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BORDER TRADE VIS-À-VIS INDIA'S LOOK EAST POLICY: A CASE STUDY OF MANIPUR

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ABSTRACT

The present paper has been planned to study the importance of India – Myanmar relations in the smooth implementation of the Look East Policy. Concerning the relationship between the two countries, the paper argues that India's overriding "security" concerns have always played spoilsport in Manipur and the North East. The study concludes that significant changes have taken place in regard to the commodity composition and the direction of Indian merchandise exports and imports during the reference period. With Manipur as a vital transit route in this highly flourishing trade of illicit drug trafficking, India's failure to monitor its borders effectively and check this evil remains crucial in assessing the probable outcome of the Look East Policy. The paper stresses on the need for synchronization of India's Myanmar policy for meaningful contribution by Manipur in the Look East Policy.

KEYWORDS

Expectation of the people of Manipur, India's Myanmar policy, Manipur in Look East Policy, Security, Smuggling.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concluded 12th Home Secretary level talks between India and Myanmar from 13 to 14 September, 2006, in New Delhi, on wide ranging issues such as cross border insurgency, narcotics proliferation, border trade, HIV/AIDS etc., brought once again to the fore the long term implication of the bilateral relations between the two on Manipur and the entire Northeast. The paper attempts to trace the growth of Indo-Myanmar relations and its implications on Manipur. At present Indo-Myanmar relations happen to be at one of the most decisive and crucial stages. India, the emerging Asian power, and Myanmar, the biggest country in the Southeast Asia mainland with its abundant natural resources, are clubbed together in one of the most geo-strategically and economically significant regions of the world. The two are in the tri-junction of South, East and Southeast Asia.

Geopolitical shifts in South and Southeast Asia and the increasing wave of globalization after the end of the cold war brought about the need for a new orientation in India's Foreign policy. This need for a more pragmatic and dynamic foreign policy culminate in India's Look East Policy. The rapid multi-polarization in the new sphere of geo-politics compelled the country to move nearer to the regional and sub-regional power Centre for security and economic interests. India's relation with Myanmar is of utmost importance in the context of our new orientation and area specific approach to the Look East Policy. Policy makers in South block perceive Myanmar as a bridgehead to Southeast Asia. On Myanmar's part also the growing relationship is increasingly regarded beneficial in the sense that it can counter balance China by using India as a bargaining chip and thereby enhance its position in the international arena. In this scenario Manipur occupies a crucial space in the emerging configurations. New Delhi's concern for Manipur and the North East India is conditioned by more of security issues than economic ones, in spite of its conspicuously different projections. An in-depth analysis is needed to ascertain to the validity of New Delhi's claims of benefit in the North East through this policy.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To review the impacts of the Look East Policy, various committees and analysts have presented their expertise as it has been a key area of study on the relationship between India and Myanmar. They have suggested various tools and techniques for effective analysis and interpretation of the financial and operational aspects of the trade relation with Myanmar.

Ministry of External Affairs (1993-94) extended the fact that India's relations with Myanmar underwent a major change in 1994 with the signing of a MOU on trade and economic cooperation, particularly in terms of border trade.

Bahroo (2005) maintain that improved India-Myanmar relations formed the first and critical step in India-Southeast Asia ties while improving security in the North East region and paving the way for future economic development in the region.

In the meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July, 2006 in Kuala Lumpur, India's State Minister of Defense declared that India would not isolate Myanmar in an attempt to encourage democracy in the country. The changing shifts in India's economic and strategic needs and its desire for a strong foothold in Southeast Asia through its all-inclusive "Look East Policy" necessitated a close relationship with Myanmar.

Singh, Jasjit,(2000) has assessed in the context of larger China-Myanmar relations, Myanmar's increasing dependency on China in economic terms as well as for military armaments has been a matter of concern for India.

Langpoklakpam (2000) identified that in the backdrop of developments Myanmar's relations with China and its overall implications on India's national interests can be analyzed mainly from two angles: i) Strategic considerations; and ii) Economic compulsions.

