

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology  
of Egypt / Egyptology

ROLE OF BORDER TRADE IN ESTABLISHING POLITICAL TIES  
BETWEEN THE NORTH-EASTERN REGION OF INDIA AND MYANMAR

*Pori Borah*

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, St. Xavier's College, Sonabheel, Tezpur  
poriborah777@gmail.com  
&

*Sankar Das*

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Science and Technology,  
Meghalaya  
sankardas749@gmail.com

**Pori Borah, Sankar Das; Role Of Border Trade In Establishing Political Ties Between The North-Eastern Region Of India And Myanmar-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(9). ISSN 1567-214x**

**Keywords: Strategic partner, foreign policy, look east policy, act east policy, border trade, diplomacy.**

**Abstract**

While defining the role of nation-states in the international arena, national interest plays a definite role. In doing so, more emphasis is laid upon the Foreign policy of a nation as it plays a determining role in illustrating the outlook of the nation in front of the International Community, by shaping its course of action in relation to the rest of the world. In the process of maintaining their relation with each other, multiple aspects of social, political and economic spheres influence the nation-states. Among all, the economic aspect of a nation is closely linked with the political aspect. This work aims to analyze the political relation of North Eastern region of India with Myanmar in the light of economic cooperation as emphasized in both Look East policy and Act East policy. Myanmar, a strategic partner of India, is one of the South East Asian nations who shares international border with the North Eastern part of the Indian Sub-continent. In this paper efforts would be made to examine the various steps taken by the Indian authority for increasing connectivity via border trade so that it would help to develop its relation with the neighboring state of Myanmar. Trade implies exchange of goods and services which is possible only when there is a smooth connectivity across the borderlines. Border trade creates and

maintains a peaceful and co-operational atmosphere in the border areas of the nation-states which will help them to develop friendly relation with their neighboring countries. It ultimately serves the interest of fulfilling the national interest which is the prime goal of Foreign Policy. Diplomacy helps in attaining such purpose. Trade politics assists in the collective development of countries with the support of bilateral trade agreements. Due to its geographical placement the Indian government wants to make its North Eastern region a gateway for strengthening relations with South East Asian countries by inviting the Global investors.

#### OBJECTIVES:

1. To study the role of border trade in promoting political connectivity between neighboring countries.
2. To analyze the Foreign Policy shift of the Central government of India in regard to its North-Eastern region.
3. To examine the impact of Act East Policy on north-east India with special reference to Myanmar.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. What is the relation between border trade and Foreign policy?
2. How does the Act East Policy of Indian government influence its North Eastern part?
3. What are the changes that took place as a part of Act East strategy between India and Myanmar?

#### METHODOLOGY:

To conduct the present study data is collected from secondary sources which include research articles, newspaper articles and web sources. Both analytical as well as descriptive methods are used to convey the research work.

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

The north-eastern part of India consists of eight states, which is known as the land of seven sisters and one brother viz. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Sikkim. Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is one of the South East Asian nations as well as a member country of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) since 1997. Myanmar shares international border with India to its west. The north eastern region of Indian sub-continent shares international border with Tibet in the north, Myanmar in the east, Bhutan in the northwest and Bangladesh in the southwest direction. There are four states in the north eastern region which have border crossings with Myanmar. Out of which two are officially designated immigration and customs crossings. One is the Moreh town of Manipur state which is connected to Tamu town of north-west Myanmar. The second one is the Zorinpui International border crossing in Mizoram. There is a Free Movement Regime (FMR) in the India-Myanmar border area which allows the

tribes living in the border areas of both the countries to travel 16 kilometers across the border on either side without any visa requirements. In spite of the two formal crossings, there are some local border crossings between North East India and Myanmar. There is a mountain pass in the Arunachal Pradesh known as Diphu Pass to Myanmar which is close to disputed tri-point borders of India, China and Myanmar. Pangsau pass is situated above Nampong of Arunachal Pradesh and Ledo of Tinsukia (part of Assam) again connects the north eastern region of India with this South East-Asian counterpart. Other points of border crossing are in the state of Nagaland that is Avankhu International Border Checkpost in Phek District of the State as well as road connectivity from Lungwa village of Nagaland to Loji village in Myanmar. Along with all these, Zokhawthar village of Mizoram also connects India with two villages of Myanmar i.e. Khawmawi and Rikhawdar. In the era of globalization, such type of border connectivity between these two neighboring countries helps in the expansion of their economy. It is also connected with other aspects of development such as issue of security, politics etc. Government of India has viewed the north eastern part as a future connectivity zone to develop relations with the South East Asian nations of the world. State authority of India has taken steps in this direction which is visible in its foreign policy outlook towards North East India.

