently below its potential, and also give great impetus for flow of investment both ways to give more meaning to the Look East Policy of India in the coming years.

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5. The Bay of Bengal initiative for multi sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation- It is an International Organisation involving a group of Countries in South Asia and South East Asia for tourism, culture, education, transport and communication.
6. Mekong-Ganga Cooperation is an initiation of six Countries i.e. India and five other ASEAN Countries.
7. It is the capital and largest city in Yunan Province of Southwest China, was attacked by terrorist on March, 2014.
8. United Nations Security Council.
9. Memorandum of Understanding- it is a formal agreement between two or more parties, but not a legally binding, but they carry a degree of seriousness and mutual respect stronger than a gentlemen's agreement.

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