3. NEEDS OF THE STUDY

In the backdrop of the review of literature, it is evident that Manipur's position in the equations of India-Myanmar relations has felt needs careful scrutiny. Its implications on Manipur have to be looked into with depth. Manipur being a prospective gateway to the mainland Southeast Asia becomes important in the context of its locational importance in the greater prospective of India's Look East Policy.

4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

It is important to understand in the context of the sustainability of the India's Look East Policy in light of Indo – Myanmar border trade. Perception and understanding of Manipur and the North East have been engaged from two vantage positions, operating more or less with similar dynamics. One reflects the bureaucratic position of the geo-strategic location of the region and its identification with the security/defense matrix of India. The other position, apparently liberal in its outlook, talks about developmental perspectives and failure to transform the economic backwardness of the region. As such, there is a compelling

need to analyze and assess the production and consumption of these notions vis-à-vis the recent thrust to bring changes in Manipur and the North East through the Look East Policy.

5. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study under consideration proposes to achieve the following objectives:

- i) To find out the significance of the experience of the people of Manipur in particular with respect to the various aspects concerning Look East Policy.
- ii) To give suggestions in the context of the sustainability of the Look East Policy in light of Indo-Myanmar border trade.

However, the researcher would like to emphasize that researcher has tried to make the study purposeful and fruitful and make inroads into the subject as much as possible.

6. METHODOLOGY

The data collection comprises of primary data collection, secondary data collection and informal discussions. The data for the study are collected through personal interview and discussion with different persons concerned. The secondary data was collected from the various sources like- relevant books on the subject, articles published in various journals, reports of various committees constituted by the appropriate bodies from time to time to make necessary modifications in the bylaws of the policy, brochures issued by the different government's departments, trade magazines, and relevant web sites. The method used in the present study for sampling is convenience sampling. Thus out of the Government departments, Directorate of Commerce and Industries (DIC) and Taxation Department are chosen and out of the Private sectors, The Imphal Free Press & Sangai Express (Manipur English Daily newspaper) and Association of exporter & importer of Moreh (border town of Myanmar) are chosen for the purpose of the present study. The type of sample used for the selection of respondents is also the convenience sampling.

The data collected by means of questionnaire are analyzed by using tabulation and appropriate statistical tools and conclusions are drawn based on the analysis. The statistical tools used in the study are CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate), Growth Rate and Two-dimensional-diagram.

7. RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present study is to know the position of such trends of business and such study would indicate the trends in the development of effective policy and problems confronted to it from time immemorial.

"A good economy is the most prominent determining factor for full fledged development of the material aspects of man's life. No scheme of education therefore can be contemplated without considering the economic structure of the community". All the economic activities of the tribal were veering round their outdated method of shifting cultivation. The review of literature for the concerned study is essential to every researcher to produce accurate and sufficient information related to the area of study. In fact the reference of the early studies is of tremendous help and positive sources of an invaluable output. In other word, referring to the studies done previously is the basic attempt has been made to review some of the available studies.

It may be said that a number of studies have been done to identify problems. Many further studies may be said to be needed to identify problems. In this perspective, the present investigation proposed here is to be quite relevant. With this thinking, we proceed to outline the particular problems that plague Government policy.

8. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- i) Present position:

Though the trade is to be conducted in freely convertible currencies mutually agreed upon by the two countries under Article-III of the agreement, the trade is functioning under Barter mechanism though the following payment system with regard to border trade has been agreed upon by both sides.

- a) Through ACU mechanism

(N.B. both Myanmar and India is member of Asian Clearing Union),

- b) In US dollar.

- c) Through ESCROW Account Mechanism (a contract or bond deposited with a third party, by whom it is to be delivered to the guarantee on the fulfillment of some condition).

- d) Through Agency arrangement between the Indian and Myanmar Banks.

Transaction : United Bank of India((UBI), Moreh Branch, has been nominated by the Indian Authorities to act as designated bank (authorized dealer) on Indian side (through Moreh border) to facilitate trade related transaction and similarly the Myanmar authorities have nominated Myanmar Economic Bank (MEB), Tamu from Myanmar side.