### **MAIN THEME:**

The present research work aims to analyze the role of border trade which is a very important branch of economy in the contemporary period, in establishing grounds for the advancement of political relations among countries of the World especially the bordering states. In order to understand how border trade has provided the opportunities to take initiatives and develop political relation among countries, the connection between Border trade and Foreign policy need to be understood.

### **Border Trade and Foreign Policy**

In the contemporary period, nation-states are more interested to maintain a cordial relation with the rest of the world rather than waging a war against each other. This perspective is much more generative in case of the neighboring countries. For the attainment of this purpose the countries have been using several mechanisms so that it will create a constructive atmosphere in the international arena. Creation of such an atmosphere facilitates the growth of strong economic ties among nation-states. Cooperation in the economic field gives a boost to positive development in the political scenario of these countries. All these require the construction of a strong foreign policy which aims at the fulfillment of its national interest. Trade constitutes a part of the national interest. Economic relation will develop smoothly when there will be sufficient communication among nation-states. Here comes the role of diplomacy. It is through the various diplomatic means that the government of a

state maintains relation with the international community. For an effective Foreign Policy the existing state authority needs to evolve strong diplomatic mechanisms. Strong diplomatic mechanisms facilitate the promotion of economic policy of a nation across the globe. Border trade is a small part of the larger body of Trade policy which constitutes one dimension of the economic policy of a nation-state. Border Trade implies exchange of goods and services via shared international borders which is possible only when there is a smooth connectivity across the borderlines. It helps in the collective development of nations not merely in the economic sphere but also in other related spheres like political sphere. It is because, when borders of two nations are used for trade purposes the governments of both the nations put much emphasis upon its security arrangements that secures the border. Sometimes, both the governments conclude several agreements between them to protect their borders from any kind of intrusion. Ultimately border trade assists to build and improve political ties among nations of the world.

### **Policy shift from Looking East to Act East in the Indian perspective**

With the onset of globalization in the international sphere, border trade assumes significant role in the process of foreign policy making. Globalization has created a web of interconnectedness where every nation follows the policy of interdependence. The prevalence of Interdependence liberalism is also perceptible in India's foreign policy outlook. It is during the Premiership of P.V. Narasimha Rao that India opted for LPG policy i.e. Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization. Earlier, the foreign policy thrust of India was highly Soviet centric which posed a threat to India's relation with its neighboring countries as well as with other nations of the Asian continent. India was not much aware about the economic changes that took place in the East Asian nations. But after the end of Cold war and disintegration of USSR, the world has witnessed a new shift in the global power relation. As a result, some Asian powers like Japan and China have shifted their foreign policy focus towards the east. Along with them India also exhibited its concern for creating and expanding regional markets for economic engagements. The adoption of look east policy by the Indian government was an attempt to move towards East from West. However, economic cooperation was not the sole domain of focus rather it also aimed to forge strategic defense schemes. Under look east strategy, several developments took place between Indian government and Myanmar. Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement was signed in the year 1994 that formalized border trade practices between both the nations by officially recognizing cross border trade initially in 22 products which was increased to 40 in the year 2010 via the notification no. 62/2010-Customs. The construction of the India-Myanmar Friendship Road (Tamu-Kalemyo-Kalewa Road) in the year 2001 by a wing of Indian Army i.e. the Border Roads Organization (BRO), the involvement of both the governments in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) as well as in the Makong-Ganga Cooperation are