- ii) Year-wise volume of trade :-

The total turnover of foreign trade (imports / exports) has been steadily rising since the beginning of the Planning era in India. Value of trade increased from Rs. 6, 93, 63,143/- in 1999-2000 to Rs. 29, 81, 92,391/- in 2009-2010. During 2009-2010, India's total export amounted to Rs. 21, 50, 40,000/- as compared to Rs. 1, 60, 59,236/- during 2008-09, registering a growth rate of 1230%. At the same time, import increased from Rs. 76, 14,553/- in 2008-09 to Rs. 8, 31, 52,391/- during 2009-2010 thereby registering growth of 992%. And, the trade deficit was not happening in most of the years except for 1999-2000, 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2005-06, and 2007-08. Balance of trade is quite favorable for the recent year, 2009-2010 (Depicted in Table 1).

Table 1, disclosed that progressiveness and acceptability of Export and Import have resulted in an intermittent rise and fall in the figure of Export/Import with Myanmar. During 2009-2010, share of export have reached to 72.11 per cent from mere 46.95 per cent in 1999-2000 besides a frequent fluctuation in the percentage rate during the reference period. Conversely, share of Import is depicting a decreasing rate from 53.05% in 1999-2000 to 27.89 % in 2009-2010. Table shows an unsteady percentage rate of Export and Import.

TABLE 1: INDIA' MERCANTILE EXPORT & IMPORT PERFORMANCE SINCE 2000 (In Rupees)

PERIOD	EXPORT	IMPORT	TOTAL VALUE IN FOREIGN TRADE WITH MYANMAR	BALANCE OF TRADE
1999-2000	3,25,65,827/- (46.95)	3,67,97,316/- (53.05)	6,93,63,143/- (100)	(-)42,31,489/-
2000-2001	5,29,17,530/- (96.46)	19,38,523/- (3.54)	5,48,56,053/- (100)	5,09,79,007/-
2001-2002	1,25,08,345/- (13.10)	8,29,71,255/- (86.90)	9,54,79,600/- (100)	(-)7,04,62,910/-
2002-2003	3,89,46,060/- (24.64)	11,90,92,960/- (75.36)	15,80,39,020/- (100)	(-)8,01,46,900/-
2003-2004	9,45,82,647/- (51.64)	8,85,91,062/- (48.36)	18,31,73,709/- (100)	59,91,585/-
2004-2005	6,12,70,400/- (52.77)	5,48,18,676/- (47.23)	11,60,89,076/- (100)	64,51,724/-
2005-2006	3,86,66,699/- (42.60)	5,21,15,866/- (57.40)	9,07,82,565/- (100)	(-)134,49,167/-
2006-2007	61,26,52,642/- (95.78)	2,69,64,981/- (4.22)	63,96,17,623/- (100)	585687661/-
2007-2008	4,93,74,078/- (26.83)	13,46,73,330/- (73.17)	18,40,47,408/- (100)	(-)852,99,252/-
2008-2009	1,60,59,236/- (67.84)	76,14,553/- (32.16)	2,36,73,789/- (100)	84,44,683/-
2009-2010	21,50,40,000/- (72.11)	8,31,52,391/- (27.89)	29,81,92,391/- (100)	13,18,87,609/-
Total	1,22,45,83,464/- (64)	68,87,30,913/- (36)	1,91,33,14,377/- (100)	53,58,52,551/-

Source: Directorate of commerce and Industries, Government of Manipur, 2010

Growth rates of Export and Import is depicted in Table 2. It is evident from the table that export reflects a negative growth in the years 2001-02, 2004-06, 2007-09, but in 2009-2010, there is a large scale increase in the same (1239.04 per cent). Conversely, percentage growth in Import have registered a positive rate at increasing trend over the years resulting in -94.73 per cent in 2001 to 992.02 per cent in 2010. Though rise in Import items has shown an intermittent fluctuating rate. Even in the terminal year of the reference period when Import transactions registered a declining growth rate of 992.02 %, the growth rates of Export transactions were far ahead at 1239.04 per cent.

TABLE 2: GROWTH RATE OF EXPORT & IMPORT OF INDIA WITH MYANMAR

YEARS	EXPORT	GROWTH PERCENT	IMPORT	GROWTH PERCENT
1999-2000	3,25,65,827/-	-	3,67,97,316/-	-
2000-2001	5,29,17,530/-	62.49	19,38,523/-	-94.73
2001-2002	1,25,08,345/-	-76.36	8,29,71,255/-	4180.12
2002-2003	3,89,46,060/-	211.36	11,90,92,960/-	43.54
2003-2004	9,45,82,647/-	142.85	8,85,91,062/-	-25.61
2004-2005	6,12,70,400/-	-35.22	5,48,18,676/-	-38.12
2005-2006	3,86,66,699/-	-36.89	5,21,15,866/-	-4.93
2006-2007	61,26,52,642/-	1484.45	2,69,64,981/-	-48.26
2007-2008	4,93,74,078/-	-91.94	13,46,73,330/-	399.44
2008-2009	1,60,59,236/-	-67.47	76,14,553/-	-94.35
2009-2010	21,50,40,000/-	1239.04	8,31,52,391/-	992.02

Source: Directorate of commerce and Industries, Government of Manipur, 2010

The above pattern in Table 2 is further confirmed by the figures of Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) computed for various years in Table 3. From 1999 to 2010, CAGR of Export transactions is 21 per cent, while Import transactions reveal CAGR of 8.5 per cent during the same period. From the foregoing analysis, we can conclude that growth performance of Export is much better as compared to Import transactions.

Thus, CAGR for 10 years export and import transactions is equal to 21% and 8.5% respectively, representing the smoothed annualized improvement over export-import time horizon. CAGR assumes that foreign trade with Myanmar grew at a steady rate. In reality there is volatility: export and import transactions with Myanmar are vary significantly over time.

TABLE 3: CAGR (%)

YEARS	EXPORT	IMPORT
1999-2010	21	8.5

Source: Calculation of above CAGR is as follows:

$$\text{CAGR} = [\text{Ending value}/\text{Beginning value}]^{1/(\text{Number of years})} - 1$$

$$\text{Export} : (215040000/32565827)^{1/10} - 1 = [1/10 \log(6.60324)] - 1 = (1/10 \times 0.8197) - 1 = \text{Antilog } 0.08197 - 1 = 1.208 - 1 = 0.208 \text{ or } 21\% \text{ (approximately)}$$

$$\text{Import} : (8,31,52,391/3,67,97,316)^{1/10} - 1 = [1/10 \log(2.25974)] - 1 = (1/10 \times 0.3539) - 1 = \text{Antilog } 0.03539 - 1 = 1.085 - 1 = 0.085 \text{ or } 8.5\% \text{ (approximately)}$$

iii) NER (North East Region) – Myanmar Trade :-

As per the 'Planning Commission, Task Force on Connectivity and Promotion of Trade and Investment in the NER, 2006', the reasons for lack of significant trade with Myanmar are, first, the presence of troops along the international border affects the movement of goods and second, the official 'Rupee' and 'Kyat' exchange rate is grossly distorted.

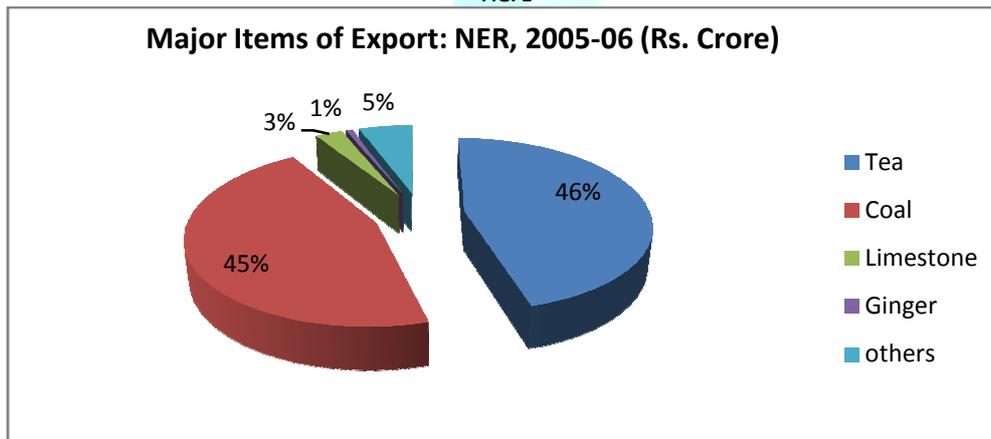
To a large extent the export composition of the NER is dominated by tea, coal, lime stone, ginger, etc. (Table 4). And the absence of manufacturing products in the region is a major handicap in the growth of trade between the two regions. However, the northeast imports significant amount of products from Myanmar. The free trade agreement is likely to facilitate greater trade integration between the two regions. Since the NER is not fully integrated with the national economy, trade integration with Myanmar is likely make the NER imports more easy and cheaper, which may not harm the regional economy of the region. However, easy access of the NER market may have an unfavorable repercussion on the Indian economy.