some of the examples that seeks to maintain cordial economic relation between India and Myanmar. State authority of India has adopted several means to increase connectivity with the Myanmar which will open the gate for future economic growth in the region of North East such as Kaladan Multi-Model Transit Transport Project, Bharatmala Project and so on. With the passing of time, the look east policy of Indian government has turned its pace and evolved as Act East policy in the year 2014. The name itself reflected its expanded scope of responsibility where mere formulation strategy would not work. It is seen that the state authority of India has adopted a more practical approach which aims to generate more wealth for the nation at the same time seeks to develop the North Eastern Region of the country which is considered to be a gateway for building healthy economic as well as strategic relations with the South Asian nations. This new paradigm shift of Act East policy can be defined as an effective tool for Indian foreign policy to develop relation with South Asian countries. The initiatives that are taken under this scheme provide the people of India's North Eastern region with hope for prosperity and peace as well as the development of the region. Myanmar, the sole South East Asian country that shares international border with India, is a potential neighborhood for the country to implement the Act East Policy in an effective manner. In the recent time, positive growth of political relationship of India with Myanmar is observed. The high level official visit of political leaders like Aung San Suu Kyi and Narendra Modi can be regarded as an indicator of growing interdependence in the field of political relation between both the countries. During her visit to India in 2018, Myanmar's State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi has signed 11 agreements with Indian government to strengthen their multifaceted partnership. It can be considered as a realist approach to strengthen friendly relation with South East Asian countries. The international border on Moreh/Tamu was formally opened by these two governments on August 2018 to increase connectivity. Through Act East Policy Indian government is not only focusing upon its South Eastern neighbor of Asian continent but also aims to check the hurdles that comes in the path of smooth growth of the North East region. For the fulfillment of this purpose, numbers of project are undertaken in this region by state authority, most of which will facilitate greater connectivity of the region with South East Asia.

### **CONCLUDING OBSERVATION:**

In the conclusion, it is seen that apart from strengthening the economic sphere of nation-states, border trade also helps in building and maintaining a cordial relation between nations in all other related spheres of development. Though the concept of border trade is directly connected with economic relations between nation-states yet it requires the active involvement of political machineries of the state. An analysis of the background of look east policy of Indian government reflects the impact of China's 'string of pearls' strategy over it. Ambuj Thakur in his article "*India's Northeast: Transforming a Troubled Frontier into a Gateway*" said that the policies of China made the

Indian government conscious towards North East region. Again, Udai Bhanu Singh in his article “*India’s Policy Challenges in Myanmar*” regarded the changed attitude of Indian government towards the military junta of Myanmar as a significant switch in its foreign policy. It is expected that the development of cordial relation with Myanmar will help the Indian government to tackle the issue of growing terrorism in the north eastern region. For successful completion of the Act East strategy, along with all these efforts by the state authority, there is a need to concentrate on some other grounds also. First, as involvement of common people is an essential condition for developing relation among nation-states, proper and effective people to people connection should be ensured by the governments of both the countries. Secondly, the central government of India should adopt inclusive approach i.e. North East centric approach rather than Delhi centric approach while dealing with the development agenda. Thirdly, focus should be laid upon building the policy of good neighborhood rather than considering Myanmar as a counter strategy against China. Fourthly, proper research studies should be conducted to encourage people to learn the historical as well as cultural linkages between these two countries.

#### **REFERENCES:**

- Chatterjee Aneek, *International Relations Today: Concepts and applications*, Pearson, New Delhi, 2010
- Ghosh Peu, *International Relations*, PHI Learning Private Limited, Delhi, 2016
- Taneja Nisha, Naing Tin Htoo, Joshi Sanjana at all., *India-Myanmar Border Trade*, Retrieved from [https://icrier.org/pdf/Working\\_Paper\\_378.pdf&ved](https://icrier.org/pdf/Working_Paper_378.pdf&ved)
- Mujtaba Syed Ali, *India-Myanmar trade relations*, retrieved from <https://www.bilaterals.org/?india-myanmar-trade-relations&lang=fr>
- Sewda Kavita, *India-Myanmar Commercial Relations*, retrieved from <https://thekootneeti.in/2020/09/03/india-myanmar-commercial-relations/>
- Shahriar Saleh, *India’s Economic Relations with Myanmar: A Study of Border Trade*, Journal of Borderlands Studies, retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/>
- Miliate Brandon J., *India’s Act East Policy and Manipur*, retrieved from <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/indians-act-east-policy-and-manipur>
- Kesavan K.V., *India’s ‘Act East’ Policy and regional cooperation*, retrieved from [www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-act-east-policy-and-regional-cooperation-61375](http://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-act-east-policy-and-regional-cooperation-61375)