TABLE – 4: MAJOR EXPORT ITEMS FROM THE NORTHEASTERN REGION (Rs. Crore)

Items	1999-2000	2000 – 01	2001 – 02	2002 – 03	2003 – 04	2004 – 05	2005 – 06
Tea	219.59	250.32	195.64	200.73	184.86	188.65	199.68
Coal	105.62	135.87	150.67	188.61	227.14	175.08	199.14
Limestone	29.20	4.34	13.75	4.46	7.46	9.24	12.05
Boulder	3.99	3.62	2.18	1.99	0.99	0.65	0.52
Ginger	2.27	0.26	2.75	3.04	1.16	3.63	2.90
Fruits	0.56	0.96	1.36	1.12	1.31	1.25	1.65
Vegetables	0.05	0	0.05	0.02	0.11	0.16	0.006
Perfumery	0.03	0.24	0.39	0.72	0.42	0.87	0.64
Soya Bari	2.24	4.43	0.97	1.28	1.44	1.53	2.08
Cumin	0.13	0.47	0.12	1.91	0.46	1.04	1.07
Flour	0.77	0.35	N.A.	N.A.	3.17	1.7	N.A.
Others	31.45	3.22	11.27	6.23	6.48	8.24	18.08
Total	393.55	404.23	384.47	409.36	434.96	392.03	437.81

Source: Planning Commission, Task Force on Connectivity and Promotion of Trade and Investment in the NER, 2006.

FIG. 1



Source: Personal Calculation.

It is imperative that the proportion of Export or Import of Myanmar with India is quite minimal as compared to the India's foreign trade with other countries like America, European Union, ASEAN, etc.

iv) Developmental strategies

Manipur daily (Sangai Express, 19/03/2011) reported that – Helicopter service will be launch shortly at Moreh, Tamenglong, Jiribam. External Affairs Minister extends hand for Imphal-Mandale bus services. Whole week service will be provided to Moreh.

A first kind of Trilateral Trade Conference was organized at Water World, Tamu, and Manipur, participated by the official of India, Myanmar and Thailand. Thai-Myanmar border Trade in-charge Tharadol thoruang, Myanmar Trade Chamber of Commerce Vice President Yu Minthe Sube and India Commerce and Industries OSD Foreign Trade official Dwijamani represent Thailand, Myanmar and India respectively and many businessmen communities are also attended on the conference. Thailand delegates inserted that "India's Look East Policy and Thailand's Look West Policy will be effective if we consider Myanmar as a potential because of its geographical location". They also discussed about the increment of the number of items that has to be traded between the said countries. Indian delegate put emphasis on the importance of maintaining relationship on Sports and Culture among the participated countries. (Manipur Daily, Sangai Express, 28/03/2011).

As part of the Government's initiative to boost Trans-border trade between India and Myanmar, the foundation stone for a multi- storey market complex was laid on 4/04/2011 at Moreh jeep parking area by Commerce and Industries Minister Y. Erabot. It is targeted for completion by March next year i.e 2012. Land would be provided by the Meitei Council Moreh (MCM) on lease for a period of 90 years. (Sangai Express, 04/04/2011).

Form an association, called, "Indo Asian Friendship, Manipur" under the theme of Look East Policy of the Government of India, so as to bring good relationship with the Asian countries through Tourism, Sports, Business, Health and Cultural exchange. (Sangai express, 01/05/2011) .

A four member team of officials of Reserve Bank of India, Foreign Exchange Department headed by DGM A Bhaskara Rao convened a meeting of traders, importers, and exporters of Moreh on May 9, 2011 at the Moreh Trade Centre. Later in the evening, another meeting of traders, exporters and importers of Manipur was held at Classic Hotel, Imphal. United bank of India is coordinating the programmed with the help of Government of Manipur. A team of UBI officials headed by Chief Manager Ananda Kumar visited Moreh along with the RBI team. UBI Moreh branch is authorized for monitoring barter trade in the Moreh border for import and export of goods of value above \$ 1000 to \$ 20,000. Beside barter trade, other normal trade is also allowed through Moreh Land Customs Station but so far no normal trade except the barter trade through banking channel is materialized so far. The RBI officials would analyze the bottlenecks of formal trading through Moreh border and would take stock of the weaknesses of the banking channel, if any, conveyed a press release issued by the United Bank of India. (Sangai Express, May 7, 2011).

9. RECOMMENDATION / SUGGESTION OF THE STUDY

Highlighting the rich potential that Manipur has to offer for various industrial sectors, Industry Minister Shri Y. Erabot and his Cabinet colleague Mr. TN Haokip, who holds the Tourism portfolio, have urged investors of the country to set up business units in the state. Addressing a seminar on "Investment opportunity in Manipur" on 26/04/2011, Erabot highlighted certain projects taken up by the Government at Moreh town bordering Myanmar to accelerate the ongoing commercial activities between the two countries. Significantly Moreh, the gateway to Southeast Asia and a strategic place for the country's "Look East Policy", does a business of around rupees five crores daily in trans-border trading. Chief Secretary of the State, Manipur, D.S. Poonia pointed out the construction of rail link between Jiribam sub division of Imphal East District and Imphal, which would be extended up to Moreh to be the backbone of the proposed Trans Asian railways. (Sangai Express, 27/04/2011).

10. CONCLUSION

When viewed from Manipur's perspective, Indian initiative seems to have more political and security concerns rather than the economic concerns related with the border trade. New Delhi's interest in the region has more to do with security concerns *vis-à-vis* the prevailing conflict than with genuine economic development and trade promotion. Economic analyses in the region think that the Central Government is not keen with the overall development of the state,

inclusive of the India-Myanmar border trade, which is now in total disarray. No one seems to know who is in charge of the border trade. Policy makers in New Delhi have already forgotten the intertwined relationship between economic development and socio-political problems. In the heat of containing insurgency most of the significant bilateral development Projects are left in the lurch. Millions of rupees are pumped by the Indian Government to maintain its security forces in Manipur and other states bordering Myanmar while necessary infrastructural developments related with the border trade are blatantly ignored.

India while moving forward with its broad Look East Policy needs to give a minute and systematic policy approach commensurate with the distinctive needs of the region and the state. Improving relations with its neighbor and opening borders lone in the absence of proper policy planning will neither solve the multi-faceted problems faced by New Delhi in Manipur nor bring socio-economic changes in the region. Consequently, India's Myanmar policy itself loses meaninglessness for Manipur and the North East. Initial hopes of the people of Manipur that there will be a major opening in the Eastern direction, the opening of the traditionally believed *Nongpok Thong* (Eastern Gate), which will bring prosperity, seems to be gradually disappearing. Contrary to their expectation nothing sort of significant progress came. Practically positive improvement in the direction could be possible only when the right type of planning is taken up with sincerity on the part of policymakers in New Delhi, taking into confidence the local authorities, and by going much beyond its narrow outlook of security maintenance.

Political pragmatism should be combined with development realities in taking up any policy implementation and planning on the part of New Delhi. Synchronization of India's Myanmar policy with the interest of those who are directly linked with the issue is a necessity. Only then India-Myanmar cooperation will become meaningful for the North East region, and Manipur can play a positive role in India's Myanmar policy in its greater perspective of Look East Policy.

11. SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

On the basis of the study in the preceding analysis, the findings, suggestions and conclusion have been drawn and a number of suggestion and recommendation have been offered so that the sustainable development will be able to overcome the problems/difficulties on the part of overall development for economy and it helps in achieving the roles and objectives for the national look east policy. Since the research study is limited to only Manipur state, it needs further study for overall development of Border Trade through India's Look East Policy.

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